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Interactions between the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo and the Unión  
General de Trabajadores in Spain and Catalonia, 1931-1936

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## Abstract

At the moment of the founding of the Second Republic in April 1931, the labour movement in Spain was dominated by two organizations, namely the anarcho-syndicalist Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) and the socialist Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT). The Second Republic marked the first period in which the two organizations had concurrently operated openly since the Primo de Rivera dictatorship had made the CNT illegal at the same time as the UGT had agreed to cooperate with the General's corporatist project. With the founding of the Republic, a long-standing organizational and ideological hostility between the two organizations was exacerbated by the fact of the UGT actively participating in the reform project of the Republican-socialist government and the CNT increasingly opposing that project. However, the Republic progressively became polarized between left and right; as fascist regimes came to the fore across Europe, increasingly large sectors of the Spanish left called for a unity of their forces to prevent a similar occurrence in Spain. The outbreak of the Civil War in July 1936 made this unity even more imperative.

This thesis focuses on interactions between the CNT and the UGT between 1931 and 1936 within this socio-political context, primarily from the perspective of the CNT. The thesis traces and analyses the evolution of CNT as a national actor's overall position on the UGT from one of outright hostility to a stance of proposing a revolutionary alliance with it in 1936. The thesis also examines interactions between the two organizations in Catalonia, which was both the CNT's birthplace and stronghold and a region in which the UGT had historically garnered little support. In addition to highlighting the pivotal role that the Catalan CNT had in determining the CNT's national-level stance on the UGT throughout this period, the thesis explores how the anarcho-syndicalist movement in the region presented its socialist counterpart as the embodiment of a socialist- and state-sponsored project to destroy the CNT, and also examines the largely hostile encounters between CNT and UGT unions in workplaces and localities across the region.

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## Glossary of Abbreviations

### Organization names

AIT	Asociación Internacional de los Trabajadores: the syndicalist International
BOC	Bloque Obrero y Campesino: dissident communist party
CEDA	Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas: right-wing political party
CGTU	Confederación General de Trabajo Unitaria: the PCE's labour federation
CNT	Confederación Nacional del Trabajo: anarcho-syndicalist labour federation
ERC	Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya: Catalan nationalist left-Republican party
FAI	Federación Anarquista Ibérica: federation of anarchist affinity groups
FEOP	Federación de Entidades Obreras del Puerto: federation of trade unions of the Barcelona port that joined the UGT in 1931.
FNIF	Federación Nacional de la Industria Ferroviaria: the CNT's rail workers' union
FNTT	Federación Nacional de Trabajadores de la Tierra: the UGT's land workers' union
FRE	Federación de la Región Española: the Spanish section of the First International
FSL	Federación Sindicalista Libertaria: federation of former CNT militants set up following the organizational schism that took place within the CNT.
PCC	Partit Comunista de Catalunya: Soviet communist party based in Catalonia
PCE	Partido Comunista de España: the Soviet communist party
POUM	Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista: dissident communist party created out of a merger of the BOC and the Izquierda Comunista in December 1935

PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español: the Spanish Socialist party
STV	Solidaridad de Trabajadores Vascos: labour federation aligned with the Basque Nationalist Party
SNF	Sindicato Nacional Ferroviario: the UGT's rail workers' union
UGT	Unión General de Trabajadores: socialist labour federation
UGSOC	Unió General de Sindicats Obrers de Catalunya: Catalan labour federation formed in 1934 due to a schism in the Catalan UGT. The UGSOC rejoined the UGT in the spring of 1936.
USC	Unió Socialista de Catalunya: Catalan socialist party with regionalist sympathies

#### Archival abbreviations

ACA	Arxiu Comarcal de l'Anoia
AHN	Archivo Histórico Nacional
CDMH	Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica
FIM	Fundación de Investigaciones Marxistas
FO	The National Archives: Foreign Office Papers
FPI	Fundación Pablo Iglesias
IISG CNT	Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, CNT (España) Archives
IISG FAI	Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Federación Anarquista Ibérica Archives
IISG RAP	Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Ramón Álvarez Palomo Papers



## **General Introduction**

This thesis will consider the relationship and interactions between the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) and Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT) labour federations in Spain and Catalonia between the foundation of the Second Republic in April 1931 and the outbreak of the Civil War in July 1936.<sup>1</sup> One of the most well-known features of the history of the Spanish left during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is that it contained strong anarchist and syndicalist currents, which more than two decades before the founding of the Second Republic in 1931 began converging in the ‘anarcho-syndicalist’ CNT. In the context of the labour movements of other European countries during the same period, Spain was in this respect something of an anomaly. Whilst the anarchist and syndicalist movements of France, Germany and others were declining in the early twentieth century, those of Spain continued to gain ground. Consequently, whereas in much of Europe splits within the left were based around different interpretations of Marxism, in Spain there existed a still more fundamental distinction between Marxist-oriented organizations and those that defined themselves as anarchist and/or syndicalist. In the Second Republic, this divide had manifested itself on the level of organizations principally in the form of the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) and the UGT labour federation on the one hand, and the CNT and the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (FAI), a collection of anarchist affinity groups, on the other.

The CNT and the UGT were divided by a legacy of theoretical differences, over which opposing camps had been in dispute since the expulsion of Marxists from the Federación de la Región Española (FRE) in 1872 by the followers of Mikhail Bakunin.<sup>2</sup> The fundamental differences expressed by these ideological groupings in the 1870s formed the different foundations on which the CNT and the UGT were built.<sup>3</sup>

The CNT’s ultimate goal since the late 1910s, when anarchists came to stamp a decisive influence on the organization,<sup>4</sup> was the implantation of ‘libertarian communism’ or, synonymously, ‘anarchist communism’.<sup>5</sup> These terms signified a post-revolutionary structuring of society which would be faithful to the original aims of Bakunin and his followers in the First International. Libertarian or anarchist communism required the destruction of the state, which was consistent with the basic anarchist principle that a central state, even one run by the proletariat, was intrinsically oppressive towards those who lived within it. Within the CNT there were different views as to how quickly and by what means revolution could be achieved, ranging from immediately and through

spontaneous uprisings that would set off an innate revolutionary instinct in the masses, all the way through to revolution being unachievable until the CNT had consolidated itself into an all-powerful organizational force in which all workers were enrolled. All currents of opinion within the CNT, however, were certain that revolutionary confrontation would be necessary to overthrow capitalism and the state. With the exception of small nuclei of communists who operated within the CNT, virtually all active *cenetistas*, whether through a commitment to anarchist or syndicalist principles, rejected the possibility of bringing about proletarian emancipation through participation in political processes or political organizations. Politicians were regarded in CNT circles simply as advancing bourgeois and capitalist interests, and in the case of left-wing ones, tricking workers into supporting them through false claims, simply so they could acquire power and live off workers.<sup>6</sup> Instead of workers placing their hopes in politicians, they should, in the view of the syndicalist strand of principles that guided the CNT, organize themselves outside of the political sphere, and in unions. A key rational basis for this principle was that unions, unlike political parties, were controlled by workers and not politicians, and therefore were the real expression of proletarian interests. On a day-to-day basis, unions would be used to fight against the material conditions imposed by capitalism, with the unions alone carrying out this function and rejecting solutions offered by the political system. In the long term, the unions would be used to coordinate production in the absence of a state and political system after the libertarian communist revolution had begun.<sup>7</sup>

The prevailing theoretical bases of the UGT diverged from those of the CNT in a number of crucial respects. Above all, the UGT, as a Marxist organization connected to a political party, rejected the anti-political and anti-statist principles of the CNT. The founder of both the PSOE and the UGT, Pablo Iglesias, who had been at the helm of the socialist movement up until his death in 1925, was amongst those who had been expelled from the FRE by the Bakuninists.<sup>8</sup> The rejection of politics was seen by the socialists as entirely self-defeating for workers, cutting them off from an avenue through which material improvements to their lives could be made, and from advances towards a society in which workers controlled the means of production. Although there were different currents of opinion within the socialist movement as to whether the PSOE should be involved in government or should remain outside of it until capitalism had been overthrown, the socialist movement nevertheless participated in the political process, both via the PSOE, whose leaders were also key figures within the UGT, and through participation in dispute negotiation and social reform initiatives managed by government institutions. The socialists had traditionally regarded proletarian revolution as a long-term project to be

achieved gradually and in line with a deterministic reading of the Marxist view of historical change, and continued to do so in the Republic.<sup>9</sup>

The Second Republic in its first years represented an unprecedented period of rivalry between the CNT and the UGT, with the UGT operating in support of and within the government and the CNT increasingly opposed to it. The conflict between the CNT and the UGT during these years was an ongoing cause of deep concern to those who sought to build the new Republic. Following a debate on the matter in the Cortes on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1931, Manuel Azaña remarked that the issue was ‘one of the most serious and intense’ questions facing the Republic.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, however, the political and social currents in Spain also became increasingly polarized between left and right. The Marxist left and left Republicans in particular witnessed the rise of fascist and authoritarian movements abroad, and saw them as foreshadowing what the domestic right had designs on bringing about in Spain, a fear borne out to a large extent by the open admiration for fascist regimes abroad that was expressed by different sectors of the Spanish right such as the Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (CEDA) and the Falange. In tandem with this CNT-UGT hostility there was thus a counter-current towards a belief in the need for the left and the working classes to unite against this threat of fascism. This belief gained even greater momentum following the rebellion of October 1934 and in the context of increasingly open confrontation between left and right over the first half of 1936. The importance that was publicly attached to unity by the left would increase even further with the outbreak of the Civil War, especially as the organizations of the left became embroiled in infighting.

This thesis will examine the way in which the CNT interacted with the UGT in the period 1931-1936, approaching the subject from the CNT’s perspective. At the heart of the thesis is a goal of examining how far the CNT’s relationship with the UGT both at the national level and specifically in Catalonia changed in response to the overall framework of a polarization of Spanish political organizations and different sectors of society into opposing camps that would ultimately create the conditions for the outbreak of what would prove to be a protracted, bloody and deeply tragic civil war. This is not simply a question of establishing the ostensible official position of the CNT on the UGT at the national level on the eve of the war, but also a matter of establishing the agendas that lay beneath this position and determining how much the basic mentalities of mutual hostility that *cenetistas* and *ugetistas* exhibited towards one another since the early months of the Republic had changed in response to the gathering storm clouds. To truly understand the many different fissures within the Republican side during the war, it is every bit as important to

understand their pre-war sources as it is to examine their intensification in the war itself. Indeed, without the context of the pre-war years, accounts of the infighting that plagued the Republic during the war will always be incomplete.

The thesis will not merely determine the official positions adopted by the CNT towards the UGT and vice versa in their capacity as national actors and explain how and why they came about and how they linked to the organizations' broader agendas, but will also examine the ulterior motives that hid behind these official positions, as well as the *de facto* positions the two organizations developed on one another on the national level through their most important newspapers. Beneath these layers of interaction, the thesis will examine the deeper mentalities of CNT and UGT militants towards one another, which is to say what they regarded as being the essential qualities and characteristics of the other organization and its members.

Much of the analysis of the thesis focuses on the interactions between the CNT and the UGT in Catalonia. In some respects this analysis draws on the national level of the CNT's interactions with the UGT, in that it considers what role the Catalan CNT – by some distance the largest CNT grouping in Spain – played in determining the CNT's national-level stance on the UGT, as well as determining how the national dynamic of the CNT's interactions with the UGT establishing the CNT's stance on the UGT in the region. The focus on Catalonia also has a more grassroots dimension, through examining how the unions of the two movements and their militants interacted with one another as they competed to further their movements and represent the interests of workers across Catalonia. Above all, it will examine how the belief of the *cenetistas* of Catalonia that the CNT had a deep historical and even spiritual bond with the working classes of Catalonia shaped their interactions with UGT organizers and nascent UGT unions in workplaces and localities across the region. It is generally taken for granted in the historiography of the Second Republic that the UGT was at its weakest in Catalonia, where the proletariat were overwhelmingly allied to the CNT; in examining interactions between the two organizations in the region, this thesis will suggest that the notion of the proletariat in Catalonia almost unanimously backing the CNT and rejecting the UGT may need some revision.

At present, there is no substantial piece of research into the subject of CNT-UGT relations. However, this is not to say that the literature that exists on the workers' movement or indeed more general narratives of the Second Republic and the Civil War does not

acknowledge this theme. On the contrary, amongst researchers into early twentieth-century Spain it is fairly widely acknowledged and often mentioned – though usually in passing – that the CNT and the UGT were, generally speaking and notwithstanding a few momentary exceptions in the 1910s, the most bitter of rivals as a consequence of their clashing ideas on the questions of revolution, the state, political participation and methods for dealing with employers. In making this observation, creators of general narratives and specialists in the left or the workers' movement alike largely do not expand upon the subject in much greater depth. The acknowledgement of the enmity between the organizations has followed these lines since at least Gerald Brenan's depiction of the two union movements in *The Spanish Labyrinth*, and has since made appearances in narratives of the Republic or earlier decades.<sup>11</sup> Raymond Carr's study of Spain between 1808 and 1975, for example, depicts an enduring animosity between the two labour federations that was both a legacy of the theoretical disagreements that had divided Marxists and anarchists since the nineteenth century and a product of the two organizations' conflicting ideas regarding the handling of labour conflicts and the role of political organizations.<sup>12</sup> This appraisal of the dynamic of relations between the CNT and the UGT is certainly not incorrect; it is rather the case that because an overall dynamic of animosity was prevalent and can seemingly be attributed to glaring differences of theoretical and practical tenets, not much in the way of further investigation of the subject has been forthcoming.

As is to be expected, more explicitly CNT-centred studies provide a more comprehensive account of the CNT's national-level stance on the UGT than do more generally focused studies of Spain in the early twentieth century. For example, Antonio Bar in *La CNT en los años rojos* provides a detailed consideration of the debates on the CNT's relationship with the UGT as it was discussed at the main plenums and congresses of the organization during the 1910s, in which he traces the key positions that existed within the movement on the matter as well as how and why the one particular faction came to have a decisive say in the matter.<sup>13</sup> Works such as José Peirats's seminal three volume *La CNT en la revolución española* provide information on the main resolutions passed on the UGT at CNT plenums and congresses, as well as the pacts into which the CNT entered with the UGT over the course of the Civil War.<sup>14</sup> However, the subject is somewhat secondary to other themes that the authors of these works have sought to address.

At the same time, there are numerous studies that focus on the workers' movement in specific towns and regions during the Republic and the Civil War. Because the CNT and the UGT's unions co-existed in localities across Spain, a substantial proportion of these

works provide details of the interactions between local CNT and UGT organisms.<sup>15</sup> Such works provide important indications as to the extents of the rivalries and occasional instances of cooperation between CNT and UGT militants in their geographical area of study. Just as importantly, these studies also illustrate very clearly how disputes between CNT and UGT unions during the Republic readily broke out as a result of the CNT's commitment to direct action tactics clashing with the UGT's reticence towards striking and preference for using government-backed arbitration mechanisms to win improvements. However, because of their local focus and the fact that the question of CNT-UGT interactions is not central to these works, these studies are unable to offer a full insight into how these local interactions linked to the bigger picture of CNT-UGT relations, and nor do their authors seek to base the overall arguments and conclusions of their work around the question of CNT-UGT interactions.

Although the CNT's interactions with the UGT are rarely the specific subject of focus of historical research into the Second Republic, more recent years have seen crucial advances in the way in which the CNT has been studied. In addition to shedding crucial new light on the anarcho-sindicalist movement itself, the innovative approaches of these works have provided important advances that allow the CNT's interactions with the UGT to be examined from a more multi-faceted perspective.

The works of Eulàlia Vega on the CNT, which focus principally on the competing factions and ideological currents in the CNT during the Second Republic, represent a crucial advance in the way in which the CNT is studied and understood.<sup>16</sup> They approach their subject matter to a very large extent through an examination of the unions and local federations of which the CNT was comprised rather than simply the activities of its elite, and consequently demonstrate the importance of understanding how the CNT was structured and operated, especially at grassroots level. Factors such as the decision-making process within the CNT are brought to the fore, as are the way in which the crucial issue of the factional split was understood and manifested itself at the level of local federations and *sindicatos únicos*.

In a similar vein Anna Monjo's *Militants* is fundamental for understanding the internal dynamics of the CNT in terms of its decision-making processes.<sup>17</sup> Monjo systematically explores how the CNT was structured, how it made decisions and which cadres of the organization had in practice a deciding say in the positions formally held by the organization as a whole. Her examination of this aspect of the CNT leads her to suggest

that the inclusive ‘direct democracy’ that the organization claimed to uphold, which was supposed to set the organization apart from the controlling tendencies of political organizations over their bases, did not always function in practice. Instead, local leaders, upper cadres and more personally influential militants in practice exerted a substantial degree of control over decision-making processes, not to mention a decisive influence over precisely what matters could be addressed internally through a control over meetings.<sup>18</sup> Monjo carries out the equally important task of examining the militants of the CNT themselves. This aspect of her work involves identifying the different categories of militancy, from grassroots labour activists to oral propagandists, as well as examining precisely why people chose to join the CNT and participate in it, particularly at the grassroots level. Her study demonstrates how those at the lowest end of the CNT, such as its representatives in individual workplaces and even the organisers of its *sindicatos únicos* often participated little in the discussion of the bigger questions that confronted the organization, and instead were focused on the narrow tasks such as collecting membership dues.

The works of Monjo and Vega highlight the importance of examining the CNT – and in this case its position on the UGT – with an awareness of the dynamics of its decision-making system and how the activities of its grassroots militants on a day-to-day basis tied in with the bigger goals that the movement articulated on the national level. The thesis is very much concerned with examining the issue of CNT-UGT interactions in relation to the internal mechanics of the CNT, namely how decisions were made on the UGT, how they were transmitted through the organization’s hierarchy and which cadres played a determining role in formulating positions on the UGT. A study of CNT-UGT interactions from the CNT’s perspective would be very much incomplete without an understanding of how the organization’s decision-making process operated.

Monjo and Vega also demonstrate the importance of a constant awareness that the CNT was not merely a national or a regional actor, but that it was built fundamentally on the activities of grassroots militants in workplaces across Spain. Recognition of this requires the thesis to approach the question of CNT-UGT interactions in part from the level of the factory floor, recognising that it was in such contexts that the bulk of tangible CNT-UGT interactions took place. The work of Chris Ealham is also crucial in this regard. Ealham’s *Anarchism and the City* is geared towards delineating the customs, lifestyle and routines of the Barcelona proletariat – with a particular emphasis on the development of community structures and networks in the *barris* inhabited by the unskilled workforce – and using this

in part to help understand the attraction of the Barcelona working classes to the CNT.<sup>19</sup> Ealham illustrates that the CNT was so popular in the city in large measure as a result of its ability to integrate itself into the culture of popular protest and mutual support of working-class communities and to help promote the causes and preoccupations that underlay them. Perhaps more so than any other study, Ealham's work highlights the extent to which an understanding of movements such as the CNT can be improved significantly with an awareness of their operation at the grassroots level, the social context in which they operated on a day-to-day basis and the motivations of the individuals the organization hoped to represent, rather than simply focusing on their doctrinal positions and the actions of their leaderships. Again, this is an approach that will be adopted in this thesis to better understand the CNT's interactions with the UGT, above all in the form of a case study of interactions between the two organizations in the town of Igualada.

The work of Julián Casanova on the CNT also constitutes a major advance in the study of the anarcho-sindicalist movement. His *Anarchism, the Republic and Civil War in Spain* is concerned to a large degree with separating the rhetoric and discourse of the anarcho-sindicalists from the reality of their actions; in many respects the work is an attempt to debunk the myths generated by CNT-FAI propaganda and passed into secondary literature by writers sympathetic to the anarchists.<sup>20</sup> Casanova's work is a crucial advance in the political study of the CNT for a number of reasons. He painstakingly unpicks the discourse produced in CNT-FAI propaganda over the Second Republic and the Civil War, examining for example its superimposition of the idea of violent revolution as a panacea during the Second Republic, and its creation of a mystique and a myth regarding the CNT and its leading figures. His highly critical analysis of the anarcho-sindicalist movement is crucial as it draws attention to the centrality of rhetoric in the CNT's *modus operandi*, as well as highlighting the failures of the movement that have often been masked by this representation of itself.

The concepts of rhetoric and discourse are crucial to the question of the CNT's interactions with the UGT because, to a large extent, the CNT's stance on the UGT was articulated most regularly through the pages of the CNT press. It was here that the basic prevailing position amongst CNT militants – or at least those who controlled the means of public expression – were reproduced on a daily basis and in response to the wider developments of the Republic. A study of this discourse is thus fundamental to understanding what was the CNT's prevailing stance on the UGT. In addition, and departing from Casanova's examination of CNT discourse, this thesis will also take certain aspects of the CNT's press



output as indicative of the more deeply ingrained mentality of *cenetistas* towards *ugetistas*. Looking beyond editorials that were written about, for example, Largo Caballero in response to specific pieces of legislation, a detailed study of the CNT's public discourse reveals recurring themes and assumptions that were made about the UGT. These were expressed not just in the main editorials of the papers, but also in contributions to *Solidaridad Obrera* and others by union juntas and even ordinary CNT members.

The primary research for this thesis is based mainly on documents produced by the CNT and the socialist movement. The newspapers and internal bureaucratic documentation of the two organizations provide different but equally important facets of how the CNT and the UGT interacted with one another. On the one hand, the newspapers produced by the CNT and the UGT reveal how their leading figures wished the other labour federation, its members and its activities to be understood by the working classes, as well as revealing how militants from both organizations understood their rivals. A substantial proportion of interactions between the two organizations revolved around how they sought to construct an interpretation of one another to be transmitted to the working classes; as such the newspapers of the two movements constitute an essential source for examining CNT-UGT interactions.<sup>21</sup> They also provide crucial details regarding how CNT and UGT unions interacted with one another during the course of both large and small, localized labour conflicts, albeit through accounts which contain heavy organizational biases. On the other hand, the organizations' internal minutes, correspondence and circulars provide an insight into the decision-making processes through which positions and strategies relating to the other labour federation – or individual unions within it, in the case of documents produced at the grassroots level – were formulated, not to mention a window through which strategic calculations that were not publicly articulated through the press can be viewed.

The thesis is divided into three parts. Part one examines the national level of interactions between the CNT and the UGT between 1931 and 1934. This takes the form of two chapters which consider the official national-level position adopted by the CNT on the UGT (and vice versa) through their decision-making mechanisms and bodies, as well as the organizations' stances on one another as expressed through the main newspapers of the movement. These factors are placed within the context of the key developments of the Second Republic. The first of these chapters deals with the period of the Republican-socialist government; the second focuses on the period between the November 1933 election and the October 1934 rebellion, a crucial period in terms of both the escalation of hostilities between the left and the right and in terms of the development of discussions on

unity amongst the left. Part one also contains a chapter that focuses on the discursive output expressed by anarcho-syndicalists and socialists on one another between 1931 and October 1934.

Part two switches the focus of the thesis to Catalonia in the period between the founding of the Republic and October 1934. This part of the thesis partly examines specific, on-the-ground interactions between CNT and UGT militants, whilst also considering how the CNT and UGT in the region interpreted one another's movements in the region as a whole, as well as referring back to the national positions of the two organizations on one another. More specifically, the chapters in part two examine the attempts of CNT entities in the region to marginalize UGT unions, the rationale that underpinned these efforts, and the dynamics of labour conflicts in Barcelona in which the two organizations clashed.

Part three focuses on the post-October 1934 period, going as far as the eve of the nationalist uprising of July 1936, with the strands of the national level and Catalonia this time being interwoven. Its first chapter charts the change of the CNT's national-level stance on the UGT to one of proposing an alliance, examining in particular the role of the Catalan region in the creation of this stance, and also considers grassroots instances of convergence between CNT and UGT organisms. The following chapter then examines the counter-currents against unity within the CNT that went against its official pro-alliance position, as well as focusing on instances of grassroots hostilities and manifestations of the anti-UGT mentality that had prevailed earlier in the Republic. Like in part one, the analysis within these chapters will be placed into the wider context of escalating social and political conflict that beset the Republic.

The final main chapter of the thesis is a case study of interactions between the CNT and the UGT in the Catalan town of Igualada between 1931 and 1936. The case study examines the interactions between the two labour federations in much greater detail than in previous chapters, and also ties its analysis into the principal themes examined in the previous three parts of the thesis. This chapter is designed to highlight the significance of the question of CNT-UGT interactions to *cenetistas* who were on the front line of organizing and sustaining a local CNT movement, both in terms of how they viewed national relations between the two organizations and how they handled their own interactions with a local UGT counterpart.

The thesis then ends with a summary of its overall conclusions, as well as a short consideration of the impact of the interactions between the CNT and the UGT in the Second Republic on how the CNT handled relations with the UGT during the Civil War.

As a final comment, it is worth stressing that examining how political or labour organizations interact with one another, even (or perhaps especially) if they seek to draw their support from similar sectors of society, will almost inevitably unearth the least savoury aspects of an organization's behaviour. It is not without good reason that there is an almost universal tendency for historians and contemporary writers to refer almost instinctively to two or more organizations operating in the same political or social space – whether it be Spain, France, Britain, or any other country – as 'rivals' or even 'enemies'. Because this thesis focuses first and foremost on the CNT's handling of its interactions with the UGT, often it presents a critical analysis of the anarcho-syndicalist labour federation. This should not be taken as indicative of an overall stance of criticism of the movement. Outside the realm of interactions with other organizations, the CNT's unions and militants played a vital role in organizing and fighting for the concerns of some of the most exploited groups of Spanish industrial society, as studies by several authors such as Chris Ealham, have demonstrated.

Nor should this thesis be interpreted as singling out the CNT for being responsible for a failure to create a united front of left-wing and democratic forces in a context of escalating political polarization. Were this study to have focussed on the UGT's relationship with the CNT instead, it is highly likely that it would be equally critical of the socialist labour federation's handling of relations with its anarcho-syndicalist counterpart, something that is hinted at above all by the critical and groundbreaking studies of the socialists put forward by Helen Graham and Paul Heywood, who outline the leadership of the movement's repeated spurning of opportunities to build alliances through what Heywood describes as their 'bureaucratic imperialism over the workers' movement'.<sup>22</sup> This thesis merely presents one strand of what was, in reality, a failure by virtually all the actors of the Republic to come to the type of meaningful understanding that could have made a vital difference to the Republic's ability to fight a war.

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<sup>1</sup> There is no single satisfactory term that describes both the CNT and the UGT. To refer to them as 'unions' in this thesis would potentially create confusion, since the thesis considers both the activities of the organizations as national actors, as well as the activities of the organizations' individual unions. Although the UGT had a federal structure while the CNT was structured as a confederation, for the sake of clarity and

simplicity the term 'labour federation' is used throughout the thesis when referring to both the organizations as overall entities.

<sup>2</sup> George Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology and the Working-Class Movement in Spain, 1868-1898* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 10-45

<sup>3</sup> A more detailed summary of the theoretical differences between the CNT and the socialists can be found in Javier Paniagua, 'Republicans, Socialists and Anarchists: What Revolution Was That?' in José A. Piqueras and Vicent Sanz Rozalén (eds.), *A Social History of Spanish Labour: New Perspectives on Class, Politics and Gender* (New York: Berghahn, 2007), pp. 241-256

<sup>4</sup> This process of the CNT increasingly formally subscribing to anarchist goals is explored in Antonio Bar, *Syndicalism and Revolution in Spain: the ideology and syndical practice of the CNT in the period 1915-1919* (New York: Gordon Press, 1981)

<sup>5</sup> Both terms were used at the CNT's national congress of 1919 to describe the CNT's ultimate goal. Marcos José Correa López, *La ideología de la CNT a través de sus congresos* (Cádiz: Universidad de Cádiz, 1993), pp. 87-105; José Peirats, *La CNT en La Revolución Española* (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1971), p. 28

<sup>6</sup> As will be seen in this thesis, however, this did not prevent occasional cooperation with political figures and groups who were sympathetic to the CNT.

<sup>7</sup> For a succinct overall summary of the CNT's ideological foundations, see Correa López, *La ideología de la CNT a través de sus congresos*, pp. 199-200

<sup>8</sup> Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology*, p. 39

<sup>9</sup> For an account of the socialist movement's theoretical underpinnings prior to the Second Republic, see Paul Heywood, *Marxism and the Failure of Organised Socialism in Spain, 1879-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 1-108

<sup>10</sup> Manuel Azaña, *Memorias políticas y de guerra* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1978), vol. 1, p. 63; Julián Casanova, *The Spanish Republic and Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 55-56

<sup>11</sup> Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth: An Account of the Social and Political Background of the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp. 198, 224, 252, 224-272

<sup>12</sup> Raymond Carr, *España 1808-1975* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1982), pp. 421-435

<sup>13</sup> Antonio Bar, *La CNT en los años rojos (del sindicalismo revolucionario al anarcosindicalismo, 1910-1926)* (Madrid: Akal, 1981)

<sup>14</sup> Peirats, *La CNT*

<sup>15</sup> Some of the more notable examples include Angeles Barrio Alonso, *Anarquismo y anarcosindicalismo en Asturias (1890/1936)* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno 1988); Aurora Bosch, *Ugetistas y libertarios: Guerra civil y revolución en el País valenciano 1936-1939* (Valencia: Edicions Alfons El Magnànim, 1983); José Luis Gutiérrez Molina, *Crisis burguesa y unidad obrera: el sindicalismo en Cádiz durante la Segunda República* (Móstoles: Nossa y Jarra, 1994); Anna Monjo and Carme Vega, *Els treballadors i la guerra civil. Història d'una indústria catalana col·lectivitzada* (Barcelona: Biblioteca Universal Empúries, 1986)

<sup>16</sup> Eulàlia Vega, *Anarquistas y sindicalistas durante la Segunda República: La CNT y los sindicatos de oposición en el País Valenciano* (Valencia: Edicions Alfons El Magnànim, 1987); *Entre revolució i reforma: la CNT a Catalunya (1930-1936)* (Lleida: Pagès Editors, 2004); *El trentisme a Catalunya. Divergències ideològiques en la CNT (1930-1933)* (Barcelona: Curial, 1980)

<sup>17</sup> Anna Monjo, *Militants: democràcia i participació a la CNT als anys trenta* (Barcelona: Laertes, 2005)

<sup>18</sup> Monjo, *Militants*, pp. 286-289, 297, 302-304

<sup>19</sup> Chris Ealham, *Anarchism and the City: Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Barcelona, 1898-1937* (Oakland: AK Press, 2010)

<sup>20</sup> Julián Casanova, *Anarchism, the Republic and Civil War in Spain, 1931-1939* (London: Routledge, 2004)

<sup>21</sup> A more thorough discussion of the role of the press in the anarcho-syndicalist and socialist movements appears in chapter three.

<sup>22</sup> Heywood, *Marxism*, p. 138; Helen Graham, *Socialism and War: The Spanish Socialist Party in Power and Crisis, 1936-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 47

## **Part One: The CNT and the UGT on the National Level, 1931-1934**

## **Chapter One: The CNT, the UGT and the *bienio reformista***

### The final months of the monarchy

The CNT began to emerge and regroup from the clandestinity imposed by Primo de Rivera's illegalization of the organization from the spring of 1930 onwards. As it did, its militants were eager to witness the fall of the monarchy. But although the CNT participated in some anti-regime initiatives, it was a coalition of Republicans and socialists, formed following a meeting in San Sebastián in August 1930, that was the focal point of opposition to the ailing system and that would be in a position to take charge once Alfonso XIII had fled Spain after 14<sup>th</sup> April 1931.<sup>1</sup> Initially, socialist participation at this event was limited to the more informal involvement of Indalecio Prieto and Fernando de los Ríos, two of the most prominent members of the PSOE. At first, some of the key socialist leaders, amongst them Julán Besteiro and Francisco Largo Caballero, were wary of creating formal ties with the bourgeois Republican parties.<sup>2</sup> However, by October an inkling developed amongst the sectors of the socialist leadership who had hitherto resisted the possibility of joining the San Sebastián conspirators that were they not to join the movement, the socialist movement would be left behind.<sup>3</sup> By October 1930 the socialist leadership had agreed to throw its weight behind the plans of the San Sebastián Republicans.<sup>4</sup>

In formally joining the movement conceived in San Sebastián, the socialists and the UGT became indirectly connected through it to the CNT, whose leaders had been courted by the Republican protagonists since the signing of the San Sebastián Pact.<sup>5</sup> The representative of the provisional government in Barcelona, the Republican Rafael Sánchez Guerra, kept in contact with, among others, Ángel Pestaña and Joan Peiró, perhaps the most prominent and still active figures of the CNT from its heyday of the late 1910s, with a view to convincing them to have the unions of the CNT support the military coup they planned with a general strike.<sup>6</sup> With some of the legal restrictions on its activity being removed in April 1930, CNT unions once more began to organize and expand, especially in their former strongholds such as Catalonia, and as such their support would be a boon for any group that wished to overthrow the political system.<sup>7</sup> Although public commitments to supporting Republican causes by some of the most prominent members of the CNT such as Pestaña were met with censure from the more radical sectors of the CNT that would go on to be characterized as '*faístas*', there was no question that the anarcho-sindicalist movement favoured the collapse of the system.<sup>8</sup>

However, the circumstances that to a certain degree tied the CNT and the UGT to the same goals did not by any means bring about any *rapprochement* between the two labour federations. Relations between the CNT and the UGT had remained frozen in a state of animosity since 1923.<sup>9</sup> The coming of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, and in particular the UGT's response to it, had massive implications for the overall state of relations between the CNT and the UGT, not to mention on the CNT itself. Whilst the CNT was declared illegal by the new regime, and so were driven underground until the end of the decade, Primo de Rivera made overtures towards the socialist leadership to allow the UGT to avoid a similar fate by participating in the corporatist state framework he intended to set up. Although the wing of the socialist movement most closely aligned to Indalecio Prieto was against collaboration with the regime, Pablo Iglesias, Largo Caballero and their supporters took the UGT into partnership with the dictator, with Largo taking up a position as a councillor in the government.<sup>10</sup>

Once the CNT had found its public voice through the re-establishment of its press, a hostility towards the UGT and the socialist movement was articulated, based around its collaboration with the dictatorship.<sup>11</sup> The view was also put forward that the socialist leaders were in the present moment working towards the illegalization of the CNT, an argument that foreshadowed the anarcho-syndicalists' interpretation of the UGT's objectives during the Second Republic.<sup>12</sup> The attacks were every bit as personal as they were ideological. *Solidaridad Obrera* mockingly claimed in January 1931 that an incarcerated Largo Caballero had been unable to leave his cell for fear of being confronted by other prisoners.<sup>13</sup> On other occasions, he was lampooned in such terms as the 'perpetual secretary' of the UGT, a reference to his decades-long activity in the leading committees of the labour federation.<sup>14</sup> As time progressed, the regularity of printed attacks increased. Such criticisms had been expressed in the anarchist or CNT press in 1928 and even before, but were by late 1930 being expressed much more frequently and to a much wider audience as a result of the remobilization of the organization.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, these criticisms were certainly not a one-way street, with pieces in the CNT press often being written in response to public criticisms of the anarcho-syndicalist movement made by the leaders of the socialist movement.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, the socialist press also routinely mocked 'anarchists' and 'syndicalists' for a variety of reasons, above all for the apparent primitiveness of their ideas and their lack of open, unequivocal support for the anti-monarchy movement.<sup>17</sup>

The CNT and the UGT thus entered the Republic largely divorced from one another's activities and agendas. Although both were definitely on the same side of the divide that separated the old establishment from the anti-monarchy movement, there was no recognized communal purpose between the two labour federations. The CNT remained as hostile to the UGT in 1930 and early 1931 as it had throughout the Primo de Rivera era, and the two organizations acted virtually in isolation of one another even as they adhered to the same anti-monarchist cause, even during the failed strike movement of 15<sup>th</sup> December 1930 that formed a key component of the provisional government's attempt to take down the monarchy and install itself in government.<sup>18</sup> Instead, there was merely public animosity and mockery, articulated through the pages of their respective newspapers. The basic foundations of the war of words that would characterize the CNT and the UGT's national-level relationship over the first years of the Republic had already been laid by April 1931.

Once the December movement against the monarchy had failed, the CNT leaders to a large extent turned their attentions away from playing a role in the activities of the provisional government, and instead focused on rebuilding the CNT.<sup>19</sup> This was achieved with some success; as the *dictablanda* stuttered from one crisis to another, the monarchy collapsed following the 13<sup>th</sup> April municipal elections and the provisional government took charge, the CNT entered the Republic as a movement whose membership base was expanding rapidly.<sup>20</sup>

#### The Republican-socialist government and the UGT

The Republican-socialist government that was elected in June 1931 would set about trying to implement extensive reforms of labour conditions, agrarian questions and the role of the Catholic Church in public life; as is well-known these attempts were from the outset met with opposition from several sectors of society and embroiled the Azaña government in battles with both left and right. The UGT would be at the heart of supporting the Republican-socialist government, with the hopes of its membership pinned to its ability to implement wholesale social reforms.

The provisional government that had been waiting for the fall of the monarchy became the key protagonists in the government of the new Republic. Following their initial installation in government a general election was held, at which the Republican-socialist coalition swept to victory. The PSOE was the largest party in the Cortes, winning 116 deputies.<sup>21</sup>



The socialists occupied three seats in first the provisional government, as had been agreed upon in late 1930, and then again in the subsequent government of Manuel Azaña; this crucially included Francisco Largo Caballero occupying the position of Labour Minister in the name of the UGT.<sup>22</sup> As will become apparent, the position held by Largo and the initiatives he attempted to pursue through it would become in many respects the key focal point of the battle between the CNT and the UGT at the national level. The participation of the leader of the UGT and other prominent socialists in the government is the most obvious demonstration that socialism in its party-political and labour-union manifestations had a vested interest in defending and shaping the new Republic. The PSOE ratified socialist participation in government at a special congress held in July 1931,<sup>23</sup> which the UGT also formally approved at its October 1932 congress.<sup>24</sup>

The overall picture of the UGT's membership levels during the first years of the Second Republic appears to be one of an initial surge followed by a decline from the latter part of 1932. Having had roughly a quarter of a million members in 1930, by the end of 1931 the socialist labour federation had approximately one million members.<sup>25</sup> But by 1933, the overall figure had fallen to around 400000.<sup>26</sup> Both the rise and the fall came principally through the expansion of the UGT in the countryside, with rural labourers joining the Federación Nacional de Trabajadores de la Tierra (FNTT) in large numbers at the beginning of the Republic. Membership of the FNTT increased from 36639 in June 1930 to 392953 in June 1932.<sup>27</sup> This represented a fundamental change in the overall composition of the UGT, in which peasants had been a much smaller grouping. At the same time, however, the UGT's presence in urban areas across the country continued to grow, albeit at a relatively more modest rate. When the decline did come within the urban movement, it appears to have been fairly uniform across different industries and regions, with unions often being ejected from the labour federation for non-payment of dues or simply dissolving themselves, a trend that undoubtedly reflected the frustration many workers felt with the lack of progress delivered during the tenure of the Republican-socialist government.<sup>28</sup>

For the Republican-socialist government, the period following on from the June 1931 election was one in which the near impossibility of implementing the sweeping reforms it proposed would become apparent as its opponents on the right began to coalesce and present a well-organized, well-financed and more coherent threat. The social groups represented by the 'old' Spain were horrified with the new government's intentions for reform of the countryside, the armed forces and the Church. As Preston above all has

demonstrated, the legalist right placed obstacles in the passage of the government's reform bills, ensuring they were delayed and watered down. Outside of parliamentary business the right-wing press continually attacked the reforms and the integrity of the government itself.<sup>29</sup> It soon became apparent that the government lacked the control over the machinery of the state to implement the reforms it actually managed to pass through parliament. In the countryside in particular the legislation designed to redistribute land was hardly implemented due to an inability to enforce it at the local level, leading to confrontations between peasants and landowners and local authorities across the countryside.<sup>30</sup>

The issue of state-backed repression became an increasingly thorny one, over which protests were voiced most strongly by the anarcho-sindicalist movement. As some commentators have pointed out, Miguel Maura took up his position as Minister of the Interior with a zeal for ensuring that the laws of the Republic were obeyed at all costs.<sup>31</sup> Maura himself dedicates an entire chapter of his memoirs to outlining the threat he believed the CNT posed to the Republic.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the government also lacked control over the security apparatus it inherited from the monarchy.<sup>33</sup> Both these factors lead to it being tarnished with the same accusations of repression as the *ancien régime*. As early as May 1931, protesting workers in Pasajes, Guipúzcoa, were shot at by the Civil Guard, causing eight fatalities. At the turn of the year massacres were committed by security forces in Castilblanco and Arnedo.<sup>34</sup> The setbacks suffered by the Republican-socialist government and its supporters continued throughout 1932 and 1933. The government was criticized by the right not only for the reforms that it had planned, but also cynically capitalized on acts of repression meted out by the state security apparatus. The massacre by Assault Guards in Casas Viejas, Andalucía in response to an uprising there in January 1933, in which several peasants were murdered in reprisal, was met with a barrage of outrage by politicians from across the political spectrum, including those of the right.<sup>35</sup>

The accumulated calamities suffered by the Republican-socialist coalition took their toll on the socialist movement's commitment to the Republic, especially at grassroots level. Many within the socialist camp had become increasingly disillusioned with the process of governing, in particular the failure of reform to take effect and the stigma that their movement suffered through being in a government whose security forces had committed such atrocities as Castilblanco and Casas Viejas.<sup>36</sup> When parliament was dissolved by the President in September 1933, the PSOE in many areas of Spain chose to fight the subsequent election in isolation from Republican groups. The result was that the right,

whose consolidation into a coherent electoral bloc suited the Republic's electoral system, swept to power as the divided Republicans and socialists floundered.<sup>37</sup>

### The CNT and the Republic

Workers enrolled in the CNT, and to a degree *cenetista* militants and leaders, were filled with a sense of optimism and elation upon the founding of the Republic, a position that retrospectively seems surprising given the rapidity with which the CNT would come to present a position of outright hostility to the Republican state. The initial public reaction of the movement to the Republic itself was somewhat ambiguous. By as early as 18<sup>th</sup> April *Solidaridad Obrera* had suggested from its front page that 'it seems that the Republican government is betraying us'. At the same time, however, the very same issue of the paper also suggested that the Republic itself could satisfy some of the working classes' immediate demands.<sup>38</sup> But the general consensus in the CNT at the time was that the Republic and the freedom it offered was not so much an endpoint as it was an opportunity for the movement to quickly spread and take root, and ultimately lead Spain to libertarian communism.<sup>39</sup> Between the different factions of the CNT there were diverging opinions on how quickly this final goal could be achieved, but in the initial months of the Republic these were less apparent.

The *cenetistas'* optimism at this juncture was undoubtedly buoyed considerably by the continued renaissance that their organization was experiencing. The collapse of the monarchy initially removed any remaining restraints on open CNT activity, and consequently stimulated an enormous push by militants to return the organization to the height of its strength of 1919 and beyond. Over the spring and summer of 1931, new CNT unions and local federations were created across Spain, and old ones reformed. This process of expansion was particularly notable in Catalonia, where the membership base of the CNT expanded dramatically, reaching a high of 291150 members in June 1931.<sup>40</sup> This expansion was accompanied and to a significant degree fed by an increase in labour militancy against employers, especially in industrial Catalonia.<sup>41</sup>

A CNT national congress was convoked for June 1931 in Madrid. Overall, the congress reflected the general optimism in the CNT camp at this moment in time. Important structural changes were made to the CNT, such as an agreement to create national industrial federations to organize workers operating in the same industries across the country.<sup>42</sup> However, the congress did also hint at the factional differences that would later

come to the fore and nearly destroy the organization.<sup>43</sup> Essentially at this point two overall positions within the CNT could be discerned. On the one hand, there were those who saw the Republic as offering the CNT time and freedom to expand and consolidate as an organization so that it could then proceed to carrying out its social revolution on strong foundations. This moderate – or merely reformist in the eyes of its enemies – faction would go on to coalesce into the *treintista* movement and ultimately split from the CNT in 1933. On the other, there were those who saw possibilities for immediate social revolution in the present moment, thus meaning no temporary coexistence with the bourgeois Republic would be necessary. This current, though much more heterodox than its single labelling of ‘*faísta*’ would suggest, had by 1932 stolen the initiative from the moderates, setting off a process of self-destructive infighting as they attempted to assert a doctrinal purity over the CNT.<sup>44</sup>

For the most part the hopes of *cenetistas* regarding the possibilities of the new era proved to be quickly dashed. Instead, from the summer of 1931 onwards, the overall experience of the CNT as a national movement was one of embitterment and setbacks. The difficulties encountered by the CNT to a large extent resulted from it clashing with the new state. As the summer of 1931 progressed, the CNT’s anger came to be directed every bit as much at the government and the state as it was against employers. A nationwide telephone operators’ strike which began in July 1931 marked the point at which the CNT’s battle against employers came to overlap with, and in many respects be eclipsed by, a struggle with the government. Initially the vast majority of telephone operators adhered to the strike. However, the government had a vested interest in Telefónica, and was also aware that the conflict was outside of its control whilst in the hands of the CNT. The strike was declared illegal. There was a spate of violent confrontations between strikers and security forces, with the gravest incidents occurring in Seville. Most provocatively of all from the CNT’s perspective, the UGT undermined the strike through providing replacement workers. The conflict was presented in *Solidaridad Obrera*, other CNT newspapers from around Spain and the pro-CNT *La Tierra* as representing an offensive by a reactionary government, backed by the UGT and in hock to American capital, against the CNT and the telephone operators.<sup>45</sup>

Although the CNT had already publicly been at loggerheads with the government, and particularly Largo Caballero’s Labour Ministry, the Telefónica strike marked something of a point of no return, after which the CNT placed itself on a permanent war footing against the government and, as an integral part of this, as will be discussed, against the UGT. With

Largo in charge as the Labour Minister, a raft of legislation relating to labour arbitration, creating a rigid legal framework for labour disputes was created, centred around arbitration bodies known as *jurados mixtos*, which would replace the *comités paritarios* of the dictatorship. These *jurados mixtos* were to be more comprehensively enforced and were intended to be the only legal method through which labour disputes could be channelled, and linked in with legislation specifying how strikes could be conducted. The *jurados mixtos* were one of the flagship policies of Largo Caballero's Labour Ministry, and for the UGT leadership the implementation and usage of the *jurados* would be at the forefront of their labour relations strategy. Although militants lower down the hierarchy sometimes found the process of the *jurados* being set up and ensuring their settlements were enforced in the face of concerted employer opposition to be a frustrating experience, as a general rule those actively involved in the UGT wholeheartedly supported the notion of the *jurados*.<sup>46</sup>

The arbitration systems put in place were highly suited to the UGT's methods for handling industrial relations, which Santos Juliá succinctly describes as an approach of 'management unionism'. As Juliá illustrates, this 'management unionism' was characterized by UGT unions attempting to settle labour issues through committees and negotiation, seeking to eliminate the conflict element of dealings with employers. The chances of success of such an approach were improved immeasurably by the implementation of institutions that would arbitrate negotiations between workers and employers. In addition to viewing the Republic as a golden opportunity to implant such systems, the socialist leadership had taken the chance to be involved with other state-sponsored initiatives which might allow worker gains through less conflictive means; in the 1910s it had participated in the Instituto de Reformas Sociales, and much more controversially had been actively involved in Primo de Rivera's *comités paritarios*.<sup>47</sup> The UGT's unions across Spain attempted to implement *jurados mixtos* in their spheres of activity, much to the disgust of their CNT counterparts, who frequently opposed their creation and the settlements they produced. In backing the *jurados*, UGT organizers were not just fulfilling their preferred method of handling industrial relations, but also lending their support to the socialists' programme of social and labour legislation.

As has been commented upon by various authors, Largo's initiatives represented to a degree an illegalization of the CNT's preferred methods of negotiating labour relations.<sup>48</sup> The CNT's approach to industrial relations had, since its foundation, been grounded in the principles of 'direct action'. In many respects the tenets of direct action were squarely at

odds with the ‘management unionism’ of the UGT. For one thing, anarcho-syndicalism rejected the notion that workers should seek mediated solutions with employers; as Santos Juliá points out, such an approach was regarded as making concessions to the bourgeoisie and in turn stalling the course of proletarian emancipation. For the state to be in charge of these negotiations was, for an anarchist movement, doubly unacceptable.<sup>49</sup> The very notion of direct action was based upon workers having total control over their interactions with employers, in which they could deploy the methods they thought necessary – such as strikes, picketing, boycotts or even sabotage – to make gains against the bourgeoisie. A legally regulated framework for labour negotiations would render this approach illegal.

However, the CNT’s problems with the government did not simply stem from the narrow world of industrial relations. Within a year of the Republic’s foundation a cycle of insurrection being followed by repression which then incited protest against the government had become established. By as early as June 1931, *Solidaridad Obrera* was complaining of ‘the Republican dictatorship’.<sup>50</sup> Its hostility towards the Second Republic and its government on the grounds of its repression of the CNT would only intensify as CNT strikes were declared illegal, protest actions were dealt with by heavy-handed law enforcers and its attempts at insurrections were met with widespread arrests and closures of CNT organisms across the country.

The event that truly gave momentum to this cycle of insurrection and repression was the attempted uprising carried out by miners in the Alt Llobregat region of Catalonia in January 1932. The uprising began in Figols, where miners disarmed the local authorities, before spreading to neighbouring localities. It was ultimately crushed through the intervention of the armed forces. Under the terms of the *Ley de Defensa de la República* – which itself was inevitably a key preoccupation of CNT propaganda – the *cenetistas* arrested at the end of January 1932 were sentenced to be deported.<sup>51</sup> The decision sparked enormous protests from the CNT press, and kick-started a concerted propaganda campaign against the government and its repression.<sup>52</sup>

The turn of the CNT towards such an insurrectionary stance was in part a result of the deepening of factional splits within the organization, with more radical elements beginning to gain the initiative in deciding the propagandistic stance taken by the CNT and organizing protest campaigns and insurrections. When the Republic was founded, many of the key positions in the National Committee, the Catalan Regional Committee and the editorial board of *Solidaridad Obrera* were filled by moderates. However, following the

release of the *treintista* manifesto by prominent moderate figures in August which railed against the radical position that revolution would be brought about through spontaneous insurrection, tensions between the moderates and the radicals escalated. The *faístas* responded to the manifesto with a combination of angry condemnation and ridicule. The radicals of the movement proved to be far more adept at publicly attacking their moderate rivals. Moreover, the circumstances of the government's attacks on the CNT movement, exemplified in key strikes such as the Telefónica conflict in the summer of 1931, played into the hands of the radicals. Under pressure from these criticisms, moderate figures such as Joan Peiró began to resign from their positions of responsibility from the end of 1931. On the union level, radicals also began to make progress in controlling *sindicatos únicos*, especially in Barcelona.<sup>53</sup>

The difficulties for the CNT as a national actor continued and intensified throughout the Republican-socialist biennium, grounded in the same two areas of repression in response to its protest movements and internal factional conflict. Another set of insurrections took place in January 1933, which again failed absolutely and led to arrests and imprisonments of militants. Of these, the rebellion in Casas Viejas and the massacre in response to it by the local security forces gave ample stimulus to the CNT's protest campaign against the government, which more than ever was presented as an outright enemy of the working classes. Illegal strikes also continued to be called, with militants arrested, further sapping the strength of the organization.<sup>54</sup>

Over the course of 1932 and 1933 the factional war within the CNT intensified. When CNT entities led by moderates, such as the local federation of Sabadell, voiced their protests against FAI control, the *faístas* were able to push through their expulsion from the CNT. By the spring of 1933 many unions dominated by moderates had formally seceded from the CNT and founded the Sindicatos de Oposición bloc of unions and the Federación Sindicalista Libertaria, which was in effect the moderates' organizational equivalent of the FAI. Their leaders were drawn from the signatories of the *treintista* manifesto. In Levante they represented a majority of unions, whereas in Catalonia they constituted a significant minority. It is estimated that the *treintista* unions in Catalonia had a membership of somewhere between 35000 and 50000, which though not a large enough figure to represent the dominant tendency amongst the Catalan working classes, nevertheless represented a significant dent on the CNT's membership in the region.<sup>55</sup>

As the name suggests, the *Sindicatos de Oposición* saw their organization as standing in opposition to what they viewed as the aberration of the CNT's principles through the *faísta's* dominance of the organization; the *treintistas* viewed themselves as representing the real essence of the Confederation, and one day hoped to return to the fold. Accordingly, much of their press output during 1933 and 1934 was dedicated to attacking the *faístas*.<sup>56</sup> The unions in the *Sindicatos de Oposición* for the most part adhered to the same tenets of direct action that formed the core of the CNT's principles. However, the movement as a whole took a very critical view of their Barcelona CNT counterparts' long, violent strike actions that were a consequence of their refusal to obstinately reject any settlement that was handed down by the *jurados* or the labour ministry.<sup>57</sup> However, the *treintistas* did not stay united for long. A further split developed within their ranks as a result of Ángel Pestaña's advocacy of the movement breaking the taboo of participating in politics. Pestaña went on to form a political party, the Partido Sindicalista, which was rejected by the majority of the rest of the *treintistas*.<sup>58</sup> The *Sindicatos de Oposición* remained on the outside of the CNT, gaining no real additional momentum during 1933 and 1934, and then found themselves targeted by repression following October 1934, having participated, along with the Marxist left, in the October general strike in Barcelona.<sup>59</sup> It would only be in the spring of 1936, in the context of both the radicals and moderates realizing that they had both made strategic mistakes that had only damaged the Confederation, that reconciliation came about. Even then, however, not all those who had left the CNT in the first years of the Republic returned; some, such as the Sabadell Local Federation, remained autonomous, and then joined the UGT during the Civil War.

The functioning of the CNT's organizational structure and the decision-making processes embedded within it also began to suffer as a consequence of the disintegration of the organization. Prior to the Republic, the full organizational structure and procedures of the Confederation had lain dormant for years. With the organization operating openly once more from 1931, however, its decision-making bodies and the configuration in which they were linked could – and indeed needed – to be re-established so that the organization could engage with the political and social circumstances of the new era and work towards fulfilling the movements' overall goals. The CNT's militants viewed their organization as fundamentally different from – and superior to – the UGT due to their belief that whereas the UGT operated according to a strict hierarchy, at the top of which sat a national executive with which a substantial degree of overall authority rested, the CNT was, in their eyes, a collection of autonomous regional groupings which collectively decided upon the path that the organization would take. In practice, however, there was inevitably an



element of hierarchy in terms of how the CNT operated, both because there ultimately had to be a level at which a final decision was made and also because the reality of how decisions were made did often not match the anti-authoritarian ideals on which its structure was based.

The fundamental unit of division in the CNT's organizational structure was its regional confederations, of which there were ten during the Republic, each covering a different geographical area of Spain. Each region was headed by a regional committee, which acted as the coordinating body for the region and provided delegates to represent the region at national plenums. Grouped within each regional confederation were all of the *sindicatos únicos* and local federations – the focal points for unions in a given locality – that operated within the region. Plenums and congresses were held by each region, at which representatives of the region's unions and local federations attended, with a view to formulating that region's stance on whatever matters had been placed on the agenda for discussion, relating both to local and national matters. The representatives at these plenums and congresses attended holding positions that, if procedures had been followed correctly, had been agreed on through open assemblies of the organisms which they represented.<sup>60</sup> The overall coordinating body of the CNT was its National Committee, which was comprised of delegates from the city in which it was based, this location being decided upon at national congresses. The National Committee had the remit of organizing the convocation of national plenums and congresses, which were the two forums at which decisions of a national nature were made, as well as serving as the central body through which communications between regions were passed. National congresses involved a much wider participation of the grassroots, with all CNT unions and local federations able to send delegates. Officially national congresses were to be held every year and were supposedly the only forum through which important decisions could be definitively made. National plenums, by contrast, were attended only by delegates from each region, with these delegates carrying stances on the plenum agenda that had been agreed upon through aforementioned plenums or congresses held within their region.

Overall, then, the CNT was divided according to regions, with national-level decisions being formulated at national plenums and congresses attended by militants from each region, rather than the organization having any permanent national bodies that had the power to make decisions in the name of the entire organization, as the UGT's National Committee and National Executive could. On a day-to-day basis, union activity did not revolve around national questions, but rather local labour ones, and the handling of these

issues stayed within the CNT organisms of that region, rather than being passed onto a national executive or national industrial federation.<sup>61</sup> And because the positions that regional delegates took to national plenums were meant to be the product of consultation with the unions and local federations of that region, the decisions taken at national level were, if the chain of deliberation functioned correctly, ultimately an expression of the organizations' ordinary members.

However, the decision-making process was highly susceptible to being disrupted if any links in this chain were damaged, as occurred with increasing frequency throughout the Republic. National congresses were supposed to occur on a yearly basis, and were meant to be the only forum in which truly important issues affecting the CNT as a national movement could be decided upon. However, national congresses took place only in 1931 and 1936. In their absence, national plenums, which were easier to arrange as they involved the attendance of only small delegations of the leaders of each region, were relied upon for making national-level decisions.<sup>62</sup> However, the breakdown of decision-making mechanisms did not end there. Regional delegates frequently attended national plenums without carrying positions on the items on the agenda that had been agreed upon through regional plenums or congresses. It was a similar story within the regions themselves, where many of the delegates who attended regional plenums or congresses had not – either through poor organization or the effects of repression – held meetings with the members of the organisms they represented to agree a stance on a given issue.

As will be seen during the thesis, the breakages in the CNT's decision-making system would have important consequences for how the organization developed a stance on the UGT. In the absence of issues being discussed according to procedure, corners came to be cut, and decisions on important matters were taken by those towards the top of the CNT hierarchy without the full consultation of the grassroots organisms and ordinary members of the CNT. As the Republic progressed, as Anna Monjo demonstrates, the CNT's decision-making mechanisms eroded, leaving influential individual factions or individuals increasing options to impose their agendas on the organization as a whole.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, some regions, as will be demonstrated, saw fit to exploit the weaknesses in this complex decision-making process, or even brazenly tried to ignore established procedures to either force through their own positions or block those which they opposed.

The overall changes in membership of the CNT between the start of the Republic and 1934 vividly illustrate the initial optimism and confidence of the movement and the subsequent

difficulties it suffered. Looking at the overall membership of the CNT, it is clear that the organization experienced an enormous surge in membership in the earliest months of the Republic, which was a quickening of the momentum that had initially begun in 1930. The official national figure at the organization's June 1931 congress was 535566 members. The lion's share of these members came from Catalonia, with the organization also expanding rapidly in Andalucía.<sup>64</sup> By 1932, the overall trend was towards decline, though there are no overall membership figures until 1936. As with the membership surge, the erosion of the membership base occurred principally in Catalonia and Andalucía. In Catalonia, for example, membership fell from 291150 in June 1931 to 202354 in March 1933, with further falls still to come as a result of the *treintista* split.<sup>65</sup> It was a similar story in the Levant region; although the CNT here continued growing throughout 1931, reaching a peak of 99741 in January 1932,<sup>66</sup> by October of the same year that figure had fallen to 72604,<sup>67</sup> and would drop as low as 23308 in February 1934, the decline exacerbated as in Catalonia by the *treintistas'* formation of the *Sindicatos de Oposición*.<sup>68</sup> This is not to say that the CNT declined to the same extent across all of Spain. Regional membership figures compiled by historians reveal that in some regions the CNT's membership base stayed relatively constant, and sometimes continued to increase. In Asturias, for example, membership of the CNT rose from 24881 in June 1931 to 30803 in July 1933.<sup>69</sup> The rapid gains made by the CNT in the Madrid construction sector contributed to the CNT growing in the capital over the period in question.<sup>70</sup> However, in spite of such gains the inescapable truth for the CNT leaders was that, in the regions that constituted the overwhelming majority of the CNT's national membership, the organization shrank significantly.

In addition to demonstrating the rapid decline of the CNT, the above figures highlight the very uneven distribution of the CNT's membership throughout Spain, which had significant consequences regarding how the organization as a national actor operated. In June 1931, fifty-four percent of the CNT's members lived in Catalonia.<sup>71</sup> Although the CNT was comprised of ten regional confederations, therefore, in practice half of its members were concentrated in one single region. Andalucía was the next most important region in terms of its membership levels. It is possible that in 1932 its membership base eclipsed even that of Catalonia due to the fact that its decline in membership truly began in 1933, whereas the CNT in Catalonia was already waning in late 1931, though the true membership figures of the Andalusian CNT are virtually impossible to ascertain given the fleeting and disorganized nature of many of its rural unions.<sup>72</sup> The Levant region initially accounted for a significant portion of the CNT's membership, though its haemorrhaging of members reduced it by 1933 to being proportionally much less important. The remainder

of the CNT's ten regional confederations therefore accounted for a relatively small proportion of the organization's overall membership base, even if in some, such as Asturias or Aragón, they either rivalled or outnumbered the number of workers in the UGT.

This highly uneven distribution of members inevitably had an impact on how the CNT operated as a national entity. As discussed, the organization was based on the premise of autonomous regional confederations that would collectively formulate the CNT's national stances and goals. Unsurprisingly, however, the largest regions asserted a much greater level of influence when it came to the formulating the CNT's overall goals and strategies. As will become clear later in the thesis, Andalucía and above all Catalonia often steered debates at national plenums in the directions that they wished them to go, especially with regard to discussions on alliances and the UGT that would take place in 1934 and 1936. However, this influence of the largest CNT regions on the rest of the organization was not confined to national plenums. On a day-to-day basis, the Catalan CNT, as the region with the greatest resources, produced *Solidaridad Obrera*, which was by far the CNT's largest newspaper and *de facto* the organization's national mouthpiece. The public interpretation of the Republic and the UGT that was put forward by the CNT was therefore largely that of the Catalan CNT. On a more intangible level, as Anna Monjo argues individual militants within the CNT had a disproportionate influence in accordance to the weight of their public profile and the level of importance accorded to them by other militants.<sup>73</sup> The leading figures of the Catalan and Andalusian regions inevitably acquired a cache and national-level influence that was impossible for the leading militants of the smaller regions. Figures such as Buenaventura Durruti, Federica Montseny, Juan García Oliver and Joan Peiró, all based in Catalonia, received much greater exposure in *Solidaridad Obrera* and were nationally-known, whereas the leaders of the CNT in Galicia or the Basque Country, for example, were not.

The combined effects of government repression, factional splits and the *faístas'* mismanagement of the CNT ensured that by the time the right had gained power in the 1933 elections, the CNT was in disarray. Though the radicals were still able to cajole certain elements of the grassroots into carrying out ill-advised insurrections, and a vitriolic anti-Republic line was maintained from the pages of *CNT* and *Solidaridad Obrera* that promised an imminent libertarian revolution, the reality was that the CNT was badly damaged.

The confrontation between the CNT, the government and the UGT

What, then, was the CNT's public stance on the UGT as a national actor in this context? Put simply, it was one of unprecedented hostility, articulated through the pages of CNT and anarchist newspapers and through the speeches of leading CNT militants. The socialist labour federation was put at the heart of the CNT's overall interpretation of the Republic, to the effect that the UGT was presented as being a driving force behind the acts of repression against the CNT, and that this was part of an overriding goal on the UGT's part to destroy the CNT.

The fact of the UGT being in the government and the CNT being opposed to it, a manifestation of the two movements' clashing theoretical standpoints, was the axis on which the hostilities between the two organizations on the national level turned. The CNT press presented an overall interpretation of the UGT between April 1931 and November 1933 of it having the overriding goal of destroying the CNT so that 'the way will be clear for the UGT to try and recruit the proletariat, organizing it in its ranks and placing it under the tutelage of the state'.<sup>74</sup> From the earliest months of the Republic, *Solidaridad Obrera* and other CNT papers spoke of 'the UGT offensive against the CNT'.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, even before the founding of the Republic, *Solidaridad Obrera* had argued that the provisional government would put the UGT to use for this purpose.<sup>76</sup> This argument was articulated repeatedly by anarcho-syndicalist newspapers in relation to both the activities of the socialist leadership and of UGT unions across the country. The claim was even occasionally made that local UGT leaders attempted to arrange for the Civil Guard to murder *cenetistas* to this end.<sup>77</sup> The CNT press presented the overall dynamic of relations between the CNT and the UGT as being one of a battle whose winner would be 'them or us'.<sup>78</sup>

The legislation and other initiatives spearheaded by the Labour Ministry, such as the laws regarding strikes, the regulation of unions and the implementation of arbitration systems and government-appointed officials to regulate labour disputes, and the heavy-handed public order initiatives of the Interior Ministry, above all the *Ley de Defensa de la República*, were interpreted as being designed specifically to allow the CNT to be destroyed and the UGT to replace it. For example, outlining the imposition of labour relations settlement in Andalucía by the Captain General which stipulated that revisions to *bases de trabajo* had to be submitted and negotiated through *comités paritarios*, *Solidaridad Obrera* argued that

in Andalucía, as in Barcelona, the UGT wishes to impose, through the authorities that represent it in government, a system of organization that the CNT never has and never will accept. For this reason militants are incarcerated and unions are closed.<sup>79</sup>

Any possibility that socialist legislation was designed for reasons other than to destroy the anarcho-syndicalist movement was implicitly rejected by this stance. With regard to the Republic's stance on public order, *Solidaridad Obrera* gave the following interpretation of the *ley de defensa de la República*: 'it means that the socialists can remain alone, having as they wish the Spanish proletariat and the organizations of struggle against capital. Those organizations of open struggle against the state, let us just say that they will disappear'.<sup>80</sup>

This overall interpretation of the socialist movement's goals in the new era was expressed above all through the notion of Francisco Largo Caballero, the most publicly-known socialist figure, the Labour Minister and the General Secretary of the UGT, masterminding a plan to destroy the CNT. This plan was executed from above by the machinery of state, and from below by his command of the UGT. It was 'Largo Caballero's offensive against the CNT'.<sup>81</sup> In May 1931, for example, *Solidaridad Obrera* provided a summary of key conflicts across the country in which the CNT were involved. There was not necessarily any direct involvement from Largo in any of them, but each occurrence was presented as having been masterminded by Largo. His hand was seen behind an apparent pact between employers and the UGT in Zaragoza against the CNT. He was condemned for attempting to prevent the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) mediating in negotiations at the Barcelona port. And he was also seen as directly responsible for the incidents in Pasajes, San Sebastián, where in the view of *Solidaridad Obrera* 'to protect the UGT a peaceful demonstration was dispersed with gunshots, killing people in the most vile and cowardly manner'. The verdict of the paper was that 'the coercions of Largo Caballero have had and could have tragic consequences that in any other country in the world would be punished with a prison sentence and the death penalty'.<sup>82</sup> Largo quickly took on the role of an omnipotent despot who could strike out against the CNT anywhere and everywhere, a notion that, as Julián Casanova has pointed out, was totally detached from the realities of how much control the socialists could have exerted at the local level from their position in government.<sup>83</sup>

These core arguments regarding the UGT were not simply made and then forgotten. Rather, they were repeated throughout the lifespan of the *bienio reformista*. On one level this repetition came about through editorials written in the aftermath of bouts of repression

suffered by the CNT following its various insurrections, or as new legislative initiatives were passed. Just as importantly, however, they and the more basic sentiment of an all-out fight for survival between the CNT and the UGT were recurrently expressed on a day-to-day basis through the CNT's press coverage of labour conflicts involving the CNT and/or the UGT, or even just of reports on the activities of UGT unions from across Spain. Between April 1931 and the end of 1933 each week brought with it reports of new outrages committed by UGT organisms as they set about fulfilling the government and socialist movement's anti-CNT agenda.

To give some examples to convey the continual nature of these attacks on the UGT,<sup>84</sup> in August 1931, CNT shoemakers in Valencia accused the Labour Ministry and local employers of colluding in an attempt to sideline the CNT and establish the UGT in the sector.<sup>85</sup> In September, *cenetistas* in Córdoba published a lengthy article in the paper in which they attacked both their local UGT counterparts and the Spanish socialist movement in general for its collusion with the bourgeoisie and the yellow nature of its unions.<sup>86</sup> In October, a militant from Reinoso, Cantabria, recounted the apparently deceitful activities of the local socialist leadership in their attempts to ensure workers were not laid off from a local factory, with the contributor advising other local workers to 'get away from anyone who has a whiff of socialism about them or is a member of the UGT'.<sup>87</sup> In November, CNT waiters in Játiva reported in the paper that a strike they had led had collapsed after the UGT provided strike breakers.<sup>88</sup> In January 1932, the newspaper reported on the collusion of local UGT leaders and employers in the sugar processing industry in Zaragoza, vehemently attacking their corrupt self-interest and selling-out of workers.<sup>89</sup> In March, members of the CNT's barbers' union in Madrid published a piece that exhorted barbers in the capital to abandon the UGT on the basis that its barbers' union had done nothing but manipulate and betray them for the previous quarter of a century.<sup>90</sup>

Once *CNT* had gone into publication from 1932, thus giving the anarcho-syndicalist labour federation an officially 'national' mouthpiece for the first time, the coverage of CNT-UGT grassroots conflict outside of Catalonia increased. In November 1932, the paper accused the socialists' mining union in Asturias of betraying workers through curtailing a strike action there.<sup>91</sup> In December, *CNT* reported, amongst several other conflicts over which it attacked the UGT, on the intervention of socialist leaders in Vitoria in an attempt to suppress a strike by the CNT-affiliated bakers there.<sup>92</sup> Also that month the paper alerted readers to a case of the UGT in Valladolid preventing CNT workers from finding employment in local public works schemes.<sup>93</sup> In March 1933, the paper reported on the

‘treachery’ of the UGT’s mineworkers’ union in Asturias after it voted to end a strike in the region.<sup>94</sup> In April, apparent collusion between the local authorities and the UGT in Córdoba against the CNT led to the paper decrying another case of ‘eternal socialist treachery’.<sup>95</sup> In June the UGT in La Coruña was strongly criticized as ‘social fascists’ for ‘betraying’ the CNT at the city’s port for refusing to back a CNT strike there.<sup>96</sup>

Of course, between April 1931 and November 1933 there were numerous altercations between CNT and UGT unions across the length and breadth of Spain which were the product of local union leaders from the two organizations approaching labour questions from conflicting theoretical and practical approaches to industrial relations, rather than these conflicts simply being an interpretative spin of the two movements’ newspapers, as several important local studies of the union activity in this period illustrate,<sup>97</sup> as do the preoccupations of British diplomats with incidents such as clashes between the CNT and the UGT in the Río Tinto mines and at the port in Tenerife.<sup>98</sup> What is important to note, however, is that the CNT chose to draw attention to the UGT’s activities on a regular basis, even if the incident in question was relatively small or did not directly or indirectly involve a CNT counterpart, and with a scant regard for context. As a result, minor conflicts such as a bakers’ strike in Vitoria often received front-page billing in CNT papers as part of attempts to publicly discredit the UGT. Similarly, conflicts run by the UGT, such as the general strike in Salamanca in December 1932, were given a running commentary that argued that the organization was trying to prevent the workers from carrying out the strike action and ‘manoeuvring with the goal of bursting the movement before it has borne its fruits’.<sup>99</sup>

Crucially, the idea that the UGT was acting from government and through its unions to destroy the CNT and replace it with the UGT was far from a secondary aspect of the CNT’s overall public interpretation of the Republic and the Republican-socialist government. The Republic was a ‘socialist dictatorship’<sup>100</sup> that dedicated its efforts to creating ‘socialist laws against the workers’ and the CNT.<sup>101</sup> At the same time, the sheer frequency with which the socialists’ activities in government were referred to and with which the activities of UGT organisms across Spain were reported ensured that the UGT dominated the CNT’s ongoing interpretation of the Republic. The scheme of destroying the CNT and replacing it with UGT was presented as being a central component, at times even the overriding one, of the project of the Second Republic. The UGT and its apparent sectarian, anti-worker objectives were thus at the very heart of the CNT’s overall understanding of the new political and social era.



The repeated and consistent articulation of this stance on the UGT begs the question as to how such an interpretation came about. Given that the UGT occupied such a central role in the CNT's narration of the Second Republic, it would be easy to assume that it was the product of some sort of formal decision emanating from within the CNT to deliberately target the UGT with the intention of mobilizing the working classes against a rival. However, an examination of the proceedings of the CNT's national plenums and national congress that took place during the first years of the Republic reveals that in this period the UGT was seldom a topic of discussion.

To put the relevance of national plenums and congresses into context, according to the CNT's established processes, it was at these meetings that national CNT principles, goals and strategies were formally discussed and implemented. They were the principal outlets for representatives of the different CNT regions (and representatives of different unions and local federations across Spain in the case of national congresses) to come together and reach a national consensus on issues that were deemed to be of primary importance to the CNT. The decisions made at these meetings were generally taken to be binding. The organization's national plenums dealt with outstanding ongoing matters between congresses, which were supposed to be the forum for the outstanding practical and theoretical issues facing the movement.<sup>102</sup> As such, it would be expected that if *cenetistas* wished to build a coherent public line on the UGT, formally discuss the implications of the CNT's coexistence alongside the UGT in the new context of the Republic, or establish a strategy for CNT-UGT interactions, it would be carried out at these meetings.

However, at neither the national congress of June 1931 nor in any of the national plenums held between the founding of the Republic and November 1933 was the issue of UGT in any shape a formal item of discussion on the agenda of the meetings, and nor did the issue of the CNT's relationship with the UGT on the national level become a topic of discussion at the sessions of these meetings as they progressed. The main themes discussed at the national congress and early national plenums focused rather on a combination of how to expand the organization and administer its press, with the playing out of factional differences also playing a role.<sup>103</sup>

By 1932, the items of discussion at national plenums reflected the more insurrectional tone of the *faístas* who dominated the organization's agenda, not to mention the preoccupation of *cenetistas* with the effects of repression on their organization and increasingly divisive factional battles. The December 1932 plenum, for example, was convoked to discuss the

possibility of a national strike by rail workers and the viability of it being backed by other strike and insurrectional activity around the country.<sup>104</sup> In January 1933 a national plenum was held in which the failure of these efforts were discussed, as well as how to launch a fightback campaign, especially with regard to the imprisonment of *cenetistas*.<sup>105</sup> At the January 1933 plenum an analysis of the UGT did not extend beyond the suggestion made by the delegate for the central region regarding a propaganda campaign to fight back following the failure of the January 1933 insurrections, which should in his view target the socialists in government, 'who are responsible for everything'.<sup>106</sup> At the June 1933 national plenum, in reporting on the course of the general strike of the previous month in their respective regions, delegates from some regions commented upon the position adopted by their UGT counterparts, often reporting on their refusal to participate and the effect this had on dampening popular participation in the strike. The Aragonese, for instance, reported on the efforts made by the UGT, 'faithful to their trajectory of treachery', to dampen the general strike by postponing the general strike they coincidentally had planned for the same day.<sup>107</sup>

However, aside from tangential references to the stance of the UGT in the midst of CNT labour conflicts and protest actions, the socialist labour federation was certainly not a point of discussion, especially not in a sense of analyzing the relationship between it and the CNT. This non-discussion of the UGT during these forums for national policy and strategy formulation highlights two salient points. First of all, it demonstrates that the founding of the Republic did not, for the CNT, serve as a stimulus to re-evaluate its overall relationship to its socialist counterpart, whether with a view to deciding upon a strategy for decisively eclipsing its rival or for seeking some form of *rapprochement*. Given the respective positions occupied by the two labour federations, and above all the links of the UGT with the government and its reform program, it is hardly surprising that the CNT's ongoing and longstanding hostility towards the UGT intensified with the founding of the Republic, which had no bearing on the differences of theories, principles and goals that had divided the two ideological currents since the nineteenth century, and nor did it change a past in which the UGT had collaborated with Primo de Rivera and the CNT had been made illegal. However, it is evident that this increase in hostility was essentially a reflexive amplification of a position created during a previous social and political epoch. It is clear that once the UGT was generally perceived to be an enemy by *cenetistas*, no further consideration of the rival organization was required. The question of how to orientate the organization towards its biggest rival therefore slipped through the cracks of the decision-making mechanisms.

Secondly, it is evident that the CNT's placing of the UGT at the heart of its interpretation of the Republic was not part of a formally agreed-upon strategy by its members. Instead, it would appear that the articulation of the interpretation of the UGT was left to the writing and editorial teams of the CNT press organs, and also the *cenetistas* who contributed articles to the papers, generally in a capacity in which their writings were not themselves a statement created through consultation with fellow *cenetistas*. The CNT's public position on the UGT was therefore created in a largely non-consultative fashion. At the same time, however, there is nothing to suggest that there was any significant opposition within the movement to the public stance that was taken against the UGT – neither with regard to the propensity to attack the UGT, nor the overall interpretation of it having a goal of destroying the CNT – from within the movement. What prevailed as the CNT's *de facto* stance on the UGT was something that was on the one hand created by a small proportion of militants writing in what was effectively a personal capacity, yet at the same time appears to have been unanimously endorsed by the rest of the movement.

#### The socialists' stance on the CNT

The socialist movement and the UGT likewise were on a constant footing of public opposition to the CNT throughout the first years of the Republic, though not to the same vitriolic degree exhibited by *Solidaridad Obrera* and *CNT*. Editorials in *El Socialista* above all presented the CNT's disregard for the Republic's social legislation and its continued attempts at insurrection as at best 'playing into the hands of the bourgeoisie',<sup>108</sup> and at worst simply 'counter-revolutionary'.<sup>109</sup> Whilst the socialist press overall presented less of a continual narrative based around attacking specific CNT strikes, it and local UGT leaderships were certainly willing to make their position clear regarding the CNT's activities. When *El Socialista* did comment on a CNT strike, it was usually to condemn it. Commenting on a CNT general strike in Granada in November 1932, for instance, the paper condemned what it viewed as a crude 'importation' of Catalan syndicalism, combined with forms of violent protest redolent of nineteenth-century Andalucía. In its news coverage of the conflict *El Socialista* dwelt in particular on the incidents of violence that were carried out.<sup>110</sup> *El Socialista* warned its readers that a CNT general strike in Zaragoza in May 1933 was a 'monarcho-anarchist plot'.<sup>111</sup>

The deliberations of the UGT National Committee reveal that this was not simply a propagandistic spin, but a genuinely-held belief – though it hardly needs pointing out that the CNT were not carrying out their protest movements on behalf of the right – by the

labour federation's leaders. In the December 1932 meeting of the National Committee, for example, Julián Besteiro raised as a point for urgent discussion that 'syndicalist and communist elements, together with the extreme right, have the goal of overthrowing the Republic'. Other members of the Committee were similarly convinced that in the areas in which they were based the CNT was planning either to carry out an insurrection on behalf of the forces of reaction or destroy the local UGT organisms at their behest, including planning a series of assassinations of UGT members.<sup>112</sup>

Like the CNT, the UGT's own public opposition to the CNT was not the product of its most important decision-making forums, namely its national congress or the meetings of the National Committee. That said, the CNT did feature more heavily in the appraisals made of the Republic by socialists. At the PSOE extraordinary congress held in July 1931, the CNT's activities were cited by both those who were in favour of and those who were opposed to ministerial participation in defence of their respective positions.<sup>113</sup> The issue of the organization's stance on the CNT was also indirectly addressed at the UGT's 1932 national congress, through a debate on whether to amend the UGT's basic position, established at its previous congress in 1928, that the organization would not enter into alliances with other organizations. However, no amendment was ultimately made, with the opinion of one delegate that 'the simple fact' of changing this position 'means recognizing that there are other trustworthy organizations, and this is not correct' seeming to reflect the perspective of the majority.<sup>114</sup> At the congress there was also a brief and fairly unanimous condemnation of 'anarchist violence' and the 'murders of several of our comrades carried out by syndicalist elements'.<sup>115</sup>

It must be emphasized, however, that these discussions were a relatively minor aspect of the congress and were quickly resolved with little required in the way of discussion. Instead, the bulk of the congress was dedicated to appraising the conduct of the Executive Commission, particularly during the December 1930 attempt to topple the monarchy; the statutes of the UGT; and the social program of the UGT with regards to matters such as education, workplace safety, working hours and so on. In proportional terms, then, the CNT was not a principal subject of discussion.<sup>116</sup>

More importantly, it must also be borne in mind that the UGT's national congress did not take place until October 1932, approximately eighteen months after the Republic had been declared. By this time, the Republican-socialist government and its reform program had already run into considerable difficulties and opposition, and the CNT had become firmly

entrenched in its hostility to both the government and the UGT. It must be stressed, therefore, that in spite of the declaration of the Republic representing a watershed moment that ought to have prompted an immediate analysis and re-evaluation of the UGT's relationship with the Republic and a whole host of other matters besides, the socialist labour federation had not convened such a forum of discussion since 1928. In turn, this meant that the forum for discussing the UGT's position on the CNT – and indeed any other organizations – going into the Republic was essentially the one carried over from the final years of the monarchy. The hostile line of *El Socialista* and other socialist newspapers towards 'syndicalists' and 'anarchists' during the Republic was therefore a continuation of the position developed in the previous decade (and indeed in decades prior to that), rather than being the product of a discussion of the CNT by representatives of the constituent parts of the UGT during the first moments of the Republic.

Whilst an overall position on the CNT was not formulated through the UGT's formally most important decision-making forum, an examination of the role played by the organization's Executive Commission and National Committee in presiding over their organization through their regular meetings reveals that there was an overall, coherent line taken against the CNT. The National Committee retained a preoccupation with instances of violence directed against UGT members and organisms by the CNT. Members of the committee who were based in regions in which the CNT were strongest painted a picture to the rest of the committee of their memberships living in continual fear of attack from *cenetistas*, sometimes with the assent of the local authorities. For example, Luis Viesca, who as representative of the national sugar workers' federation was based in Zaragoza, described instances of the CNT organizing lockouts of factories to prevent UGT members from working in them, and generally planning, in his view, a campaign of terror against UGT organisms and members.<sup>117</sup> Reports of CNT activity in Catalonia were no less bleak, with the UGT presented as being forced to fight every bit as much against the CNT as against intransigent employers.<sup>118</sup>

On a day-to-day basis, the Executive Commission of the UGT handled queries from individual UGT organisms regarding how to handle their CNT counterparts. UGT organisms would contact the commission with details of their problem with 'anarchists' and 'syndicalists', and the UGT leaders would dispense advice or attempt to offer a solution, where they could. On several occasions, UGT grassroots entities wrote to the Commission to complain that syndicalists were attempting to take over the local UGT movement. For example, the Executive became concerned in September 1932 that UGT

organisms in Vigo, Galicia, were ‘finding themselves influenced by communist and syndicalist elements’, which, they were concerned, could lead to ‘unpleasant things’.<sup>119</sup> Clearly, the leadership of the UGT was concerned throughout the Republic to ward off any possible anarcho-syndicalist interference in UGT organisms and ensure that the grassroots of the organization remained closely aligned to the agenda of the socialist movement. Based on the fact that these reports and denunciations were often made by local *ugetistas*, it would appear that this was every bit as much a concern for lower-level UGT organizers as it was for the leadership, rather than it having simply been a case of the UGT leaders keeping their grassroots under unwanted surveillance.

Sometimes the UGT Executive Commission would use its position to attempt to elevate cases of CNT threats to UGT organisms to the authorities of the Republic. For example, in June 1931 a delegation from Valencia visited the UGT leadership to seek help for workers in the leather industry there; the delegation asked for the Commission to help ‘guarantee liberty of work in the face of syndicalist elements’. Wenceslao Carrillo made contact with the Civil Governor to try and ensure this.<sup>120</sup> The commission attempted to make a similar ministerial-level intervention on the request of UGT workers in Málaga who were dismissed from an olive oil manufacturer and replaced by CNT workers, who were apparently operating in collusion with the owner of the business.<sup>121</sup>

However, the most common response made by the UGT Executive Commission to details of *cenetista* threats sent to it by the organization’s grassroots was to send out orators to the locality in question. Consequently, the UGT Executive’s principal strategy for fighting for territory with the anarcho-syndicalists around Spain seems to have been based on the belief that the best – or perhaps only – method at their disposal was to try and initiate a propaganda war. So, for example, the head of the UGT’s local federation in Barcelona, Juan Sánchez Marin, contacted the Executive Commission to request that Pascual Tomás be sent to address a meeting they had planned, the object of which was to ‘counteract the work of syndicalist elements’ who were attempting to force UGT members at the port to abandon their union.<sup>122</sup> Both Tomás and Andrés Saborit were sent by the Commission. Towns that were far smaller than Barcelona also received this dispatch of UGT leaders as part of a propaganda counter-attack against local *cenetistas*. Localities such as Aranda de Duero, Burgos, and Alcira, Valencia, upon writing to receive support for their propaganda efforts to ‘counteract the work of the anarchists’<sup>123</sup> were offered prominent *ugetistas* such as Wenceslao Carrillo.<sup>124</sup>

The overall strategy of the UGT national leadership on the CNT was thus one of fighting a defensive action against CNT unions across the country, based on an overall impression that CNT unions represented a significant threat to the survival of UGT organisms – not to mention militants – across the country. Far from corresponding to the CNT's belief that the UGT's unions would be used to destroy the CNT, the stance taken by the Executive Commission was in fact that of attempting to fight a defensive action against the threat of CNT unions. This is a counter-perspective to the overall question of the CNT and UGT's stances on one another in the early years of the Republic that has largely escaped the attention of commentators. As discussed, many writers have pointed out that the socialists' legislation from government placed an impediment on the CNT's ability to function according to its principles. Others have argued, and certainly not inaccurately, that the socialist leaders were keen to ensure that the full weight of the state's security apparatus was applied against the CNT when it broke the law, whether in the labour sphere or during insurrections.<sup>125</sup> This is certainly backed up by the public attitude taken by socialists over arrests and punishment of *cenetistas*, which occasionally was simply callous.<sup>126</sup>

However, it must also be taken into account that on a day-to-day basis, the UGT leadership did not approach the question of the CNT as though they had access to force to destroy outright CNT unions. Rather, their primary concern was for the survival of their own unions, which they viewed as under threat from CNT coercions, against which they generally turned to measures such as sending mediators or propagandists to the area. This is not to argue that this was a particularly rational appraisal of the on-the-ground dynamic of interactions. It is the case, however, that the UGT's leadership did not operate on the premise that it had the ability to destroy the CNT, but instead on the basis that it needed to minimize the effect of anarcho-syndicalist pressure or coercion on its grassroots.

The Second Republic therefore did not bring with it any let-up in hostilities between the CNT and the UGT in terms of the way the two labour federations interacted as national actors. In fact, to the contrary, it brought hostilities between the two organizations to new levels through them placing themselves on opposite sides of the dividing line between defending the Republic and attacking it. The CNT's escalating confrontation with the new regime was inextricably linked with the anarcho-syndicalist labour federation intensifying its public stance of hostility towards the UGT on the national level. For its part, the socialist movement likewise became increasingly hostile to the CNT from early on in the Republic, for the converse reason that the anarcho-syndicalists' actions were interpreted by the movement as being counter-revolutionary. These were the prevailing positions that the

CNT and the UGT held on one another at the national level during the Republican-socialist biennium. However, the elections of November 1933 would change the foundations on which these positions were based, not to mention have far-reaching consequences upon what role the concept of unity –and in turn the position of the CNT and the UGT relative to one another – would have within the Spanish left.

<sup>1</sup> Shlomo Ben-Ami, *The Origins of the Second Republic in Spain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 80-84, 89-97

<sup>2</sup> Javier Aisa and V. M. Arbeloa, *Historia de la Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT)* (Bilbao: Zero, 1975), pp. 121-122

<sup>3</sup> Ben-Ami, *The Origins*, p. 145

<sup>4</sup> Aisa and Arbeloa, *Historia de la UGT*, pp. 121-124; Ben-Ami, *The Origins*, pp. 140-152

<sup>5</sup> Ben-Ami, *The Origins*, p. 147; John Brademas, *Anarcosindicalismo y revolución en España (1930-1937)* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1974), pp. 48-57

<sup>6</sup> Ben-Ami, *The Origins*, p.90

<sup>7</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, p. 76; Brademas, *Anarcosindicalismo*, pp. 44-46

<sup>8</sup> Brademas, *Anarcosindicalismo*, pp. 41-42; Peirats, *La CNT*, vol. 1, pp. 44-46

<sup>9</sup> Of course, the relationship between the CNT and the UGT had never been easy. The UGT had opposed the founding of the CNT in 1910 (Xavier Cuadrat, *Socialismo y anarquismo en Cataluña: los orígenes de la CNT (1899-1911)* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Revista de Trabajo, 1976)), and from then onwards ties between the two organizations had always been strained, even during times of the organizations entering into alliances with one another, such as in 1916 and 1917. The final attempt at convergence ended with a short-lived pact in 1920, which the CNT declared broken after the UGT refused to support a protest strike declared by the CNT (Manuel Tuñón de Lara, 'Vida y muerte del pacto UGT-CNT, 1920' in *Historia 16*, 57 (1981), pp. 28-39)

<sup>10</sup> Shlomo Ben-Ami, *Fascism from Above: The Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in Spain, 1923-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 81, 292

<sup>11</sup> For example, *Acción* 03 May, 06 September 1930; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 14, 19 October 1930, 20 March 1931

<sup>12</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 October 1930

<sup>13</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 22 January 1931

<sup>14</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 28 February 1931

<sup>15</sup> For example, *Acción Social Obrera*, 01 September 1928, 26 January 1929; see also David Ballester, *Marginalitats i hegemonies: La UGT de Catalunya (1888-1936)* (Barcelona: Columna, 1996), p. 77

<sup>16</sup> For example, *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 October, 01 November 1930

<sup>17</sup> For example, *Boletín de la Unión General de Trabajadores*, Jan 1931, p. 2; March 1931, p. 42

<sup>18</sup> Ben-Ami, *The Origins*, p. 148; *El Socialista*, 30 October 1930; Vega, *Entre revolució*, p. 95

<sup>19</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, p. 77

<sup>20</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, pp. 76-98

<sup>21</sup> Paul Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War: Reform, Reaction and Revolution in the Second Republic* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 84

<sup>22</sup> Casanova, *The Spanish Republic*, p. 13

<sup>23</sup> *El Socialista*, 12 July 1931

<sup>24</sup> *El Socialista*, 15-25 October 1932

<sup>25</sup> Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, p. 78; Amaro del Rosal, *Historia de la UGT de España, 1901-1939* (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1977), vol. 2, p.919

<sup>26</sup> Rosal, *Historia de la UGT*, p. 919

<sup>27</sup> Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, p. 78

<sup>28</sup> The minutes of the meetings of the Executive Commission of the UGT contain details of the motives for unions' departures from the organization; FPI AARD-255-3, AARD-256-1, AARD-256-2, AARD-256-3 *Actas de la Comisión General de la Unión General de Trabajadores, 1931-1934*

<sup>29</sup> Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 38-73

<sup>30</sup> Casanova, *The Spanish Republic*, pp. 38-48

<sup>31</sup> Casanova, *Anarchism*, p. 7; Nicholas Rider, 'Anarchism, Urbanization and Social Conflict in Barcelona, 1930-1932' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Lancaster, 1987), p. 572

<sup>32</sup> Miguel Maura, *Así cayó Alfonso XIII* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1995), part two, chapter 7

<sup>33</sup> Casanova, *Anarchism*, p. 8



- <sup>34</sup> Casanova, *The Spanish Republic*, pp. 48-53; Gerald Blaney, 'The Civil Guard and the Spanish Second Republic, 1931-1936' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 2007), pp. 144-146; *La Tierra*, 08, 12 January 1932
- <sup>35</sup> FO 371/17426/W5271/116/41 Report from Sir George Grahame to Sir John Simon, 08 March 1933; Casanova, *Anarchism*, pp. 68-72; Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 38-73, p. 109
- <sup>36</sup> Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, p. 120
- <sup>37</sup> Casanova, *The Spanish Republic*, p. 94
- <sup>38</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 18 April 1931
- <sup>39</sup> Casanova, *Anarchism*, p. 4; Marcos José Correa López, *La ideología de la CNT*, p. 164
- <sup>40</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, p. 146
- <sup>41</sup> Peirats, *La CNT*, vol. 1, pp. 51-52; Vega, *Entre revolució i reforma*, pp. 76-102
- <sup>42</sup> Peirats, *La CNT*, vol. 1, pp. 53-54
- <sup>43</sup> Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, *Memoria del Congreso Extraordinario celebrado en Madrid los días 11 al 16 de junio de 1931* (Barcelona, 1931)
- <sup>44</sup> The most comprehensive studies of the factional divisions within the CNT are contained within the works of Eulàlia Vega.
- <sup>45</sup> *El Sol*, 01, 08, 18, 23, 26 July, 02 August 1931; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 02 July 1931-28 August 1931; *Solidaridad Obrera* (La Coruña), 11 July 1931; *La Tierra*, 01, 10, 13, 15, 17 August 1931; Benjamin Martin, *The Agony of Modernization: Labor and Industrialization in Spain* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 1990), p. 314; Brademas, *Anarcosindicalismo*, pp. 62-63
- <sup>46</sup> Marta Bizcarrondo, *Historia de la UGT: Entre la democracia y la revolución, 1931-1936* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno, 2008), p. 25; Martin, *The Agony of Modernization*, pp. 302-303
- <sup>47</sup> Santos Juliá, *Madrid, 1931-1934: De la fiesta popular a la lucha de clases* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno, 1984), pp. 147-172; Santos Juliá 'La UGT de Madrid en los años treinta: un sindicalismo de gestión' *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, 20 (October-December 1982), pp. 121-151
- <sup>48</sup> For example, Chris Ealham, *Class, Culture and Conflict in Barcelona, 1898-1937* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 94; Martin, *The Agony of Modernization*, pp. 302-303; Peirats, *La CNT*, pp. 52-53
- <sup>49</sup> Santos Juliá, *Madrid*, pp. 172-190; Eduardo González Calleja 'Conflictividad sociolaboral y violencia colectiva en la Segunda República' in Julio Aróstegui (ed.) *La República de los trabajadores: la Segunda República y el mundo del trabajo* (Madrid: Fundación Francisco Largo Caballero, 2006), pp. 76-109
- <sup>50</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 28 June 1931
- <sup>51</sup> *El Sol*, 20, 23, 24, 26 January 1931; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 03, 06 March 1932; *La Vanguardia*, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27 January 1932; Casanova, *Anarchism*, pp. 31, 64-67
- <sup>52</sup> For example, *Solididad Obrera*, 04 March, 02 April 1932
- <sup>53</sup> Casanova, *Anarchism*, pp. 53-63; Brademas, *Anarcosindicalismo*, pp. 78-86
- <sup>54</sup> Casanova, *Anarchism*, pp. 68-72
- <sup>55</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, pp. 259-284
- <sup>56</sup> See, for example, *Sindicalismo*, 05 May 1933, in which a cartoon appears of a *faísta* dancing to a tune played by a Nazi piper.
- <sup>57</sup> See, for example, *Sindicalismo*, 11 August 1933, which attacked the CNT's Barcelona wood workers' union for undermining a settlement agreed by the *jurados mixtos* by agreeing an inferior one with employers.
- <sup>58</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, pp. 286-289
- <sup>59</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, p. 395
- <sup>60</sup> Monjo, *Militants*, pp. 113-145
- <sup>61</sup> Although the 1931 national congress agreed upon the creation of national industrial federations, by the time of the outbreak of the Civil War the only major industry for which one had been set up was for railway workers. The CNT thus continued to be fundamentally compartmentalized into regions.
- <sup>62</sup> Monjo, *Militants*, pp. 138-139
- <sup>63</sup> Monjo, *Militants*, p. 179
- <sup>64</sup> Casanova, *Anarchism*, p. 13; Peirats, *La CNT*, pp. 68-72
- <sup>65</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, p. 146
- <sup>66</sup> Vega, *Anarquistas y sindicalistas*, p. 246
- <sup>67</sup> Vega, *Anarquistas y sindicalistas*, p. 258
- <sup>68</sup> Vega, *Anarquistas y sindicalistas*, p. 282
- <sup>69</sup> Pamela Radcliff, *From Mobilization to Civil War: The politics of polarization in the Spanish City of Gijón, 1900-1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 190
- <sup>70</sup> Juliá, *Madrid*, p. 189
- <sup>71</sup> This percentage figure is based on the figures of 291150 members in Catalonia in June 1931, out of a total of 535566 members for the whole of Spain in the same month, taken from Casanova, *Anarchism*, p.13 and Vega, *Entre revolució*, p. 146.
- <sup>72</sup> José Luis Gutiérrez Molina, *Crisis burguesa y unidad obrera: el sindicalismo en Cádiz durante la Segunda República* (Móstoles: Nossa y Jarra, 1994), p. 168

- <sup>73</sup> Monjo, *Militants*, pp. 297-312
- <sup>74</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 18 July 1933
- <sup>75</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 05 June 1931
- <sup>76</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 08 April 1931
- <sup>77</sup> *CNT*, 23 March 1933
- <sup>78</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 11 November 1932
- <sup>79</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 20 May 1931
- <sup>80</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 24 October 1931
- <sup>81</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 14 February 1933
- <sup>82</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 29 May 1931
- <sup>83</sup> Casanova, *Anarchism*, pp. 9-11
- <sup>84</sup> The following examples do not include incidents involving the UGT in Catalonia, which formed a significant proportion of the CNT's anti-UGT coverage. These incidents and their press coverage will be discussed in part two of the thesis.
- <sup>85</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 01 August 1931
- <sup>86</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 27 September 1931
- <sup>87</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 20 October 1931
- <sup>88</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 04 November 1931
- <sup>89</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 01 January 1931
- <sup>90</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 March 1932
- <sup>91</sup> *CNT*, 19 November 1932
- <sup>92</sup> *CNT*, 04 December 1932
- <sup>93</sup> *CNT*, 10 December 1932
- <sup>94</sup> *CNT*, 06 March 1933
- <sup>95</sup> *CNT*, 05 April 1933
- <sup>96</sup> *CNT*, 12 June 1933
- <sup>97</sup> See, for example, Juliá, *Madrid*; Barrio Alonso, *Anarquismo*
- <sup>98</sup> FO 371/16510/W3573/2643/41 Report from John Morrison to Sir George Grahame, 16 March 1932; FO 371/16512/W6458/6458/41 Report from John P. Trant to Sir George Grahame, 27 May 1932
- <sup>99</sup> *CNT*, 31 December 1932
- <sup>100</sup> *CNT*, 19 December 1932; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 17 January 1933
- <sup>101</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 01 December 1931
- <sup>102</sup> Anna Monjo, *Militants*, pp. 113-145
- <sup>103</sup> Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, *Memoria del Congreso Extraordinario celebrado en Madrid los días 11 al 16 de junio de 1931* (Barcelona, 1931)
- <sup>104</sup> IISG CNT 93B1.1 'Actas del Pleno de Regionales celebrado en Madrid los días 1, 2 y 3 de Diciembre de 1932'
- <sup>105</sup> IISG CNT 93B1.2 'Extracto de las actas del Pleno de Regionales celebrado en Madrid durante los días 30 de Enero y sucesivos [sic]'
- <sup>106</sup> IISG CNT 93B1.2 'Extracto de las actas del Pleno de Regionales celebrado en Madrid durante los días 30 de Enero y sucesivos [sic]'
- <sup>107</sup> IISG CNT 93B1.2 'Extracto del Pleno nacional de Regionales, celebrado en Madrid en Junio de 1933'
- <sup>108</sup> *El Socialista*, 13 October 1931, 19 March 1933
- <sup>109</sup> *El Socialista*, 18 February 1932
- <sup>110</sup> *El Socialista*, 27 November 1932
- <sup>111</sup> *El Socialista*, 09 May 1933
- <sup>112</sup> FPI AARD 259-3 Minutes of the meeting of the UGT National Committee, 5-6 December 1932
- <sup>113</sup> *El Socialista*, 12 July 1931
- <sup>114</sup> *El Socialista*, 18 October 1932
- <sup>115</sup> *El Socialista*, 18 October 1932
- <sup>116</sup> Coverage of the congress taken from *El Socialista*, 15-23 October 1932
- <sup>117</sup> FPI AARD 260-1 Minutes of the meeting of the UGT National Committee, 16-18 July 1933
- <sup>118</sup> FPI AARD 260-1 Minutes of the meeting of the UGT National Committee, 14 October 1933
- <sup>119</sup> FPI AARD 256-1 Minutes of the meeting of the UGT Executive Commission, 21 September 1932
- <sup>120</sup> FPI AARD 255-3 Minutes of the meeting of the UGT Executive Commission, 07 July 1931
- <sup>121</sup> FPI AARD 256-1 Minutes of the meeting of the UGT Executive Commission, 06 January 1932
- <sup>122</sup> FPI AARD 255-3 Minutes of the meeting of the UGT Executive Commission, 07 October 1931
- <sup>123</sup> FPI AARD 256-1 Minutes of the meeting of the UGT Executive Commission, 13 April 1932
- <sup>124</sup> FPI AARD 256-1 Minutes of the meeting of the UGT Executive Commission, 17 February 1932 & 13 April 1932
- <sup>125</sup> Casanova, *The Spanish Republic*, pp. 55-56
- <sup>126</sup> See, for example, *Boletín de la Unión General de Trabajadores*, May 1932, p. 123, in which CNT deportees were mocked.

## **Chapter Two: Alliance Initiatives and the CNT, November 1933-October 1934**

### Socialist and anarcho-sindicalist responses to the 1933 elections

In the November 1933 elections, the right swept to power, leaving left and centrist Republicans and the socialists in opposition and with a substantially reduced number of deputies. A new government was formed, headed by Alejandro Lerroux and the Radicals, but backed by the more hard-line CEDA. Precisely what the Radicals' agenda in government was in 1934 is open to debate; for some, it was essentially an unscrupulous organism that was beholden to the anti-democratic ideals of the CEDA.<sup>1</sup> Others, most convincingly Nigel Townson, have suggested that the Radicals themselves sought to occupy a middle ground, through which a democratic state could have been consolidated.<sup>2</sup> What is more important here than this debate amongst historians, however, is that the Republicans and socialists who were deposed from power, and indeed the majority of the Marxist left, viewed the election result as being a harbinger of an authoritarian counter-revolution against the Republic and the working classes. The November 1933 elections thus ushered in a fundamentally different era in the politics and the society of the Republic. The hostilities between the Republicans and the left on the one hand and the right on the other – with the CNT taking on both sides of the divide – entered a new, more intense phase.

The ascent of the right to power had a particularly significant effect on the socialists. The experience of the years in government had left varying degrees of acrimony amongst the different factions of the party and union. The *Caballeristas* and the socialist youth wing were left particularly disillusioned by the experience, and after the 1933 election the process of their radicalization, which would continue up until the outbreak of the Civil War, began to gather momentum.<sup>3</sup> The centre of the movement, led by Indalecio Prieto, meanwhile, was wary of the possible consequences of such an openly antagonistic stance towards the Republic.<sup>4</sup> There was no overall consensus within the movement as to what its stance on the Republic was, neither in the immediate aftermath of the election nor on the eve of the October insurrection. However, what prevailed was a public stance that was couched in the rhetoric of revolution against the current governing forces. *El Socialista* increasingly articulated such a line in its attacks on the government,<sup>5</sup> and Largo Caballero and his followers in particular made increasingly severe threats in speeches and newspaper articles.<sup>6</sup>

The coming to power of the Lerroux government had little discernible impact on the public positions adopted by the CNT via the pages of *Solidaridad Obrera*, *CNT* and other official newspapers of CNT organisms. One CNT response to the election result was the organization of another uprising, which took place in December 1933 and was put down by the authorities with little difficulty.<sup>7</sup> However, this stand against the new government of the right did not mean that the CNT changed its position on the rest of the left. Communists and socialists alike continued to be attacked with equal vehemence by the anarcho-syndicalist press. Even before the November 1933 election, in the aftermath of the dissolution of parliament, *Solidaridad Obrera* revelled in the socialists' loss of power and their indignant threats to revolt in the event of a victory of the right, declaring in one editorial that 'they have lost their heads after losing their *enchufes*'.<sup>8</sup> The revolutionary posturing of the socialists in the run-up to the election was roundly ridiculed, with the sexagenarian Largo Caballero being mockingly presented as 'the d'Artagnan of socialism'.<sup>9</sup>

Once the Lerroux government had been formed, the interpretation put forward was that if the right represented some form of fascism, then what the Marxist left had to offer was an equally and possibly more dangerous form of fascism. This perspective was arguably consistent with the anarchist principles of the movement, though this theoretical basis was to a large extent masked by its hyperbolic articulation. Crucially, the interpretation of the UGT and the socialists offered in the CNT press was a fundamental continuation of that which it had expressed between 1931 and 1933, even though some of the key aspects of the political scene around which it was based had disappeared. With the socialists out of government, the UGT no longer had a privileged link to the Labour Ministry. The socialists' overall relationship with the Republic changed completely as a result of the defeat. The UGT no longer had any remit to defend the Republic by attempting to minimize labour conflict and endorsing the idea of a *República de los trabajadores*, even if many of its leaders did continue to counsel against confrontation with employers and the state. Thus two of the key motivations of CNT hostility towards the UGT – its allegiance to state institutions and coercive apparatus and its defence of a bourgeois capitalist regime – were now part of the past. However, this certainly did not mean that the actions of the socialists during their time in government had been forgotten. Instead, articles were produced that dwelt on the period of the Republican-socialist government, implying all the while that the socialists would return to the previous *status quo* if possible.<sup>10</sup> In July 1934, for example, a front-page editorial in *Solidaridad Obrera* suggested that Largo Caballero's ambition was to install an Austrian or German-style system of fascism in Spain.<sup>11</sup>

The development of the *Alianza Obrera*

In the context of the apparently imminent onset of fascism that the November 1933 election result was seen to represent amongst the left, a certain consensus emerged within Marxist organizations in Spain that some form of unity was required to form a defensive bloc. Although a pan-left unity on the national level was never achieved, talk of unity nevertheless did become an increasingly prominent feature of the left's activities. The alliance proposal that proved to be most enduring and generated the greatest debate on the matter of unity of the left was known as the *Alianza Obrera*, an initiative spearheaded by the dissident communists of the Bloque Obrero y Campesino (BOC), whose main base of operations was Catalonia. Although the BOC remained throughout the Republic a movement of secondary importance in terms of its size, it nevertheless gained popularity, above all in Catalonia, throughout the period. The movement's distinguishing feature was that its leaders' interpretation of Marxism was much more responsive to the current political and social circumstances, rather than being bound by dogma or subordinated to the Comintern.<sup>12</sup>

The BOC's appraisal of fascism and the strategies that needed to be adopted to fight it were one key manifestation of this dynamism. The BOC's militants began warning of the threat of the authoritarian right from as early as 1932, a threat which, in the analysis of Joaquín Maurín, needed to be met with a pan-left alliance, the likes of which had not been attempted before.<sup>13</sup> To *bloquista* leaders, alliances of left-wing organizations could potentially be used to create sufficient collective strength so as to prevent the rise of the right and additionally bring about proletarian revolution. An initial pact was signed between the BOC, the Unió Socialista de Catalunya (USC) and the *treintista* Federación Sindicalista Libertaria (FSL) in March 1933, called the *Alianza Obrera contra el Fascismo*.<sup>14</sup> The victory of the right in the 1933 elections made the idea of an anti-fascist front a far more pressing issue amongst the left. In December 1933, leaders of the BOC, the PSOE of Catalonia, the Catalan UGT, the FSL, the *treintista* unions, the Izquierda Comunista, the USC and the Unió de Rabassaires – which is to say virtually all the organizations of the left in Catalonia other than the CNT, the FAI and the Partit Comunista de Catalunya - signed the agreement that created the *Alianza Obrera* of Catalonia. In its founding manifesto a need to present a united front against fascism was the essential message.<sup>15</sup>

The *Alianza Obrera* movement began to gain momentum in early 1934 as local *Alianza Obrera* committees were set up in dozens of localities across Catalonia, and regional agreements were signed in Valencia, Asturias and Aragón.<sup>16</sup> Just as important as the fact of the creation of these committees was the proliferation of debates on the idea of *alianzas* and *frentes* that occurred in the press organs and propaganda of organizations across the left. The BOC was unsurprisingly the most vocal in its promotion of *Alianza Obrera*. However, the debate was certainly not restricted to *bloquista* circles. The left-wing (though anti-PSOE and UGT) *La Tierra*, for example, firmly backed the idea of left-wing unity, and gave editorial space to those in favour of it to put their case forward.<sup>17</sup>

### The socialists' view of alliances

The socialist movement's overall position on the question of alliances with the rest of the left was ostensibly in favour, but was also undercut by doubts and ulterior motives on the part of its national leadership. Based on the public pronouncements of Largo Caballero, and the general handling of the issue in *El Socialista*, it outwardly appeared that the socialists were working towards bringing about the unity of the Spanish proletariat to fight fascism. Largo Caballero's publicized visit to Barcelona in February 1934 to meet with the leading figures involved in the *Alianza Obrera* also lent weight to the notion that the socialists were interested in participating in the alliance initiative. Largo reported back favourably on the initiative both through the press and to the UGT Executive Commission and National Committee.<sup>18</sup> Tellingly, *El Socialista* reported the socialist leader to be as much as anything satisfied with the receptiveness to the PSOE and UGT in the region. Behind the scenes the UGT Executive made the divisive stipulation that the UGT regional secretariat in Catalonia should instruct its members to support the PSOE and not the Unió Socialista de Catalunya as part of its approval of the alliance in the region.<sup>19</sup>

However, the national leadership of the socialists was by no means unconditionally committed to the spirit of *Alianza Obrera*. Significant figures within the National Committee displayed an innate suspicion towards any overtures from other organizations. Discussing a letter from the *treintista* leadership in late 1933, for example, Díaz Alor argued that the UGT should under no circumstances act under orders from other organizations, who ought to be aware that 'they can collaborate with or follow us, but they should not hold the belief that we are going to follow them as they see fit'.<sup>20</sup> Even though the UGT agreed to offer some support to the idea of the *Alianza Obrera* following Largo's visit to Barcelona, there was a clear sense amongst the UGT national leadership that the

initiative could not eclipse the discipline of the socialist movement's organizations.<sup>21</sup> The UGT Executive feared that committing the socialist labour federation to a generalized alliance could lead to 'the Unión General de Trabajadores being erased from the imagination of our comrades'.<sup>22</sup>

In considering the question of unity and alliances, it is clear that the socialist leadership did not consider the CNT as any more of an important piece in the jigsaw than other organizations, in spite of the fact of the anarcho-syndicalist labour federation being much larger than the other actors of the left. Instead, the socialists retained a suspicion of the integrity of the CNT movement. In the UGT National Committee and the Executive discussions on the stance to be taken on alliances, the CNT were barely taken into consideration as a significant factor. This was most likely due to a combination of the CNT's own position of rejecting the *Alianza Obrera* outright, as will be discussed later in this chapter, and just as importantly due to the majority of the UGT leadership's deeply held distrust of the CNT movement, which does not appear to have been tempered by the election of the right. Immediately prior to the election and in the weeks after it, some members of the National Committee continued to report on the apparently violent tendencies of CNT militants in regions such as Aragón, viewing them as something that could provoke the forces of reaction and also as a threat directed at UGT activists.<sup>23</sup>

However, the public impression was given off that the socialists were interested in the CNT playing a part in the drive towards the *Alianza Obrera*. For example, in a speech to the youth wing of the socialist movement Largo stated that he was in favour of union with 'anarchists', and also praised the 'anarchic' spirit of the Spanish working classes that would lead them to reject fascism.<sup>24</sup> During 1934 *El Socialista* notably desisted in the sort of public criticisms of the CNT that it had made throughout the earlier years of the Republic. The socialist press also drew attention to the CNT's deliberations on *Alianza Obrera* as part of their June 1934 national plenum, the coverage implying that it was hopeful that the position of the pro-alliance regions would prevail.<sup>25</sup>

In spite of the provocative statements of Largo Caballero and others, privately the socialist leadership were fearful of actually committing their movement to a revolutionary confrontation with the government. In late 1933 and early 1934 the prevailing mood within the National Committee was that attempts to overthrow the government would usher in an authoritarian regime – Trifón Gómez argued that the activities of the CNT could lead to an Italian or German-style fascist dictatorship, 'as did the communists' in these two countries

– and so the UGT should ensure that its members did not participate in any such protest movements.<sup>26</sup> Although this position was held above all by the most reformist sections of the National Committee, even those factions of the socialist movement who were most vociferously espousing revolutionary threats over 1934 – in particular the *Caballeristas* – were at bottom unwilling to make good on them. As Paul Preston highlights, the socialist leaders tried to make sure the impetus towards *Alianza Obrera* developed within the cautious limitations of the outlook of the socialist leadership. Where socialists dominated *Alianza Obrera* committees, such as in Madrid, they sought to overrule any revolutionary initiatives by other members.<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, the National Committee and the Executive became alarmed with the activities of local *Alianzas Obreras* when they carried out protest actions that had not been initiated by the UGT, such as those that took place in Valencia and Barcelona.<sup>28</sup> As Preston also highlights, dissident communists involved in the *Alianza* became increasingly suspicious that the socialists' motives for endorsing it were primarily to use it as a weapon in their posturing against the right rather than treating it as a genuine method of uniting the proletariat.<sup>29</sup>

Overall, therefore, the socialist leaders' position on the *Alianza Obrera* was a somewhat opportunistic one, based around buying into the revolutionary edge of the movement and the popular support it garnered, whilst at the same time attempting to subvert it to the far less revolutionary outlook that lay beneath the rhetoric of Largo and others. As Paul Heywood suggests, in 1934 the socialist leadership's interest in alliances was fundamentally limited by their unwillingness to risk other organizations taking away their assumed position of leaders of the working classes.<sup>30</sup>

#### The CNT's response to alliance initiatives

Nevertheless, the public stance of the UGT with regard to unity was far more attuned to the general mood of the rest of the left than was that which prevailed within the CNT, which was one of outright rejection. To an extent, this stance must be seen as a continuation of the organization's previous responses to alliance initiatives made in its direction, which to varying degrees amounted to attempts to win the CNT's backing for a cause other than its own. In 1932, for example, the virulently anti-PSOE left-wing Republicans in the Cortes who converged around *La Tierra*, in particular Eduardo Barriobero, spearheaded an initiative called the *Alianza de Izquierdas*, a more radical alternative to the Republican-socialist government. Part of this *alianza's* strategy was to gain the support of the CNT.<sup>31</sup> Reflecting the anti-political principles of the movement, *Solidaridad Obrera* roundly



rebuffed the advances of the *Alianza de Izquierdas*, suggesting they were an attempt to make the CNT an ‘appendage’ of politicians, ‘just as the UGT is of the socialists’.<sup>32</sup>

Even before the *Alianza de Izquierdas*, however, the CNT had already come into contact with another unity initiative, this time from the Communist Party’s activities in the labour movement. In line with the Comintern’s directives, communists in Spain adopted the strategy of co-opting workers from the grassroots of rival organizations under the guise of a push towards unity.<sup>33</sup> With regard to the CNT, the communists’ initial attempt to do this was carried out on the eve of the Republic by the creation of CNT ‘reconstruction committees’ which had some success in Seville but failed elsewhere. The goal of these was to discredit the legitimate leadership of the CNT as ‘anarchists’ who had won control of the ‘glorious title of the CNT with the help of the fascist government of Berenguer’ so that the CNT grassroots would recognize the communists’ reconstruction committees as having authority over the CNT.<sup>34</sup> Following the failure of these attempts at ‘reconstruction’ the communists started agitating amongst CNT and UGT grassroots for them to unite and reject the leaderships of their respective labour federations.<sup>35</sup> All these efforts unsurprisingly met with the virulent criticism of the CNT press.<sup>36</sup>

Once public discussions of anti-fascist unity, and in particular the *Alianza Obrera*, gained momentum, *Solidaridad Obrera* and other CNT papers were compelled to express a position on the matter. However, the dominant position that emanated from the CNT was an unflinchingly critical one. At first, the anti-alliance stance of *Solidaridad Obrera* focused on the communists themselves and sought to highlight the form of communist movements across the world in attempting to hijack proletarian movements for their own ends. *Solidaridad Obrera* opined that communists could not possibly front efforts against fascism given that the Soviet Union was ‘the first fascist [regime] in the world’.<sup>37</sup> The paper warned workers not to be seduced by this alleged anti-fascist alliance initiative of the BOC on the grounds that ‘all workers know that the communists are nothing but a demagogic manifestation of the bourgeoisie and tend towards establishing a dictatorship as brutal and infamous as that of Hitler’.<sup>38</sup>

*Solidaridad Obrera* also took a tone that the idea of alliances and united fronts was becoming increasingly ubiquitous but still essentially meaningless, with the paper commenting on

*frente único* for the struggle for material gains, *frente único* against fascism, *frente único* against dictatorships, *frente único* against war. This useful chorus has been transformed into something similar to those miraculous ointments that are useful for anything, and that, precisely for that reason, end up having no use at all.<sup>39</sup>

The CNT and FAI's position on the question of alliances in 1933 was thus markedly different from all of the other actors on the left. Whilst each Marxist organization had its own particular stances and strategies on the question of alliances, all espoused some promotion of unity. By 1933, the *faísta* faction's monopoly over the CNT's major committees and mouthpieces was fairly unassailable. The result was that the CNT's public stance on the matter, expressed especially by *Solidaridad Obrera*, was the defiant belief that 'in spite of pacts and agreements, the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo will never succumb!'<sup>40</sup> whilst at the same time arguing that, in the words of one *faísta*, 'the Confederation and the FAI would march at the vanguard of the proletariat'<sup>41</sup> in the event of a fascist grab for power, in contrast to the bogus anti-fascist credentials of those associated with the *Alianza Obrera*.

The support shown publicly by the socialists towards left-wing unity led to the CNT press presenting the socialists as being the most significant piece of evidence of all in favour of its argument for discounting alliances. For instance, in February 1934 an editorial in *Solidaridad Obrera* affirmed that 'to offer our hand to the socialists, we would have to step over the corpses of Casas Viejas', not to mention reach agreement with those who had masterminded the *jurados mixtos*.<sup>42</sup> In the process of attacking the idea of alliance, the focus of *Solidaridad Obrera* therefore shifted to the socialists and became a part of the continuing attacks on them.

Figures from the CNT also contributed to the ongoing debate in the pages of *La Tierra*, in most cases to reassert the idea of the CNT opposing alliances with other organizations. The veteran anarchist E. Mateo Soriano was one such contributor to the debate. He cited precedents of treachery committed by the socialists, which included not just the *Ley de Defensa* and *jurados mixtos* laws, but also referred to 'the years 1917, 19, 22, 30 and 31'.<sup>43</sup> Opposition to any form of unity was echoed in the pages of *La Tierra* by amongst others Manuel Rivas, former General Secretary of the National Committee, for whom the only valid form of unity would come in the streets at the moment of revolution.<sup>44</sup>

However, certain sectors of the confederal movement did not support the line expressed in *Solidaridad Obrera*, and used the pages of *La Tierra* to argue for the CNT to consider the

possibilities offered by alliances. Indeed, their contributions to the debate would be a key cause for the question of the CNT's relationship with the UGT to be discussed at CNT national plenums in 1934. The writings of Valeriano Orobón Fernández in *La Tierra* on 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> January 1934 represented the most original thinking within the CNT regarding the possibilities of alliance, even if they were initially loudly denounced by the *faístas*. Orobón Fernández based his ideas on the premise that fascism represented a uniquely serious threat to the Spanish proletariat that could not simply be dismissed by arguing that libertarian revolution would sweep it away. Orobón Fernández argued that the proletariat were aware of the threat it posed, and had, generally speaking, begun to become more predisposed to the idea of united proletarian action to prevent fascism and saw that 'the combative class union is today a question of life or death for the proletarian cause', even if the convergence of grassroots around the same ideals compromised the tactical and organizational imperatives of individual organizations. He stressed that the fact of unity and the positive consequences it would bring were far more important than the precise mechanisms that brought it about, arguing that 'long discussions over the process of approximation' were a waste of time.<sup>45</sup> For Orobón Fernández, anti-fascist unity and revolutionary unity went hand-in-hand, and the defeat of fascism could only be brought about through a united, revolutionary front.

Orobón Fernández viewed the position of the communists as something of an irrelevancy, stating that 'proletarian unity is ninety-nine percent feasible if only the CNT and the UGT want it'.<sup>46</sup> This perspective undoubtedly reflected an awareness on Orobón Fernández's part that had he explicitly proposed the inclusion of political organizations in an alliance he would have been exposed to the accusation of betraying the most fundamental principles of the movement. He also addressed the issue of the socialist leadership. For Orobón Fernández, the socialist leaders would have to prove that Largo Caballero's rhetoric was genuine and act in accordance with it, rather than continue with the 'dealings of the Trifones, Besteiros and Saborits against the unity of workers and revolution'.<sup>47</sup>

Far from being an argument in favour of simply signing a pact with the socialist leadership or a cross-organizational alliance based on limited anti-fascist ends, then, Orobón Fernández believed that a 'revolutionary' form of unity in which the CNT could participate was possible, even if it would require a starting point of all organizations involved in it respecting one another's ideological and theoretical canons.<sup>48</sup> The basic tenets of Orobón Fernández's position were repeated in the *La Tierra* debates by, amongst others, the Asturian Acracio Bartolomé, who took a more hostile line towards those in the CNT who

dismissed any possibilities of alliance and also placed less emphasis on the need for the UGT leadership to change.<sup>49</sup>

However, what really proved to be the stimulus for a polemical discussion on alliances within the CNT was not the writings of Valeriano Orobón Fernández but a document from the CNT's central region that was printed in *La Tierra*.<sup>50</sup> In this document, the central region's Regional Committee advocated CNT unions collaborating with other labour unions that were prepared to act in line with the CNT's tactics of direct action. It also hinted that the matter of cooperation with other labour unions should be discussed openly within the CNT. The statement was interpreted by some elements of the movement as the region encouraging CNT unions to actively pursue alliances or even unification with other organizations, though the Regional Committee printed a clarification to deny this was the case.<sup>51</sup>

The statement became one of the aspects of the discussion of alliances at the CNT's February 1934 national plenum. The central region of the CNT had requested at the same time as it had published its piece in *La Tierra* that the National Committee include a discussion of the unity question at this national plenum. However, from the outset of the plenum discussion the anti-alliance regions questioned the legitimacy of the issue even being considered, based on the conduct of the central region in publishing its opinions on the matter.<sup>52</sup> In spite of these objections, the matter was placed on the agenda for the plenum and was the subject of a lengthy discussion. From the outset the question of alliances at this plenum was framed almost exclusively in terms of the CNT and the UGT. Consideration of pro-unity political parties such as the BOC was excluded from the start, notwithstanding occasional references to political groups that were attempting to gain control over the workers' movement. The theoretical grounding shared by most *cenetistas* would ensure, both in 1934 and again in 1936, that when the organization did discuss the questions of alliances and unity, the parameters of these discussions would be very heavily conditioned by anti-political principles and convictions. The wording of the question on the agenda was 'in view of the suggestions that the UGT has been making about the advisability of unifying working-class forces to carry out a revolutionary act, what position should the CNT adopt?'.<sup>53</sup> This tendency of the anarcho-syndicalist movement to discuss the question of unity exclusively in terms of the CNT and the UGT would be equally present in the months before the start of the Civil War, and undoubtedly reflects a fairly unanimous, unspoken consensus amongst CNT militants that an alliance could only ever be even contemplated with the UGT, and not with any political organization. The

paradoxical effect of the movement's anti-political principles was that, even when the depth of anti-UGT sentiment amongst many sectors of the CNT was as profound as it was in 1934, the socialist labour federation was, effectively by default, the only organization with which any form of cooperation could be considered.

The three CNT regions that argued most strongly in favour of the CNT making itself open to the possibility of an alliance with the UGT were the central region, Asturias and Galicia, with more muted support also coming from the Balearics. Prior to the national plenum, the centre and Galicia had both held regional plenums at which the question of alliances was discussed, and both accordingly had sent their delegates to the national plenum with express instructions to argue in favour of the CNT making some sort of move towards a revolutionary alliance, although both regions were fairly vague as to how this would be brought about and on what terms. What is perhaps most significant about the propositions for a closer relationship with the UGT is that they were not inspired by local instances of cooperation with the UGT, but rather a belief that neither the CNT nor the working classes as a whole could achieve emancipation without the CNT and the UGT working in tandem, inspired in some cases by experiences of failure on the part of some regions following on from the UGT refusing to work with the CNT in recent strikes and uprisings. The central region, for example, explained to the plenum that the reason the attempts of their militants to contribute to the December 1933 uprising failed was that they devoted a disproportionate amount of time to attempting to gain the complicity of the UGT, and were in many cases held back by the indecision of local *ugetistas*. Similarly, the CNT leadership in Asturias found that their efforts to gain the support of their regional UGT counterparts were thwarted by the national leadership of the UGT and socialist politicians. This point was most strongly made by the delegate for the Balearics, who argued that in spite of 'the thousands of betrayals of the UGT' the unification of their forces for revolutionary ends was necessary to prevent fascism.<sup>54</sup>

However, the pro-alliance regions found themselves outnumbered and outmanoeuvred by the regions that opposed any move by the CNT towards a pro-unity position. These regions, it must be pointed out, represented the more traditional CNT strongholds relative to the central region, Asturias and Galicia. Andalucía, Aragón, Catalonia and Levante all argued against the CNT changing its position of flat opposition to alliances. The bulk of the arguing against the pro-alliance regions was carried out by Andalucía, whose delegate focused to a large extent on the procedural irregularity of the central region having managed to make the alliance question a subject of debate at the plenum. The position of

those regions that did engage in the debate itself to take on the pro-alliance regions was essentially that the CNT and the UGT's aims were irreconcilable, and that any alliance would inevitably involve socialist politicians and as such would not work towards a true social revolution. A belief that the UGT's leaders were not really interested in organizing a revolutionary front was likewise voiced.<sup>55</sup>

But it was the Catalan region which made the most decisive contribution to ensuring that no pro-alliance position was adopted. Its delegation argued that even discussing the matter would represent 'an outright negation of our principles' and repeatedly threatened to withdraw from the plenum if a discussion on it did take place, a threat that turned out to be a hollow one. The main additional contribution that the Catalan delegation made to the debate was to argue that the alliance movement in Catalonia was comprised of elements who were the greatest enemies of the CNT.<sup>56</sup> The conduct of the Catalan region in discussing relations with the UGT at the February 1934 plenum could be considered another manifestation of the distortions of the CNT's decision-making process that are highlighted by Anna Monjo in her arguments regarding the gaps between the CNT's ideals of being an open democracy and the reality of how it actually operated.<sup>57</sup> It was able to counteract an open debate through attempting to interrupt procedures, ostensibly on the grounds of CNT principles, but in reality because it was virulently opposed to the pro-alliance position. As will be seen in part three of the thesis, the Catalan region would once again take advantage of its influence and the failings of the decision-making procedures of the organization in 1936 to control the organization's national-level stance on the UGT.

A vote was taken at the plenum on whether the CNT should adopt a pro-alliance stance, the result being against such a position, with Andalucía, Aragón, Levante, the North (which comprised Cantabria and the Basque Country) and Navarre and La Rioja voting in this direction. Catalonia abstained on the grounds of its original opposition to the discussion taking place at all. However, a delegation was also formed to draft a public response on the matter of unity. There was a sense, even amongst those who opposed the notion of alliances most of all, including Catalonia, that the CNT needed to take a public stance on the matter. The AIT delegate at the plenum had also argued that such a public statement was necessary. The public statement that was produced argued that the CNT was

willing, as always, to contribute all its forces to any revolutionary movement that works towards the emancipation of all the working classes, without this implying an agreement or pact with political parties or forces. Therefore the CNT calls upon the UGT to clearly and publicly indicate what its revolutionary aspirations are.<sup>58</sup>

The resolution gave the appearance, then, of an organization whose majority did not hold the belief that the CNT and the UGT had irreconcilably different goals and did not believe that seeking to reach a set of common goals with the UGT amounted to a total negation of the CNT's principles, which was precisely the prevailing view expressed at the plenum and which had been endorsed by the vote on the question of alliances. This very observation was made by the Asturian delegate at the following national plenum, held in June 1934.<sup>59</sup>

Accounts of the alliance discussions that took place amongst the left in the months prior to the October 1934 uprising have tended to take the plenum's resolution at face value, implying in the process that the CNT's leaders were inclined towards an alliance with the UGT during these months.<sup>60</sup> However, the resolution of the plenum cannot be considered outside of the context of the actual decision-making process and debate on alliances that took place at the February 1934 plenum, which was fundamentally more important as it represented the actual stance of the CNT's leaders towards the UGT. Although a statement indicating a willingness to work with the UGT had been released, a continued position of viewing all alliances as contradictory to CNT principles and a shared CNT-UGT revolution as being impossible prevailed. It is difficult not to see that the publication of the above statement as an attempt to present the CNT as not being opposed to the notion of unity that was gaining momentum in these months – or at the very least act as a salve for the pro-alliance regions of the Confederation – and in the process attempting to deflect attention towards the UGT by suggesting that the ball was in the UGT's court on the matter of alliance, whilst at the same time ensuring that the CNT could remain opposed to alliance initiatives. As much as serving 'to gloss over disagreement' as Julián Casanova argues the February 1934 plenum agreement did, the resolution was also a veneer of pro-unity sentiment that masked the deeply anti-alliance instincts of the CNT regions, and above all Catalonia, that held the most sway within the organization at the national level.<sup>61</sup> This confusing outcome to the plenum based around a public statement that indicated one thing and a dominant internal current of opinion that indicated quite another foreshadowed how the question of unity would also be dealt with in the months leading up to the Civil War.

Although the February 1934 plenum was intended to put an end to the diverging opinions on alliances and bring about a unanimous position on the matter, at least until a national congress could be held,<sup>62</sup> the question of alliances resurfaced at the very next national plenum, held in June 1934. This time, however, the circumstances of the matter being raised were very different. For barely a month after the February 1934 plenum the

*cenetistas* of Asturias had entered into a pact with their UGT counterparts, a development that was viewed by many other sectors of the CNT as sufficiently grave as to warrant the Asturians being called to account at a national plenum. The pact's overriding goal was articulated as being the bringing about of social revolution in Spain through the overthrow of the current bourgeois-capitalist regime. The pact outlined the basic structuring of this revolutionary alliance, which would take the form of local committees across the province that would liaise with an executive committee, all of which would be comprised of members of the CNT and the UGT. The pact was, then, an enormous departure from the dominant stance of the February 1934 plenum.<sup>63</sup>

At the June plenum the Asturian delegation made a highly unapologetic defence of their decision to enter into a pact with their UGT counterparts. The delegation pointed out that the Asturian CNT had a record of attempting to bring about unity with the UGT since as far back as the 1919 national congress, and also rejected outright the notion that alliance with the UGT amounted to a rejection of the CNT's principles, or that it represented a dalliance with politicians, arguing instead that in view of current circumstances a pooling of CNT and UGT strength was the only way that any of the CNT's goals could possibly be fulfilled. To lend weight to this line of argument, the delegate proceeded to highlight that in every region of Spain the CNT was either a minority force relative to the UGT, or in the case of regions such as Catalonia, was in the process of losing public support. Although the formal decision made at the plenum was that the Asturian CNT had broken the agreement of the previous plenum, it did not modify its stance and persevered with the pact.<sup>64</sup>

The entrenched anti-alliance position of many sectors of the movement was revealed by their scrutiny of the Asturians. It would appear that some delegations even believed that the Asturians having signed up to an *Alianza Obrera* in Asturias had meant that they had split from the CNT altogether. It was formally agreed that Asturias had broken the agreement of the last plenum by entering into an alliance with the UGT. Catalonia was amongst the regions that most eagerly sought to censure the Asturians. In light of this outcome, and given the basic content of the Asturian pact, the true outcome of the February 1934 plenum – as opposed to the face-value outcome as suggested by the public statement released on the back of it – is worth re-visiting. The Asturian *Alianza Obrera* pact had as its first point the 'triumph of the social revolution in Spain'. The pact also presented itself as representing 'an agreement of the working class organizations to coordinate their action against the bourgeois regime and abolish it'. In its fundamental aspects, then, the pact corresponded to the type of joint CNT-UGT action that the



statement of February 1934 had said the CNT would support.<sup>65</sup> That regions such as Andalucía, Catalonia and Aragón would oppose the pact, focusing on very specific aspects of the wording such as its commitment to ‘socialist and federalist principles’ – undoubtedly an attempt to reconcile socialist and anarcho-syndicalist principles as closely as possible – demonstrates that, to the anti-alliance regions, and in spite of attempts to make appearances to the contrary, these regions were opposed to cooperation of any sort with the UGT for instinctive, sectarian reasons as much as ones of theory and principle.<sup>66</sup>

Although it was also agreed that a national congress would take place as soon as possible so that the CNT could reach a final decision on alliances, the June 1934 plenum marked the last significant internal discussion of alliances and the UGT within the anarcho-syndicalist movement until 1936. As has been seen, there was a highly entrenched opposition from its key regions to the notion of entering into an agreement with the UGT, and through the decision-making process this became the official stance of the organization. It was a stance that fitted in perfectly with the positions that had hitherto been adopted on the matter by *CNT* and *Solidaridad Obrera*, both of which continued their criticisms of all alliance initiatives, the socialists and the UGT, throughout the summer of 1934.

#### CNT-UGT cooperation in Madrid and Zaragoza

A further complicating factor in the conflicting positions on alliances, in particular for the CNT in light of its prevailing stance of committed opposition to them, was the fact of some CNT and UGT unions in different locations in Spain cooperating with one another in labour conflicts and protest strikes. In both Madrid and Zaragoza during 1934 CNT unions entered into strikes jointly with their UGT counterparts, something that would have seemed unthinkable in these cities just a year previously. However, although these initiatives generated some celebrations of the idea of worker unity, none of them was viewed by either the socialists or the anarcho-syndicalists as heralding any possibilities for further ties between the CNT and the UGT.

The construction strike that began in the capital in February 1934 brought about a somewhat surprising convergence of CNT and UGT unions. Prior to this moment, relations between the CNT and the UGT in this sector had been deeply acrimonious since 1931. The CNT had repeatedly attempted to carry out strikes which the UGT attempted to undermine, and there were what amounted to turf wars over which union represented workers at

particular construction sites. However, in an illustration of the growing disillusionment of many UGT members at the pace of reform, from late 1933 some UGT workers in the construction sector began to participate in CNT-led conflicts. A general strike began in the construction industry in February 1934, once again over the dismissal of workers. The strike was convoked jointly by the CNT and the UGT, the latter of whose members seem to have been keen to enter into the conflict in spite of the reticence of their leaders. After initial attempts at direct negotiation between employers and representatives of the CNT and UGT failed, the Labour Ministry stepped in and imposed a solution that included new working hours for the industry. During the strike joint public meetings of CNT and UGT construction workers were held, at which orators from both unions spoke. CNT and UGT representatives also attended the negotiations with employers and the government together, and joint statements were released by the strike committees of the two unions.<sup>67</sup>

A few months later, a general strike broke out in Zaragoza. It would prove to be one of the longest and most intense general strikes of the Republic. The CNT and the UGT struck jointly throughout. As the CNT press continued publishing articles that discounted the idea of the *Alianza Obrera* or attacked the UGT, its members in the Aragonese capital were joined with the UGT against the local authorities. That such a convergence of CNT and UGT would occur in Zaragoza was all the more remarkable given that since 1931, the two labour federations had been in near perpetual conflict. The CNT on the one hand had viewed the UGT as having connived with the local authorities on several occasions to provide strike breakers in CNT conflicts,<sup>68</sup> whilst the local UGT leaders viewed themselves and their members as living in continual fear of attack from violent anarchists.<sup>69</sup> Now, however, the CNT and UGT were cooperating in the Aragonese capital, united against the repressive actions of the Civil Governor.

The strike, called initially by the CNT to protest the arrest and torture of *cenetistas* by local security forces, became a joint initiative as a result of the equally draconian measures adopted against the CNT and the socialists by the Civil Governor, whose response of declaring the strike illegal and launching a campaign to replace strikers caused the strike to become indefinite. The strike remarkably held until mid-May. During that time, the strikers, both in the CNT and the UGT, were resolute in their position – it appears there was an enormous amount of popular support for the strike, fed by anger at the authorities and employers – just as the local authorities and then the national government remained intransigent towards the strikers. Police reinforcements were sent in, workers were arrested and beaten whilst in detention, and decrees were made to prevent workers gathering in

public. The length and steadfastness of the strike led to the conflict capturing the imagination and support of the working-class public across Spain. The welfare of the strikers and their families became a national concern. As they began to run out of food by the middle of April, CNT and UGT organisms in other cities organized efforts to take in the children of those involved in the strike. In what became the abiding symbol of the conflict, thousands of children were shipped across Spain to be cared for by working-class families in other cities. As the level of public attention towards Zaragoza increased, the Civil Governor came under increasing pressure to drop the heavy-handed tactics he and the local security apparatus had adopted. A settlement was negotiated with the CNT and UGT strike committees which reversed the earlier fines and guaranteed the strikers their previous jobs back.<sup>70</sup>

However, the fact of definite pieces of CNT-UGT cooperation did not affect the overall stance that the CNT presented on either the UGT or the idea of unity, and nor were these events interpreted in the socialist press as being a starting point for closer CNT-UGT ties in the immediate future. In Madrid, although the CNT and UGT unions involved did agree to strike jointly with joint demands, the cooperation was largely pragmatic and circumstantial rather than being motivated by a desire by either labour federation to foster a broader form of unity. Although *Solidaridad Obrera* and *El Socialista* did mention that the CNT and the UGT had entered jointly into the construction dispute, including publishing their joint press releases and reporting details of the joint public meetings held during the conflicts, no significance or celebration was attached to this cooperation. Instead, the emphasis rested on highlighting the intransigence of the employers in the disputes. Neither the CNT nor the UGT press were interested in attaching any significance to these instances of cooperation. It was a similar story with the socialist and anarcho-syndicalist coverage of the Zaragoza general strike. Of course, both *El Socialista* and *Solidaridad Obrera* were effusive in their praise for the strikers and their families. Much was made by both papers of the solidarity between workers, in facing down the reactionary stances taken by the local authorities in the city. However, the coverage in *El Socialista* and *Solidaridad Obrera* neither lauded nor attributed any particular significance to the fact of the CNT and the UGT working together. Instead, the papers in their reporting of the Zaragoza general strike referred simply to the courage and solidarity of ‘workers’ rather than organizations. There appears to have simply been no interest on the part of the CNT or socialist press to draw attention to grassroots cooperation between their members.<sup>71</sup> And nor did such events engender any wider goodwill in terms of the CNT’s overall public stance on the UGT; although *Solidaridad Obrera* was suspended before the conclusion of

the Zaragoza strike and until the end of June, upon its return to publication it resumed precisely the same hostile line against alliances, the socialists and the UGT that it had been producing previously.<sup>72</sup>

Overall, and in spite of isolated instances of cooperation between CNT and UGT unions, the stance that prevailed within the CNT as a national movement since the end of 1933 on the matters of alliances and how to respond to the rise of the right led the organization to occupying a position of isolation relative to the rest of the left. Whereas by the autumn of 1934 all other organizations on the left publicly viewed some form of alliance against fascism as being necessary, the CNT was as hostile as ever to all other proletarian organizations. In no small measure as a result of this, as will be seen in part three of the thesis, during the October insurrections the anarcho-syndicalist labour federation as a national actor appeared deeply impassive. The CNT, which had repeatedly proclaimed itself to be the only truly revolutionary movement in Spain, would fail to participate in what was by some distance the most significant moment of class struggle that had occurred in Spain for decades.

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<sup>1</sup> Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, p. 127

<sup>2</sup> Nigel Townson, *The Crisis of Democracy in Spain: centrist politics under the Second Republic, 1931-1936* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2000), pp. 347-359

<sup>3</sup> Heywood, *Marxism*, pp. 124-127; Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 113-154

<sup>4</sup> Heywood, *Marxism*, p. 129; Paul Preston, 'The Creation of the Popular Front in Spain' in Paul Preston and Helen Graham (Eds.) *The Popular Front in Europe* (London: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 84-105

<sup>5</sup> Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, p. 131

<sup>6</sup> An example of Largo's new rhetoric is a speech he gave to the Arte de Imprimir union on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1934 (Francisco Largo Caballero, *Discursos a los trabajadores* (Madrid, 1934) pp. 135-162). For examples of *El Socialista's* stance, see *El Socialista*, 03 January 1934, 27 September 1934

<sup>7</sup> Brademas points out that it was largely only the Aragonese CNT that sought to carry out an uprising, but just as had been the case with previous insurrections, once a minority had taken the initiative the National Committee felt compelled to throw its weight behind it. (Brademas, *Anarcosindicalismo*, pp. 112-116)

<sup>8</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 17 October 1933

<sup>9</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 04 October 1933

<sup>10</sup> For example, *Solidaridad Obrera*, 24 February 1934, 12 July 1934, 02 August 1934

<sup>11</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 03 July 1934

<sup>12</sup> The most comprehensive accounts of the *Alianza Obrera* are Victor Alba, *La Alianza Obrera: Historia y análisis de una táctica de unidad en España* (Madrid: Júcar, 1977), pp. 44-116; Durgan, *B.O.C.*, pp. 137-305

<sup>13</sup> Alba, *La Alianza Obrera*, p. 46; Durgan, *B.O.C.*, pp. 154-203

<sup>14</sup> Durgan, *B.O.C.*, p. 193

<sup>15</sup> Durgan, *B.O.C.*, pp. 240-241

<sup>16</sup> Alba, *La Alianza Obrera*, pp. 95-98

<sup>17</sup> For example, *La Tierra*, 27 November 1933, 06, 29, 31 January, 01, 03 February 1934

<sup>18</sup> FPI AARD 260-3 'Memoria de la Comisión Ejecutiva de la UGT 04 febrero – 30 junio 1934'; *El Socialista*, 01 March 1934

<sup>19</sup> FPI AARD 256-3 Minutes of the meeting of the UGT Executive Commission, 01 March 1934

<sup>20</sup> FPI AARD 259-4 Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the UGT National Committee, 24, 27 November 1933

<sup>21</sup> FPI AARD 256-3 Minutes of the meeting of the UGT Executive Commission, 01 March 1934

<sup>22</sup> FPI AARD 256-3 Meeting of the UGT Executive Commission, 17 May 1934

- <sup>23</sup> FPI AARD 260-2 Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the UGT National Committee, 31 December 1933
- <sup>24</sup> *El Socialista*, 21 April 1934
- <sup>25</sup> *El Socialista*, 24 June 1934
- <sup>26</sup> FPI AARD 260-2 Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the UGT National Committee, 31 December 1933
- <sup>27</sup> Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 153-154
- <sup>28</sup> FPI AARD 260-3 'Memoria de la Comisión Ejecutiva de la UGT 04 febrero – 30 junio 1934'
- <sup>29</sup> Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 156-157
- <sup>30</sup> Heywood, *Marxism*, p. 138
- <sup>31</sup> *La Tierra*, 08, 20 June 1932
- <sup>32</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 17 June 1932
- <sup>33</sup> Heywood, *Marxism*, pp. 134-135
- <sup>34</sup> FIM APCE V 69 Leaflet by the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo Comité Nacional de Reconstrucción addressed to 'All the revolutionary unions and revolutionary opposition minorities of the reformist unions', Seville, March 1931
- <sup>35</sup> *Unidad Sindical*, 21 November 1931
- <sup>36</sup> For example, *Solidaridad Obrera*, 24 December 1931
- <sup>37</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 29 March 1933
- <sup>38</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 29 March 1933
- <sup>39</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 27 June 1933
- <sup>40</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 08 July 1934
- <sup>41</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 03 August 1934
- <sup>42</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 14 February 1934
- <sup>43</sup> *La Tierra*, 18 January 1934
- <sup>44</sup> *La Tierra*, 15 February 1934
- <sup>45</sup> *La Tierra*, 29 January 1934
- <sup>46</sup> *La Tierra*, 29 January 1934
- <sup>47</sup> *La Tierra*, 29 January 1934
- <sup>48</sup> It is worth noting that precisely what form of 'revolution' this unity would achieve was not outlined in detail, beyond the implication that it would fulfil the ultimate goal of working-class emancipation
- <sup>49</sup> *La Tierra*, 17 February 1934. There is a detailed discussion of Valeriano Orobón Fernández's ideas in Antonio Liz, 'La CNT y la Alianza Obrera' in *Viento Sur*, 105 (October 2009), pp. 62-68
- <sup>50</sup> The central region was comprised primarily of Madrid and the provinces of the two Castillas that were closest to the capital.
- <sup>51</sup> *La Tierra*, 13 January 1934
- <sup>52</sup> IISG CNT 93 B1.2 'Acta del pleno nacional de regionales celebrado el día 10 y siguientes del presente mes en Barcelona'
- <sup>53</sup> IISG CNT 93 B1.2 'Acta del pleno nacional de regionales celebrado el día 10 y siguientes del presente mes en Barcelona'
- <sup>54</sup> IISG CNT 93 B1.2 'Acta del pleno nacional de regionales celebrado el día 10 y siguientes del presente mes en Barcelona'
- <sup>55</sup> IISG CNT 93 B1.2 'Acta del pleno nacional de regionales celebrado el día 10 y siguientes del presente mes en Barcelona'
- <sup>56</sup> IISG CNT 93 B1.2 'Acta del pleno nacional de regionales celebrado el día 10 y siguientes del presente mes en Barcelona'
- <sup>57</sup> Monjo, *Militants*, pp. 49-50, 135, 206
- <sup>58</sup> IISG CNT 93B1.2 'Acta del pleno nacional de regionales celebrado el día 10 y siguientes del presente mes en Barcelona'
- <sup>59</sup> IISG CNT 93B1.2 'Extracto del acta del Pleno Nacional de Regionales celebrado en Madrid en Junio de 1934'
- <sup>60</sup> For example, Victor Alba and Stephen Schwartz, *Spanish Marxism versus Soviet Communism: a history of the POUM* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1988), p. 65; Barrio Alonso, *Anarquismo*, p. 394; Peirats, *La CNT*, vol. 1, p. 89; Vega, *Entre revolució*, p. 362
- <sup>61</sup> Casanova, *Anarchism*, p. 85
- <sup>62</sup> IISG CNT 93B1.2 'Acta del pleno nacional de regionales celebrado el día 10 y siguientes del presente mes en Barcelona'
- <sup>63</sup> Copy of the pact reproduced in José Luis Gutiérrez Molina, *Cuadernos de la guerra civil 6: las relaciones CNT-UGT* (Madrid: Fundación Salvador Seguí, 1989), pp. 25-26
- <sup>64</sup> IISG CNT 93B1.2 'Extracto del acta del Pleno Nacional de Regionales celebrado en Madrid en Junio de 1934'
- <sup>65</sup> Gutiérrez Molina, *Cuadernos de la guerra civil 6*, pp. 25-26

<sup>66</sup> IISG CNT 93B1.2 'Extracto del acta del Pleno Nacional de Regionales celebrado en Madrid en Junio de 1934'

<sup>67</sup> *ABC*, 13, 15, 16 April 1934; *El Socialista*, 04, 06, 08, 16, 20 February 1934; *Solidaridad*, 13, 20 February 1934; Juliá, *Madrid*, pp. 350-366; Sandra Souto Kustrín, «*Y¿ Madrid? ¿Qué hace Madrid?*» *Movimiento revolucionario y acción colectiva (1933-1936)* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno, 2004), pp. 102-104

<sup>68</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 29 May 1931, 01 August 1931, 01 January 1932, 12 October 1932; *CNT*, 17 June 1933; Graham Kelsey, *Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State: The CNT in Zaragoza and Aragón 1930-1937* (Amsterdam: IISG, 1991), pp. 35-36, 49, 59, 60, 69-70

<sup>69</sup> Luis Viesca, the representative of the UGT's sugar workers, repeatedly commented on threats and attacks made by CNT and/or FAI militants in Aragón at UGT National Committee meetings. See, for example, FPI AARD 260-1 Meeting of the UGT National Committee, 17 July 1933

<sup>70</sup> *ABC*, 05, 06, 07, 12, 20, 21, 27 April, 04, 08, 09 May 1934; *El Socialista*, 03, 05, 25 April 1934, 02, 05, 06, 09, 11, 12 May 1934; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 April 1934, 08 May 1934; Kelsey, *Anarchosyndicalism*, pp. 106-117

<sup>71</sup> It is also worth considering that in both Madrid and Zaragoza, the unions of the two organizations were soon at loggerheads once more. Indeed, the ending of the construction strike in Madrid created a certain amount of mutual antipathy. *Cenetistas* complained at their meeting to vote on a return to work that the Socialists had not helped them 'provoke a revolutionary general strike' as they had originally wished, and had instead focused on bringing about a 'pre-emptory solution'. (*Solidaridad*, 20 February 1934; see also Souto Kustrín, «*Y¿ Madrid?*», p. 125; Kelsey, *Anarchosyndicalism*, p. 117)

<sup>72</sup> For example, *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 August, 04, 19 September 1934

### **Chapter Three: Constructing a Rival: CNT and Socialist Discourses, 1931-1934**

Thus far this thesis has examined the CNT's relationship with the UGT through considering the formal decision-making mechanisms of the two organizations, as well as through the articulation of opinions on the other labour federation in the main press organs belonging to the two labour federations. With regard to the CNT's expression of a stance on the UGT and vice versa through press and other propaganda, this has been restricted to a focus on how a stance was formed in relation to ongoing political and social events. So, for example, the CNT's stance on the UGT as outlined so far has been that the UGT was seeking to destroy the CNT and expand itself through the use of the legislative and coercive apparatus of the state. The socialists, on the other hand, interpreted the CNT's activities as counter-revolutionary as they were seen to be attacking the Republic and doing the bidding of the reactionary right.

A more detailed study of the anarcho-syndicalist and socialist press reveals that the hostilities between members of the two organizations went far beyond an interpretation of current events, and were in fact an articulation of a series of rigid and entrenched beliefs regarding the integrity and intentions of the active members of the opposing movement. Some aspects of these beliefs were grounded in the conflicting theoretical perspectives that separated the socialist and anarcho-syndicalist movements. To an extent, the hostilities between the CNT and the UGT based around these differences have been touched upon by historians and contemporary commentators.<sup>1</sup> It is known, for example, that the CNT, in line with its anti-political principles, deplored the UGT's links with the PSOE and endorsement of politics and its use of paid union officials, not to mention its support for an 'authoritarian' state. Consequently, it was common for editorials in CNT papers to refer in passing to the UGT in such terms as 'the workerist appendage of the Socialist Party',<sup>2</sup> or even for *Solidaridad Obrera* to devote whole articles lampooning the connections between the PSOE and the UGT under sarcastic headlines such as: 'It seems that the UGT is not the same as the Socialist Party'.<sup>3</sup> Related to this, writers have also pointed out the anarcho-syndicalists' disdain for the socialists' habit of accepting paid positions, both inside their organizations and in government posts, with the accusation of *enchufismo* being made repeatedly.<sup>4</sup> Criticisms based on such differences were expressed in the CNT and socialist press throughout the first years of the Republic and served as a staple form of ammunition through which hostilities between the organizations could be perpetuated.

However, there was also another layer of discourse between these more tangible differences that separated the CNT and the UGT and to a significant extent facilitated their ongoing hostilities. Chris Ealham has rightly highlighted how aspects of CNT discourse during the Republic mirrored those of the communists during the ‘Third Period’, such as the use of the term ‘social fascist’.<sup>5</sup> However, CNT discourse on the UGT was not merely a regurgitation of the negative epithets deployed by the communists. This layer of discourse revealed a highly emotive set of assumptions and beliefs about the opposing labour federation, grounded in notions and qualities such as ‘treachery’. This aspect of *cenetistas*’ understanding and representation of the UGT and vice versa has been examined in far less detail by historians, perhaps because it was based around such visceral, subjective concepts rather than more readily identifiable aspects of left-wing theory and practice.<sup>6</sup> However, as will be demonstrated in this chapter, this side of *cenetistas*’ and *ugetistas*’ understandings of one another was absolutely crucial in the Second Republic; not only did it constitute a highly significant proportion of how the two organizations attacked one another in public, but it also represented the articulation of a deeply entrenched mentality on the part of militants towards one another that cut substantially deeper than mere events or ideological or practical differences.

Before examining the representations of the CNT and the UGT as constructed by the discourse of the two organizations’ press organs, it would be worthwhile first to consider briefly how this discourse was created, disseminated and accessed by members of the two labour federations. Both the socialist movement and the anarchist and syndicalist currents of which the CNT was primarily comprised had a long and established tradition of newspaper publication that stretched back into the nineteenth century. The ability to publish and distribute a newspaper that fought an organization’s ideological corner and provided an orientation to its members and also convinced others to join the movement was of fundamental importance to most political groupings. The CNT and the PSOE-UGT were no different.<sup>7</sup> At all times throughout its history, a top priority of the CNT was to maintain the publication of a newspaper, with *Solidaridad Obrera* having been the movement’s key publication since 1907.<sup>8</sup> The principal functions of the CNT and the socialists’ official newspapers were to put forward the movement’s ongoing interpretation of current events, promote the organization amongst workers, and also provide practical information to members in the form of publishing official notifications produced by official bodies across the hierarchy, from union juntas to the leading committees. All these functions were central to allowing the CNT and the UGT to be able to mobilize their current memberships and gain new supporters.



*Solidaridad Obrera* was in practice the key daily national-level vehicle of expression for the CNT, in spite of the fact that the newspaper was controlled by the Catalan region. Although *CNT* began publication in 1932, ostensibly as the CNT's new national newspaper, *Solidaridad Obrera* was far more strongly established and thus continued to be more influential.<sup>9</sup> The paper's Catalan origin both reflected and to a significant extent perpetuated the dominance of the Catalan region's dominance over the movement as a whole. The paper's editorial board and main team of writers were chosen through a ballot at Catalan regional plenums.<sup>10</sup> Its main body of staff and opinion-piece writers was thus drawn overwhelmingly from the Catalan region. A significant proportion of the paper's content – though generally not its main opinion pieces and editorials – was created by contributions sent in by CNT militants operating at the grassroots level, relating to their own specific sphere of activities. Such items were for the most part reports by union juntas on the activities of their union, or by local federations on the activities of the CNT in the locality. The study of the CNT's discourse on the UGT in this chapter is drawn as much from these types of article as it is from the paper's main opinion pieces, in part to illustrate the grassroots' perspective on the UGT. The *cenetista* construction of the UGT that is highlighted in this chapter and the mentality it represents was repeated as recurrently by local militant contributors to the paper as it was in the main opinion pieces written by the paper's writers. Articles that examined local activities outside of Catalonia were often written by local militants from the area in question. *Solidaridad Obrera* unsurprisingly had its highest readership levels in Catalonia, and had a peak average circulation of 46855 in August 1931,<sup>11</sup> but was also available outside of the region, being distributed to towns across the country where there was a CNT local federation.<sup>12</sup> Given that the focus of this thesis is on CNT-UGT interactions in Catalonia, and given also that *Solidaridad Obrera* was the most important and widely read of the CNT's papers, it has been used as the primary source of study for CNT discourse on the UGT. Nevertheless, an examination of this paper is complimented by examples from the Madrid-based *CNT*, as well as some of the CNT's other regional papers – most of which were relatively short-lived – to illustrate the continuity in discursive themes between the different papers.<sup>13</sup>

Examining a *ugetista* discourse is more problematic, given the substantial overlap between the PSOE and the UGT. It would be worth clarifying what distinction, if any, can be drawn between a 'socialist' discourse and a discourse that could be attributed specifically to the UGT. The UGT lacked a widely-read publication that was presented as the official mouthpiece of the UGT and the UGT alone. The socialist movement had more newspapers linked to it than did the CNT, in the form of regional newspapers holding pro-socialist

positions, often because they were either owned or edited by members of the PSOE.<sup>14</sup> The main official publication of the socialist movement was *El Socialista*, which had an average circulation during the Republic of approximately 40000 copies.<sup>15</sup> It would be impossible to differentiate whether an editorial or a piece of reportage on the CNT in the paper could be attributed solely to either the PSOE or the UGT, and as such it would be impossible to identify in the pages of *El Socialista* what could definitively be classed as discourse specific to the UGT. But the UGT did have a select range of its own publications, in particular the *Boletín de la Unión General de Trabajadores*. The *Boletín* was a monthly publication that did not go on general sale in the same way that a daily newspaper such as *El Socialista* would. Rather than make an artificial distinction between ‘socialist’ and ‘UGT’ discourse, this chapter will examine ‘socialist discourse’, it being understood that a UGT discourse that was differentiated from general socialist discourse cannot be satisfactorily identified, though the chapter will draw in particular on articles published in the *Boletín*.

#### The CNT’s construction of the UGT hierarchy

The overall picture of the UGT hierarchy presented in the CNT’s discourse divided the UGT into three basic categories, namely national leaders and ordinary workers, and also a more hazily defined middle category of union leaders who operated the UGT’s organizational machinery and also had some form of local authority within the movement, but who did not hold the most important leadership posts. It was the two levels of leadership that were most often dwelt on within the CNT press. On the national level, Francisco Largo Caballero was unsurprisingly the most frequently depicted UGT leader. Largo made almost daily appearances in the CNT press, often being the subject of editorials but even more frequently being referred to in passing in the course of discussing other aspects of the UGT’s activities, whether on the national level or in individual localities. These references were virtually always critical in nature.<sup>16</sup>

Attacks on the Labour Minister drew on several themes, all of which reflected the criticisms made on either the UGT as a whole or of its leadership in general. The issue of Largo Caballero’s collaboration during the dictatorship was one theme that was referenced with particular regularity; it was certainly not uncommon for articles to introduce Largo Caballero in such terms as the ‘ex-counsellor of the Bourbons’<sup>17</sup> at some point when discussing his activities in the present.<sup>18</sup> Articles in the CNT press were quick to suggest he was personally responsible not just for the repression of CNT unions and their activities

through collaboration with the bourgeoisie and repressive laws, but also for the hardships suffered by the Spanish working classes in general. When CNT unions were closed by the authorities, it was often attributed to factors such as ‘Largo’s hatred of the CNT’.<sup>19</sup> His activities as Labour Minister ‘were more evil’ than those of any of the other members of the government.<sup>20</sup> It would not be an overstatement to suggest that the CNT press were obsessed with the Labour Minister, depicting him as having a hand in every misfortune the CNT – and indeed the working classes – suffered during the years of the Republican-socialist government. In CNT discourse, Francisco Largo Caballero effectively served as the personification of the UGT. It was Largo who was presented as having personally devised a plan to destroy the CNT for the benefit of the UGT. And because the UGT as a whole was seen as ‘Largo’s edifice’,<sup>21</sup> his aims were by extension those of the entire organization. Like many of the elements of the anarcho-syndicalists’ discursive construction of the UGT and its members, criticism of Largo was recurrent in the CNT press even before the Republic. Although prior to April 1931 he occupied no ministerial position, the attacks were fundamentally based on the same notions of his collaboration, his thirst for political power and his hatred of workers and the CNT.<sup>22</sup>

Other national UGT leaders played a supporting role to Largo in CNT discourse, and were presented as embodying the most self-serving and exploitative aspects of Spanish socialism. There was a grouping of roughly half a dozen socialist figures, the majority of whom currently or previously held high-level positions within the UGT, whose names were widely known as the leading figures of the socialist labour federation. In particular and in addition to Largo Caballero, the figures of Julián Besteiro, Andrés Saborit, Trifón Gómez, Wenceslao Carrillo and Manuel Cordero were the most publicly identifiable. As with Largo, this coverage was always critical. Cordero, in his capacity as editor of *El Socialista*, had committed ‘low and vile acts’<sup>23</sup> and was lampooned for holding ‘ten or twelve posts’ as was seen to be typical of *enchufista* socialists.<sup>24</sup> Julián Besteiro, meanwhile, spoke ‘like a perfect bourgeois’.<sup>25</sup> As with the attacks on Largo, this depiction of the UGT elite was equally present prior to the Republic.<sup>26</sup>

The role afforded to Trifón Gómez was slightly different, as his primary sphere of activities was related more strictly to the labour movement in his capacity as leader of the UGT’s rail workers’ federation. Throughout the Republic the CNT’s Federación Nacional de la Industria Ferroviaria (FNIF) was constantly at loggerheads with the UGT’s Sindicato Nacional Ferroviario (SNF). The FNIF led various strikes across the country during the Republic, which were largely opposed by the SNF, in part due to the highly cautious,

reformist leadership of Trifón Gómez.<sup>27</sup> The substantial coverage afforded to the railways in the CNT press inevitably led to the socialist labour leader making more frequent appearances within it.<sup>28</sup> Trifón Gómez was depicted as the embodiment of the socialist labour leader who sought to ‘betray’<sup>29</sup> workers through his reformist stance and his collaboration with the bourgeoisie.<sup>30</sup>

In the mindset of *cenetistas* these individuals constituted an elite grouping of ‘leaders’ who were responsible for the reprehensible actions of the socialist movement from government. In September 1934, for example, *CNT* appraised the viability of alliance initiatives, and in so doing concluded that the socialist motives for calling for anti-fascist unity emanating ‘from those who sowed police terror and massacred the working people’ could not be believed ‘if we bear in mind what the socialist leaders are and have been’.<sup>31</sup> Often this controlling class of the UGT was pointed out to the readership of CNT newspapers by way of calling on the names of these standout figures, the link between the names and their crimes taken to be automatically made by readers. The UGT as a national actor was controlled by ‘the Corderos’<sup>32</sup> who had created a ‘Cordero-style *República de trabajadores*’.<sup>33</sup> Emphasising that workers themselves should control the struggle against capitalism and not submit to a class of leaders, *cenetista* employees of the Barcelona bus network argued that ‘emancipation is in us and not in their Largo, Cordero etc’.<sup>34</sup> The activities of the ‘*Unión General de Traidores* [General Traitors’ Union]’ were the work of ‘individuals of the moral calibre of the Largos, Prietos, Saborits, Corderos, etc’.<sup>35</sup> Overall, then, the distrust exhibited by *cenetistas* towards the national leadership of the socialist movement cut very deep; it was not merely that they were seen to have adopted an erroneous agenda in their capacity of leaders of the organization, but rather – and much more emotively – that they were simply irredeemably corrupted, anti-CNT and anti-worker. Although this perspective was based in part around the anti-political principles, specifically the rejection of figures who exerted a political control over an organization, to which the anarcho-syndicalist movement adhered, it is evident that these attacks were much more than a mere articulation of anti-political theory, and were every bit as much grounded in suppositions of a lack of integrity and an instinctive loathing.

However, if a clique of half a dozen individuals was seen ultimately to exercise overall control over the socialist labour federation for their own interests and for anti-worker ends, then their orders were carried out across the country by a far larger, nameless army of ‘leaders’ who formed the next significant cadre in the CNT’s representation of the UGT hierarchy. This class of *dirigentes* conformed to the idea of the UGT’s union entities and

industrial federations being controlled by self-interested bureaucrats who took control of labour disputes out of the hands of workers, usually with the result of them suppressing workers' inclinations towards striking and colluding with employers and authorities to the detriment of the workers themselves. This type of leader would frequently appear in reports in the CNT press in which the CNT and/or the UGT were involved, such as those outlined in chapter one.<sup>36</sup> Again, such a perspective existed in CNT discourse prior to the Republic, though was understandably expressed less frequently due to the more limited occurrence of labour conflicts prior to April 1931.<sup>37</sup> In such reports, workers were often 'miserably tricked by the socialist leaders' who inhabited their local Casa del Pueblo, as was the case of construction workers in Zamora.<sup>38</sup> The strike of graphic arts workers in Madrid of 1934 had been initially undertaken by the CNT and the UGT together, when 'the leaders of the socialist sector, in the middle of the struggle, and without consulting anybody and especially not the strikers, declared the conflict resolved'.<sup>39</sup> As will be elaborated on later in this chapter, deceived workers were often presented as 'abandoning the UGT leaders' after those leaders had stifled their conflicts with employers.<sup>40</sup> The attitude exhibited by editorial writers and local militant contributors alike revealed the basic mindset that the individuals who ran the UGT were fundamentally motivated by a desire to deceive the working classes, rather than it simply being the case that the UGT pursued an erroneous strategy in industrial relations.

The final grouping within the UGT hierarchy was ordinary workers. To a significant extent, ordinary UGT members presented a problem for the CNT press. To fully understand why, it is first necessary to be aware that, crucially, in the eyes of *cenetistas*, the CNT and the working classes were synonymous. It was repeatedly stated in editorials and local militant contributions that 'authentic workers'<sup>41</sup> would ultimately realize that the CNT was the only organization to which they could belong.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, in CNT discourse 'the working classes' and synonymous terms were often substituted for 'the CNT' when dealing with the subject of the conspiracy against the CNT. For example, on some occasions Largo Caballero's agenda from the Labour Ministry was designed to destroy the CNT; but on other occasions it was the working classes who were 'victims of the dictatorship exercised by Largo Caballero from his throne at the Labour Ministry'.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the proletariat was often the subject of the most effusive praise in the CNT press for its revolutionary capacity, as was the CNT itself.<sup>44</sup> As will be discussed throughout the thesis, this assumption of CNT-working class synonymy was a deeply significant factor in determining how *cenetistas* – especially in Catalonia – interacted with UGT counterparts.

However, this belief also created the need to explain why some workers did gravitate towards the UGT. To a large extent, this was carried out through the concurrent belief, outlined above, that ordinary workers were ‘tricked’ by UGT leaders. As a result, some *cenetistas* simply believed that it was the case that UGT workers would come to their senses and see the UGT and its leaders for the intrinsically corrupt collective that they really were. A call by rail workers in Utrera, Andalucía, to their UGT counterparts through the pages of *Solidaridad Obrera* sums up this attitude when presented in its most aggressive form. The authors called on their members to ‘try and win over and rescue our brothers in the UGT’. Addressing UGT members, they then asked of them:

Can you in the UGT be proud of your leaders? No, no and no. Only *enchufistas* and those who aspire towards it militate in the Unión General de Trabajadores; the rest of them are *esquiroles*. Those who have not already abandoned their treacherous ranks, you must be ashamed and regretful of your actions as workers.<sup>45</sup>

The CNT press attempted to reinforce this idea with an aggressive promotion of the notion that the UGT was on the brink of collapse as a result of workers abandoning the organization for the CNT,<sup>46</sup> a claim that was equally made prior to the founding of the Republic.<sup>47</sup> Such cases were often given prominent position within the CNT’s national papers, even if the numbers of members involved were relatively small. One such example is provided by a report from 30<sup>th</sup> November 1932 edition of *CNT*, regarding the defection of UGT members in Motril, Andalucía, from the UGT to the CNT, which was given a prominent position on the second page of the edition under the heading ‘the decomposition of the UGT’. According to the report, three prominent *cenetistas* from Granada took the decision to visit Motril to attend a UGT assembly in the town. The three immediately met with the opposition of the organizers of the assembly, described as ‘the dozen lackeys of the socialist ministers who represent the badly depleted remains of the fossilized [Socialist] Party’. The socialist leaders managed to gain the backing of the Mayor to prevent the *cenetistas* speaking at the meeting. However, the workers gathered at the meeting demanded that the three be allowed to speak, and the demands of the authorities and the socialist leaders were disregarded. The *cenetistas* then proceeded to address the meeting, and after doing so ‘several men from Motril, who having been fervent militants of the UGT and the Socialist Party’ acknowledged the erroneous nature of their old ideological principles. A mass conversion of the audience took place; ‘in the Motril Casa del Pueblo more than six thousand UGT membership cards were torn up and burned’. The retelling of the incident thus conformed perfectly to the notion that although socialist leaders may have attempted to work with the authorities to hold back the CNT, the masses would

spontaneously and freely back the CNT against such manoeuvres and ultimately abandon the UGT for the CNT.<sup>48</sup>

Other incidents of workers abandoning the UGT for the CNT were presented in blunter, less elaborate terms, which nevertheless celebrated the victory of the CNT over the UGT which such incidents were seen to represent. In October 1932 the UGT membership of the village of Cala, Andalucía, abandoned the socialist labour federation *en masse* to join the CNT. The event was met with fanfare from *Solidaridad Obrera*, with the incident occupying a prominent spot on the back page. The defection in this single village was presented as being ‘another proof of the disappointments that the Spanish proletariat has been suffering at the hands of the UGT’. The article went on to explain that workers across Spain were abandoning the UGT and ‘fleeing to our revolutionary labour federation because it is clear that the Unión General de Trabajadores does not represent the aspirations of the workers’.<sup>49</sup> At times, the assertion that workers were abandoning the UGT for the CNT was placed in more general terms that were not connected to any particular event. For example, on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1932 *Solidaridad Obrera* published an article on its front page that addressed ‘the crisis of the UGT’. The editorial declared that ‘the working multitudes are abandoning [the UGT], emancipating themselves from the tutelage of their leaders, who are comfortably aligned with the new regime’.<sup>50</sup>

### The UGT and treachery

Working in tandem with these constructions of the different groups within the UGT was a simultaneous understanding of what was the UGT as a whole’s most fundamental quality. In anarchist and syndicalist discourse, the most essential quality of the UGT and the socialist movement was treachery, perpetuated against both the CNT and the working classes. The accusation of treachery was made repeatedly in editorials in the CNT press and by CNT militants. Of course, on one level accusations of treachery or betrayal of the CNT and the working classes were made in direct relation to the present-day activities of the socialist leadership, with regard above all to the initiatives launched from government. However, it is important to recognize that such incidents were interpreted by many *cenetistas* – and were certainly presented in this fashion by the CNT press – as being merely the present-day manifestation of a virtually unbroken line of treachery. For example, in focusing on the activities of the UGT in Extremadura in 1932, *Solidaridad Obrera* prefaced its commentary by asserting

that Largo Caballero, Cordero, de los Ríos et al go united with the parties that defend property, capitalism and the state to take on the just and human popular aspirations is not a secret to anybody. It is not once, twice nor three times, but hundreds of times that the social fascists have shamefully betrayed the Spanish proletariat.<sup>51</sup>

The Primo de Rivera dictatorship was one key period that was recurrently referred to in the CNT press throughout the Republic by militants on all levels of the organization's hierarchy who wrote in the paper to demonstrate the previous record of treachery against the working classes of the socialists and the UGT leadership. Unsurprisingly, Largo was most commonly used in discussing the UGT's collaboration, undoubtedly due to a combination of his ubiquitous presence in the paper and the fact that he held the most high-profile post under Primo de Rivera. Entire articles were devoted to outlining Largo's role as a counsellor of state during the 1920s, published under large-print headlines such as 'Largo Caballero and Primo de Rivera',<sup>52</sup> whilst many others made passing references to this collaboration. There is no question that the goal of such articles was to add to the ranks of the 'many [who] still remember how the socialists acted during the six and a half years that this regime lasted for'.<sup>53</sup>

Whilst there was undoubtedly a strong element of such references to the Primo de Rivera dictatorship serving as a smear attack on the UGT due to the activities of the socialists from government in the present moment, there can be no doubt that they were also part of a belief that, throughout its history, the UGT had always played a role of holding back the working classes. A front-page editorial published in *Solidaridad Obrera* in July 1934 provides one of the most complete manifestations of this interpretation. The point that the editorial sought to make was that the revolutionary rhetoric emanating from socialist leaders such as Largo Caballero in these months was entirely hollow and merely designed to preserve the socialist movement now that it was out of government. However, in part to substantiate this position, the bulk of the editorial entailed narrating the history of the socialist movement since the 1910s. The historical account began with the events of the summer of 1917, when 'Spanish socialism was taught an important lesson'. As a result of the 'cowardice that their leaders displayed that year the UGT was left reduced to such an emaciated labour federation that it strongly resembled a skeleton'. The account then moved on to the Primo de Rivera era, a period which, as mentioned, the CNT press tended to dwell on when discussing the UGT: 'The Primo de Rivera dictatorship saved Spanish socialism. Lacking scruples, its leaders clung on [to it] like limpets'. The approach of 'flattering' the dictator was the 'only path through which it [socialism] could expand'. This history of the Spanish socialists then arrived at the Republic, in which 'the socialists



attempted to continue making use of the monopoly that the dictator had granted them'. In the view of *cenetistas*, then, the overall history of Spanish socialism was a mixture of cowardice in the face of revolution, mixed with collusion with reactionary elements and abuse of power to fulfil an overriding goal of expanding the reach of the movement's organisms.<sup>54</sup>

This interpretation of the socialists' historical role within Spain drew the *cenetista* militants who contributed to the CNT press – and of course the writing and editorial staff of the movement's papers – to hold and project a basic mentality that the UGT always had been and always would be treacherous. References to a timeless past of socialist misdeed and treachery spanned the majority of types of article published in *Solidaridad Obrera*, *CNT* and other CNT papers, including front-page editorials, reports of the activities of socialists in individual localities – both those produced by the papers' central writing staffs and those submitted by local contributors – and reportage on political events.<sup>55</sup> This belief in treachery as being an intrinsic and timeless quality of the UGT *modus operandi* was a direct continuation of a belief that was regularly expressed prior to the founding of the Republic.<sup>56</sup> It was not uncommon for either the UGT as a whole or the socialists in general to be referred to in such terms as 'eternal enemies of the Confederation'<sup>57</sup> or as 'eternal traitors'.<sup>58</sup> Likewise, grassroots-level confrontations between *cenetistas* and *ugetistas* would give the CNT press occasion to loudly proclaim 'eternal socialist treason',<sup>59</sup> or that 'the record of the UGT was always to betray the working class'.<sup>60</sup> These references to an eternal yesterday of deceit by the socialists reveal, in the mindsets of those who controlled production of the CNT's discursive output, just how deeply treachery was viewed as an intrinsic quality of socialism as a movement and as a doctrine. It was not merely the case that Spanish socialists had at various points betrayed the CNT movement; this treachery was in fact an obligatory and inevitable element of socialist activity. Such assertions must be regarded as qualitatively very different from an objective refutation of socialist ideology and methods.

It is important to emphasize that the discursive construction of the UGT that has been outlined here cannot be dismissed as simply being a propaganda line against the socialist labour federation that was controlled by the editorial and writing staff of the movement's newspapers. As mentioned, a substantial amount of the content of CNT papers was produced by grassroots-level militants. In every issue, *Solidaridad Obrera*, *CNT* and other CNT newspapers contained reports on the activities of the CNT and other items of interest to the working classes from localities across the length and breadth of Spain. Contributions

from grassroots *cenetistas* displayed the basic mentality, outlined above, that the UGT as an organization simply stood for treachery. When references to ‘treachery’, ‘traitors’ or some other ‘eternal’ characteristic appeared in the CNT press, as often as not they were contained within contributions from grassroots militants rather than editorials. Furthermore, local contributions to anarcho-syndicalist newspapers reveal that militants at this level often endorsed the ‘political’ arguments against the UGT, such as that the *jurados* and legislative initiatives were designed to destroy the CNT, and these freely mixed with this underlying anti-UGT mentality, as well as the entrenched belief in a synergy between the CNT and the working classes.

A report on Monzón, Aragón that appeared in *Solidaridad Obrera* in August 1931 serves as an example of the overall interpretation of the UGT’s agenda that was expressed by local militants in their depiction of events within their own locality. The incident the piece ostensibly reported on related to alleged attempts by employers in the sugar industry to force workers to join the UGT. The language adopted in the report firmly framed the incident in national terms. ‘The *ugetistas*, allies of Lerroux,’ it began, ‘are trying to convert the towns of the Ribera del Cinca into a fiefdom of the UGT’. The piece outlined the agenda of the UGT as a whole: ‘from power [the UGT] practices the annulment of the class struggle and advocates class integration, preparing the stages of the fascistization of the state, of fascist infiltration in the social, economic and industrial life of Spain’. The militant also asserted a synonymy between the CNT and the working classes. Having established the threat that the UGT posed not just in Monzón but across all of Spain, the author asserted that the socialist labour federation would be unsuccessful because ‘the *compañeros* of the Comarcal Federation [of the CNT] watch over the interests of the workers and educate their revolutionary development’. Moreover, ‘the workers of Monzón, as in the rest of Spain, are convinced that there is only one revolutionary organization: the CNT’.<sup>61</sup>

### Socialist discourse on the CNT

It is of course important to be aware that the socialists themselves produced a discourse on the anarcho-syndicalist movement throughout the Republic. *El Socialista* and the *Boletín de la Unión General de Trabajadores* often printed editorials on the activities of the CNT, and there were even more frequent passing references to ‘anarchists’ and ‘syndicalists’. This discourse was no less critical – even if much less vitriolic in its articulation – and in fact mirrored many of the themes articulated in CNT discourse on the UGT. For example,

*ugetistas* recurrently expressed the belief that the CNT was founded on a dishonest minority exploiting an often misguided proletariat. One explanation given for the CNT's membership base by the socialists, particularly with regard to Catalonia, was that those who joined the CNT were illiterate or in some other way lacking the education that would allow them to realize their error in joining an anarcho-syndicalist union. For example, writing in the *Boletín de la Unión General de Trabajadores*, Salvador Vidal Rosell, one of the key socialist figures in Catalonia, explained that 'textiles in Catalonia has always been one of the bastions of the anarchists, due to the enormous percentage of illiterates' within the industry.<sup>62</sup>

However, the CNT's membership base was not merely a product of ignorance, but also of coercion carried out by *cenetista* militants. To understand this element of the socialists' representation of the CNT, it is first necessary to establish the nature of the individuals who ran the CNT, as constructed in UGT discourse. Where for the CNT the UGT was run by a class of *dirigentes* who duped workers into joining the UGT, for the socialists the CNT was run by a gang of violent *pistoleros* who used threats and force to coerce individuals into the CNT.<sup>63</sup> On one level, the CNT was seen as being an organization that facilitated *pistolero* by allowing individuals to join its ranks whose interests did not extend beyond violence, whether it be on behalf of a union or an employer. This in itself 'made it impossible' for the CNT 'to represent the honourable working class'.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, however, the socialist press was littered with references to 'the *pistoleros* of the anarchist Confederation' who waged a campaign of violence against both their opponents and ordinary workers.<sup>65</sup> Those who followed the CNT's protest actions were condemned to 'playing the sad role of victim, complying with meek diligence when faced with the pistols of the foremen of syndicalism'.<sup>66</sup> The socialist press were at pains to stress that the UGT would never adopt coercive methods to make workers join their organization, however much it was in the best interests of these workers to join. Instead, this tactic was emphasized as being the preserve of the anarcho-syndicalists.<sup>67</sup>

Socialist discourse again mirrored that of the anarcho-syndicalists in the critically important respect that it argued a synonymy of the UGT and the working classes. It was stressed in the socialist press that 'class-conscious workers' would inevitably follow the UGT, just as the CNT claimed that 'authentic' or 'revolutionary' workers would join the CNT.<sup>68</sup> Such remarks made it clear that support for anarcho-syndicalism amounted to at best a lack of class consciousness, and perhaps even false consciousness. This belief in the UGT being the true representatives of the working classes was accompanied by an equally

strong belief in the innate superiority of the UGT as an organization. The *Boletín de la Unión General de Trabajadores* once alluded, for example, to ‘the superiority of the Unión General de Trabajadores. A superiority and competence that they have never, not even in the heyday of anarcho-syndicalism, managed to equal’.<sup>69</sup>

Like the CNT in their discourse, the socialists argued that the CNT was an historically and intrinsically anti-worker entity. On one level, there were immediate antecedents that were called upon to discredit the CNT. In the first months of the Republic, attempts were made to attack the CNT for its actions in the final months of the Monarchy. The accusation was made on several occasions that the CNT had not only failed to participate in efforts to overthrow the old regime, but had actively sabotaged efforts to overthrow it, in the form of publishing an article in *Solidaridad Obrera* in November 1930 that contained details of the developing conspiracy against General Berenguer. The goal of the accusation was to suggest that the CNT backed in some form the monarchy and had attempted to stop its overthrow.<sup>70</sup> This accusation of support for the old, anti-worker regime mirrored the references made in the CNT press to the collaboration of the UGT with Primo de Rivera in the important respect that both accusations attempted to use the past activities of the corresponding labour federation as proof that they were backers of the repressive old order and as such anti-worker entities.

However, in the historical narrative of the labour movement as contained in socialist discourse, the activities of the CNT press in November 1930 were merely one of the more recent in a succession of past attempts to derail the cause of the working classes. The history of the organization of the working classes was essentially presented as one in which anarchists and syndicalists had always played an interfering role. Indeed, anarchism itself – which, it must be stressed, socialist discourse identified the CNT as its present-day organizational force – was an anachronism that ought to have been supplanted by the theoretically superior socialist movement. Anarchism persisted in Spain in the form of the CNT, when it should ‘no longer exist except in museums of historical artifacts’.<sup>71</sup> Anarchism and the CNT were thus condemned to playing a retardant role throughout history and into the present. An extensive history of the UGT published in the *Boletín de la Unión General de Trabajadores* provides the most comprehensive example of this reading of the role of anarchists – including the CNT – in the Spanish workers’ movement. For the nineteenth century, anarchists were attributed a role of attempting, without success, to sabotage the establishment of socialist organizations in Spain. Prior to the foundation of the UGT, ‘anarchists, who later called themselves libertarians, syndicalists and today

libertarian communists' had attempted to fight employers without creating a strong organizational structure, and as a result encountered 'continual defeats'. A change of tactics and strategy was necessary, 'and this mission was that which the Unión General de Trabajadores came to fulfil'. In spite of this, these anarchist groups continued to harass the UGT. Anarchism, then, was presented as a historically nefarious parallel movement to that of the UGT, which should have faded away long ago but unfortunately had not.<sup>72</sup>

Undoubtedly in part to substantiate these ideas of the anarcho-syndicalist movement being a malign anachronism, the socialist press was keen to present the CNT's activities as being indicative of an organization founded on a fundamentally flawed set of ideas, as a result of which it lurched from one failure to the other.<sup>73</sup> This mirrored the CNT press's own claims that workers were abandoning the CNT in droves.<sup>74</sup> At times the focus of attention centred on age-old practical differences such as the question of the ongoing accurement of a strike fund, but unsurprisingly the main issue at stake was the role of arbitration bodies. For example, the *Boletín de la Unión General de Trabajadores* highlighted in August 1931 the course of a conflict in the Barcelona metal industry by the 'anarchist union'. The publication made a point of comparing the pay settlement the CNT had achieved after a strike that had lasted for a month, noting not just that it was a far lower amount than they had initially demanded, but that it represented a lower rate of pay for most categories of worker in that industry than their counterparts in Madrid – which is to say UGT members – were being paid.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, in November 1931 the CNT's textile union in Valencia was ridiculed after it capitulated to employers after fourteen weeks of conflict. This ridicule took the form of printing a letter sent to the employers by the union, which, although claiming the union's request for talks did not amount to 'a confession of cowardice or exhaustion' seem to suggest that the union wished to back down.<sup>76</sup>

### Conclusions

Overall, then, over the course of the period between the founding of the Republic and October 1934, the CNT and the UGT through their publications wrote copious amounts on one another. Their competing interpretations of one another took the form of fairly elaborate and repeatedly expressed constructions of the rival labour federation. In the case of the CNT the articulation of its interpretation of the UGT pervaded all levels of the CNT's journalistic output, from front-page editorials all the way down to local union notices; moreover the CNT press gave disproportionate coverage to relatively minor events simply because they involved the UGT. Crucially, the discursive output of both the

anarcho-syndicalists and the socialists on one another was not based particularly often around a critical application of their theoretical tenets. Rather, theoretical differences were articulated through vitriol, if they were articulated at all; much of the discourse was instead firmly in the realm of attacking the integrity of the other movement. The overriding feature of the discursive output of the two movements was their positioning of the other labour federation as having no legitimate role amongst the Spanish working classes, and indeed being a purely malign entity that prayed upon them, a judgement that, though inspired by theoretical premises, should not be assumed to be a logical or inevitable result of them. It would not be inaccurate to characterize these discursive outputs as being as much representative of a mentality held by either group on one another as they were an expression of theoretical or practical differences. As will be seen later in the thesis, for many militants of both organizations these mentalities would ultimately prove to be impervious to being modified by changes in political and social circumstances.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Juliá, *Madrid*, pp. 172-190; Paniagua, 'Republicans, Socialists and Anarchists', pp. 241-256

<sup>2</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 14 July 1934

<sup>3</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 13 September 1932

<sup>4</sup> *Enchufismo* is a concept that has no satisfactory direct translation into English; Gerald Brenan's description of it as 'the art of getting cushy jobs' during his outlining of this aspect of anarcho-syndicalist criticisms of socialists is fairly accurate with regard to how the CNT used the term in reference to socialists (Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth*, p. 295)

<sup>5</sup> Chris Ealham, "'Revolutionary Gymnastics" and the unemployed: the limits of the anarchist revolutionary utopia in Spain, 1931-1937' in Keith Flett and David Renton (eds) *The Twentieth Century: a Century of Wars and Revolutions?* (London: Rivers Oram, 2000), p. 148

<sup>6</sup> Julián Casanova perhaps provides the clearest indication of the centrality to the anarcho-syndicalist movement of creating a discourse which placed it and the working classes against the forces of reaction and repression. (Julián Casanova, *Anarchism*, p. 10)

<sup>7</sup> Francisco Madrid Santos, 'La prensa anarquista y anarcosindicalista en España desde la I Internacional hasta el final de la guerra civil' (unpublished PhD thesis, Universidad Central de Barcelona, 1989), p.15-18; Susanna Tavera i García, 'Revolucionarios, publicistas y bohemios: los periodistas anarquistas (1918-1936)' in Hofman, Bert, Joan i Tous, Pere and Tietz, Manfred (eds) *El anarquismo español y sus tradiciones culturales* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Iberoamericana, 1995), pp. 373-393

<sup>8</sup> Susana Tavera, *Solidaridad Obrera: el fer-se i desfer-se d'un diari anarcosindicalista* (Barcelona: Col.legi de Periodistes de Catalunya, 1992), p. 10

<sup>9</sup> Antonio Checa Godoy, *Prensa y partidos políticos durante la II República* (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1989), p. 77; Madrid Santos, 'La prensa anarquista', p. 179

<sup>10</sup> Monjo, *Militants*, p. 162; Tavera, *Solidaridad Obrera*, pp. 52-53; José Peirats, *De mi paso por la vida: memorias* (Barcelona: Flor del Viento, 2009), pp. 260-265, 273-277 contains a personal insight into the writing and editing process of *Solidaridad Obrera* through recounting his experiences of writing for the paper.

<sup>11</sup> Susanna Tavera, *Solidaridad Obrera*, p.57

<sup>12</sup> Workers who had the inclination to do so could get hold of copies of the main newspapers of both the socialist and anarcho-syndicalist movements. Peirats, for example, recounts how he and his uncle used to subscribe to *CNT* and *El Socialista* respectively whilst living together in Vall d'Uixó, Castellón, in 1932 (Peirats, *De mi paso*, p. 218)

<sup>13</sup> The regional CNT papers consulted as part of this study are *Solidaridad Obrera*, the paper of the Galician CNT, published in La Coruña; *Solidaridad Obrera*, the paper of the Levant CNT, published in Valencia; and *Solidaridad Proletaria*, the paper of the Andalusian CNT, published in Seville. To differentiate between these different versions of *Solidaridad Obrera*, the place of publication of each title published outside Barcelona appears in brackets in the references.

<sup>14</sup> Checa Godoy, *Prensa y partidos*, p. 19 highlights the large proportion of PSOE deputies who were newspaper editors or had ties to a newspaper.

<sup>15</sup> Checa Godoy, *Prensa y partidos*, p. 73

<sup>16</sup> The stance that the CNT publicly occupied over Largo during the Civil War seems astonishing if placed into the context of the vilification of him by the organization before the war. At the height of the May 1937 government crisis, as the CNT sought to fend off political marginalization, the National Committee instructed the CNT press to ‘exalt the figure of Largo Caballero as a guarantee of impending victory’ (CDMH, P/S Barcelona, B1345, undated report authored by the CNT National Committee entitled ‘documentos que se citan en el informe sobre la tramitación de la crisis’)

<sup>17</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 June 1931

<sup>18</sup> For example, *Solidaridad Obrera*, 13 October 1931, 26 May 1932

<sup>19</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 20 May 1931

<sup>20</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 14 February 1933

<sup>21</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 02 July 1931

<sup>22</sup> For example, *Acción Social Obrera*, 15 September 1928, 25 January 1930; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 05 December 1930, 22 January, 28 February 1931; *Solidaridad Obrera* (La Coruña), 15 November 1930

<sup>23</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 29 October 1930

<sup>24</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 09 October 1930

<sup>25</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 09 April 1933

<sup>26</sup> For example, *Acción*, 01 March 1930, 16 August 1930; *Acción Social Obrera*, 25 January 1930; *Solidaridad Obrera* 09, 28, 29 October, 05 December 1930; *Solidaridad Obrera* (La Coruña), 22 November 1930, 21 February 1931

<sup>27</sup> Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, p. 108

<sup>28</sup> Examples of CNT journalists or militants in the rail industry attacking their UGT rivals, in particular the leadership of the SNF and/or Trifón Gómez, include *CNT*, 08, 19, 28 November 1932; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 21 October 1931, 03 March, 19, 27 April, 30 November, 22 December 1932

<sup>29</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 22 December 1932

<sup>30</sup> Peirats in his memoirs refers to Trifón Gómez as the ‘cacique’ of the UGT rail workers’ union (Peirats, *De mi paso*, p. 220)

<sup>31</sup> *CNT*, 24 September 1932

<sup>32</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25 March 1932

<sup>33</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 08 May 1932

<sup>34</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 23 November 1932

<sup>35</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 16 March 1933

<sup>36</sup> Examples of grassroots militants denouncing the leadership of their local UGT rivals for collusion with employers or other forms of holding back local workers (names of the locality in question are given in brackets) include *Solidaridad Obrera*, 08 May 1932 (Villacarrillo, Andalucía), 17 June 1932 (Aguilas, Murcia), 13 July 1932 (Santa Pola, Alicante), 11 November 1932 (Peralta, Basque Country). Examples of regional CNT papers attacking local UGT leaderships include *Solidaridad Obrera* (La Coruña), 27 June, 07 July 1931; *Solidaridad Obrera* (Valencia), 07, 14 November 1931, 20 February 1932

<sup>37</sup> For example, *Acción*, 31 May 1930; *Acción Social Obrera*, 14 June 1930; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 11, 24 October 1930; *Solidaridad Obrera* (La Coruña), 22 November 1930

<sup>38</sup> *CNT*, 20 April 1933

<sup>39</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 April 1934

<sup>40</sup> *CNT*, 30 October 1933

<sup>41</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 06 October 1932

<sup>42</sup> For example, *CNT*, 04, 06 December 1933; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 31 March, 10 May, 07 November 1931, 05, 20 April 1933, 12 July 1934; *Solidaridad Obrera* (La Coruña), 16 May 1931

<sup>43</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 13 August 1932

<sup>44</sup> Casanova, *Anarchism*, p. 5

<sup>45</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 31 March 1932

<sup>46</sup> Examples of journalists or militants claiming the UGT’s membership base was collapsing, made either by editorials or by grassroots militants regarding their local rival: *Solidaridad Obrera*, 24 September 1931, 11 June, 06 September, 02 October, 20 November 1932, 17 October 1933; *Solidaridad Obrera* (La Coruña), 02 January 1932; *Solidaridad Obrera* (Valencia), 14 November 1931, 30 April 1932

<sup>47</sup> For example, *Acción*, 30 May 1930; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 05, 28 October 1930

<sup>48</sup> *CNT*, 30 November 1932

<sup>49</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 06 October 1932

<sup>50</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 03 June 1932

<sup>51</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 16 July 1932

<sup>52</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 13 October 1931

<sup>53</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 26 May 1932

<sup>54</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 14 July 1934

- <sup>55</sup> Examples of articles in which ‘treachery’ was presented as an intrinsic or timeless quality of the UGT or ‘the socialists’ include: *CNT*, 19 November, 22 December 1932, 17, 31 March, 05, 08 April, 12, 14, 30 June 1933; *Solidaridad*, 15 February 1934; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 20 August, 27 October 1931, 20 January, 26 March, 15 September, 25 November 1932, 08 December 1933, 12 July 1934; *Solidaridad Obrera* (La Coruña), 11 July, 26 December 1931
- <sup>56</sup> For example, *Solidaridad Obrera*, 14, 15, 29 October, 01 November 1930
- <sup>57</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 11 November 1932
- <sup>58</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25 June 1931
- <sup>59</sup> *CNT*, 05 April 1933
- <sup>60</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 27 October 1931
- <sup>61</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 09 August 1931
- <sup>62</sup> *Boletín de la Unión General de Trabajadores*, May 1932, p. 208. Other examples of the socialist press equating CNT membership with illiteracy include *El Socialista*, 26 January, 16, 29 May 1932
- <sup>63</sup> Other references to ‘pistoleros’ running the CNT include *El Socialista*, 10 June, 12 July, 13 August, 23 September 1931, 22 September 1932, 12 March 1933
- <sup>64</sup> *Boletín de la Unión General de Trabajadores*, June 1931, p. 128
- <sup>65</sup> *Boletín de la Unión General de Trabajadores*, April 1932, p. 99
- <sup>66</sup> *Boletín de la Unión General de Trabajadores*, June 1933, p. 218
- <sup>67</sup> *Boletín de la Unión General de Trabajadores*, November 1931, p. 329
- <sup>68</sup> Examples of articles in the socialist press equating ‘class-conscious’ workers with the UGT or the socialists’ agenda include *El Socialista*, 18 July 1931, 04 August 1931, 07, 22, 23, 31 January 1932, 29 November 1932
- <sup>69</sup> *Boletín de la Unión General de Trabajadores*, July 1932, p. 255
- <sup>70</sup> This claim was made in *Boletín de la Unión General de Trabajadores*, June 1931, p. 134 and March 1932, p. 67
- <sup>71</sup> *Boletín de la Unión General de Trabajadores*, January 1931, p. 2
- <sup>72</sup> *Boletín de la Unión General de Trabajadores*, May 1932, pp. 124-129
- <sup>73</sup> *El Socialista* often ran articles that mocked the results of the CNT’s direct action. See, for example, 12 August, 20 November, 29 December 1931
- <sup>74</sup> For example, *El Socialista*, 29 July 1931, 18 March, 26 May 1933
- <sup>75</sup> *Boletín de la Unión General de Trabajadores*, August 1931, pp. 213-214
- <sup>76</sup> *Boletín de la Unión General de Trabajadores*, November 1931, p. 329



## **Part Two: The CNT and the UGT in Catalonia, 1931-1934**

## **Chapter Four: Catalonia and the Second Republic, 1931-1934**

Part one of the thesis examined the national level of the CNT's interactions with the UGT. Part two of the thesis will turn its attention to the question of the CNT's interactions with the UGT in Catalonia. As was established in part one, the Catalan region was a key player in determining the CNT's national-level stance on the UGT through its participation in the organization's decision-making process and its control of *Solidaridad Obrera*. However, in addition to the national level of CNT-UGT interactions, it is also crucial to consider how the CNT and the UGT interacted in specific regional contexts, both because different regions had their own social and political particularities, and also because it was at this level that the national level of relations intersected with CNT and UGT unions and militants interacting with one another in the workplace.

Catalonia represents a particularly intriguing area in which to examine CNT-UGT interactions in the Second Republic. There was a great disparity of strength between the two organizations here. For the CNT, Catalonia was its stronghold and birthplace; for the UGT Catalonia represented a failure of the organization to connect with the most proletarian region of the country. As will be highlighted in this part of the thesis, the CNT in Catalonia viewed the Catalan UGT as being of an even more reactionary stripe than it believed the rest of the UGT to be; this in turn had a profound impact on how CNT militants interacted with the UGT on the ground.

### **The Republic in Catalonia**

The political scene of Catalonia was different from the national political level, primarily due to the different institutions that had a governmental role in the region and the different set of actors that dominated in the region. These were in turn a result of long-standing economic, social and cultural differences between Catalonia and the rest of Spain. Aside from the CNT and anarchism's unique role here, undoubtedly the most prominent features of Catalan political and social life during the Second Republic were the fact of the region having political autonomy of one form or another during the Republic (with the exception of the period between October 1934 and the 1936 election), and the dominance throughout of the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya.

The ERC was a movement that was quite different from the Republican parties of the national political scene. Aside from the obvious dimension of its Catalan nationalism, as a

party it was also much more populist than Republican parties elsewhere. The ERC sought to appeal at the ballot box as much to Catalonia's working classes as it did to the middle classes, even if its politicians were drawn principally from urban professionals. Courting the CNT was a particularly important method of attempting to fulfil this aim, with various claims being made regarding how in the future the ERC would take various steps to alleviate poor social conditions and allow worker organizations to operate freely. Its attempt to have such a broad appeal had two principal results. Firstly, it ensured that the movement was highly popular, both in the final days of the monarchy and in the 1932 Generalitat elections. Secondly, it meant that the party inevitably had to garner support based on a programme of sentiment rather than specific policies, and also set itself the rather difficult task, once in power, of bringing about the changes it had championed.<sup>1</sup>

The ERC swept to victory in the April 1931 municipal elections, gaining a share of the vote far beyond the expectations of even its own leaders. Francesc Macià's first decisive move after the election result was to declare Catalonia a Republic within a federal Spain, a move that was then retracted just a few days later following negotiations with the Republicans in Madrid. Though that particular difference of opinion ended amicably enough, it foreshadowed things to come over the course of the Republic in the respect that the precise division of jurisdiction between Madrid and Barcelona was the subject of ongoing disagreements, and where Madrid's power ended and the Generalitat's began was in practice never precisely defined.<sup>2</sup> Amongst other things, this uncertainty and rivalry had repercussions on the CNT and the UGT in the region due to both the central government and the Generalitat both making conflicting claims to the handling of labour conflicts in Catalonia, not to mention their own preferred labour federation.

Aside from this grappling with Madrid, the ERC was faced with a further quandary following the establishment of the Republic, which was how to fulfil the expectations placed on it as a result of the very broad campaign message and the sweeping changes it promised to various sectors of Catalan society. As Rider points out, the ERC had two possible areas on which it could focus. It could either invest its efforts into creating the institutions of an autonomous Catalonia, or it could address the social issues to which it had alluded in the build-up to the elections. In the event it chose the former. This would have enormous repercussions with regard to its relationship with the CNT, in light of the overtures it had made to the anarcho-syndicalist movement. At the same time, however, progress was made, albeit slowly, in creating the institutions of autonomy, and each step of the way the ERC's popularity was reaffirmed. Macià created a provisional government,

formed from elements of the majority of the Republican and socialist parties in Catalonia.<sup>3</sup> The process to create more permanent autonomous institutions then began. Within Catalonia, the process ran relatively quickly. However, the process then became severely bogged down when the Cortes in Madrid got its hands on the draft statute. A diluted version of the statute was approved there in September 1932.<sup>4</sup> The first and only regional election of the Second Republic was then held in November 1932, at which the ERC won an impressive absolute majority of sixty-one out of eighty-five seats.<sup>5</sup>

The timing and results of elections in Catalonia, in which a left-Republican party dominated all the way up until October 1934, thus created a key difference between the regional political sphere of Catalonia and the national level of politics. In Catalonia, going by the regional election at least, there was no rise of the right. Power was held throughout by parties with fundamentally Republican ideals, a fact that would place the regional government on a collision course with the state in October 1934. However, this broader success in the march towards autonomous institutions – or at the very least the continued popularity of the ERC in spite of the obstacles encountered along the way – could not change the fact that the ERC had neither a specific plan nor the administrative mechanisms at its disposal to make the sort of social and labour reforms that would have matched the expectations of the CNT, whose membership base and leadership had been so closely courted by the ERC in early 1931.<sup>6</sup>

Initially the ERC leaders were happy to make concessions to the CNT. Its crackdown on the *Sindicatos Libres* and its agreement with the CNT transport union in June to create a CNT closed shop at the Barcelona port, which will be discussed in the next chapter, are two key examples of this.<sup>7</sup> However, relations between the CNT and the ERC had become fairly acrimonious by the end of 1931. One of the key reasons for this was the flurry of CNT strikes that swept the region during the first year of the Republic and the ERC's response to them from its new position of power. Whilst during the monarchy the CNT's actions were viewed by the ERC as being a just response to a corrupt regime, the ERC was now itself the regime. In this new role, the party sought first and foremost to maintain order.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, civil governors of Barcelona, in particular José Oriol Anguera de Sojo, were more than willing to deploy the forces of order against CNT pickets.<sup>9</sup> In so doing, the ERC and the Generalitat, in the eyes of the CNT, had turned their back on the working classes and the CNT, choosing to defend its institutions once it had power rather than come good on the promises it had made to the working classes. As was the case with the relationship between the CNT and the Republican-socialist government on the national

stage, once a precedent of confrontation between the CNT and the Generalitat and the ERC was established, there was no turning back.<sup>10</sup> By August *L'Opinió*, the ERC's main mouthpiece, had begun to attack the CNT's propensity for strikes, and would only become more critical as the months passed.<sup>11</sup> At the same time the CNT through *Solidaridad Obrera* attacked the Generalitat, the civil governors and the ERC with ever more severity.

### The CNT in Catalonia

Catalonia was unquestionably the CNT's heartland, though this is not something that can be understood simply by looking at the raw membership figures of the Confederation alone. As anarchists and syndicalists frequently asserted both during the 1930s and in the long years of exile afterwards, the CNT considered itself, and was considered by many workers in Catalonia themselves, to have gone beyond the confines of simply being a labour union.

A significant factor in forging the CNT's popularity in Catalonia was the role of the organization in defending working-class interests in the critical periods of the industrial expansion brought about by World War One and the post-boom stagnation. As Angel Smith argues, the organization's steady growth in popularity, starting from approximately 1916, and culminating in a huge surge in members in 1919, was grounded firmly in its ability to organize workers and defend their interests in the context of an escalating cost of living and in the face of deeply intransigent employers.<sup>12</sup> Under the leadership of Ángel Pestaña and Salvador Seguí, CNT unions in this period staged some highly disciplined, arduous strikes which gained the widespread backing of the region's urban workers, scoring some notable victories in the process. Above all, the *La Canadiense* conflict of 1919 cemented the CNT's reputation as the defenders of the working classes. Starting as a dispute centred around the dismissal of a handful of employees at the *La Canadiense* electric company, there would be a steady escalation over the following month to the point where nearly three-quarters of Barcelona's industry was brought to a standstill. The conflict represented both the greatest show of union mobilization and working-class solidarity Spain had seen, and also ushered in an era of unprecedented repression and reprisals by the authorities. The conflict was both the moment when the CNT would come to be viewed as representing the industrial working classes of Barcelona and also when the notion that governments and employers would stop at nothing to destroy the CNT would truly emerge.<sup>13</sup>

Chris Ealham and Nick Rider have made the crucial contribution to our understanding of the labour movement in Barcelona of illustrating and explaining the depth of the CNT's ties with the working classes through its integration into the cultural and social networks of working-class Barcelona, and, just as importantly, its willingness to address concerns – prior to the *faïsta* dominance of the organization, at least – that arose outside of the workplace but were crucial to everyday working-class life. Rider demonstrates, for example, that the CNT became involved in particular with supporting rent strikes in Barcelona and campaigning against the conditions of housing provided by slum landlords.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Ealham highlights the importance of the CNT's efforts to mobilize the unemployed and initiatives such as the creation by the Barcelona construction union of a Commission for Economic Defence to campaign for the working classes' concerns over costs of living.<sup>15</sup> These initiatives were carried out through committees that were based in the hearts of working class districts, and were thus a focal point within them rather than an abstract bureaucratic entity.<sup>16</sup> Such practices took the CNT beyond being simply a vehicle for negotiating *bases de trabajo* and placed it at the centre of workers' everyday concerns.

Ealham also illustrates that such integration into the everyday life of working-class Barcelona allowed the CNT to be kept alive during the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, through its militants meeting in such institutions as the social and cultural clubs known as *ateneus*. This allowed the CNT's militants to re-found its unions quickly, and the rapidity of the remobilization is a reflection of the commitment of the movement's militants and the extent to which they were integrated with the Barcelona working classes.<sup>17</sup>

Whilst recognizing the unique manner in which the CNT was embedded into the social structures of working-class Barcelona and other industrial towns in the province, however, it is also important to recognize that its periods of membership growth and decline were very rapid. This can be attributed to the phenomenon of what might be termed more 'passive' workers flocking to the CNT as it came out into the open. The Republic brought with it in Catalonia highly significant proportions of workers – sometimes over half of the workers in some unskilled industries – joining the *sindicatos únicos*. Regardless of what claims the Catalan UGT might have made about workers being coerced into joining the CNT, which will be discussed in this part of the thesis, such a mobilization simply could not have been propelled primarily through intimidation. Crucially, however, joining the CNT as it was preparing to redress grievances from the 1920s was one thing, but staying with the organization into the darker years of 1933 and 1934 was another matter. As Anna Monjo highlights, there was a fundamentally different level of involvement of ordinary

workers – those whose commitment to the organization did not extend beyond acquiring a membership card, or in some cases attempting to organize a CNT section in their workplace – in the anarcho-sindicalist movement in Catalonia compared to that of the organization's committed militants.<sup>18</sup> And as Eulàlia Vega argues, these ordinary workers often did not live up to the expectations of the organizing militants in terms of their commitment to the organization.<sup>19</sup> The decline in membership levels over these years certainly reflected – in addition to the repression suffered by the movement – that a significant proportion of workers were happy to back the CNT when it was on the ascendant, but less interested in the movement in more difficult times.

A final factor in considering the extent of the links between the CNT and the Catalan working classes is the role played by the propaganda output of the CNT press and the organization's militants. The CNT's propaganda was more than equal to the task of creating its own mythology for the movement; as Casanova argues convincingly, rhetoric became an increasingly central prop to the CNT's attempts to mobilize workers during the Republic.<sup>20</sup> One of the most crucial facets of this, outlined in chapter three of this thesis, was the linkage made by the CNT through its press between itself and the working classes; *Solidaridad Obrera*, the paper of the Catalan CNT, was at the very forefront of making this argument that the CNT was the organizational embodiment of the working classes. As such it is difficult to know precisely where the genuine popularity of the movement stopped and the self-mythologizing began.

The bulk of the CNT's membership base in Catalonia was drawn from the unskilled sectors of Barcelona – with semi-skilled and skilled blue-collar and also lower-level service sector jobs also occupying an important secondary position – and also the working-class populations of the industrial towns of Barcelona province. In the period prior to the onset of decline, the largest unions in Barcelona were the construction union, with 24000 members in June 1931; the textile union, with 30000; the metal workers' union, with 30000; and the transport union, with 18000 members. Even as the CNT in Catalonia had shed a third of its membership by early 1933, these sectors continued to be the biggest unions, with each continuing to have at least 10000 members even in late 1933. Certain non-industrial sectors also had a large proportion of workers affiliated to the CNT for a time. For example, at one point there were 7000 shop workers, though this figure had plummeted to just 1000 by March 1933. Likewise, there were 8000 Barcelona-based graphic arts workers in the organization in 1932.<sup>21</sup> Outside of Barcelona, the key industrial towns of the province, such as Terrassa, Badalona, Sabadell and Manresa, had similarly

large proportions of the local workforce belonging to the CNT, with the unskilled sectors likewise dominating their membership figures. Many smaller towns in the province also had membership figures in the thousands, though it is more difficult to break down these figures into individual industries.<sup>22</sup> Outside of Barcelona province, the CNT's presence was much less strong.

The broad outlines of the CNT's changes in membership levels in Catalonia have been touched upon in chapter one. Indeed, as discussed, the rapid rise and subsequent decline in membership levels were most pronounced of all in Catalonia. The overall membership of the CNT in Catalonia had a peak of 291150 in June 1931; by March 1933 it was 202354, a figure that does not take into account the further substantial losses inflicted through the formal departure of the *treintistas*.<sup>23</sup> In absolute terms the greatest losses were suffered by the largest unions in Barcelona; the construction union had fallen to 10000 members by March 1933, while the textiles union had dropped to 20000 members. The BOC's unions also began to make in-roads into several industries, to the irritation of the CNT, most notably shop workers and power workers, as well as expanding in Gerona and Lleida following the expulsion from the CNT of unions led by *bloquistas*.<sup>24</sup> In proportional terms, these declines were matched and sometimes surpassed in smaller unions and in industrial towns outside of Barcelona. The membership of the CNT in Badalona, for example, fell from a peak of 13888 in June 1931 to 2860 in March 1933.<sup>25</sup>

### The UGT in Catalonia

Judging the fortunes of the Catalan UGT is a more difficult task than examining the CNT in the region, due to a combination of the movement leaving much less in the way of documentation behind and the lack of research that has been carried out into the socialist labour federation in Catalonia. Whilst it cannot be denied that the Catalan UGT was on the fringes of the labour movement in Catalonia for much of the Republic, it would be to the detriment of the historiography of the period to ignore the movement for a whole host of reasons. For one thing, doing so impedes the ability to understand the growth of the UGT in Catalonia during the Civil War. It also means that a sector of the Catalan workers' movement whose affiliation was in the tens of thousands, and moreover whose numbers grew throughout the period, as will be examined in this part of the thesis, is missing from analysis of the subject area.



In the absence of analysis of the Catalan UGT, the CNT's own perspective on the socialist labour federation in the region seems to have been adopted by some historians.<sup>26</sup> As will be examined in more detail in the next three chapters, this perspective was essentially that the UGT represented a rump of the reactionary elements of the urban workforce in Catalonia, and in the Second Republic was a haven for the *pistoleros* and yellow workers of the *Sindicatos Libres*. An evolution of this view with regard to the Civil War, endorsed by some historians such as Stanley Payne, was that the Catalan UGT became a refuge for the petite bourgeoisie of the region as they sought protection from the CNT's social revolution.<sup>27</sup> Research produced by David Ballester and Pere Gabriel has demonstrated that individual aspects of the CNT's attacks on the UGT are inaccurate. Gabriel's research into the Catalan UGT demonstrates that it was substantially larger than is often acknowledged<sup>28</sup> – the CNT repeatedly claimed that the UGT in Catalonia was miniscule – while David Ballester's work reveals, among other things, that the Catalan UGT was not simply a continuation of the *Sindicatos Libres*.<sup>29</sup> However, neither Gabriel nor Ballester in their writings seek specifically to address the CNT's own interpretation of the Catalan UGT. The following chapters of the thesis will demonstrate that to a very significant extent the CNT's portrayal of the Catalan UGT as an entity that acted as an agent and a vessel for the forces of reaction and that was instinctively rejected by workers does not stand up to scrutiny, and that as such the general position that the Catalan UGT occupies in the historiography is in need of reassessment.

In Barcelona, the organization was formed of a combination of unions that catered to a specific skill-set, as well as some unions, considerably smaller than those of the CNT, which catered to the unskilled sectors that formed such a large proportion of the Barcelona workforce. The details of unions from Catalonia that entered the UGT provide some indication of this trend. Of the fifty-four UGT unions based in Barcelona whose entries to the socialist labour federation were recorded by the Executive Commission between April 1931 and October 1934, a significant proportion catered to one relatively specific trade.<sup>30</sup> Often these sorts of UGT unions in Barcelona represented the more skilled occupations within such fields, such as masons in the construction industry or electricians, though it would be an error to view the UGT's unions in Barcelona as simply representing that of a labour aristocracy who wanted to separate from their counterparts. There were also UGT unions which, whilst catering to a specific occupation, did not cater to an especially skilled one. This was the case with the various unions that comprised the organizations of the port federation, which were split according to the goods that the workers handled in the loading and unloading process.<sup>31</sup>

However, the UGT unions of Barcelona and Catalonia were certainly not only comprised of entities that represented individual occupations, whether of a skilled nature or otherwise. A large proportion of the UGT's unions in Barcelona were either broad and industrial-based, such as its metal and textile unions, or covered a limited set of occupations in which there was a significant number of workers, such as barbers and bakers. Indeed, the UGT tended to have established unions in Barcelona in these areas prior to the Republic. However, these unions, especially the ones that catered for the most unskilled sector of the workforce, such as in the construction and textile industries, were generally much smaller than their CNT counterparts in 1931. For example, while the UGT's bricklayers' union had only a few thousand members, the CNT's construction union had a peak of 24000. UGT unions tend to have been numerically stronger in the service sector, catering to semi-skilled and unskilled workers as much as the skilled. For example, although the UGT's bakery union was, with approximately 200 members, smaller than the CNT's own, it was nevertheless a stable union, representing a field of workers which, though not as unskilled and beset by unemployment as construction workers, did suffer low pay and fairly torrid working conditions. The UGT in Barcelona also had unions for waiters and grocery store workers, occupations which were similarly outside the immediate orbit of unskilled industrial labour but certainly important sectors of the Catalan workforce.<sup>32</sup>

The final category of employment that the UGT had in Barcelona and Catalonia was that of clerical and administrative workers, a group that had traditionally remained outside of the labour federations until the Second Republic. In fact, during the Republic, especially from 1933 onwards, non-professional white-collar workers were one of the most significant groups of new entrants to the UGT in Catalonia. The entry of the Barcelona bank workers' union into the UGT in early 1934 brought with it nearly 3000 new members to the organization, the largest single union entry into the organization from Barcelona prior to October 1934. Pharmacy workers and local government employees also provided significant influxes of members to the Catalan UGT from 1933 onwards. This white-collar sector was one in which the CNT in Catalonia had not managed to achieve a significant foothold, and this would continue to be the case throughout the Republic.<sup>33</sup>

Overall, although the UGT was small relative to the CNT in Barcelona during the first years of the Republic, it nevertheless had an organizational presence in the majority of industries and skill levels in the city. Admittedly much of its membership was either organized in niche professions or sectors in which the CNT had little influence, such as amongst office workers; but it also had unions, albeit generally small ones, in the industries

dominated by the CNT's *sindicatos únics*. Had it not done so, and had it been comprised of unions of skilled, niche professions, there would have been far less scope for antagonism between the CNT and the UGT in the city.

The overall trajectory of the Catalan UGT between 1931 and 1934 is a curious one of weak and split leadership that was accompanied, against all odds, by a modest growth. The movement in Catalonia had been dogged by splits at leadership level since before the Republic. One of the key dividing lines was the question of allegiance to the PSOE. On the one hand there were arch-PSOE loyalists, and on the other there were those who sided with the *Unió Socialista de Catalunya*, whose most fundamental difference with the PSOE was its pro-regionalist stance. The USC was a larger party than the tiny Catalan PSOE; in spite of efforts made within Catalonia to reconcile the two, the socialist leadership in Madrid put a halt to any *rapprochement*, leading in July 1934 to the UGT unions that were loyal to the USC, totalling approximately 20000 members, breaking from the UGT to form the *Unió General de Sindicats Obrers de Catalunya* (UGSOC).<sup>34</sup> The pro-USC unions constituted a significant proportion of the Catalan UGT, including the entire Barcelona Local Federation; as such the split left the UGT itself significantly reduced in size. Reconciliation would come about in April 1936.<sup>35</sup>

Given the infighting that took place amongst those involved at the top of the UGT in Catalonia, it is surprising that the organization actually grew during the Republic. The socialist labour federation had just under 17000 members in Catalonia in October 1931, but by April 1934 it had nearly 45000.<sup>36</sup> Whilst this still did not make the Catalan UGT as big as the CNT in the region, it must be placed in the context of the Catalan CNT losing a third of its membership during the same period. Whilst the CNT in Catalonia experienced an initial explosion in membership followed by a longer-term decline, the Catalan UGT by and large grew at a steady rate. There are no reliable figures for the CNT's membership in 1934, but given that it was down to 200000 in March 1933, it is not unreasonable to assume that its membership levels were even lower by the spring of 1934. The disparity in membership between the CNT and the UGT in Catalonia in this period therefore shrank considerably.

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Dolors Ivern i Salvà, *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (1931-1936)* (Barcelona: Publicacions l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1988) pp. 21-242; Nick Rider, 'The new city and the anarchist movement in the early 1930s' in Angel Smith (ed.) *Red Barcelona: Social Protest and Labour Mobilization in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 81-83; Rider, 'Anarchism, Urbanization and Social Conflict in Barcelona' pp. 517-544; Chris Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, p. 56

- <sup>2</sup> Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, pp. 59-62
- <sup>3</sup> Rider, 'Anarchism, Urbanization and Social Conflict' pp.559-578; see also Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, pp. 54-84 for an account of the ERC's governing of Catalonia in relation to its earlier populist stance
- <sup>4</sup> Agustí Colomines i Companys, 'Representing Catalan National Identity: Catalonia during the Spanish Second Republic and the Civil War' in *Journal of Catalan Studies* (2008), pp. 69-70
- <sup>5</sup> Colomines i Companys, 'Representing Catalan National Identity' p. 72
- <sup>6</sup> Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, pp. 54-84
- <sup>7</sup> Francisco Madrid, *Ocho meses y un día en el Gobierno Civil de Barcelona: confesiones y testimonios* (Barcelona: Las ediciones de la flecha, 1932), p. 152
- <sup>8</sup> Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, pp. 63-84
- <sup>9</sup> Norman Jones, 'Regionalism and revolution in Catalonia' in Paul Preston (ed.) *Revolution and War in Spain, 1931-1939* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 91; Madrid, *Ocho meses*, p. 187
- <sup>10</sup> Jones, 'Regionalism and revolution in Catalonia', pp.100-102; the labour conflicts at the Barcelona port, examined in chapters five, six and seven, provide one such example of the increasing severity with which CNT labour conflicts and protest actions were met.
- <sup>11</sup> For example, *L'Opinió*, 14 July, 19 August 1931
- <sup>12</sup> Angel Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction: Catalan Labour and the Crisis of the Spanish State, 1898-1923* (New York: Berghahan, 2007)
- <sup>13</sup> Maria Amàlia Pradas Baena, *L'anarquisme i les lluites socials a Barcelona: la repressió obrera i la violència* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat de Barcelona, 2003), pp. 53-60; Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction*, pp. 290- 302
- <sup>14</sup> Nick Rider, 'Anarquisme i lluita popular: la vaga de lloguers de 1931' in *l'Avenç* 89 (1986), pp. 6-17
- <sup>15</sup> Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, pp. 115-116, 90-101
- <sup>16</sup> Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, pp. 85-129
- <sup>17</sup> Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, pp. 44-45, 52
- <sup>18</sup> Monjo, *Militants*, pp. 242-245
- <sup>19</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, p. 178
- <sup>20</sup> Casanova, *Anarchism*, p. 10
- <sup>21</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, pp. 139-140
- <sup>22</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, pp. 139-146
- <sup>23</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, p. 146
- <sup>24</sup> Durgan, *B.O.C.*
- <sup>25</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, pp. 139-140
- <sup>26</sup> For example, Rider, 'Anarchism, Urbanization and Social Conflict', pp. 630-631
- <sup>27</sup> Stanley Payne, *La revolución española* (Barcelona: Argos, 1977), p. 232
- <sup>28</sup> Pere Gabriel, 'Sindicalismo y sindicatos socialistas en Cataluña. La UGT, 1888-1938' in *Historia Social*, 8 (1990), pp. 47-72
- <sup>29</sup> Ballester, *Marginalitats i hegemonies*
- <sup>30</sup> FPI AARD 225-2, 255-3, 256-1, 256-2, 256-3 Minutes of the meetings of the Executive Commission of the UGT, 1931-1934
- <sup>31</sup> Jordi Ibarz Gelabert, *Treballar a la ciutat: sindicalisme i relacions laborals dels estibadors del Port de Barcelona durant la II República, 1931-1936* (Lleida: Universitat de Lleida, 2000), pp. 17-28
- <sup>32</sup> Gabriel, 'Sindicalismo y sindicatos socialistas en Cataluña', p. 60; Vega, *Entre revolució i reforma*, p. 139
- <sup>33</sup> FPI AARD 256-3 Minutes of the UGT Executive Commission, 1934
- <sup>34</sup> Ballester, *Marginalitats*, p.184
- <sup>35</sup> For a detailed account of the infighting around the leadership of the Catalan UGT during the Second Republic, see Ballester, *Marginalitats i hegemonies*, pp. 113-209
- <sup>36</sup> Gabriel, 'Sindicalismo y sindicatos socialistas en Cataluña', p. 60; Ballester, *Marginalitats i hegemonies*, p. 134

## Chapter Five: CNT Direct Action and the Marginalization of the Catalan UGT

It should by this point be clear that between the beginning of the Republic and October 1934, the basic position expressed publicly by the CNT regarding the UGT was one of outright opposition phrased in terms of accusations of treachery, plans to destroy the CNT and attempts to manipulate the working classes at the behest of the bourgeoisie. The Catalan CNT's stance on its socialist rival in the region was not merely a straightforward re-articulation of the national-level stance adopted towards the UGT. The *cenetistas* of Catalonia adopted a uniquely hostile position over the Catalan UGT. This opposition to the UGT did not only manifest itself in the form of vitriolic propaganda attacks on the UGT, but also took the form of physical measures that were carried out to prevent the establishment of UGT unions in the region.

An examination of this campaign against the UGT is the principal focus of the following two chapters. This chapter will examine what might be termed the 'practical' side of the CNT's attempts to marginalize the UGT in Catalonia, in the form of highlighting the combinations of threats, boycotts and other forms of mobilization against the Catalan UGT that were attempted by the CNT. The subsequent chapter will then examine the discursive construction of the Catalan UGT that underpinned the CNT's attempts to marginalize the socialist labour federation in the region, as well as examine how far this construction reflected both the reality of the Catalan UGT and also to what extent it represented a satisfactory explanation of why CNT and UGT entities in the region came to blows.

### The practical dimensions of the marginalization of the Catalan UGT

The newspapers of the Catalan UGT during the first years of the Republic, as Nick Rider points out, dedicated an extremely large proportion of their column inches to criticizing the activities of the CNT in the region.<sup>1</sup> The majority of this criticism, anchored firmly in the notions of violent 'anarchists' and 'syndicalists' that were discussed in chapter three, centred on accusations of the Catalan CNT systematically trying to exclude and marginalize the Catalan UGT and other unions from operating in Catalonia. The Catalan UGT's papers repeatedly cried foul over instances of CNT unions and activists organizing boycotts against UGT unions, of collusion with employers to effect the removal of *ugetistas* from workplaces and of outright, unprovoked threats of violence against UGT activists and ordinary workers. The first issue of *La Internacional*, the Catalan UGT newspaper launched in June 1931, coincided with a violent altercation between *cenetistas*

and *ugetistas* at the Alena wood panel factory; the paper's extensive and indignant coverage of the event set out its central message on the CNT from its very first issue. The incident was presented as part of a widespread trend of workers 'being coerced and attacked by those from the CNT, who wish to impose their will through any means on Catalan workers'.<sup>2</sup> CNT-UGT hostilities in Catalonia were for the Catalan UGT fundamentally a question of freedom of workers to choose their union affiliations. The struggles between the CNT and the UGT at the Barcelona port, for example, which was the most high-profile battleground between the labour federations in the region, 'boils down to an attack against freedom of union affiliation through the violent coercion of the CNT and the defence of it by the UGT'.<sup>3</sup>

Not all incidents reported in the Catalan UGT's newspapers were the clear-cut cases of anti-UGT violence that they were reported to be. The example of the Alena factory, as will be seen in chapter six, was one such case of the Catalan UGT accusing the CNT of violent intimidation when in reality the event was far more complex. Nevertheless, although the press of the Catalan UGT presented virtually all CNT activity in the region as being directed at imposing itself on workers, there were unquestionably numerous cases of CNT militants and organisms in Catalonia attempting to use force, intimidation and rhetoric to try and neutralize their UGT rivals. To provide just one general example here, before going on to examine the specific ways in which CNT organisms attempted to sideline grassroots UGT rivals, the *ugetistas* of Mataró were subject to various forms of intimidation throughout the Republic. In addition to regular articles published in *La Internacional* on the subject,<sup>4</sup> the UGT's local gas, water and electricity union sent a telegram to the Civil Governor in August 1932 to complain about 'outrages committed by extremist elements in public meetings and against our comrades'.<sup>5</sup> This message followed on from similar complaints made by the leaders of the local UGT to the Executive Commission in May 1932 following attempts made by the CNT in the textile industry, which included a strike, to force workers to leave the UGT and join the CNT.<sup>6</sup>

The most basic level of anarcho-syndicalist militants resorting to intimidation in Catalonia during the Republic appears to have simply taken the form of workers, most likely whilst at their workplace, being told to join the CNT, with this instruction being accompanied by some form of threat of consequences in the event of non-compliance. José Peirats, who was one of the CNT's most committed servants in the post-Civil War decades of exile, recounts how his recruitment into the CNT in 1922 as a fourteen year-old came about through him being summoned to the offices of the construction union, where he was

questioned about why he had not yet joined the union and warned that if he did not do so he would have to 'abide by the consequences'.<sup>7</sup> Given the highly informal nature of this practice, it is almost impossible to gauge how widespread it was. Undoubtedly the general accusation made in the pages of *La Internacional* and *Cataluña Obrera*, the two official papers of the Catalan UGT, of CNT intimidation of workers was based on just such a practice. In itself, this type of activity was not so much directed at UGT members as it was at all workers who were not in the CNT and happened to be working in a sector or workplace in which *cenetistas* saw fit to adopt this tactic. Nevertheless, it inevitably had an impact on the ability of individuals to join or remain in the UGT, and also served the purpose of preventing the spread of rivals such as the UGT as much as it did on gathering unaffiliated workers into the CNT. This is illustrated by the plight of the treasurer of the UGT's national textile federation, which was based in Barcelona, who wrote to the Executive Commission to plead that he be allowed to remain as a member of the UGT in spite of the fact that 'due to anarchist coercions he has had to accept the membership card of the Confederation, without which he would have been prevented from working'.<sup>8</sup>

However, whilst there was an unquantifiable level of workers being informally pressured to join the CNT, there were times when the amount of workers involved was sufficiently large and the actions of the *cenetistas* involved were sufficiently aggressive for the incidents to come to public attention. Such cases tended to come about not from CNT militants attempting to induct unaffiliated workers, but from when they attempted to force them out of the UGT and into the CNT. Such a case occurred at a textile factory in Manlleu, where a UGT union had existed since before the founding of the Republic. In June 1931, *cenetistas* in the town made threats against workers in one factory there to warn them off from the UGT. A public meeting was held by the CNT in the town, during the course of which one of the speakers, according to the socialist press, asserted that the UGT needed to be removed from the town. The next day, two *cenetistas* who had come to the town from Barcelona entered a local factory in which the workers, who totalled approximately seventy, were members of the UGT's local textiles union, and ordered the workers there to leave the UGT and join the CNT. When the workers did not comply, the *cenetistas* left the workplace, only to return later the same day, this time threatening to burn down the factory, and then returning a third time, when, after failing to stop work there, they gave the employees fifteen days to leave the UGT and join the CNT.<sup>9</sup> The socialist press made much of the incident, with *El Socialista* referring to it on three separate occasions in the course of publishing editorials that focused on CNT violence.<sup>10</sup>

The case of Manlleu was one of many in which the UGT, rather than unaffiliated workers in general, were targeted by the CNT within a particular workplace, locality or industry. Whilst in some cases, such as Manlleu, the attempts involved the simple use of threats, in others the CNT organized boycotts and strikes to force out the UGT presence in a particular sector. Undoubtedly the most high-profile examples of this occurred at the Barcelona port during 1931. Here on the 28<sup>th</sup> May 1931, the CNT's transport union held an assembly, at which the port sections agreed that they would from then on refuse to work with individuals who were not in the CNT.<sup>11</sup> The Catalan government quickly stepped in, bringing about a temporary resolution to the matter that enraged the *ugetistas*. Francesc Macià declared on 9<sup>th</sup> June that only CNT members would be allowed to work in the loading and unloading of goods at the port.<sup>12</sup> Through *La Internacional* the UGT presented this development as proof of Generalitat favouritism towards the CNT, motivated in part by a desire to win votes from CNT members and in part by a fear of the consequences of not acquiescing to the CNT.<sup>13</sup> The UGT port federation was therefore temporarily sidelined, with its members joining the CNT's transport union so that they could continue working. Therefore partly with the help of the new Catalan government, the CNT was able – temporarily at least, as will be examined in chapter seven – to force the removal of the UGT from the Barcelona port.

However, this was not the last instance of the CNT resorting to such methods to remove the UGT at the port. The initial monopoly granted to the CNT transport union at the docks was soon broken after it held a strike at the port almost immediately afterwards.<sup>14</sup> The UGT's port federation, perhaps unsurprisingly given the CNT boycott against it the previous month, provided workers to replace the strikers,<sup>15</sup> and it is likely that those UGT members who had joined the CNT in June to continue working then returned to the UGT. Following the conclusion of the CNT strike at the end of July, an uneasy truce prevailed at the port in the following months. The animosities over the port between the CNT and the UGT, which now had a worker presence at the port once more, though admittedly a reduced one, were articulated through the newspapers of the two organizations, as they had been since May, with Desiderio Trilles, the leader of the UGT port federation, accusing the CNT of routinely threatening and intimidating UGT members and non-affiliated workers through the pages of *La Internacional*.<sup>16</sup> But in October 1931 these hostilities gained a practical dimension once more, when the members of the port section of the CNT transport union voted in favour of refusing to work with non-CNT workers. There can be no doubt that this decision was more motivated by seeking to remove the UGT than it was by making unaffiliated workers join the CNT.<sup>17</sup>



This time, however, there would be no endorsement of this position from the Generalitat; much of the goodwill between it and the anarcho-syndicalists had been destroyed by the CNT's July strike. Instead, what was effectively a form of strike broke out. *Cenetistas* who worked on board ships refused to hand over wood to *ugetista* dockers; similar cases of refusal to engage in work that involved contact with UGT members occurred in other sectors. The strike had a significant impact on the Barcelona economy, with industrial concerns in the region running out of primary materials. In spite of the disruption it caused, however, through a combination of the regional authorities taking a highly intransigent stance against the boycott and the UGT somewhat unsurprisingly willing to provide members to replace CNT workers in a strike that was directed against itself, the boycott effort effectively collapsed by the end of October. Nevertheless, the CNT's transport union had been willing to carry out a month-long strike to the principal objective of excluding the UGT from the port.<sup>18</sup>

The events at the port over 1931 were the most large-scale example of what was repeated on the smaller level of workplaces in Barcelona during the first years of the Republic. For example, in September 1932, the CNT textiles union carried out a strike against the *Casa Sans*, in protest at 'the frequent provocations of the few workers affiliated to the Unión General de Trabajadores' who had allegedly been hired as the product of collusion between socialists, the employer and the authorities.<sup>19</sup> As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, *Solidaridad Obrera* played a crucial role in mobilizing workers behind such conflicts through going to lengthy efforts to demonize the UGT workers involved. The *cenetistas* from Sants who conducted the campaign asserted that 'the workers want, as is natural and normal, the dismissal of these shameful individuals [the UGT workers] who, unconsciously or through bad faith, are playing into the bourgeoisie's hands and bring disquiet to all of the textile industry'.<sup>20</sup> It is difficult to find specific examples of the UGT members' bad conduct being referred to by the *cenetistas*. The account of the strike given in *La Vanguardia* paints a different picture, according to which a proportion of the factory's two hundred workers did not wish to support the strike, and consequently the police were dispatched to protect the workers through the picket line, something that further angered *cenetistas*.<sup>21</sup> In some workplaces, therefore, the CNT militants regarded a UGT presence as sufficiently grave as to warrant initiating a strike to force their exclusion.

Attacks on UGT organisms were not just restricted to the workplace. On various occasions between April 1931 and October 1934, CNT militants adopted the tactic of disrupting UGT meetings. In towns outside of Barcelona, the tactic could be used to try and halt the

presence of the UGT altogether, owing to the smaller size of the locality. For example, in Terrassa on 5<sup>th</sup> August 1932, the UGT attempted to hold a propaganda meeting in the town, with Desiderio Trilles, the leader of the UGT unions at the Barcelona port and a deeply unpopular figure amongst *cenetistas*, as one of the main speakers. According to the account given by local *cenetistas* in *Solidaridad Obrera*, there was an impressive turnout of workers at the event, who were there solely to heckle the speakers. Some individuals in the crowd started throwing chairs and stones at the orators, with one being struck on the head by a stone. After an hour, the police arrived, which according to the CNT account was indicative of ‘the official support that the *socia-lenchufistas* receive’.<sup>22</sup> Five *cenetistas* were arrested.<sup>23</sup> This response to the UGT propaganda meeting reflected the general *modus operandi* of the *faísta* elements of the CNT in Terrassa, who also attended meetings of *treintistas* in the town to shout down the orators.<sup>24</sup>

In Barcelona the tactic of disrupting meetings tended to be carried out at the union level to try and prevent the spread of the UGT within a particular sector. In April 1934, for example, *cenetista* bus employees attempted to disrupt a meeting at the Casa del Pueblo of their UGT counterparts. Their intention in doing this was to ‘unmask the Judas of the buses’ that was the UGT. In writing about the incident, one of the *cenetista* participants explained that the CNT in carrying out such actions ‘defends like a man what that miserable [organization] stamps on and sells to the company like a coward: the dignity of the worker’. The departing *cenetistas* were met by members of the Guardia de Asalto, whom the *ugetistas* had called to report the disturbance; this aspect of the incident was used to create the headline: ‘In the UGT they incite the arrest of workers’.<sup>25</sup>

Above all, however, the main thrust of efforts to marginalize the UGT in Catalonia was carried out by mobilizing workers against the socialist labour federation through the CNT press, orators at public meetings and other forms of propaganda. As will be discussed further in the next chapter, the examples of attacks on UGT entities outlined above were not limited to physical acts of disruption. Inevitably, they were underpinned by an anti-UGT rationale that was put forward by *cenetistas* to explain their attacks on the UGT. In some cases, in particular ongoing boycotts against UGT workers, this recourse to aggressively asserted anti-UGT arguments was an integral part of sustaining the practical dimension of the attacks on the UGT by ensuring workers stayed motivated to support the actions. However, attacking UGT organisms through the press was in itself a regularly used method by *cenetistas* in their efforts to mobilize workers in their area of activity against their UGT rivals.

Throughout the first four years of the Republic, this use of *Solidaridad Obrera* and other CNT and anarchist and/or syndicalist papers by grassroots *cenetistas* was the most publicly visible aspect of the CNT's attacks on the Catalan UGT, and was highly widespread. *Solidaridad Obrera*'s union and local notices sections, which were generally comprised of messages by members of union juntas or local federations, very frequently contained instances of attacks on a UGT rival. Militants from outside of Barcelona were apt to use *Solidaridad Obrera* to turn workers against UGT presences in their locality. For example, in February 1933, the *cenetistas* of Caldes de Montbui published an article in *Solidaridad Obrera* recounting an altercation at a local foundry between a foreman named Ignacio Martínez and the CNT-affiliated workers at the factory. Martínez had, according to the contributor, 'wielded a pistol, cockily threatening some workers'. The report focused on the wider threat that the UGT posed to the workers of Caldes de Montbui, based on the premise that it housed individuals such as Martínez:

We know what individuals of Ignacio Martínez's kind propose to do in this town. We know that they want to impose the UGT (General Traitors' Union) with the collaboration and help of the socialist ministers. Here, people of Caldes, is who those of the UGT are.<sup>26</sup>

CNT unions in Barcelona were equally prepared to use *Solidaridad Obrera* to mobilize workers against their UGT rivals. In the most important sectors of the Barcelona workforce, such as the port and the construction industry, these campaigns occupied much of the front pages and headlines of the paper, thus elevating them to the level of an attack on all UGT entities in the region. Such attacks will be explored in more detail later in the next chapter. However, union juntas in Barcelona also used the press to mobilize their members against the UGT in their sector of activity in a bid to stop the socialist labour federation gaining a foothold there. The public anti-UGT stance taken by the CNT's wood workers' union at the start of the Republic is an example of the zero-tolerance stance taken to the possible enrolment of workers in the industry in the UGT that was put forward through *Solidaridad Obrera*. In early June 1931 the union placed an article in the paper in which it warned its members to remain vigilant against the possibility of attempts to recruit UGT members in their workplaces. A specific workshop in the wood working industry was then given as an example of the threat the UGT posed, in which the CNT workers boycotted their single UGT colleague to force his removal. The following description was given of the individual in question, having named the workplace being discussed:

In [the workshop] there are eight workers, all of whom belong to the wood workers' union. Only one of them refuses to accept the card. This individual is an agent

provocateur of the UGT. He works like a condemned man, out of step from the normal and human rhythm of the other comrades in the workshop. Furthermore he coarsely insults our organization and makes rude remarks of the most repugnant vulgarity.<sup>27</sup>

According to the article, the workshop owner, having taken on board the opposition of the other workers to this individual, proceeded to dismiss him. However, the *ugetista*, 'emboldened and supported' by the UGT, returned to the workshop, in possession of some form of stamped certificate that apparently required him to be rehired. The seven *cenetistas* abandoned work in protest. The UGT worker then returned to the workshop once more, according to the *cenetistas*' report, accompanied by policemen, to order the owner to rehire the worker and instruct him to, 'if necessary, ask the reformist and yellow UGT for new personnel'. Wood workers were warned to be vigilant against similar 'socialist machinations'.<sup>28</sup>

The version of events put forwards by the CNT junta reveals how some *cenetistas* wished *ugetistas* who worked in their industry to be treated and perceived by CNT members. The account of the incident, based as it was on the unrealistic claim that individual UGT workers had almost limitless access to the support of the authorities, was designed to present the idea that UGT workers were inevitably a source of trouble and needed to be forced out by their CNT colleagues. The worker was depicted as a traitor of the highest order, and the central implication of the article was that other UGT members in their workplaces were the same. The leaders of the CNT wood workers' union – and their attitude was mirrored by other union leaders as well – therefore adopted a tactic of trying to force out individual UGT workers by mobilizing ordinary CNT members against them through the CNT press.

Therefore during the first four years of the Republic, many CNT militants in Barcelona and elsewhere in Catalonia took aggressive steps to neutralize UGT presences in their area of labour militancy. Whilst this was linked to the more widespread tendency amongst some *cenetistas* of seeking to pressurize non-affiliated workers into the Confederation, it is clear that, when faced with a UGT presence, many CNT militants would resort to methods that went far beyond these usual pressure tactics. Although it would be unwise to suggest that these methods were universally adopted by *cenetistas* in Catalonia against the UGT, it is clear that they were relatively widespread, and certainly do not appear to have been discouraged by anyone in the Catalan anarcho-sindicalist movement. As such, it would be worth exploring the extent to which these activities against the UGT represented a

deliberate policy that had been agreed upon through the CNT's decision-making mechanisms.

### The CNT decision-making process on the Catalan UGT

The non-discussion of the UGT at national-level plenums as outlined in chapter one was just as notable in Catalonia. Here, across the regional plenums held between 1931 and 1934, the issue of the UGT was also virtually absent from discussions in terms of the UGT on the national level. Instead, aside from routine administrative issues, the key issues of debate related either to the factional battle that was progressively tearing the Catalan CNT apart, or appraisals of the CNT's past and future protest actions and the debilitating effects of government repression of the organization. This latter category of debate did on occasion refer to the socialist movement and the role it was playing from government, but overall there was very little discussion of the activities of the UGT in Catalonia.<sup>29</sup>

In general, a similar lack of formal discussion of the Catalan UGT and how the CNT should react to it – including discussion of methods to halt the growth of UGT organisms – was also a feature of discussions that took place at the meetings of the Barcelona Local Federation and of CNT unions in the city.<sup>30</sup> The main features of discussion of the construction union's junta meetings in 1933 related to attempting to mobilize and organize workers in the industry in the face of restrictions placed by the authorities on the union and an appreciable loss of interest among a significant proportion of unskilled workers in the industry. The UGT construction rival was mentioned tangentially as a result of workers at the *hospital militar* being enrolled in the socialist labour federation and thus participating in the *jurados mixtos*, but no discussion was made of how to respond to this, or indeed whether to respond at all.<sup>31</sup> The decisions by the transport unions to boycott non-CNT workers in 1931 were a product of assemblies of the CNT transport union.<sup>32</sup> The case of the port, however, seems to represent the only significant example of a union coherently formulating a strategy against the UGT in this fashion. Generally speaking, neither at the level of regional plenums nor at local federation level was a coherent strategy formulated on UGT unions. Thus the instances of attacks on UGT unions in Barcelona and elsewhere in Catalonia cannot be considered as being part of a pre-formulated campaign or some other official policy of attacking the UGT wherever they appeared in the region.

However, though the Catalan UGT was rarely the subject of discussion at the regional and Barcelona-level decision-making processes, and accordingly no official stance nor strategy

was formulated on it, there can be no doubt that a sizeable majority of committed *cenetistas* shared precisely the same sentiment on the Catalan UGT, namely that it was the embodiment of reaction and an integral part of the efforts of the bourgeoisie and the government to destroy the CNT.<sup>33</sup> One particular incident at the May 1932 regional plenum illustrates the unanimously felt nature of this sentiment amongst Catalan *cenetistas*. At this plenum, the Catalan UGT was brought up in response to a manifesto published in *El Obrero*, a recently launched paper that was in fact an initiative of former members of the *Sindicatos Libres* who were trying to rebuild their shattered labour federation, and had no connections with the UGT. To unanimous applause, a delegate spoke in response to the manifesto, arguing that *cenetistas* in Catalonia were as under threat from *pistoleros* as they had been during the monarchy, and asserted that these *pistoleros* were now enrolled in the UGT following the dissolution of the *Sindicatos Libres*.<sup>34</sup>

On the one hand, then, there seems to have been a unanimously-held perspective amongst local and regional CNT leaders that the UGT in Catalonia represented an irredeemably reactionary force and was at the forefront of the government's alleged campaign to destroy the CNT. This interpretation was expressed as a deep antipathy towards the Catalan UGT. On the other hand, however, this shared sentiment was not converted at any point into a plan formulated at regional level, nor at city level in the case of Barcelona, on how to neutralize the Catalan UGT. Yet as has already been established in this chapter, CNT militants across the region frequently attempted to mobilize workers against their UGT counterpart and even individual UGT workers, as well as deploying physically confrontational measures against them. In the absence of an explicitly formulated plan to take on the Catalan UGT in this manner, it must be assumed that the decision to take such actions against UGT entities was principally a product of individual and localized initiatives. And because an anti-UGT mentality was so widespread amongst *cenetistas*, a large proportion of them adopted similar methods when dealing with a UGT presence in their sphere of activity. It would appear, then, that from the start of the Second Republic, adopting methods of intimidation against the Catalan UGT was automatically assumed by CNT militants at both grassroots levels and at the top of the regional hierarchy to be a valid, even established practice.

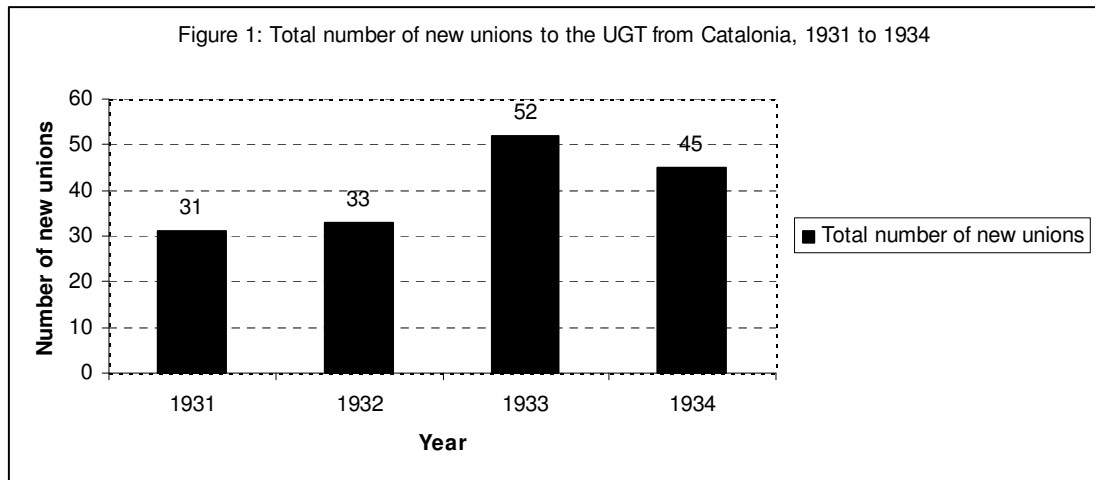
### The effect of anti-UGT attacks on the Catalan UGT's membership levels

It is difficult to gauge how much success the CNT had in preventing the spread of the UGT in Catalonia. The growth or contraction of an organization such as the Catalan UGT is based on myriad factors, and was not simply determined by the existence of the CNT and its stance towards its socialist rival. Consequently, the changes in membership figures for the Catalan UGT cannot be interpreted as simply being a result of the success or failure of the CNT's attacks on its rival. Nevertheless, an examination of the growth of the Catalan UGT between 1931 and 1934, and placing this examination into the context of the difficulties encountered by the CNT over the same period, does provide some clues to the extent to which the CNT was able to halt the socialist labour federation in the region.

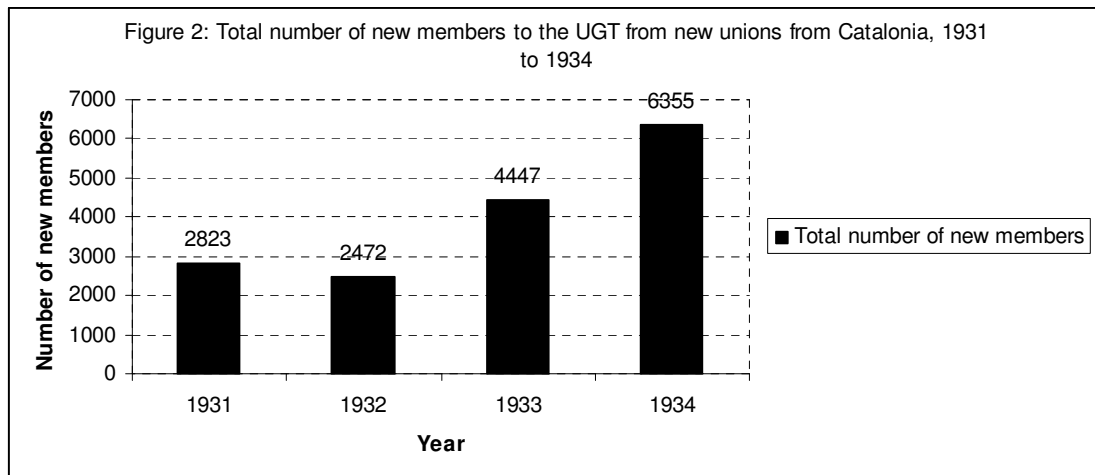
The pattern of growth and decline of the CNT in Catalonia is relatively well established, even if the precise figures are debatable as a result of poor record keeping and the overly optimistic figures kept by the organization.<sup>35</sup> However, for the UGT the figures are far less clear, due to a mixture of it having been a much smaller entity, the relative lack of documentation on which to base the estimates and the lack of attention paid by historians to the Catalan UGT. Nevertheless, as mentioned in chapter four, Pere Gabriel highlights that the organization progressed from having 17000 members in October 1931 to 45000 in April 1934, nearly a tripling of its membership base. Although in absolute terms these numbers still made it smaller than the CNT, the fact that the Catalan UGT continued to grow while the CNT declined is worth investigating in more detail.<sup>36</sup>

The method that has been adopted here is to base the figures for new members and unions to the UGT from Catalonia on the new entries received and approved by the Executive Commission of the UGT in Madrid during the period in question, which appear in the minutes of the Commission's regular meetings. Admittedly, this is not a perfect measure of the Catalan UGT's growth. It only allows growth to be measured according to the starting membership figures provided by a union at the moment of its entry; a substantial proportion of unions did not provide this figure at all. Any subsequent growth in these unions is therefore not recorded. By the same token, the growth of UGT unions in Catalonia that existed prior to the Republic is also not recorded. This is important to bear in mind, given that the UGT's unions in many of the most important industries in Catalonia, such as construction and textiles, were created prior to the Republic. The figures used here therefore represent one indicator in the pace of growth of the Catalan UGT, rather than representing its overall changes in membership size. The following graphs

indicate the number of unions from Catalonia that joined the UGT each year between 1931 and 1934, as well as the total number of members held by these unions when they joined the UGT:



Data source: *Actas de la Comisión Ejecutiva de la Unión General de Trabajadores, 1931-1934*



Data source: *Actas de la Comisión Ejecutiva de la Unión General de Trabajadores, 1931-1934*

As can be seen, the years 1933 and 1934 saw a marked increase in new unions – and by extension new members – to the UGT from Catalonia relative to 1931 and 1932. Though the number of new unions entering the organization fell slightly between 1931 and 1934, the total number of members within these unions rose considerably and it must also be borne in mind that the figures for 1934 only go as far as the beginning of October 1934 rather than for a full year.



Andy Durgan is one of the few writers to highlight the growth of the UGT in Catalonia during the Second Republic, especially with regard to the post-October 1934 period.<sup>37</sup> However, the Catalan UGT was experiencing discernible growth even before October 1934, and what is apparent about the timing of these increases is that they coincide with what were the two most calamitous years for the CNT. From 1933 onwards the level of repression enacted upon the CNT in Catalonia was even greater than in the two preceding years, with many of its unions experiencing prolonged bouts of enforced closure, not to mention many of its organizing militants languishing in jail. By 1933 the CNT had also lost much of the membership base that it had picked up in 1930 and 1931. Just as importantly, 1933 was also the year in which the factional battle between *faístas* and *treintistas* became a formal schism, leading to the rupture of many CNT unions. The above figures for new entrants to the UGT from Catalonia suggest that the UGT in the region benefited from these setbacks suffered by the CNT.

It would appear that the CNT's difficulties allowed the UGT to have space to establish a small but increasing union presence. At the beginning of the Republic, the prospect of joining the UGT would have been an intimidating one for many workers who worked in an industry or workplace with a dominant CNT presence. The workers would have been in a minority that would have been seen to have rejected the CNT, an organization which, as outlined in chapter three, aggressively promoted itself as the only valid representative of the working classes in the region. At the same time, the workers would have put themselves at risk of being subjected to the practices that have been outlined in this chapter. Even if they were not threatened with a boycott or directly intimidated in some other way, they would have been tarred with the CNT's discourse on the Catalan UGT that emanated from the pages of *Solidaridad Obrera* and from the mouths of *cenetistas* at public meetings. For an ordinary worker who did not have any particular ideological preferences in this context, there would have been no benefits to joining the UGT, only stigma.

However, the events of the Republic led to a combination of CNT unions losing their ability to sustain their anti-UGT initiatives in industries and the workplace, as well as its successive failed attempts at insurrection and ill-conceived strike actions turning many workers away from the organization, even if this was not in most cases accompanied by a simultaneous growth in enthusiasm for a particular alternative to the CNT. The detention of active and committed CNT militants meant that there were fewer *cenetistas* in workplaces who might attempt to intimidate non-CNT members or actively stigmatize

members of other unions. The arrest of militants and the prolonged closure of CNT unions meant that ordinary CNT members would have gone for longer periods without the guidance of the organization's militants. The closure of unions also led to more passive workers leaving the union, meaning fewer instances of workplaces or industries in which an imperious majority of CNT workers could be used as an argument to demand that the remaining workers join the CNT. At the same time, the turning away from the CNT that was brought about by its failed strikes and insurrections, in addition to meaning that fewer workers were as disposed to the CNT's general message as they had been previously, also meant that the specifics of its message, including the assertions that the UGT was a union of strike breakers, *pistoleros* and reaction and was undertaking a campaign to destroy the CNT, would have undoubtedly become less powerful, especially as they were repeated in the same fashion and at the same intensity irrespective of other events.

This is not to say that workers then immediately flocked to UGT unions. The UGT continued to be a fringe movement in Catalonia in these years, even if among some sectors of workers and in some localities it garnered a significant following. Nevertheless, it would certainly appear that as the CNT suffered the cumulative effects of repression, the Catalan UGT began to grow, and it is highly likely that this was at very least in part a result of the Catalan UGT's activists, or workers that bought into the UGT's methods, finding themselves increasingly freed from the constraints placed upon them by *cenetistas*.

The decline of CNT unions in the region allowing their UGT rivals to flourish can also be seen in some individual localities and industries that are not covered by the statistics above. In Barcelona, the port was undoubtedly the most notable example of the UGT expanding after its CNT counterpart had first attempted to extinguish it but was then itself nearly destroyed through its clashes with the authorities. Initially the UGT's port federation had a minority presence at the port – though certainly not as small as the CNT claimed it was – before temporarily disappearing all together as a result of the CNT's Macià-backed monopoly. For a short time, therefore, the CNT's attempts to prevent the presence of the UGT in the industry succeeded. However, the CNT's subsequent prolonged strike action allowed UGT workers to return to the sector, with the CNT's closed shop rescinded. The second CNT attempt to marginalize the UGT at the docks in the form of its October 1931 boycott then backfired as a result of the uncompromising stance of the Civil Governor, José Anguera de Sojo, and the UGT's inevitable decision to offer workers to break a boycott aimed at itself. The October 1931 strike was highly damaging to the CNT's port section; not only did it lead to heavy-handed measures against it such as the arrest of

militants during the conflict, but having had the objective of excluding the UGT, by November the UGT had a greater union presence at the port than ever.

Matters did not improve for the CNT at the port over the course of 1932. The attempted revolutionary activity of early 1932 led to further repressions against CNT unions in Barcelona. Francesc Arín, the President of the transport union, was detained. The factional disputes within the CNT also manifested themselves in the transport union, with Arín and the *treintista* junta of the union being replaced by a *faísta* one in June 1932.<sup>38</sup> As Ibarz points out, there was a general trend of port workers drifting away from the CNT after the October boycott and over the course of 1932. Those dockers who remained in the CNT appear to have been less committed to the CNT's overall project, a point argued by Ibarz through highlighting their non-participation in the January 1932 unrest and subsequent CNT protest actions.<sup>39</sup> The CNT, by 1933 a minority force at the port, attempted another strike there in April to implement an eight-hour day and a new system of contracting workers. The strike was neutralized by the authorities, partly through the allowance of strike breakers, partly through repression of the CNT and partly through members of Estat Català manning the city's transport services after CNT transport workers initiated a support strike.<sup>40</sup>

Over the course of the Second Republic, then, the CNT at the port repeatedly attempted to marginalize the UGT, utilizing methods that brought it into confrontations with the authorities, through which the CNT emerged each time as the worse off party. As it did this, its ability to prevent the UGT was compromised, and also drove the UGT's port leaders and the authorities more closely together. As it became increasingly weakened, the CNT's ability to dominate the port and demand that all workers there join the organization diminished rapidly, and at the same time the UGT became increasingly popular amongst port workers without resorting to closed shop tactics or intimidation.<sup>41</sup>

The passage of some workers into the UGT as a result of the setbacks suffered by the CNT is illustrated at the workplace level by the aftermath of the failure of a CNT strike by dyers and other fabric treatment workers in Barcelona during the summer of 1934. Following the failed strike, the junta of the section wrote to its factory delegates for information on the consequences of the strike for the workforce of each factory. The available reports show that CNT membership of these workplaces was by this point less than half of the workforce, often far less.<sup>42</sup> In some cases, it appears a significant proportion of workers in some workplaces had joined the UGT by this stage. The delegate for the *Casa Pagès i*

*Pagès* reported that in that workplace there were thirty-five workers, fifteen of which were in the CNT, eleven in the UGT, and nine were unaffiliated. According to the delegate's report, the twenty non-CNT workers had all previously been CNT members. The delegate also identified seven members of the workforce who had 'most stood out through their anti-confederal activities'; six of these individuals were listed as UGT members.<sup>43</sup>

Terrassa is an example of a CNT stronghold in which attempts were made to set up a UGT presence, only for it to be met with extreme hostility from the CNT. Ultimately, however, it would appear that by late 1932, the socialist labour federation had managed to gain some sort of foothold in the city, undoubtedly in no small measure due to the significant bouts of repression experienced by the CNT's unions in the town.<sup>44</sup> In June 1932, CNT militants from Terrassa published an article in *Solidaridad Obrera* providing information on attempts made by the UGT to organize in the town. According to the article, a UGT presence there had begun in the summer 1931, as a result of 'a few individuals of shameful reputation, who in previous eras belonged to the *Sindicatos Libres*, and in agreement with the bosses, founded the *Unión General de Trabajadores*'.<sup>45</sup> The article was an attempt to mobilize local workers in the town against the convocation of *jurados mixtos*. This development appears to have spurred on the local *cenetistas* to take more direct methods to exclude the UGT, because, as mentioned previously in this chapter, in August 1932 *cenetistas* forcibly brought a UGT public meeting in the town to an end, injuring one of the speakers in the process. The local militants writing in *Solidaridad Obrera* attempted to present the meeting as an utter failure, at which the whole audience harangued the orators.<sup>46</sup>

However, just over a year later the Terrassa UGT held a series of public events in the town in conjunction with the local socialist youth, at which some of the key figures of the socialist movement in Catalonia spoke, including Rafel Vidiella.<sup>47</sup> The fact that high-profile *ugetistas* from Barcelona were involved in the meetings would suggest to a certain degree that the UGT movement in Terrassa was not simply the product of *esquiroles* that had organized with employers to destroy the CNT, as local *cenetistas* had suggested. By the accounts available, these latter propaganda events were not subject to the same coercions as that which took place in August 1932. That this was the case must be put down, to a large extent, to the fact that by the time the socialists held these events the CNT in Terrassa was in disarray, partly through the extent of the factional split in the local organization and partly because so many of its militants were in jail and its unions closed. The Terrassa CNT had been one of the most committed local federations to the CNT's

insurrections and protests against the state. To give a few examples, in February 1932 anarcho-syndicalists took over the town hall by force,<sup>48</sup> and a large cache of arms was found by the authorities at the CNT's local headquarters in January 1933 after the uprising attempt, both of which events were met with closures of the CNT's local unions and imprisonment of the local movement's key militants.<sup>49</sup> The *cenetistas* of Terrassa, writing in *Solidaridad Obrera* in October 1933, argued that the UGT had gained a presence in the town because the local authorities had closed its unions and arrested its militants as part of a project to allow the UGT to expand in the town, in line with the CNT's overall interpretation of the Republic.<sup>50</sup> It seems rather to be the case, however, that the *cenetistas'* repression was linked squarely to their insurrectionary efforts; this repression seems to have badly damaged the organization of the local movement, allowing the UGT a space in which to operate more freely.

In the period between the founding of the Republic and October 1934 there was a concerted effort by CNT militants across Catalonia to marginalize UGT rivals and prevent workers from joining the UGT. These efforts to marginalize took many forms, including verbal and physical harassment and boycotts, but above all a use of the CNT's press organs to mobilize workers against the Catalan UGT. Through the press, the impression was created that workers needed to be on guard against a predatory UGT presence in their workplaces, which the CNT would protect them from. The belief of the socialist leadership, outlined in chapter one, that their unions and activists were fighting a continual defensive action against the threats of *cenetistas* certainly seems to have been a valid one with regard to Catalonia. An examination of the fortunes of the Catalan UGT during these years suggests that the CNT were initially fairly successful in preventing the growth of the socialist labour federation, but as the anarcho-syndicalist movement began to disintegrate the UGT was able to make some modest gains, indicating that a proportion of the Catalan workforce had previously been prevented from joining the UGT directly as a result of the CNT's campaign against it.

In attacking the Catalan UGT in the fashion outlined in this chapter, Catalan *cenetistas* exhibited a mentality that their organization was the only one that could represent the working classes in Catalonia, and that UGT workers as much as the organization's leaders were inherently yellow. This was a perspective that went beyond the general-level interpretation of the UGT movement, outlined in chapter three, which by and large interpreted the UGT's ordinary workers as merely misguided. This widely-adopted approach of attacking Catalan UGT organisms and members was not the product of a

regional-level decision making process. Rather, it appears that it was fairly unanimously accepted that it was an acceptable course of action to take against the Catalan UGT. Precisely why this was will be revealed in the next chapter's examination of anarcho-syndicalist discourse of the Catalan UGT.

<sup>1</sup> Rider, 'Anarchism, Urbanization and Social Conflict', p. 629

<sup>2</sup> *La Internacional*, 13 June 1931

<sup>3</sup> *La Internacional*, 13 June 1931

<sup>4</sup> For example, *La Internacional*, 04 July, 08, 29 August, 12 September 1931

<sup>5</sup> AHN, Gobernación Serie A, legajo 3a, carpeta 19, telegram to the Ministro de Gobernación, 27 August 1932

<sup>6</sup> FPI AARG 256-1 Minutes of the meeting of the UGT Executive Commission, 11 May 1932; *La Vanguardia*, 01 May 1932

<sup>7</sup> Peirats, *De mi paso*, p. 133

<sup>8</sup> FPI AARD 255-3 Minutes of the meeting of the UGT Executive Commission, 13 May 1931

<sup>9</sup> *La Internacional*, 20 June, 11 July 1931; *El Socialista*, 16 June 1931

<sup>10</sup> *El Socialista*, 06 June 1931, 19 July, 05 November 1932

<sup>11</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera* 29 May 1931; Madrid, *Ocho meses*, p. 153

<sup>12</sup> FO 371/15774/W7137/46/41 Report from Norman King to Sir George Grahame, 09 June 1931; Albert Balcells, *Crisis económica y agitación social en Cataluña (1930-1936)* (Barcelona: Ediciones Ariel, 1971), p. 205; Ballester, *Marginalitats i hegemonies*, p. 126; Ibarz, *Treballar a la ciutat*, p. 25; Vega, *Entre revolució*, pp. 185-186

<sup>13</sup> *La Internacional*, 13 June 1931

<sup>14</sup> FO 371/15774/W8648/46/41 Report from Norman King to Sir George Grahame, 18 July 1931; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 04, 07 July 1931; Ibarz, *Treballar a la ciutat*, pp. 27-28

<sup>15</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25 July 1931; *La Vanguardia*, 25 July 1931; Ibarz, *Treballar a la ciutat*, p. 37

<sup>16</sup> *La Internacional*, 08, 29 August 1931

<sup>17</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 20, 23 September 1931; Ibarz, *Treballar a la ciutat*, pp. 45-47

<sup>18</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 07, 10, 11, 13, 24, 25 October 1931; Balcells, *Crisis económica*, p. 206; Ibarz, *Treballar a la ciutat*, pp. 45-59; Vega, *Entre revolució*, pp. 187-190

<sup>19</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 September 1932

<sup>20</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 September 1932

<sup>21</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 16 September 1932; *La Vanguardia*, 14, 15 September 1932

<sup>22</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 09 August 1932

<sup>23</sup> *Crónica Social*, 06 August 1932; *Luz*, 06 August 1932; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 09, 30 August 1932; *La Vanguardia*, 07 August 1932

<sup>24</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, p. 324; *El Socialista*, 24 July 1932

<sup>25</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 20 April 1934

<sup>26</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 16 February 1933

<sup>27</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 05 June 1931

<sup>28</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 05 June 1931

<sup>29</sup> An examination of the Catalan CNT's regional plenums between 1931 and 1934 is based on minutes and extracts of plenum proceedings contained within IISG CNT 93B1.1 and CDMH P/S Barcelona 932; Confederación Regional del Trabajo de Cataluña, *Memorias de los Comicios de la Regional Catalana celebrados los días 31 de mayo y 1 de junio, y 2,3 y 4 de agosto* (Barcelona, 1931); minutes of plenums reprinted in *Solidaridad Obrera*. See also Vega, *Entre revolució* and Vega, *El Trentisme a Catalunya*

<sup>30</sup> The surviving documentation available detailing minutes of the meetings of CNT organisms in Barcelona is incomplete. The examination of the meetings of the CNT's organisms in Barcelona is based on CDMH P/S Barcelona 500 & 50 Minutes of the Barcelona Local Federation, 1931-1933; CDMH P/S Barcelona 339 Minutes of the Barcelona construction union, 1932-1933; CDMH P/S Barcelona 932 Minutes of plenums of the unions of the Barcelona CNT, 1933. Summaries of assemblies of CNT unions (as opposed to meetings of the union juntas) were often also published in *Solidaridad Obrera*.

<sup>31</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 339 Minutes of the junta of the Barcelona construction union, 13 March 1933

<sup>32</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 29 May 1931

<sup>33</sup> How far ordinary CNT members (as opposed to militants) shared this view is very difficult to ascertain; chapter six attempts to provide some answer to this question.

<sup>34</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 03 May 1932. The CNT's interpretation of the Catalan UGT being a continuation of the Sindicatos Libres will be discussed in the next chapter

<sup>35</sup> For example, Casanova, *Anarchism*, p. 13; Monjo, *Militants*, pp. 71-72; Vega, *Entre revolució*, p. 146

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- <sup>36</sup> Pere Gabriel, 'Sindicalismo y sindicatos socialistas en Cataluña', p. 59
- <sup>37</sup> Durgan, 'The search for unity', pp. 111-119
- <sup>38</sup> *Heraldo de Madrid*, 25 February 1932; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 21 July 1932; Ibarz, *Treballar a la ciutat*, pp. 78-79
- <sup>39</sup> Ibarz, *Treballar a la ciutat*, pp. 78-82, 98
- <sup>40</sup> *Cataluña Obrera*, 21 April 1933; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 12, 13, 21 April 1933; *La Vanguardia*, 19, 20 April 1933; Albert Balcells, *Crisis económica*, p. 207; Ibarz, *Treballar a la ciutat*, pp. 92-98
- <sup>41</sup> Ibarz, *Treballar a la ciutat*, pp. 59-100
- <sup>42</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 949 Reports and letters from CNT workplace delegates to the junta of the *ramo del agua* of the Barcelona CNT's factory and textiles union, July 1934
- <sup>43</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 949 Letter from Manuel Ríos and Manuel López to the junta of the of the *ramo del agua* of the Barcelona CNT's factory and textiles union, 03 July 1934
- <sup>44</sup> It is important to stress that it is impossible to provide concrete statistics on the levels of growth of the Catalan UGT in individual localities due to the paucity of documentation available. Instead, it is necessary to rely on other indicators, such as the convocation of propaganda events.
- <sup>45</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 14 June 1932
- <sup>46</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 09, 30 August 1932; *Crónica Social*, 06 August 1932; *Luz*, 06 August 1932; *La Vanguardia*, 07 August 1932
- <sup>47</sup> *El Socialista*, 22 October, 03 November 1933; *La Vanguardia*, 26 October 1933
- <sup>48</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 16, 17, 18 February 1932
- <sup>49</sup> *El Socialista*, 11, 12 January, 28, 30 July 1933
- <sup>50</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 21 October 1933

## **Chapter Six: Largo and the Libres: The CNT's Construction of the Catalan UGT**

Although, as discussed in the previous chapter, the widespread marginalization of the Catalan UGT by *cenetistas* was not the product of a formal CNT initiative, this did not mean that efforts to marginalize the Catalan UGT were not underpinned by any sort of rationale. In fact, an examination of the Catalan CNT's interpretation of the Catalan UGT reveals that according to the outlook of the *cenetistas* of the region, there were highly pressing reasons for the UGT to be stopped at all costs in Catalonia, which the CNT press sought to continually emphasize to the working classes of the region. This interpretation of the Catalan UGT is the subject of this chapter.

### Largo's master plan

As was outlined in chapter one, the CNT presented a public stance from the first weeks of the Republic that the socialist leadership, and above all Largo Caballero, had an agenda of destroying the CNT via their position in government and then implanting the UGT in its place. Amongst *cenetistas* in Catalonia, the belief existed – and was one of the most prominent features of the regional movement's press attacks on the socialists – that Catalonia was at the top of Largo and the socialist leaders' list of targets for this plan. In an editorial published on 29<sup>th</sup> May, Barcelona was identified as being one of the main areas in which the UGT general secretary was carrying out his 'offensive against the CNT'.<sup>1</sup> The hostilities between the CNT and the UGT at the Barcelona port was the event through which this overall interpretation of Largo's designs on Catalonia was expressed. The rivalry of the two organizations at the port was in fact based upon a foundation of *cenetistas* being at loggerheads with rival autonomous unions since the 1910s. Whilst the CNT was illegal during the Primo de Rivera years, these autonomous unions continued to operate. In 1929 the various unions of the port joined together in the Federación de Entidades Obreras del Puerto (FEOP). According to Ibarz, this convergence was a result of the port unions having worked together in various labour conflicts during the 1920s, such as their campaign to bring about an eight-hour working day at the port, and also the fact that they all participated in the *comités paritarios*. The re-mobilization of the CNT from 1930 onwards reignited this rivalry. At the outset of the Republic, the CNT transport union rapidly expanded at the port, with a majority of port workers – especially the most unskilled ones – joining the CNT.<sup>2</sup> What would go on to be viewed as a key battleground between Largo and the CNT during the Republic was, to a significant extent, a well-established enmity even before the FEOP sought entry to the UGT.



Undoubtedly motivated in no small measure by the CNT's rapid remobilization at the port, the leaders of the FEOP travelled to Madrid to meet Largo Caballero. Following this meeting, their unions held assemblies, at which votes were passed to affiliate to the UGT.<sup>3</sup> Attempts were then made to present the case to workers at the port for them to affiliate to the Federation. The majority of dockers involved in cotton and wood, as well as the controllers, joined UGT entities. In other sectors, a minority of workers joined the socialist labour federation.<sup>4</sup>

The FEOP's joining of the UGT instantly changed the CNT's presentation of its battles at the port. Initially, the organization presented the move to join the UGT as being a desperate measure to win official protection. 'The [CNT] transport union has the backing of almost all the workers of the port', *Solidaridad Obrera* argued, also declaring that 'the leadership and support of Largo Caballero from the Labour Ministry will be worth nothing. We, the workers of the CNT, are stronger than the opportunists of the *comité paritario*, and we will triumph'.<sup>5</sup> However, this initial reaction was soon accompanied by a repeated assertion that the FEOP's joining of the UGT was part of a plan by Largo to destroy the CNT. The paper argued that Largo's insistence on his ministry having jurisdiction over handling of labour issues in Catalonia rather than the Catalan government was motivated by a wish to impose the UGT at the port, declaring it had been 'chosen as the place of choice for the warlike efforts of the Unión General de Trabajadores'.<sup>6</sup> Just a few days after these claims were made, the CNT transport union, as discussed in the previous chapter, declared its boycott against non-CNT workers at the port.

However, the belief that Largo was master-minding a plan to destroy the CNT was not limited to the port. The idea was quickly embraced by many CNT unions, and repeatedly and vociferously expressed through the pages of *Solidaridad Obrera*. In the first months of the Republic, some CNT unions in Barcelona interpreted the presence of the UGT in their industry as corresponding to this overall plan that was attributed to Largo. In early June 1931, for example, the CNT's wood workers' union placed an article in *Solidaridad Obrera* in which it warned its members to remain vigilant against the possibility of attempts to recruit UGT members in their workplaces. The appeal was firmly grounded in the premise that the UGT was undertaking a campaign to destroy the CNT, and was recruiting the most reactionary elements of the Barcelona workforce to help it to achieve this aim. 'The Unión General de Trabajadores is beginning its offensive against the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo', the message began, before claiming Largo was attempting to 'drag workers towards his reformist organization'.<sup>7</sup>

The actions of UGT unions in Catalonia, when they conflicted with those of CNT unions, were also interpreted as corresponding to this agenda. For instance, in June 1931, the CNT's union of cinema workers declared its intention to carry out a strike if the set of *bases* that it had sent to the Civil Governor were not accepted within eight days. The corresponding UGT union refused to back the strike call on the grounds that they believed it would be used as a pretext by employers in the industry to lay off workers. It would appear that the CNT union ultimately did not strike after agreeing to negotiate with the employers' association.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the CNT union published an article in *Solidaridad Obrera* in which it attacked its UGT counterpart not only for refusing to back the strike, but also for its members allegedly declaring their intention to occupy the posts of the striking *cenetistas*. The CNT cinema workers judged that 'only those who are in the UGT could operate in this way, at the unconditional service of Largo Caballero, playing the repugnant role of yellows and traitors to the cause of the workers'.<sup>9</sup>

As the Republic progressed and CNT unions ran into difficulties as they clashed with the authorities during labour conflicts or other protest actions, the setbacks they had suffered were explained squarely in terms of Largo's plan. Such a perspective was put forward by the CNT's transport union. The union had suffered various defeats since the founding of the Republic, such as the transport strike of October 1931, which had started at the port in an attempt to impose a CNT closed shop there but had ended with several other non-port sections striking in support.<sup>10</sup> The leading militants of the CNT's transport union in Barcelona were of the mindset that their organization was being targeted by Largo with the goal of destroying it. The expression of their belief in July 1932 that they had been in the midst of a 'battle to the death'<sup>11</sup> that the UGT general secretary had been waging against the CNT since the start of the Republic came on the back of the protracted and damaging strikes that the union had entered into. From the articles published by the transport workers in *Solidaridad Obrera*, it is evident that its organizers felt their union needed to be on a perpetual war footing against attempts emanating from the Ministry of Labour to destroy the CNT.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to scrutinize this argument that the Catalan UGT represented a conduit through which Largo could destroy the CNT. It is taken for granted in contemporary and historical accounts of the Second Republic that the UGT general secretary harboured a great deal of animosity towards the CNT. His accommodation of the FEOP leaders at the start of the Republic must be viewed in part as a marriage of convenience, through which

both parties would benefit through having the same agenda of wishing to introduce arbitration systems at the docks. A mutual antipathy towards the CNT – and obviously a recognition that it would prevent the establishment of arbitration – did undoubtedly unite the governing socialists and the leaders of the union. The difficulty comes in determining whether this collaboration was motivated first and foremost by this shared agenda of implementing an arbitration system, or rather by a simple hatred of the CNT. Certainly in the eyes of *cenetistas* it was the latter, and this was the interpretation that they presented to workers in Barcelona.

On the part of the FEOP leaders, it is difficult to establish which factor motivated them most, though it is highly likely that it was some combination of the two. What is certain is that the FEOP organizers' antipathy towards the CNT was based around a belief that the CNT's methods were inimical to the interests of workers. The proceedings of meetings of worker entities at the port that decided to join the UGT from May 1931 offer an insight into why some unions decided against joining the CNT. One of the key arguments cited in favour of joining the UGT over the CNT that was expressed by the cotton, wood and salted fish sections was that the socialist labour federation would 'totally respect our structuring and independence'.<sup>13</sup> By contrast, the idea was expressed by the leaders of these entities that under the CNT not only would their union become subsumed into the transport *sindicato único*, which also contained all the urban transport workers, whose sectors were unconnected to the port, but that they would also lose any control of their organization and how it operated, to the Barcelona CNT as a whole.<sup>14</sup>

At the heart of these port unions joining the UGT and not the CNT, therefore, was a wish to be able to ensure the workers of the unions had control over their ability to negotiate and call strikes, rather than being 'steamrollered' by the junta of the transport union.<sup>15</sup> This fear reflected a long-standing suspicion of the CNT on the part of the non-CNT port unions, who according to Ibarz had for over a decade viewed the CNT's militants at the port as outsiders who lacked an understanding of the particularities of labour issues there.<sup>16</sup> This is not to say that the leaders of the sections did not endorse the idea of workers being grouped together in a single entity, with the 'necessity that all workers have of grouping themselves together to defend our interests' being expressed as the fundamental premise for the argument that the unions needed to join either the CNT or the UGT.<sup>17</sup> It rather seems to have been the case that, while workers did need to be able to present a united front against the bourgeoisie overall, when it came to the matter of settling material conditions within a given industry, the independence of workers within that industry to chart their own path

through industrial relations with their employers was paramount. At the same time, at these meetings of the port unions the view appears to have been taken that the leaders of the CNT were fundamentally 'mistaken' with regards to their overall goals, and that there would simply be no escaping the imposition of these were the union to be affiliated to the CNT.<sup>18</sup> Rather than being motivated primarily by a wish to destroy the CNT, then, it would appear that the FEOP's activists and members chose to join the UGT principally to conserve their method of union organization rather than submit to that of the CNT.<sup>19</sup>

With regard to the designs of the UGT national leadership on Catalonia, the CNT's line that the organization was undertaking an all-out assault on the CNT through the creation of UGT unions does not receive any corroboration if the support given to Catalan UGT unions by the national leadership is given any attention. The socialist leadership in Madrid were throughout the Republic largely indifferent to the fortunes of their labour federation in Catalonia. This is illustrated by their attitude to requests for assistance from regional UGT leaders. On 20<sup>th</sup> July 1931 the Executive Commission of the UGT received a request from the Barcelona Local Federation of the UGT for 5000 membership cards. The Local Federation stated that the request was made because a large number of unions had requested to join the organization. However, the Local Federation advised that it could not afford to pay for the cards up front, as was standard UGT regulation, but would pay for them within forty-five days. The request was denied by the Executive Commission.<sup>20</sup> Similar rebuttals were experienced by the leaders of the UGT's bakery union in Barcelona when they requested additional membership cards from their national industrial federation.<sup>21</sup> This stance punctures the CNT's argument that the socialist leadership had a special interest in its organization replacing the anarcho-sindicalist labour federation in Catalonia. Had this been the case, the national leadership would have surely shown some flexibility in its procedures to ensure that *ugetistas* in the CNT's stronghold at least had the means to allow the organization to take on members there. Instead, it insisted upon an adherence the organization's standard rules, which were designed to ensure the solvency of the organization but were desperately unsuited to fighting the CNT for members in Catalonia. Whilst the CNT were able to issue over 100000 membership cards in a single month in Catalonia, a practice that left the organization with substantial deficits through the disparity between cards issued and dues paid, the UGT had to send off to Madrid for much smaller quantities, with payment upfront.<sup>22</sup>

The Catalan UGT as successors to the Sindicatos Libres

The postulation of a Largo master plan was used to explain the general presence of UGT organisms in the region; a different argument was put forward to explain the fact of workers in the region becoming UGT activists or simply holding a UGT membership card. This argument revolved around the assertion that the membership of the UGT in Catalonia was based around the Sindicatos Libres.

The Sindicatos Libres had been formed at the end of the 1910s, in direct response to the CNT, which at the time was at the height of its powers in Catalonia and was the scourge of the authorities and employers. Even after its unions rapidly dissolved with the founding of the Republic, they and the era in which they burst onto the scene of the Catalan labour movement left a long lasting, deep imprint in the imaginations of *cenetistas*. Certainly in the first months of the Second Republic amongst Republicans and the left in Catalonia the name of the Libres was associated principally with the idea of gunmen given immunity by Severiano Martínez Anido, the Military Governor of Barcelona between 1919 and 1922, to murder CNT militants, especially after the publication in 1931 of Pere Foix's exposé of links between Libres gunmen and Martínez Anido, which was also serialized in *L'Opinió*.<sup>23</sup>

Consensus exists that in its earliest days the Libres was founded and led by virulently anti-left individuals, often with Carlist connections. However, the organization expanded considerably beyond this founding nucleus, especially after the CNT was driven underground by Primo de Rivera. For much of the 1920s, it was the most important organization through which material claims were made by Barcelona workers, with even Ángel Pestaña acknowledging its role as a vehicle for protecting the material interests of workers.<sup>24</sup> As Colin Winston highlights, in the mid to late-1920s the Libres was a much more heterogeneous organization, comprised of a relatively smaller proportion of reactionary individuals, with many of its unions focused instead on reformist unionism and exhibiting no particular political agenda.<sup>25</sup> What is important here, however, is that in *cenetista* discourse, the Sindicatos Libres continued to stand for nothing more and nothing less than an anti-CNT hit squad of *pistoleros* and strike breakers. For an organization to be associated with *pistolero* was the gravest accusation that could be made. And this was precisely the claim that was made in the CNT press of the UGT in Catalonia during the Second Republic.

From the outset of the Republic, the CNT in Catalonia made repeated claims in its newspapers that the unions of the Catalan UGT that were being formed in the region were a continuation of the *Sindicatos Libres*. This claim partly took the form of arguing that the leaders and ordinary members of new Catalan UGT unions had essentially reformed their old *Libres* union in the UGT, and as such were attempting to continue the yellow and reactionary practices of the *Libres*. But above all the claim centred around the accusation that the *pistoleros* of the *Libres* had also found a home in the Catalan UGT, from which they would continue to murder CNT militants and even ordinary workers. This depiction of the Catalan UGT in its entirety was often made from editorials in *Solidaridad Obrera*, such as one in June 1931 in which the paper argued that ‘the CNT has not only refused to allow in *pistoleros*, but has rejected organizations that had belonged to the *Sindicatos Libres*. The UGT has accepted them *en bloc*’.<sup>26</sup>

The CNT often accused UGT entities that set up in Catalonia of being comprised of former *Libres* unions. For example, during 1932, moves were made by some tram workers to set up a UGT section. In keeping with its reputation as one of the most militant CNT unions, the transport union responded to these moves by attempting to mobilize tram workers against the individuals concerned. The UGT tram workers’ section was initially set up in April 1932, but appears to have remained inoperative in its first months.<sup>27</sup> On 7<sup>th</sup> September 1932, the tram workers section of the transport union placed an article in *Solidaridad Obrera* in which it warned workers to be on alert against attempts being made by the *ugetistas* to allow the UGT to be a recognized union in the sector. The names, jobs and card numbers of all those implicated in the efforts to set up a UGT section were printed as part of the article.<sup>28</sup> One of the named individuals was Eduardo Gómez Benedicto, who would go on to become the Catalan representative in the UGT’s national transport federation.<sup>29</sup> The authors also argued that the UGT was simply a replacement of the *Sindicatos Libres*, and also suggested that those involved had made threatening suggestions that force would be used to establish a UGT presence.<sup>30</sup> A similar stance was taken by the Barcelona wood worker’s union, who warned their members that members of the *Sindicatos Libres* ‘have found refuge and enrolled in the social reformist ranks, protected by the power of the government’. These individuals had been leading members of ‘the gang that Martínez Anido created’ and were ‘*agents provocateurs* at the service of the politico-socialist class’.<sup>31</sup>

Of course, the CNT were not the only entity in Catalonia for which the *Sindicatos Libres* and the era of *pistolero* had left a lasting impression. The *Libres* were also a recurrent

theme in the Catalan socialist press, to a large extent in response to the CNT's accusations against the Catalan UGT. UGT activists found themselves using the pages of *La Internacional* to repeatedly refute accusations that their organization was a haven for former Libres gunmen and activists. In June 1931, the paper claimed that the Barcelona UGT would take *Solidaridad Obrera* to court over its accusations that the UGT in Catalonia had recruited the *pistoleros* of the Libres.<sup>32</sup> Desiderio Trilles, the leader of the UGT at the port, also refuted these accusations in his regular columns on the battles between the CNT and the UGT.<sup>33</sup> Adolfo Simó, a leading figure in the UGT's bakery union, also offered a detailed refutation of the accusations specific to the industry. Simó observed that 'every time a group of workers outside of the dictatorial ranks of the Confederation refuses to follow those of the *único*, they are "*pistoleros* of the Libres"' according to the CNT press.<sup>34</sup> A similar refutation was made by the UGT's public entertainment union.<sup>35</sup>

At the same time as refuting the idea that the Catalan UGT was a re-branded version of the Libres, *La Internacional* also levelled counter-accusations at the CNT over the question of *pistoleros*. In socialist discourse, as discussed in chapter three, violence was an integral aspect of the CNT's activities as its militants attempted to impose their union on workers. In its reports of CNT attacks on UGT members, the Catalan UGT's papers averred that these incidents represented an attempt on the CNT's part to plunge the region to a return to the *pistolero* heyday of Martínez Anido. In June 1931, a piece in the paper claimed the Libres was a product of the CNT's attempts to use violence to make workers join the union, and that the CNT's activities in 1931, citing assassinations of *ugetistas* in Barcelona, Sabadell and Badalona, were an attempt to return Catalonia to the same dynamic of violence.<sup>36</sup>

The truth of exactly where the violent elements of the Libres actually did go is virtually impossible to ascertain. Clearly workers who had been in the Libres did variously join the CNT and the UGT. Nevertheless, it is certainly worth giving some critical consideration to the CNT's claims regarding the Catalan UGT. On the one hand, some incidents of altercations between CNT and UGT militants and workers do hint at some unsavoury characters being associated with the activities of the Catalan UGT, even if there is no way of proving that they had definitely been in the Sindicatos Libres prior to the Republic. A shootout that took place outside the Alena box and wood panel factory in June 1931, which will be examined in more detail later in this chapter, is perhaps the most prominent of these. Here, gunmen shot at CNT members who were picketing factory employees who

had recently joined the UGT. At the same time, however, it must be recognized that the CNT press also made assertions of UGT-Libres and/or *pistoleros* connections that were much more dubious. *La Internacional* responded to a claim made in *Solidaridad Obrera* that the UGT people involved in a violent altercation with CNT workers in Blanes were also ex-Libres *pistoleros* by highlighting that there had never been a Libres presence in Blanes, viewing *Solidaridad Obrera*'s accusations as indicative of their campaign to delegitimize the Catalan UGT through linking it to the Libres.<sup>37</sup>

It is also important to consider that, in addition to the Catalan UGT vigorously refuting any connections between the labour federation and the Libres, the Catalan UGT was historically an enemy of the Libres, as Colin Winston highlights.<sup>38</sup> *La Internacional* in its rebuttal of the accusations made against the Catalan UGT by the CNT interpreted the era of Libres dominance in Catalonia as a dark period for the workers' movement in the region. Moreover, the Libres' own papers during the 1920s were highly critical of the PSOE and UGT.<sup>39</sup> There is also evidence to suggest that Catalan UGT's public condemnation of the Libres was not merely posturing. For example, the minutes of the UGT's metal union meetings suggest that its leaders took accusations that any of its members had been militants in the Libres very seriously. In February 1932, a member of the junta warned his colleagues that a former 'action man' of the Libres was attempting to join the union. It was agreed by the junta to reject his request, and subsequently agreed that prospective members had to provide their previous union card before being allowed to join.<sup>40</sup>

The twin strands of discourse that the UGT in Catalonia was both a direct product of Largo Caballero's project to implant the UGT and destroy the CNT in Catalonia and also an organization comprised of the former *pistoleros* of the *Sindicatos Libres* quickly fused together into one. It became commonplace for editorials and reports in *Solidaridad Obrera* to identify UGT organisms in Catalonia as corresponding to both of the above traits. The activities of the UGT at the port, for example, were depicted at times as being simultaneously agents of Largo and representing a continuation of the Libres and harbouring *pistoleros*.<sup>41</sup> Having previously been portrayed as being at the 'unconditional service of Largo Caballero',<sup>42</sup> the cinema workers affiliated to the UGT in Barcelona were subsequently depicted as being 'the leaders and collaborators of the awful *Sindicatos Libres*', who, upon the collapse of the Libres 'sought refuge within the UGT, which had also benefited from the favours of the dictatorship'.<sup>43</sup>



The most obvious pay-off for the CNT of the depiction of UGT unions as being a continuation of the *Sindicatos Libres* and also a creation of an anti-CNT and anti-working classes Labour Minister was the delegitimizing value that they brought with them, which in turn would serve the overall objective of extinguishing a UGT presence in the region. The *Libres* as an organization was a byword in CNT discourse for the bourgeoisie attempting to destroy working-class organization and for *pistolerismo* carried out against representatives of the working class. To depict the Catalan UGT in this fashion therefore drew on a very powerful, well-established aspect of the workers' movement in Catalonia and allowed it to be put to use to present the Catalan UGT as every bit as reactionary and dangerous to workers as was the *Libres*. The Second Republic may have represented a massive change to the political structure of Spain and Catalonia, but in CNT discourse the working classes and the CNT continued to be locked in precisely the same struggle against the same groups and organizations as they had been in the late 1910s and the 1920s.

Likewise, because the theory of Largo's master plan was expounded when newly affiliated Catalan UGT organisms were discussed in *Solidaridad Obrera*, the idea was presented to workers that any organization that joined the Catalan UGT was playing an integral role in fulfilling the anti-CNT agenda of the Labour Ministry. Rather than merely being workers that sought a different vehicle for defending their material and social interests, they were presented as being aligned to forces outwith Catalonia that were attempting to destroy the main workers' organization. The result was that in Catalonia, UGT unions being created or unions affiliating to the socialist labour federation were presented through the anarcho-syndicalist movement as an advance of the bourgeois-socialist offensive against the workers, as well as another move by them against the CNT.

#### A case study: the Alena factory, Barcelona, June 1931

Through these linkages to Largo and the *Libres*, the Catalan UGT was thus presented as being a combination of the worst of the present and the worst of the past. The overall validity of these two interpretations has been questioned here. However, it is important to examine how these accusations worked in relation to specific incidents. Unfortunately, it is impossible to judge all claims made against the Catalan UGT by the CNT, on the grounds that so much additional information on any given incident is required to assess its validity. All too often, such supplementary evidence does not exist. However, in June 1931, a violent confrontation took place between CNT and UGT members in Catalonia, which, because of the numbers involved, received a substantial amount of press attention. The

incident in question occurred on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1931, at the entrance of the Alena wood panel factory, where eight *cenetistas*, two *ugetistas* and one unaffiliated individual were injured, the majority of them by gunshot wound. The CNT reacted to the incident by arguing that it represented a fusion of Largo Caballero attempting to use the UGT to destroy the CNT in the region and former Libres *pistoleros* carrying out these attacks on his behalf. Whereas the majority of articles in the CNT press that asserted a Libres *pistolero*-UGT connection were not backed with any substantiating proof, the Alena incident, along with a similar outbreak of violence later that month in Blanes, represented the two most compelling pieces of evidence that the CNT press were able to present of connections between Libres violence and the Catalan UGT's activities. A detailed reconstruction of the incident – and its antecedents – highlights how the interpretations of one another's movements offered by the CNT and the UGT in Catalonia do not satisfactorily explain the hostilities that sometimes occurred between their members.

The Alena factory usually employed around 150 workers.<sup>44</sup> In the months immediately prior to the founding of the Republic, all of the workers in the factory had been members of the CNT.<sup>45</sup> Conflict between the union and the management initially took the form of the CNT's factory delegate, Manuel Carlos Miralles, being dismissed, apparently for 'bad behaviour'. That Miralles may have been dismissed for his activities as a *cenetista* cannot be ruled out, but neither can it be taken for granted. Following the intervention of the CNT wood workers' union, Miralles was reinstated. Shortly after this incident, the management announced that the entire factory would be temporarily shut for renovation work. The workforce was temporarily dismissed, to be informed of the reopening of the factory at a later date so that they could return to work.<sup>46</sup>

However, in May the employer decided that it would initially only take on a proportion of the workforce, with the remaining workers being re-contracted in phases.<sup>47</sup> The CNT wood workers' union was opposed to this move, believing it to have been a manoeuvre designed to phase out undesirable workers. The sacking of Miralles would undoubtedly have been one antecedent that raised this suspicion. However – and this was a point that the UGT were eager to stress after the bloodshed – that all the workers would be readmitted had been agreed in a settlement reached by the employers and the Delegación Regional del Trabajo.<sup>48</sup> The workers that had been invited back, totalling sixty-five, did not wish to support the CNT's proposal to declare a strike at the workplace to demand that all workers be rehired at once, so they left the CNT and joined the UGT. The precise circumstances of how and why they chose to join the UGT, rather than simply leave the CNT, are not one

hundred percent clear. According to the CNT it was indicative of the socialist labour federation being an instrument of employers.<sup>49</sup>

Upon learning of the return to work of these sixty-five workers and their enrolment in the UGT, *cenetistas* – both of the wood workers’ union as well as, it would appear, those from other industries, in particular construction – began to organize a picket at the entrance of the factory, composed of both militants and the CNT’s members who formerly worked at the factory. The goals of the picket were principally to agitate for the rehiring of all workers and prevent their positions being taken by others, though censuring the UGT workers must have also been a motivation. For a few days the UGT workers continued to work as normal, in spite of the picket.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> the CNT picket arrived at the factory entrance over an hour early, and upon the arrival of the UGT workers, individuals from both sides quickly entered into confrontation before shots began to be fired. The majority of people attached to both groups quickly fled, leaving behind a smaller group of fighters. Two key points of controversy were which group made the first move towards violence, and which side was armed. The nature of the casualties would suggest that if the *cenetistas* were armed at all, they were exceptionally poor shots. Of the eleven casualties, six of the eight *cenetistas* received gunshot wounds, whereas the two *ugetistas*’ wounds were from blows from sticks or other objects.<sup>50</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera* openly accused the two injured *ugetistas* of having been *pistoleros* of the Libres in the past.<sup>51</sup> Whilst it has not been possible to corroborate this, it would appear that one of the two men, Manuel Pedra Lorente, did have a violent past, having wounded a neighbour with a knife during an argument in 1925,<sup>52</sup> and having also been detained in early 1931 for insulting a police officer.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, the *cenetistas* did exaggerate the extent of the shootout, claiming that several men had barricaded themselves in a bar opposite the factory, from which they fired shots at the *cenetistas*, an accusation that was refuted by the owner of the bar.

*Solidaridad Obrera* on its front page announced that ‘the *pistoleros* of the Sindicatos Libres, recruited by the Unión General de Trabajadores, shoot at our comrades’ and repeated on several occasions in its coverage words to this effect.<sup>54</sup> The incident was displayed as proof that the Catalan UGT had a deliberate strategy of hiring *pistoleros* to murder *cenetistas*. The paper even made the claim that people who lived near the UGT’s headquarters had overheard someone in the building saying “we need to kill a few of the Confederation’s people to spread panic”,<sup>55</sup> a claim that should be taken with a very large

dose of scepticism. The paper presented the incident as a calculated attack by gunmen on a peaceful demonstration. The other crucial point of emphasis aside from the aforementioned link with the *Sindicatos Libres* that was asserted was the argument that blame for the whole incident should be directed squarely at Largo and the leaders of the UGT in Catalonia. The editorial on the front page of *Solidaridad Obrera* argued that the initial split of the factory's workforce and the ensuing conflict were 'the consequences of the policy that Largo is directing from the Ministry of Labour'. A statement in the paper by the CNT wood workers' union went even further, arguing that 'the secretary of the UGT and of the Socialist Party, installed in the Labour Ministry, can order workers of the Confederation to be murdered'. Furthermore, the paper argued, 'the leaders of the Unión General de Trabajadores know that without recourse to violence, the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo would manage to organize all workers in Catalonia and leave them with nobody'.<sup>56</sup>

On the part of the Catalan UGT, the response to the incident was equally one of depicting it as an outrage, though one planned and executed by violent *cenetistas*, not the UGT. According to *La Internacional*, the UGT workers were merely going about their business, 'fulfilling the decision of the Delegación Regional del Trabajo that they and the employer agreed upon', only to find themselves in the days immediately prior to the fight 'coerced and attacked by those from the CNT, who wish to impose their will through all means on Catalan workers'. The 'inept and sectarian authorities' of the city were blamed for having failed to protect the UGT workers against the threats of the *cenetistas*. This interpretation of the incident was placed into the context of their wider allegations of *cenetistas* threatening workers at the port to make them join the CNT. The only acknowledgement that UGT members had any connection to the violence outside the factory took the form of arguing that it was understandable that they would defend themselves in the face of such sustained attacks and without the support of the authorities.<sup>57</sup>

For both CNT and UGT, then, the incident was an individual manifestation of their wider interpretations of the agenda of their rivals. Whilst there are elements of linkage to the wider activities and positions taken up by the two labour federations, however, certain key points relating specifically to the case in question should not be obscured by the anarcho-syndicalist and socialist interpretations. One of the most important of these is the role played by the workers of the factory themselves, independent of the activities of union militants. It would appear that all of those who were given the opportunity to return to work did so, joining the UGT in the process. They totalled sixty-five workers out of a total workforce of about 150; in other words over forty percent of the total workforce. This

would suggest that the primary motivation of many of the individuals in the factory was not rooted in commitments to a particular union, but simply being able to work. It was this which caused them to switch unions, rather than a rejection of anarcho-syndicalism or a commitment to UGT principles. The workers appear to have been happy to remain in the CNT and have it represent their interests until the moment when being in it actually came into conflict with their ability to work. To a significant proportion of the workers involved, the CNT's attempts to present the Catalan UGT as something of a bogeyman was not a sufficiently persuasive argument to prevent them from joining it, something that would indicate that by no means did all workers – and indeed (former) CNT members – share *cenetista* militants' loathing of the UGT.

It must also be borne in mind that, whilst it appears those connected with the UGT were aggressors, those at the vanguard of the CNT picket were not connected with the Alena workplace at all. Many of those injured in the fighting were militants of the construction union, and not the wood workers' union, and were therefore not even employed at the workplace, let alone connected to it through their *sindicato único*.<sup>58</sup> Their stake in the conflict was therefore more organizational and ideological than it was material. Quite what form the picket would have taken without their protagonism can only be speculated on, but their presence as outsiders to the conflict leading the demonstrations against the UGT workers can only have raised tensions, and possibly brought them further into the realm of a more sectarian conflict. In contrast, the two injured *ugetistas* – who *Solidaridad Obrera* asserted were *pistoleros* – were employees at the factory.<sup>59</sup> This composition of the two groups brings us to the question of the motivations of those who attacked. Although the balance of probabilities would indicate that the UGT workers were aggressors, the idea that they were gunmen who had turned up specifically to attack *cenetistas* and had no specific interest in the workplace dispute needs to be called into question. Certainly the two injured *ugetistas* had a specific interest in the factory. Looking at it from their perspective, and particularly that of a seemingly volatile character such as Pedra Lorente, the previous days of insults they would have received from the pickets and in *Solidaridad Obrera* may have been sufficient provocation to attack, rather than a more principled hatred of the CNT in general. Although the possibility that *pistoleros* were on the scene with the specific intention of murdering any *cenetistas* in their path cannot be discounted, the two injured *ugetistas* seem to have had a far more personal stake in the event, detached from the long-standing battle between Libres and *cenetistas*.

What certainly can be discounted in examining this incident are the accusations made in the CNT press that the event was either part of a wider policy of Largo, or had been ordered by him or any UGT leader in Catalonia. There is simply no evidence for the accusations, and the idea that Largo would have the ability or the inclination to order the assassination of such low-ranking *cenetistas* is simply not credible. This aspect of the CNT's presentation of the event needs to be seen as an attempt to graft the organization's wider stance on the UGT – in particular its representation of the socialist labour federation as having a plan to destroy the CNT using violence and the machinery of state – onto a localized incident, the roots of which were not planted in a direct rivalry between the CNT and the UGT. The Catalan UGT were equally open to grafting their wider position on the CNT onto the event. For their part, this required a fairly selective presentation of it, with *La Internacional* failing to address the fact that it appears to have been *ugetistas* firing the shots. Although the men doing the shooting may not have been gunmen from the Libres, they had certainly chosen to escalate the confrontation onto the level of violence.

However, because the *cenetista* delegate of the factory, the wood workers' union and *Solidaridad Obrera* all refused to accept that all the workers would be re-employed, as agreed upon through the Delegación Regional del Trabajo, and instead chose to adopt a picketing footing, the conflict did take on a dimension that fitted in with the CNT's wider stance on the Republic in the respect that it corresponded to the organization's refusal to accept government arbitration. And it also appears to have been through adopting this posture that the workers who did wish to return to work ultimately came to join the UGT. It was therefore through the CNT's position of deciding to fight against the Delegación Regional del Trabajo that the conflict came to take on a dimension of CNT-UGT organizational rivalry, even if it was fundamentally grounded in factors that were independent of this split, in particular the wish of one part of the workforce to return to work. Once the two sets of workers were split between the CNT and the UGT as a result of the CNT's stance, however, and especially after the altercation, the whole incident came to be seen as a straight case of CNT-UGT rivalry, enmeshed in the wider stances and representations adopted by the CNT and the UGT on their rivals, with the original, non-sectarian aspects of the incident quickly becoming obscured. As will be seen in the next chapter, the conflict at the Alena was certainly not the only one that would take place in Barcelona during these years that would also become a CNT-UGT conflict due to the question of arbitration.

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- <sup>1</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 29 May 1931
- <sup>2</sup> Ibarz, *Treballar a la ciutat*, pp. 12-15
- <sup>3</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 1412 Minutes of the meetings of the unions of the *Federación de Entidades Obreras del Puerto*, April & May 1931
- <sup>4</sup> Ballester, *Marginalitats i hegemonies*, pp.124-126; Ibarz, *Treballar a la ciutat*, pp. 21-22
- <sup>5</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 May 1931
- <sup>6</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 26 May 1931
- <sup>7</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 20 December 1932
- <sup>8</sup> *La Internacional*, 23 June 1931; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25 June 1931; *La Vanguardia*, 17, 19, 24, 26 June 1931
- <sup>9</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25 June 1931
- <sup>10</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, p. 169
- <sup>11</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 26 July 1932
- <sup>12</sup> For example *Solidaridad Obrera*, 09 September 1932
- <sup>13</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 1412 Minutes of the meeting of the *sociedad de cargadores y descargadores del algodón y genero vario*, 06 May 1931
- <sup>14</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 1412 Minutes of the meetings of the unions of the *Federación de Entidades Obreras del Puerto*, April & May 1931
- <sup>15</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 1412 Minutes of the meeting of the *sindicato de obreros cargadores, descargadores y estibadores de madera del puerto de Barcelona y su radio*, 26 April 1931
- <sup>16</sup> Ibarz, *Treballar a la ciutat*, pp. 12-15
- <sup>17</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 1412 Minutes of the meeting of the *sindicato de obreros cargadores, descargadores y estibadores de madera del puerto de Barcelona y su radio*, 26 April 1931
- <sup>18</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 1412 Minutes of the meeting of the *sindicato de obreros cargadores, descargadores y estibadores de madera del puerto de Barcelona y su radio*, 26 April 1931
- <sup>19</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 1412 Minutes of the meetings of the unions of the *Federación de Entidades Obreras del Puerto*, April & May 1931
- <sup>20</sup> FPI AARD 255-3 Minutes of the meeting of the UGT Executive Commission, 20 July 1931
- <sup>21</sup> CDMH P/S Madrid 1562 Correspondence between *La Espiga* bakery union and the UGT national bakers' federation, 18 February 1933 and 12 August 1934
- <sup>22</sup> Confederación Regional del Trabajo de Cataluña, *Memorias de los Comicios de la Regional Catalana celebrados los días 31 de mayo y 1 de junio, y 2,3 y 4 de agosto*; Vega, *Entre revolució*, p. 168
- <sup>23</sup> *L'Opinió*, June- July 1931; Pere Foix, *Los archivos del terrorismo blanco: el fichero Lasarte* (Madrid: La Piqueta, 1978)
- <sup>24</sup> Colin Winston, *Workers and the Right in Spain, 1900-1936* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 146
- <sup>25</sup> Winston, *Workers and the Right in Spain*, pp. 145-170, 178
- <sup>26</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 04 June 1931; other examples of the paper making the explicit, general claim that the Catalan UGT was a substitute for the Sindicatos Libres include *Solidaridad Obrera*, 08, 10 May, 10 June, 04 August, 11, 29 October 1931
- <sup>27</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 11 May 1933
- <sup>28</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 07 September 1932
- <sup>29</sup> *El Socialista*, 07 September 1933
- <sup>30</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 07 September 1932
- <sup>31</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 20 December 1932
- <sup>32</sup> *La Internacional*, 13 June 1931
- <sup>33</sup> *La Internacional*, 08 August 1931
- <sup>34</sup> *La Internacional*, 04 July 1931
- <sup>35</sup> *La Internacional*, 20 June 1931
- <sup>36</sup> *La Internacional*, 23 June 1931
- <sup>37</sup> *La Internacional*, 04 July 1931
- <sup>38</sup> Winston, *Workers and the Right in Spain*, p. 108
- <sup>39</sup> For example *Unión Obrera*, 14, 28 September 1928, 08 February 1929
- <sup>40</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 870 Minutes of the meetings of the UGT Barcelona metal workers' union, 10 February 1932 & 29 June 1932
- <sup>41</sup> For example, *Solidaridad Obrera*, 29 October, 02 December 1931
- <sup>42</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25 June 1931
- <sup>43</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 11 December 1931
- <sup>44</sup> *Heraldo de Madrid*, 09 June 1931
- <sup>45</sup> *La Voz*, 09 June 1931
- <sup>46</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 10 June 1931
- <sup>47</sup> *Heraldo de Madrid*, 09 June 1931; *La Vanguardia* 06 June 1931
- <sup>48</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 06 June 1931; *La Internacional*, 13 June 1931

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<sup>49</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 June 1931

<sup>50</sup> This version of events is based on a comparison of accounts contained in the following sources: FO 371/15774/W7137/46/41 Report from Norman King to Sir George Grahame, 10 June 1931; *La Vanguardia*, 10, 11 June 1931; *El Sol*, 10 June 1931; *Heraldo de Madrid*, 09 June 1931; *La Voz*, 09 June 1931; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10, 11 June 1931; *La Internacional*, 13 June 1931

<sup>51</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 June 1931

<sup>52</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 26 December 1925

<sup>53</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 08 January 1931, 30 June 1931, 22 February 1931

<sup>54</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 June 1931

<sup>55</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 June 1931

<sup>56</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 June 1931

<sup>57</sup> *La Internacional*, 13 June 1931

<sup>58</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 June 1931

<sup>59</sup> *El Sol*, 10 June 1931



## Chapter Seven: CNT-UGT Hostilities and Labour Conflicts

Bound up closely with the CNT's attempts to mobilize workers against the UGT in Catalonia and provide a delegitimizing interpretation of the organization was the series of labour conflicts that occurred in the region in which both the CNT and the UGT had a union presence in the industrial sector in question. Some of the largest and most significant strikes that took place in Barcelona between 1931 and 1934 had a central component of CNT-UGT conflict, as did many others of a lesser importance. This chapter will examine the dynamics of labour conflicts in which the CNT and the UGT clashed during this period.

### The *jurados mixtos*

The single most important stimulus for confrontation between the CNT and the UGT in Catalonia between 1931 and 1934 during labour conflicts was the question of the *jurados mixtos*. As was discussed in part one, the CNT were particularly opposed to this aspect of the UGT's national agenda, presenting the *jurados* as an attack on direct action and indeed on the CNT itself. In Catalonia and especially Barcelona, this opposition to the *jurados* and other forms of arbitration in industrial relations took on a real and practical dimension, often with violent and acrimonious consequences. Although the UGT was small in Barcelona, *jurados mixtos* would play a role in a surprising amount of the most significant industrial conflicts in the city during this period, much to the chagrin of *cenetistas*.

The *jurados mixtos* played a key, not to mention highly divisive role in two of the most prolonged labour conflicts that occurred in Barcelona during this era, namely the carpenters' strike of late 1932 and the construction strike of April 1933. In late 1932, what would prove to be one of Barcelona's most protracted strikes of the Republican era broke out in the carpentry trade, initiated by the wood workers' union. The strike, as Vega highlights, was indicative of the turn towards greater violence that occurred in CNT strikes from the latter half of 1932 onwards. The strike was called to bring about the implementation of new *bases de trabajo* for carpenters, which included a reduced working day to help remedy the high unemployment in the sector. Whilst the CNT wood workers' union pursued the new *bases* through a protracted strike that would go on for three months, the UGT minority in the sector negotiated a set of *bases* for the industry through a *jurado mixto*. The formula agreed upon in the *jurado* was a working week of forty-eight hours – four more than the CNT proposed – and similar salary increases to those contained within

the CNT's agreement. Both the CNT and employers rejected the terms drawn up in the *jurado*. The CNT strike therefore continued. The strike intersected with the January 1933 insurrection, which led to the union being closed and many of its militants being arrested. In spite of the union's continued resistance, by February the majority of workers had returned to work, effectively with the solution agreed upon by the *jurado* coming into effect.<sup>1</sup>

For the CNT wood workers' union, and indeed for the CNT in Barcelona as a whole, the carpenters' conflict became every bit as much about fighting against the *jurados mixtos* and what the UGT stood for as it did about winning material advances for workers. The union ran a vitriolic series of articles from the pages of *Solidaridad Obrera* against the UGT, the *jurados*, and, above all, against Largo. In December 1932 the union publicly advised that 'neither the Delegado del Trabajo of the Generalitat, the *jurados mixtos* nor the authorities should bother sending us conciliatory notes nor invitations, since it will be a waste of time as they will all end up in the waste paper basket at our office'. Even before the *jurado* proposed a solution, the writings of the union's junta and strike committee were focused on dismissing the *jurados* as having any legitimacy in the conflict, regularly emphasising that the employers 'have to resolve the conflict directly with the workers and no-one else'. The UGT's own wood workers' union was unsurprisingly heavily criticized for what were interpreted as its attempts to derail the CNT strike and damage the material interests of the carpenters by presenting their own set of *bases* to the *jurado*.<sup>2</sup>

*Solidaridad Obrera*'s hostility towards the *jurados mixtos* became more pronounced as the conflict wore on. References to the *jurados* and the *ley del 8 de abril* pervaded the union's statements, all in conjunction with an assertion that the CNT would remain defiant against them and would not prevent the CNT winning the dispute on their own terms.<sup>3</sup> However, as the strike ran out of impetus in February, the *cenetistas* squarely pointed the finger at Largo and the *jurados mixtos* as being the reason why the conflict had lasted so long. According to an editorial published in *Solidaridad Obrera* on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1933, 'Largo Caballero, a collaborator of Primo de Rivera' had prevented a solution being reached by coming between employers and the CNT. According to the paper, employers and the strike committee had reached an agreement and were ready to return to work until the Labour Minister had intervened as part of his 'offensive against the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo'.<sup>4</sup> To a significant extent, this position must be seen as one of damage limitation and blame deflection in the face of a failing, protracted strike. The fact that the CNT had rejected a solution created by the *jurado* for the sector was obscured by a torrent of

accusations that it had done nothing but meddle where it should not have been in the first place.

In spite of the return of workers to work, the CNT attempted to maintain the strike, with the backing of the Local Federation. By this point the stakes had been raised far higher than the winning of new working conditions and regulations for the Barcelona CNT. At a meeting of the Local Federation on 26<sup>th</sup> February, in agreeing to continue the strike and potentially extend it to other sectors, the delegate for the construction union asserted that the strike ‘was not about the conflict of a section, nor of a union, but of the UGT and the *jurados mixtos* against the CNT’.<sup>5</sup> The strike nominally continued on this basis, as did an insistence that the dispute had to be won through direct action and not through the *jurados mixtos*, which continued to be a ‘den of *enchufados* that are hated and repudiated by employers and workers’,<sup>6</sup> a claim made at a time when the majority of the industry was effectively working in accordance with the *bases* of the *jurado*.

The CNT-led construction strike that began in April 1933 had many parallels with the carpenters’ strike in terms of the role that the *jurados* played in it. In April 1933 the CNT initiated a general strike in the industry, the goal of which was the creation of a new set of *bases*. The central demand was the creation of a six-hour working day, to help better share work amongst the 10000 unemployed workers in the sector. The conflict ultimately lasted over four months. During the conflict the CNT clashed with both the UGT construction union and the *jurados mixtos*. The conflict illustrated how committed both sets of militants were to working only through their own methods of handling industrial relations. It was also a prominent example of how, to both the CNT and UGT union leaders, the actions of their rivals were tantamount to collusion with the forces of reaction.<sup>7</sup>

The CNT’s strike began on 17<sup>th</sup> April. The UGT’s union did not back the strike, with its members attempting to attend work as normal. At the same time as the CNT’s strike was launched, the UGT’s construction union, which unsurprisingly had considerably fewer members than that of the CNT, presented its own set of *bases* to the industry’s *jurado mixto*, in the hope that the conflict could be resolved using its own methods of arbitration rather than through the need to strike. The CNT, however, resolutely refused to pass the dispute through the arbitration systems.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike in the wood workers’ strike, the sector’s employers were more willing to participate in the *jurados*. That they did so, placed into the general context of businesses in Spain

opposing them, illustrates the extent to which they were not prepared to deal with the CNT. Whilst viewing this move by employers as a pretext for refusing the CNT's demands, however, the CNT ultimately blamed Largo for the employers' position. In a demonstration of their faith that direct action would otherwise have prevailed, *Solidaridad Obrera* asserted that had it not been for Largo 'imposing himself and his miscarriage of the *jurados mixtos* from his ministry, the employers would have already opened discussions with us'.<sup>9</sup> The stage was therefore set for the CNT to fight the socialists on two levels: firstly against the UGT's workers on the ground, and even more importantly against the *jurados mixtos*.

For its part, the UGT in Catalonia was from the start highly hostile to the CNT's strike, whilst at the same time wishing to present an alternative method of advancing the workers' material position in the industry. *Ugetistas* writing in *Cataluña Obrera* argued that the strike had no purpose other than to 'cover up' the CNT's 'failure' at the port, where an anarcho-syndicalist strike was during these days losing its momentum. In the eyes of the socialists, the strike only aimed to benefit the goals of the FAI, who were in turn serving the ends of the bourgeoisie by leading workers into an unnecessary strike.<sup>10</sup> The USC took an equally critical stance of the CNT's strike in the pages of *Justicia Social*.<sup>11</sup>

In the first days of the strike, the CNT was bullish about its prospects.<sup>12</sup> However, the CNT and the employers remained deadlocked, with the CNT continuing to refuse any involvement with the *jurados*. The occurrence of other, wider CNT protest actions, such as the general strike of May 1933, undoubtedly also caused the conflict to remain unresolved for longer, particularly as a result of the detentions of *cenetistas* and closure of its unions that resulted from them. At the same time, the UGT persisted in its negotiations with employers through the *jurado mixto*, but failed to reach an agreement, its demands for a seven-hour working day being rejected.

The Barcelona construction strike took a crucial turn in July, when Largo imposed a solution in his capacity as Labour Minister. Largo's solution stipulated a forty-four hour working week and substantial pay increases.<sup>13</sup> Had the settlement been accepted at this point, the rivalry between the CNT and the UGT would have in fact served to the general benefit of workers in the sector. However, the CNT roundly refused to accept Largo's settlement, precisely on the grounds that it represented an imposed solution by the socialists and an attack on direct action. The CNT's view of Largo's intervention was that after three months of conflict 'when they had calculated that the strikers had arrived at the

extreme limit of physical resistance, when they thought hunger would defeat them' Largo had stepped in, having 'prepared *bases* behind the backs of the [CNT] union and the employers'. The argument of *Solidaridad Obrera* was a somewhat contradictory one in the respect that it seemed to imply Largo and the employers constituted a single bloc that sought to exploit the lengthy nature of the conflict, whilst also seeking to present Largo as someone who had interfered in the process against the wishes of the CNT and the employers. The paper also maintained that workers were united in their rejection of Largo's ploy.<sup>14</sup>

The attempts of the UGT to use arbitration to solve the conflict had a knock-on effect of escalating the level of confrontation on the streets and in workplaces. The most high-profile instance of violence that resulted from the CNT's construction strike was the murder of Francesc Llagostera, a ceramics worker and UGT member who was a worker representative on the *jurados mixtos* of the construction sector. On the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup> July, Llagostera left his home with one of his children. In the street, a group of men grabbed him, separating him from his child, before shooting him several times.<sup>15</sup> There is little doubt that Llagostera was deliberately targeted and that his murder was premeditated; according to the Febus press agency the men had taken the trouble to find Llagostera's *jurados mixtos* accreditation card before shooting him.<sup>16</sup> The socialist press were adamant that it was *faístas* who had committed the murder. The Catalan Secretariat of the UGT released a statement to the press on 10<sup>th</sup> July in which they condemned the killing and presented it as another clear-cut instance of *pistolerismo*, linked to 'the absurd construction strike, declared in the most favourable moments for the bourgeoisie'.<sup>17</sup>

The solidity of the strike had been damaged by July, with many workers returning to work, believing that a solution had been reached by Largo.<sup>18</sup> That this was the case illustrates how for many workers, the material outcome of the strike was more important than the methods by which the gains had been won or who had won them, factors which were paramount for committed *cenetistas*. In spite of their best efforts, the CNT construction union representatives had little choice but to enter into negotiations with employers in August, and on the 13<sup>th</sup> of the month the solution formulated by the two parties was put to a vote at a CNT assembly of construction workers, at which it was approved. The negotiated solution they had reached was for a forty-four hour working week, but in terms of its pay improvements was noticeably less than that which Largo had attempted to impose. The turnout at the assembly, according to Vega, was less than 2000, perhaps

indicating less of a commitment on the part of the workforce to the CNT's handling of the conflict than *Solidaridad Obrera* had asserted throughout it.<sup>19</sup>

In some industries, the creation of a UGT union brought with it moves by its leaders to set up *jurados mixtos*, which in turn spurred on the *cenetistas* in the industry to attack their UGT rivals with a particularly acute sense of urgency. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a UGT tram workers' union was set up in Barcelona in 1932, a move which was met with the CNT's transport union attempting to mobilize workers against it. However, such efforts to prevent a UGT presence amongst tram workers failed. Even worse, those involved with the foundation of the UGT tram section moved rapidly to bring about the creation of a *jurado mixto* for the sector. On 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1932, Ponciano Alonso, one of the key militants of the CNT transport union during the Republic and the Civil War, published an article in *Solidaridad Obrera* which comprehensively attacked both the implementation of the *jurado mixto* in the industry and also carried out a character assassination of Eduardo Gómez Benedicto, the socialist who spearheaded efforts to create the UGT union in the sector. Gómez Benedicto was an expert in 'dirty and murky business' who was 'a traitor to the proletarian cause' and, to top it all, had, according to Alonso, been an *esquirol* during the infamous *La Canadiense* strike of 1919. The veracity of the accusations is unfortunately impossible to prove, but they undoubtedly complimented very well Alonso's efforts to discredit both the UGT and the *jurados*. He went on to describe the arbitration system as 'the absolute negation of liberty and proletarian defence' and argue that those who had joined the UGT's tram workers' section were of an even lesser calibre than Gómez Benedicto and were 'all *esquiroles*'. However, Alonso was also convinced that 'the tram workers, united as a single man in the invincible CNT, will not step back in their social revolutionary march', in spite of these attempts to set up a *jurado* for tram workers.<sup>20</sup>

A similarly combative outlook against the *jurado* was expressed at an assembly of tram workers held by the CNT transport union on 8<sup>th</sup> November. Here, when the subject was raised, the *jurados* were denounced as 'an instrument of capital and the state to kill the rebellious spirit and the rights of the worker' and were a 'dictatorial work' directed against the proletariat by Largo. A cry of 'no!' was raised by the assembled workers in response to a militant asking if they would accept a *jurado* for their industry. Later on at the assembly, according to the report in *Solidaridad Obrera*, speakers 'scathingly attacked the Unión General de Trabajadores for being an organism of traitors and *esquiroles* at the service of

the bourgeoisie and the state, miserably and cowardly tricking workers with promises that turn into hunger and misery, into imprisonment and crime'.<sup>21</sup>

Alonso published similar attacks on this new UGT presence amongst tram workers and the *jurado* that they were attempting to set up.<sup>22</sup> In spite of the hostility of both Alonso and the tram workers at the CNT assembly, however, the *ugetistas* did not appear to give up. In December 1932, Gómez Benedicto went to Madrid, along with another leader of the UGT's tram workers, where they met with Largo to discuss their *jurado mixto*, as well as meeting with UGT transport leaders from other cities in Spain. Moreover, in May 1933, the Sociedad de Tranviarios de Barcelona held an event to celebrate the first anniversary of the organization.<sup>23</sup>

This hostility towards the UGT tram union and the *jurados* that it promoted was maintained as late as 1934. The nature of the criticism and the language deployed indicate a movement in disarray, reduced to making the most vitriolic attacks possible on perceived enemies. *Solidaridad*, the temporary replacement for *Solidaridad Obrera* following the ban on that paper, published an article on 24<sup>th</sup> February in which the UGT tram union was attacked for presenting a set of *bases* through the *jurado mixto*. The rant against the UGT's attempts to present new working conditions was nothing short of bizarre. The socialists were 'traitors, as always'; according to the author 'their dirtiness does not surprise us. They cannot infect us with it. Our epidermis is impermeable'. It also maintained the façade that, by this stage, the CNT's transport union still commanded the loyalty of all tram workers, whilst that of the UGT represented an illegitimate minority.<sup>24</sup>

As has been demonstrated here, the CNT in Barcelona presented the *jurados mixtos* as an anti-worker aberration, and fought against the involvement of arbitration even if it would bring a faster solution to a conflict with the same material outcome. However, the idea that it did this purely out of a commitment to its principles, and not because arbitration was the strategy adopted by a rival, must be called into question. Both immediately before and during the Republic, various *cenetistas* in Catalonia were willing to accept the intervention of regional or municipal authorities into the resolution of conflicts. The case of Macià intervening on behalf of the CNT at the port in June 1931, outlined in chapter five, was not a one-off. Rider highlights the recurrent recourse, during the summer of 1931, a period which marks the peak of the CNT winning new *bases* for workers, by its unions in Barcelona to accept solutions drawn up by the local authorities.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, according to Martin Benjamin and Albert Balcells, from 1934, once the Generalitat had been given

greater power over industrial relations, some CNT unions accepted the interventions of Martí Barrera, a former *cenetista* who was appointed labour counsellor to the Generalitat.<sup>26</sup> This willingness to accept arbitration hints not just at a certain pragmatism on the part of certain CNT union leaders, but also that the attacks on arbitrated solutions to conflicts were motivated as much by an organizational rivalry as they were by ideological tenets. Eulàlia Vega points out that from the spring of 1930, once the CNT was legalized, its unions attacked Libres and UGT rivals for using arbitration, when in many cases CNT militants themselves had been using such mechanisms during the dictatorship when they were operating in other unions. Vega argues that this highlighted their wish to use the idea of arbitration as amounting to collusion with employers to discredit rivals; the same could, to a certain extent, be said of the CNT's stance during the Republic.<sup>27</sup>

If the CNT became fixated on the *jurados* in some conflicts to the point where they would reject their settlements on principle and regardless of the terms they offered, then it was equally the case that UGT unions were at times fairly opportunistic in undercutting strike actions undertaken by the CNT from their moment of inception, drawing on the *jurados mixtos* in the process. A strike called by the CNT in the packaging sector in November 1933 offers an example of how Catalan UGT unions sometimes responded to CNT-initiated conflicts. On the 26<sup>th</sup> November the CNT's graphic arts union held an assembly for workers involved in the production of paper and card packaging, at which it was agreed to call a strike after attempts to negotiate with employers over new *bases de trabajo* had not produced satisfactory results. The strike would take place with immediate effect. The UGT's union for this field immediately released a statement to the press to let it be known that it did not support the strike due to the way it had been called – that is to say, not in accordance with the laws of the Republic in terms of notice given – and instructed its workers not to adhere to the strike.<sup>28</sup> Another reason given by the UGT union for this opposition was their belief that the CNT union lacked the sufficient numerical support to be in a position to call a strike in this fashion. It was not simply the case, then, that the UGT union did not support the strike, but that it actively wished to distance itself from it and condemn it. At the same time, the UGT also entered into negotiations with the industry's employers, with a new set of *bases* being agreed via a *jurado mixto* in early December and the employers announcing to the CNT that these were the *bases* that they would be prepared to implement once they ended their strike.<sup>29</sup>

The CNT union was furious with the UGT's handling of the conflict, publishing an account of 'ugetista treachery' in *Solidaridad Obrera* on 3<sup>rd</sup> December. The *cenetistas*



took issue with the accusation that they did not have sufficient worker representation to call the strike and attacked the UGT union leaders, as was to be expected, in terms of them being ‘opportunists’ and ‘enchufistas’ who were living off workers. The opportunity was also taken to declare that workers in this industry were against the reformist methods of the UGT and wholly backed the CNT.<sup>30</sup> Although it is difficult to know the precise balance of forces in this industry, it would appear that the UGT would have represented a minority, though not a tiny one, declaring one hundred members when it joined the UGT in August 1930, having previously been an autonomous union.<sup>31</sup> The CNT union, meanwhile, evidently had enough support to disrupt production significantly through its strike; in early December, departments in the Generalitat were unable to conduct normal business due to a lack of envelopes as a result of the conflict.<sup>32</sup>

Even as the CNT in Barcelona progressively declined, its opposition to the *jurados* remained as resolute as ever. This manifested itself not just in the form of the labour conflicts in the construction and wood working sectors. The opposition in these months of decline also took the form of the CNT refusing to cooperate in any strike actions with other organizations of the left, in large measure due to these groups wishing to initially pursue conflicts through the *jurados*. In 1934, for example, the UGT workers in the fabric treatment sector sought the cooperation of the CNT for a conflict with employers in the sector. The *ugetistas* organized a meeting to suggest that they and the CNT co-ordinate their presentation of *bases* to employers. The minutes of the meeting reveal the evasive attitude taken by *cenetistas* to this suggestion, with the junta members rejecting the offer whilst stressing that they were not opposed to unity. The *ugetistas* were informed that a coordination of their efforts would be ‘problematic’ and were alerted to the different labour conflict methods adopted by the two organizations. The junta were keen to stress that they could not accept any ‘interventionism’ in a labour conflict and that all CNT labour disputes, by order of the organization’s statutes, ‘have to be carried out through direct action’. The UGT’s proposal of first seeking a solution from arbitration and then carrying out a strike if the *bases* were not accepted was rejected by the CNT junta. For the *cenetistas*, it was simply not permissible for a labour conflict to be fought outside of their own terms, while the *ugetistas* likewise insisted on first using arbitration, even if they showed slightly more flexibility by indicating a willingness to adopt direct action methods if negotiation failed. At the same time, the CNT junta sought to stress that it ‘has always and at all times done everything possible to bring about unity of action; it has never tired of asking comrades to join our section’. This latter statement illustrates that, for many

*cenetistas* in the era prior to October 1934, worker unity could only result from all workers being in the CNT.<sup>33</sup>

Outside of Barcelona, there is also some evidence of the *jurados* playing a role in interactions between the CNT and the UGT in the region. In Tortosa, the CNT found itself in 1933 and 1934 eclipsed by the UGT in terms of its membership levels. With the UGT the dominant worker entity, the *jurados* became an increasingly prominent feature in the town. Nevertheless, and as a reflection of the CNT's deep-rooted opposition to the Republic's arbitration measures, the CNT here staged a defiant stand against the UGT and the *jurados*, initiating strike actions against them. The UGT set up ten unions in Tortosa between the start of the Republic and October 1934.<sup>34</sup> The local UGT attempted to impose the *jurados mixtos* and their settlements on employers. Employers in the construction sector refused to accept the *bases de trabajo* drawn up by the local *jurados*, and the UGT construction union accordingly called a strike, which took place in September 1933. However, it was not just employers who opposed the *jurados* here. The CNT were equally opposed to the settlement and the UGT's campaign to impose it. The anarcho-sindicalists presented the UGT's settlement as an attack on liberty of union affiliation, because as part of the work distribution element of the agreement workers were required to hold a registration card from the *jurados*. Although the card was freely available to all workers, *cenetistas* in the town viewed the arrangement as an imposition of socialism. Mirroring *Solidaridad Obrera's* interpretation of workers who accepted the *jurados*, *El Socialista* suggested that the workers who opposed the *jurados* in Tortosa were being manipulated by the bourgeoisie. The case of Tortosa illustrates how there was a degree of inevitability, when two unions with opposed methods attempted to occupy the same space, that one union would have to occupy a position that would align it with employers.<sup>35</sup>

In 1934 the CNT stepped up its efforts to overturn the *jurados mixtos* of the construction industry in the town. In late August, workers without the *jurados mixtos* registration were dismissed from a construction site. One of them, a *cenetista* named José Subirats, refused to accept the dismissal, and returned to work as normal the next day. The Guardia Civil were ultimately called in to remove him. This led to a delegation of CNT militants heading to the town hall to inform the Mayor that the CNT would initiate a general strike in the town if the workers were not readmitted. The Delegado del Trabajo was immediately called to the town to resolve the dispute, but was unable to break the deadlock, his offer of immediately issuing registration cards to all workers, including those who had been dismissed, being refused by the *cenetistas*.<sup>36</sup> The CNT in the town then began to prepare to

mobilize workers against the *jurados*. However, in a reflection of the heavy-handed treatment that was by this stage of the Republic routinely used against CNT organisms, the government ordered the closure of the CNT's local headquarters and detained some of its militants.<sup>37</sup> The plight of the CNT in Tortosa was followed by the right-wing press, who used it as an opportunity to present the UGT in fairly similar terms as did *Solidaridad Obrera*. The pro-monarchist *El Siglo Futuro*, for example, took the CNT's side, declaring that 'the Casa del Pueblo of Tortosa opposes workers who do not belong to it working'.<sup>38</sup> The *cenetistas* themselves were no less indignant, describing their socialist counterparts as 'despots of the working class' and exhorting workers to 'fight against this *jurado mixto*, against these cowardly socialists'.<sup>39</sup> The fight against the *jurados mixtos* in Tortosa made the transition from the local notices section of *Solidaridad Obrera* into its opinion pieces, where the situation was presented as being that the local socialist movement had a stranglehold over the local government of the Esquerra.<sup>40</sup>

### Esquirolaje

One vital element of the dynamic of hostilities between the CNT and the UGT during labour conflicts in Barcelona was the issue of strike breaking. The linkage between the UGT and *esquirolaje* was made with regard to UGT unions across Spain, but was made especially vehemently with regard to the Catalan UGT. As the alleged successor organization to the Sindicatos Libres, *Solidaridad Obrera* and CNT militants posited that strike breaking was one of the fundamental traits of the UGT in Catalonia. *Solidaridad Obrera* often reported that UGT workers were pressed into service as *esquiroles* during smaller CNT strikes, replacing striking CNT members. To give one example, during the course of a strike at a glass workshop in January 1932, the junta of the CNT section coordinating the strike asserted through the pages of the paper that the employers had undertaken 'a recruitment of *esquiroles* in favour of the social detritus that is called the UGT'.<sup>41</sup> Accusations of strike breaking were often linked to the idea that Largo Caballero was coordinating an offensive against the CNT to destroy its unions, such as the strike that CNT cinema workers threatened to call in June 1931, outlined in the previous chapter.<sup>42</sup>

One complicating factor in judging the role that strike breaking played in the dynamic of CNT-UGT interactions in Catalonia is that the terms '*esquiroles*' and '*esquirolaje*' were used by *cenetistas* to describe instances of UGT members continuing their work when their CNT counterparts called a strike, which happened often, as well as using it in relation to instances of UGT members being called in to replace striking CNT members, which

happened far less frequently in Barcelona. These were qualitatively two very different things, the latter being far more provocative than the former, but *cenetistas* tended to brand both as being *esquirolaje*. For example, during the construction strike of 1933, *Solidaridad Obrera* labelled the Catalan UGT as *esquiroles* simply for its initial stance of opposition to the conflict.<sup>43</sup> Often, therefore, it is unclear which meaning of the term is being deployed by *cenetistas* in their attacks, making it even more difficult to assess claims of *esquirolaje*, especially in smaller-scale strikes.

What would appear to be the case is that the CNT's claims regarding the extent of the Catalan UGT's *esquirolaje*, in Barcelona at least, were overstated. To a certain degree, the CNT's repeated denunciations of UGT *esquirolaje* in Catalonia were no more or less valid than those made against the CNT by other groups, such as the communists, in the event of a CNT union not supporting one of their strikes in this period.<sup>44</sup> In the case of the cinema workers' conflict, the claim of strike breaking was made before a strike had even taken place.<sup>45</sup> Even *Solidaridad Obrera* admitted on some occasions that, whilst the UGT did not back a particular CNT strike, their organization did not provide labour to replace CNT strikers. However, according to *cenetistas*, that this was the case was due to the Catalan UGT having so few members, rather than it choosing not to provide strike breakers. The implication was therefore that the Catalan UGT did by default attempt to provide strike breakers, and was only prevented from doing this through a lack of support. For example, during the carpenters' strike of late 1932, the CNT strike committee acknowledged that the UGT wood workers' union had not provided strike breakers to replace CNT workers, though this was put down to the fact that 'the UGT is like a mythical legend, without stability nor real substance. It is a phantasm'. In other words, its non-provision of *esquiroles* was only a result of it not having sufficient members to do so.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, during the 1933 construction strike, in appraising the state of the conflict on 20<sup>th</sup> April, *Solidaridad Obrera* presented the UGT as *esquiroles* for their public announcement of not supporting the strike, whilst also mockingly implying that the union in any case must have had no members since 'there is not a single *esquirol*'.<sup>47</sup> Based on its later coverage of this conflict as it dragged on into June, had there been wide-scale deployment of UGT labour, it is certain that the anarcho-sindicalist press would have condemned it loudly and vociferously.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, the Catalan UGT itself expressed the concern that the CNT's strike was leading to the hiring of workers who were happy to act as strike breakers. The UGT also continued to maintain publicly that the CNT (or rather the FAI, which the Catalan socialists now judged to be totally in control of the union's actions) in

its handling of the conflict had ‘offered an excellent service’ to contractors by giving them a pretext to erode union representation in the sector by hiring strike breakers.<sup>49</sup>

Unsurprisingly, given the extent of the CNT-UGT conflict there and its manifestation in the form of sectarian boycotts, the port was one of the key areas of Barcelona in which the accusation of strike breaking was most aggressively levelled at the UGT. As has been outlined in this part of the thesis, in July and October 1931, the UGT provided strike-breaking labour for the two CNT strikes that took place there. As was also discussed in chapter six, during these conflicts the CNT accused the UGT of acting on behalf of Largo to destroy the CNT and replace it with the UGT. Though not termed precisely as *esquirolaje*, *Solidaridad Obrera* nevertheless argued, with regard to the October conflict, for example, that UGT port workers were ‘hypocrites and mercenaries’ who were working to serve the interests of employers at the port.<sup>50</sup>

However, it is essential to bear in mind that the two strikes that took place at the port were inextricably bound up with the CNT’s attempts to marginalize the entire UGT port federation, as was discussed in chapter five. The July 1931 strike by the CNT, though aimed at implementing a new system of contracting workers and other material stipulations, came just a month after the CNT had successfully banished the UGT from the port. It is hardly surprising that the FEOP would be willing to offer its members to employers in such circumstances, especially as, in any case, the FEOP sought to bring about an arbitration system to handle the management of industrial relations at the docks. The calling of the strike so quickly after the imposition of the closed shop illustrates, on the part of the *cenetistas*, a certain naivety. Having forced all workers into the CNT – even if it was only a minority who actually needed forcing – it was certainly not very astute then to believe that these workers would not resent that manoeuvre, let alone stand firm in a strike convoked by the CNT. If the UGT had any case to answer over its response to the July conflict on the grounds that it was a strike designed to improve the material position of dockers, the same could not be said of the October 1931 conflict. On this occasion, the CNT’s boycott-cum-strike was directed entirely at the UGT. It was hardly surprising that the organization would provide members to replace striking *cenetistas* when the dispute was aimed squarely at removing the UGT from the port entirely.

There was one further CNT-led strike at the port, which the UGT once again refused to back. By this juncture, the CNT was a fading presence at the port, through a combination of the spectacular backfiring of its July and October 1931 strikes there, the passing over of

some workers to the UGT and the general attritive effects of repression. The UGT, on the other hand, was the dominant union at the port. Nevertheless, the CNT transport union called a strike at the port in April 1933. The goals of this strike were an establishment of a fair system for distributing work, and an eight-hour day.<sup>51</sup> Once more, the FEOP provided replacement labour for CNT strikers, and the conflict collapsed.<sup>52</sup> On this particular occasion, the difficulty in judging the UGT's actions stems from the fact that it was the larger union, and as such the FEOP leaders obviously would have felt incensed by the idea of a smaller union attempting to execute a strike that was effectively in opposition to the system that it had promoted, just as CNT union leaders became enraged by their much smaller UGT counterparts attempting to resolve disputes through arbitration. This was admittedly not a dynamic that occurred frequently in Barcelona during the Republic; the norm was rather a UGT minority refusing to back a strike by the CNT majority.

#### Competing claims of legitimacy

During strikes in which the CNT clashed with the UGT, a key part of the recriminatory accusations that publicly went back and forth between the two organizations was centred on which organization had the legitimacy to speak and act on behalf of workers in the industry in question. This occurred in particular when a conflict took on the dynamic of the CNT calling a strike, and the UGT then attempting to resolve the conflict in the industry through the use of the *jurados mixtos*. In such cases, *cenetistas* loudly accused the UGT of being too small to have the right to impose a *jurado* on an industry in which the CNT was the stronger union, extrapolating from this that the *jurados* themselves were illegitimate. This very perspective was put forward by the CNT during the carpenters' strike of late 1932. In fact, the criticism went much further, presenting the leaders of the UGT wood workers' union as 'bullshitters who try to make themselves out as wise, trying to trick workers with a few material gains which will be laughed out of every workshop' and who were also trying to 'spread confusion' through their involvement in the conflict.<sup>53</sup>

The CNT's construction union equally perceived the UGT and the *jurados* as illegitimate actors during the prolonged strike in the industry over the spring and summer of 1933. 'Who do the worker "members" who attend the meetings convoked by the *jurado mixto* represent?' asked the front page of *Solidaridad Obrera* on 22<sup>nd</sup> April. The answer, according to the paper, was that 'they do not represent the construction workers, affiliated to the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo'. At the same time, the paper attacked employers in the industry for having instructed the CNT to present their demands through

the *jurados* and also of having accused the CNT construction union of having no influence amongst workers in the industry. Evidently for all sides involved in the conflict it was of paramount importance to present their opponents as having no support within the sector and therefore no legitimacy.<sup>54</sup>

The central accusation made by the CNT in such conflicts in which the UGT tried to intervene, then, was that the organization and its small unions were given, through their promotion of the *jurados mixtos*, a role that went far beyond their size. Whilst the accompanying rhetoric regarding their efforts amounting to collusion with the bourgeoisie or representing a direct attempt to destroy the CNT is more debatable, the claim itself certainly has an element of validity to it. With regard to the construction strike, for example, that there was by 1933 a *jurado mixto* established for this industry gave the UGT a stronger presence in it by allowing the socialist union publicly to present itself as having some method of resolving the dispute, in spite of its smaller size.

Some cases of the UGT setting up unions in an industry and then proceeding to set up a *jurado* likewise illustrate the CNT's fear that the arbitration would give somewhat *parvenu* UGT activists in an industry a disproportionate level of influence that would potentially undermine the CNT's influence, which was based first and foremost on the strength of numbers of workers enrolled in the *sindicatos únicos*. The reaction of the CNT transport union's militants to the creation of a UGT tram union and a *jurado* for that sector, outlined above, illustrates this. Looking at these developments from the *cenetista* perspective, it must have been galling and threatening to have expended a great deal of effort in building up a union that sought to represent the majority of workers in its field, only to then see those efforts potentially threatened by individuals with no substantial support amongst the workforce making moves to set up a legally binding entity that would govern labour conflicts for all workers in the sector. Under such circumstances, it is perhaps unsurprising that the *cenetistas'* response to the UGT tram workers' efforts was one of vitriolic hostility.

For its part, the Catalan UGT had its own series of reasons why it regarded the CNT as not a legitimate representative of the working classes in the region. These were expressed not just during specific labour conflicts, but also on a more routine basis through newspapers connected to the Catalan UGT. The claim of illegitimacy was related to one of the central accusations made against the CNT by the Catalan UGT during the Republic, which was that the anarcho-sindicalist labour federation's popularity was based upon coercion and intimidation of workers into joining the *sindicatos únicos*. The argument followed that

because its dominance in a particular sector was based on this deceit, it had no right to force workers into counterproductive and self-defeating strike actions. From the summer of 1931, *La Internacional* routinely informed its readers of cases of workers 'being coerced and attacked by those from the CNT, who wish to impose their will through any means on Catalan workers'.<sup>55</sup>

This basic interpretation of the CNT's *modus operandi* served as the main basis for justifying the Catalan UGT's opposition to the CNT's strike actions. The port was one key example of this. According to Desiderio Trilles, writing in *La Internacional*, the CNT's initial supremacy at the port was a result of its coercion of workers, and as such the actions undertaken by the transport union did not reflect the will of the port workers.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Catalan UGT organizers at times often dared to make the claim that their CNT rivals did not even represent a majority at all in some industries, even taking into account their recourse to intimidating workers into the organization. This claim was made by, amongst others, Adolfo Simó, with regard to the battle between the CNT and the UGT in the bakery industry,<sup>57</sup> and again at the port over the CNT's April 1933 strike.<sup>58</sup>

The Catalan UGT's claims of CNT illegitimacy are somewhat problematic, even if the proposition on which they are based, namely that *cenetistas* did resort to intimidation to gain members, does have some validity to it. There were clearly cases of workers being intimidated into joining the CNT, ranging from them simply being told that it would be in their interests to join the CNT all the way to outright threats of violence. However, the Catalan UGT's interpretation of the CNT turned this aspect of its militants' behaviour into being the sole reason for the CNT having members, when it was undoubtedly the case that a substantial amount of the CNT's strength was based on a genuine popularity amongst workers, albeit one which diminished over the course of the Republic. For the Catalan UGT to claim that the CNT had no legitimacy whatsoever in its claims to be acting on behalf of workers was therefore partially disingenuous. That said, it must also be borne in mind that CNT union organizers often did their utmost, as outlined in chapter five, to prevent the presence of a competing UGT union in their sector. Accordingly, it is impossible to know if UGT unions could have gained a more substantial level of grassroots support – and thus more legitimacy when it came to leading industry-wide labour disputes – had their unions had more freedom to promote themselves amongst workers from the outset of the Republic.



The negative impact of CNT-UGT hostilities on workers

One aspect of some labour conflicts in Barcelona in which the CNT and UGT clashed was that it was ultimately employers who benefited from the inter-union rivalry, and workers who lost out in material terms. Employers were able to exploit the fact of the two labour federations attempting to solve labour conflicts separately from one another by being able to choose the union that they wished to negotiate with according to which one was likely to bring about a better deal. In the 1933 construction strike, for example, the employers were able to exploit the stand-off between the CNT and the UGT to ensure that the outcome of the conflict was one of minimal improvements. In July the employers were able to reject the terms imposed by Largo Caballero as a result of the CNT's continued opposition to them; the conflict ultimately ended, as discussed, with a settlement that was inferior to that put forward by the Labour Ministry.<sup>59</sup>

Sometimes, employers were able to take advantage of the CNT's aversion to the *jurados* to roll back any material gains that they had provided workers, with the CNT willing to accept *bases* that were inferior to those that had been previously established by the *jurados*. This was the case in the wood working industry, where the CNT wood workers' union ultimately got its revenge on its UGT rival over its intervention in the carpenters' strike of late 1932 and early 1933, though certainly at an overall cost to workers in the industry. In August 1933 there was another wood workers' strike. As in the previous conflict, the UGT concurrently presented *bases* to the *jurado*, which the CNT and employers once again rejected, in the latter case undoubtedly because they realized it would be to their advantage to negotiate directly with the CNT. Accordingly, the CNT struck a deal with employers, though it was a noticeably inferior one to that which the UGT had achieved through the *jurado*.<sup>60</sup> Writing in *Justicia Social*, the Secretary of the UGT's wood workers' union denounced the development as a connivance of the CNT union leaders with the employers in an attempt to undermine the *jurados*, in the process acting against workers' interests in the sector. The secretary derided the claims of the *cenetistas* that they had won an agreement that represented the 'authentic will' of the workers by asking 'since when have wood workers had as their will to win a lower wage and have worse working conditions?'.<sup>61</sup>

Adolfo Simó of the UGT's bakery union likewise complained of the CNT undermining the material interests of workers, and thus benefiting employers, through its opposition to gains won by the UGT and through arbitration mechanisms. Writing in June 1931, Simó

claimed that ‘between December and the fall of the monarchy, the fearsome revolutionaries of the *único* did everything they could to sabotage whatever *La Espiga* did to improve the living conditions of everyone in the sector’. According to Simó, the CNT leaders were willing to accept the same conditions that the representatives of the Libres had done so that they could gain a foothold in the industry.<sup>62</sup> From early on in the Republic, the CNT and the UGT union were at loggerheads over the crucial issue of how to interact with employers in the industry. The CNT were unsurprisingly insistent on adopting an approach of direct action, whilst the *ugetistas* themselves wished to make use of the Republic to force the implementation of *bases* that they had been fighting for since the 1920s but which the Libres had hitherto blocked. *La Espiga* initially voiced their wish for an unspecified form of government intervention to force the *bases* to be adopted; they subsequently came to be strong proponents of the *jurados mixtos*.<sup>63</sup> The UGT union remained publicly critical of the methods of its CNT counterparts, claiming they were making no progress whilst maintaining the sector in a state of conflict through a strike they launched in the industry in the summer of 1931.<sup>64</sup> As the CNT were continuing to negotiate with business owners in the summer of 1931, *La Espiga* gained the support of the local Delegado del Trabajo to bring about a new starting time for bakers, one of the key points of conflict in the sector, with night work having been previously mandatory until this intervention.<sup>65</sup>

Through the Delegado del Trabajo and then the *jurados mixtos*, the UGT bakers gained the implementation of the *bases* that they had been campaigning for since the days of the monarchy. However, the CNT refused to accept these *bases*.<sup>66</sup> Instead, the leaders of the CNT and employers, in a meeting apparently brokered by the Civil Governor, came to an agreement on an alternative set of *bases* at the beginning of 1933 that were inferior to those agreed through the *jurados*. The 5am start that had been won through the *jurados* was revoked, bringing about a return to night work.<sup>67</sup> Simó indignantly vented his anger through the pages of *Justicia Social* and *Cataluña Obrera*, claiming that ‘the CNT have played into the bourgeoisie’s hands’.<sup>68</sup>

### Conclusions

Where there was a UGT presence within Barcelona industries, its acrimonious co-existence with the CNT often complicated labour conflicts, with the two labour organizations’ opposing methods and agendas conditioning the course of several important industrial disputes in the city. However, the UGT’s role in CNT labour disputes did not necessarily

conform to the accounts given by *cenetistas*. Although the CNT publicly claimed that their UGT rivals would provide strike breakers in virtually every strike that they could, the state of affairs was generally far more complex than this. Often the UGT simply refused to support a CNT strike rather than actively providing replacement labour for employers; on other occasions, strikes were themselves directed at the UGT, making their opposition to them eminently more comprehensible. However, *esquirolaje* tended to be more of a symptom of the more fundamental issue of the *jurados mixtos* and other forms of arbitration, which proved to be the primary cause of hostilities between the CNT and the UGT in Barcelona during labour conflicts. The method of winning a labour conflict, rather than the objective of receiving a positive material settlement of workers in the industry in question, all too often became the overriding focus of several highly protracted and acrimonious disputes.

The issue of which organization – CNT or UGT – and which method of industrial relations – direct action or management unionism – should be used to manage industry-wide disputes raised the deeper question of which organization could present itself as the legitimate manager of dispute, and by what criteria. The CNT sought to stress the small membership base of the UGT, whilst the UGT countered that the CNT deployed a fairly violent form of majoritarianism *vis-à-vis* the participation of workers in its disputes. Whilst it is evident that the CNT took the attitude that all those in an industry that did not comply with its strike calls were *esquiroles* and thus merited targeting, it is also difficult not to have a certain empathy with the perspective of their militants during the sorts of disputes outlined in this chapter. *Cenetistas* had built a mass movement from the ground up, and the existence of arbitration systems potentially empowered individuals who were relatively unknown to have a decisive influence in the representation of all workers in the industry, assuming the arbitration mechanisms functioned correctly. Ultimately, though, the most consistent losers in labour disputes in which the CNT and UGT clashed were not either organization, but workers themselves.

Finally, it is important to note that the broad outlines of the activities of the Catalan UGT with regard to labour conflicts for the most part corresponded closely to the ethos of Santos Julià's description of 'management unionism' that was outlined in chapter one. As we have seen, UGT unions in Catalonia that became embroiled in the most significant confrontations with the CNT did so as they attempted to pursue industrial relations according to the fundamental attributes of 'management unionism'. Furthermore, as this chapter and chapter six have also highlighted, unions that joined the UGT during the

Republic, such as the FEOP or the tram workers, did so first and foremost because they sought to manage labour relations through arbitration systems. Likewise, unions such as the bakers, construction and wood workers fell foul of the CNT in the course of practicing this form of unionism. CNT-UGT conflicts in Catalonia cannot be explained by the idea that the Catalan UGT was a reactionary front for Llibres gunmen, or the execution of a Largo Caballero master plan to destroy the CNT, executed by pliant lackeys, as the CNT presented them to be. Instead, hostilities between the two unions in the region seem to have been the result, to a significant extent, of the same causes as the battles between CNT and UGT unions going on elsewhere in Spain, which were fuelled by the CNT's direct action methods jarring against the union practices of the UGT. The key difference between CNT-UGT hostilities in Catalonia and those elsewhere was therefore not so much the characteristics of the Catalan UGT as it was the CNT's efforts to construct their socialist union rivals as being entirely reactionary and anti-worker, coupled with the *cenetistas'* belief that, because they and the working classes were in their view synonymous, they could and should attempt to marginalize the Catalan UGT.

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<sup>1</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 12 November, 02, 03, 04, 13 December 1932, 01, 10 January 1933; *La Vanguardia*, 16, 19, 20 November, 18 December 1932, 16, 19 February 1933; Claudi Ametlla, *Memòries polítiques: 1918-1936* (Barcelona: Distribucions Catalònia, 1979), pp. 204-205; Vega, *Entre revolució*, pp. 207-209

<sup>2</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 02 December 1932

<sup>3</sup> For example, *Solidaridad Obrera*, 13 December 1932, 01, 10 January 1933

<sup>4</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 14 February 1933

<sup>5</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 932 Minutes of the Barcelona CNT local plenum, 26 February 1933

<sup>6</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 26 March 1933

<sup>7</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 20 April 1933; *La Vanguardia*, 19, 20, 21, 25 April 1933; Ametlla, *Memòries polítiques*, pp. 204-205; Balcells, *Crisis econòmica*, pp. 213-215; Vega, *Entre revolució*, p. 209

<sup>8</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 20 April 1933

<sup>9</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 20 April 1933

<sup>10</sup> *Cataluña Obrera*, 21 April 1933

<sup>11</sup> *Justicia Social*, 28 April 1933

<sup>12</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 19 April 1933

<sup>13</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 18 July 1933; Vega, *Entre revolució*, pp. 210-212

<sup>14</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 18 July 1933

<sup>15</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 08 July 1933; *El Socialista*, 09 July 1933

<sup>16</sup> *El Socialista*, 09 July 1933

<sup>17</sup> *Justicia Social*, 15 July 1933

<sup>18</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 25 July, 02 August 1933; Vega, *Entre revolució*, p. 212

<sup>19</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 12, 17 August 1933; Vega, *Entre revolució*, p. 211

<sup>20</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 02 November 1932

<sup>21</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 11 November 1932

<sup>22</sup> For example, *Solidaridad Obrera*, 29 November 1932

<sup>23</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 11 May 1933

<sup>24</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 24 February 1934

<sup>25</sup> Rider, 'Anarchism, Urbanization and Social Conflict', pp. 517-544, 600-601

<sup>26</sup> Balcells, *Crisis econòmica*, p. 186; Benjamin, *The Agony of Modernization*, p. 304

<sup>27</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució i reforma*, p. 88

<sup>28</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 28 November 1933

<sup>29</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 03 December 1933

<sup>30</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 03 December 1933

<sup>31</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 24 July 1930

<sup>32</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 08 December 1933

<sup>33</sup> CDMH, P/S Barcelona 949 'Acta de las palabras y surgenencias cruzadas entre la representación de la UGT y la Junta del Ramo del Agua afecta a la CNT'

<sup>34</sup> FPI AARD 225-2, 255-3, 256-1, 256-2, 256-3 Minutes of the meetings of the Executive Commission of the UGT, 1931-1934

<sup>35</sup> *El Socialista*, 21 September 1933; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 24 September 1933; *La Vanguardia*, 20 September 1933

<sup>36</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 25 August 1934

<sup>37</sup> *La Epoca*, 05 September 1934

<sup>38</sup> *El Siglo Futuro*, 21 August 1934; see also *La Epoca*, 28 August 1934

<sup>39</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 28 August 1934

<sup>40</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 26 September 1934. This campaign against the UGT in Tortosa illustrates how, even as the stand-off between the left and the right was reaching its critical moments prior to the October uprisings, the CNT and the UGT in some parts of the country were at loggerheads every bit as much as they had been between 1931 and 1933. It also illustrates how labour concerns prevented workers from uniting in the more fundamental battle against the right. On 28<sup>th</sup> September 1934, in one of the articles on the UGT in Tortosa, the *cenetista* militant writing in *Solidaridad Obrera* swore that the CNT there would not support the general strike that was being talked about in socialist circles.

<sup>41</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 January 1932

<sup>42</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25 June 1931; *La Internacional*, 23 June 1931; *La Vanguardia*, 17, 19, 24, 26 June 1931

<sup>43</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 20 April 1933

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, accusations made by the Partit Comunista de Catalunya regarding local CNT leaders in Catalonia providing strike breakers to 'kill' other unions in the locality (*Catalunya Roja*, 23 September 1933)

<sup>45</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25 June 1931; *La Vanguardia*, 26 June 1931

<sup>46</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 31 January 1933

<sup>47</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 20 April 1933

<sup>48</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 06 June 1933, 11 June 1933

<sup>49</sup> *Cataluña Obrera*, 12 May 1933

<sup>50</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 13 October 1931

<sup>51</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 12 April 1933; *La Vanguardia*, 19 April 1933; Ibarz, *Treballar a la ciutat*, p. 90

<sup>52</sup> *Cataluña Obrera*, 14, 18 April 1933

<sup>53</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 04 December 1932

<sup>54</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 22 April 1933

<sup>55</sup> *La Internacional*, 13 June 1931

<sup>56</sup> *Cataluña Obrera*, 28 April 1933; *La Internacional*, 08, 29 August 1931

<sup>57</sup> *Cataluña Obrera*, 24 April 1933; *La Internacional*, 28 November 1931; *Justicia Social*, 30 September 1933

<sup>58</sup> *Cataluña Obrera*, 07, 14 April 1933

<sup>59</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, pp. 210-212

<sup>60</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, pp. 208-209

<sup>61</sup> *Justicia Social*, 26 April 1933

<sup>62</sup> *La Internacional*, 20 June 1931

<sup>63</sup> *La Internacional*, 27 June 1931, 15 August 1931

<sup>64</sup> *La Internacional*, 15 August 1931

<sup>65</sup> *La Internacional*, 15 August 1931

<sup>66</sup> *Cataluña Obrera*, 24 March 1933

<sup>67</sup> *Cataluña Obrera*, 24 March 1933; *Justicia Social*, 20 September 1933

<sup>68</sup> *Cataluña Obrera*, 24 March 1933

## **Part Three: Between October 1934 and July 1936**

**Chapter Eight: The CNT's *Alianza Revolucionaria* Proposal to the UGT, 1936**

October 1934 and its consequences

The left's confrontation with the right over the course of 1934 culminated in a failed rebellion, led by the socialists, in October. Though it did fail, and in most areas was put down relatively easily, October 1934 would become a watershed moment for the Republic and above all for the Spanish left, due to a combination of the two-week stand made by workers in Asturias, which was a product of the joint efforts of the CNT and the UGT there, the severity of the repression that was enacted by the government in response to the uprising, and the general sense amongst the left that the right were willing and able to use force to impose an authoritarian regime.

The event that led the socialists to launch the attempt at revolution was the withdrawal by the CEDA in late September of their support for the Radical government, which had been operating as a minority government that depended on CEDA backing. José María Gil Robles, the leader of the CEDA, now demanded the formation of a government that would include CEDA ministers. A new cabinet was formed on 4<sup>th</sup> October, containing three CEDA ministers. The socialists had argued since the beginning of 1934 that the entry of the CEDA into the government would mark the death of the Republic's ideals and the beginnings of fascism. But the socialist leadership lacked the conviction to make the decisive call to bring about such a movement when it seemed certain that the CEDA would enter the government; for all the revolutionary rhetoric of the *Caballerista* faction and in spite of the practical preparations being drawn up, the socialists sought to put off taking a stand until the last possible moment.<sup>1</sup> As Preston points out, several days elapsed between the collapse of the government and the naming of the new cabinet, and it was widely expected that the new cabinet would contain CEDA ministers. Yet during these days Largo Caballero made no decisive preparations to prime his revolutionary movement, choosing instead to do nothing until the official announcement of the new government.<sup>2</sup>

The socialist coordination of the overall movement was severely lacking. The insurrection that took place in October 1934 was the culmination of several months of planning by the socialists, even if the preparations had consisted of little more than some attempts – often with only limited success – to procure arms, and an exercise in gathering information regarding which members of the movement's grassroots would be willing to participate when the call came.<sup>3</sup> The overall plan for the insurrection was for socialist militants across

the country to call general strikes and, if possible, take up arms to neutralize the state's security apparatus when the call to do so came, and then await further instructions from the leadership in Madrid, which would provide central coordination for the nationwide movement. The overall success of the uprising would therefore depend on events in Madrid; if it was defeated there, no alternative way of coordinating the uprisings that would take place in towns across the rest of Spain existed.

On 4<sup>th</sup> October, the socialists gave twenty-four hours' notice of a general strike in Madrid. Although socialist unions, as well as some communist and anarcho-syndicalist forces, did strike, they crucially did not occupy the streets. Moreover, many socialist leaders were either arrested or went to ground, with no significant assault on the institutions of authority taking place.<sup>4</sup> The city that was supposed to be the nexus point of the revolution was therefore rapidly neutralized, even if some workers stayed on strike for up to a week.<sup>5</sup> General strikes also took place in several other major cities, including Seville, Zaragoza and Valencia.<sup>6</sup> There were isolated instances of well-planned revolt and defiant battling against security forces, such as the armed takeover of the Centenillo mining area by UGT miners in Andalucía.<sup>7</sup> But individual acts of rebellion were ultimately in vain because they were not tied together by any overall coordination. Just as importantly, none of the general strikes took on a dimension of presenting a serious threat to the forces of order that a revolution would have required them to overthrow.

The two regions in which insurrection occurred on a more significant scale were Asturias and Catalonia, though the nature and degree of success of the rebellions in these two zones were very different from one another. The contrast between events in these two areas would prove to be particularly significant for the CNT and the question of its stance on the rest of the left. The essentially different configuration of political forces in Catalonia gave the October revolt there a very different form relative to the rest of Spain. Here, two different forces coalesced to defy the government, though with little success. On the one hand the ERC potentially had much to lose were a government that closely followed the CEDA agenda to be formed. In the months immediately prior to October relations between the Generalitat and the institutions of the Spanish state had been severely strained after agricultural reforms passed by the Generalitat were overturned in Madrid. For the ERC, the government of the right in Madrid represented a real threat to the autonomy process. On the other hand, the non-CNT left in Catalonia, many of whose organizations had by this time coalesced in the *Alianza Obrera*, shared the interpretation of the socialists that the entry of the CEDA into the government would usher in the beginnings of a right-wing,



authoritarian state. Although relations between the ERC and the non-CNT left in Catalonia, namely the BOC, the *treintistas* and the USC- and PSOE- affiliated socialists were by no means uniformly good, they ultimately shared the common ground of viewing a more pro-CEDA government as being far worse than what had gone before in the *bienio reformista*. Accordingly, on 5<sup>th</sup> October the *Alianza Obrera* declared a general strike in Barcelona, with its local branches also declaring strikes or attacking the authorities in other towns in the region. On the 6<sup>th</sup> Lluís Companys publicly declared Catalonia to be an independent state within a federal Spain.

Crucially, the CNT did not share the perspective of the rest of the left in Catalonia that Companys's independent Catalonia was worth defending for the good of the working classes. As has been established already in this thesis, the organization presented a public stance of regarding the rest of the left and the Republicans as being every bit as reactionary and corrupt as the Radicals and CEDA. Consequently, when news of uprisings elsewhere came through, the ERC and the *Alianza Obrera* were on the same side, while the CNT looked on. Companys's independent Catalonia was doomed from the moment it was born; the armed forces in Catalonia stayed loyal to the central state, quickly surrounding the Generalitat, and the general strike of the *Alianza Obrera* did not develop into any form of armed insurrection. Although in some localities strikes and resistance lasted as late as 10<sup>th</sup> October, by the seventh the main thrust of the rebellion in Catalonia was over.<sup>8</sup>

Asturias was the sole case of a sustained insurrection being carried out in October 1934, a dramatic anomaly that bore no relation whatsoever to the ineffectual general strikes that characterized the rebellion elsewhere. Unlike in the rest of Spain, the manpower and resources of the CNT, the UGT and the communists were channelled into endeavours that were far more clearly revolutionary in scope than elsewhere. Instead of merely striking, the workers of the region took up arms. Indeed, the creation of communes in various areas of the region and the impressive fight put up against the armed forces mark the Asturian insurrection as arguably the most significant attempt at proletarian revolution through armed resistance in Western Europe since the Paris Commune.<sup>9</sup> With a fairly limited pool of arms, a sizeable proportion of which was simply dynamite used in the mining industry, workers in the region seized control of towns and villages from under Civil Guard control, before then fighting armed forces that had been sent to re-take control of the region for several days. Although not successful everywhere, the Asturian workers of the CNT, the UGT and the communists nevertheless managed to control sizeable areas of the region for almost two weeks, even if their efforts were ultimately doomed to failure due to the risings

elsewhere quickly collapsing. The rebellion in Asturias was greatly facilitated by the CNT and the UGT in the region working together in accordance with the *Alianza Obrera* that the two organizations had entered into in March, combined with the fact that both organizations, unlike many of their counterparts elsewhere in Spain, were capable of and willing to confront the security forces with weapons.

The uprising began late on the 5<sup>th</sup> October, when thousands of *cenetistas* and *ugetistas* besieged the barracks of the Civil Guard in the principal towns of the region and in the mining region in the south of Asturias. The miners gained control of the port towns of Avilés and Gijón, villages and towns in the mining region, and also gained a precarious grasp on the centre of Oviedo. Over the following two weeks Asturias was to all intents and purposes a warzone, as workers organized into militias fought the army and Civil Guard across the region. On several occasions, the rebels scored surprising victories against much more heavily armed and better trained opponents. However, there was a tragic inevitability that the revolutionary forces were simply no match for the might of the army, especially once the Army of Africa, Spain's only combat force, was dispatched to the region to put down the revolt with extreme force. General Eduardo López Ochoa, commanding the main body of troops that were sent to the region, had 15000 soldiers and 3000 members of the Civil Guard under his command. Mistakes were also made by the rebels, such as their failure to secure the port in Gijón, which allowed army detachments to disembark there, and their failure to decisively take Oviedo in the first days of the uprising. By 18<sup>th</sup> October, the rebels had been pushed back to the southern mining region, and were forced to surrender.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, that the unions of the CNT, the UGT and the communists were able to fight off the full might of the armed forces for nearly two weeks was a feat that captivated the hearts and minds of the left worldwide, and would have a profound effect on the outlook of the Spanish left for the remainder of the Republic.

The awe in which the actions of the Asturians were held was not just grounded in an admiration for their sheer bravery. Asturias was not simply a warzone during October; in areas held by the rebels, a revolutionary order, which in some respects foreshadowed the initiatives of the CNT's social revolution in the early months of the Civil War, was fleetingly set up. Committees were set up to coordinate the administration of towns, and money was sometimes abolished. The specific systems that were set up varied from town to town, often reflecting the blueprints of revolutionary order held by whichever of the labour federations were dominant in the area in question.<sup>11</sup> Crucially, both the military efforts and the coordination of the communes were coordinated by the *Alianza Obrera*. All

left-wing forces in the region had shown a willingness to rise up, rather than the dynamic present in Catalonia, where CNT leaders had refused to back the *Alianza*. And although in reality there were disagreements between the different organizations that comprised the *Alianza Obrera* in the region over questions of arms distribution and whether to continue resisting certain defeat, the overriding lesson that was taken from the events of October was that with a united course of action, the Spanish proletariat could achieve what its political parties and labour federations had hitherto only dreamed of. As Ramón Álvarez Palomo, a *cenetista* militant from Gijón who participated in the insurrection, suggested fifty years after the insurrection, the key legacy of the rebellion belonged to ‘the CNT and the UGT, who created the pact that served as a foundation for the events that astonished the world and were the work of all the Asturian people’.<sup>12</sup>

Critically, however, as will be discussed later in this chapter, the CNT’s main press outlets such as *Solidaridad Obrera* remained detached from this entire revolutionary attempt. CNT participation across the country depended on the local leaders of the movement.<sup>13</sup> But because the overall uprising quickly came to be defined almost exclusively by the events in Asturias, this stance of indifference was taken as being indicative of the CNT’s overall response to the heroics of Asturias. As will be examined more closely later in this chapter, the organization’s overall public appearance of ambivalence in the face of the events of October would have significant consequences in terms of the criticisms that were levelled at the anarcho-sindicalist movement after the insurrection had been put down, with the movement being characterized by the Marxist left abroad as having deliberately refused to come to the aid of the Asturians by not rising in Catalonia.<sup>14</sup>

The divergent responses between how the CNT in Asturias and Catalonia responded to the socialists’ uprising reveal a clear difference in outlook between the *cenetistas* of the two regions, even if local particularities did play a role in shaping their respective responses. As Chris Ealham points out, the CNT in Catalonia had something of a case for refusing to countenance alliance with the ERC-controlled Generalitat, with which it had been in conflict for much of the Republic and which it regarded as using the region’s institutions and security apparatus to subdue the CNT.<sup>15</sup> However, the CNT in Catalonia’s response to October was also unquestioningly one of rejecting the initiatives of the *Alianza Obrera* on the grounds of its animosity towards the organizations within it, which in the *faístas*’ view merely had designs on imposing a Marxist form of authoritarianism. The events of October put what had been previously two conflicting stances that had been expressed at CNT national plenums into revolutionary practice. Whereas the Asturian CNT followed through

with their belief in the necessity of joint action with the UGT in the context of the present moment – even if there were factions within the Asturian movement, in the form of a *faísta* minority, who disagreed with this stance<sup>16</sup> – the Catalan CNT's view that the rest of the left were as fascistic as the right manifested itself in their refusal to back the *alianza's* uprising.

That this was the case should not serve as the basis of a simplistic assumption that relations between the CNT and the UGT in Asturias had always been good, and were free of the conflicts that characterized CNT-UGT interactions in Catalonia. These difficulties went beyond the aforementioned pockets of anti-*Alianza faístas* based in the region. The CNT and the UGT's unions in Asturias were at loggerheads throughout the Republic, to a large extent based around the usual refusal of UGT unions to back CNT conflicts and *cenetistas* to accept the *jurados*. As Ángeles Barrio Alonso demonstrates, these disputes between *cenetistas* and *ugetistas* were deeply acrimonious.<sup>17</sup> What truly differentiated the Asturian and the Catalan CNT was that, unlike the *cenetistas* who dominated the movement in Catalonia, the majority of *cenetistas* in Asturias drew a distinction between differences in handling labour conflicts and the broader and much more urgent question of how to defend the working classes – and even bring about proletarian revolution – in response to an authoritarian right that was gaining rapid momentum. The *faístas* of Catalonia, however, did not view the UGT or the other actors of the left in such nuanced terms, either before October 1934, or, as this chapter will demonstrate, in the months afterwards. That this was the case makes it all the more intriguing that, as will be examined in this chapter, it would be the Catalan CNT which would set the CNT on the national level onto a path of proposing an alliance with the UGT in 1936.

Of equal importance to the Asturian heroism in the following months was the repression that followed. In Asturias, the Army of Africa's actions in re-captured areas was essentially that of occupying belligerents, with rebel workers being summarily executed – or at the least beaten and tortured – and cases of women being raped by soldiers. By the time the fighting was over 1100 Asturian workers were dead and another 2000 wounded.<sup>18</sup> Once the rebellion had been finally suppressed, a more comprehensive clean-up of the left across Spain began. Military justice was applied in Asturias. Elsewhere, the majority of the premises of the labour federations and political parties of the left and the left republicans were closed, as were their newspapers, though *Solidaridad Obrera* escaped a long-term ban, unlike the papers of the socialist movement. In total, around 40000 people across Spain were imprisoned for having played a role in the October insurrections.<sup>19</sup> Amongst

these were some of the most prominent figures of the *bienio reformista*, including Largo Caballero and Manuel Azaña. Others, such as Indalecio Prieto, managed to escape abroad. The psychological impact of the scale and intensity of the repressive response of the government on both the left and amongst the left Republicans cannot be underestimated. The imprisonment of activists in their tens of thousands by a government that was now controlled by those who were intent on undoing the most basic of reforms that so many had hoped for when the Republic had been founded provided proof, if any more was needed, that the right intended to destroy the ideals of 1931, crushing any opposition to these goals.

In the months following on from October 1934, amongst large swathes of the left and left Republicans, the sentiment developed that, based on both the heroics exhibited by the unified actions of workers in Asturias and the brutality displayed by the right, a fundamental change of approach to a common political foe at the other end of the political spectrum was necessary. Whether individuals took the lesson that unity could bring revolution, or that disunity in the face of the right would lead to extinction, the majority came to the conclusion that a united front against the right needed to be found. Whether manifesting themselves in the creation of the Popular Front in early 1936, the CNT agreeing not to explicitly implore workers to abstain in the February 1936 election or the cooperation of CNT and UGT unions in strike activity in 1936, the consequences of October 1934 on all of the left, as will be seen in the following two chapters, were enormous. However, and as will also be seen in this part of the thesis, the fractures that pre-dated October 1934 continued to exist, and the forms and goals of unity envisaged by the various organizations and the factions within them never truly came to be agreed upon.

In the short term, the events of October 1934 ushered in a period in which the left and Republican groups were largely silenced by the hard-line actions of the government of the right. And in the longer-term, the uprising and the reprisals that followed it would have an even more profound effect on how the organizations of the left interacted with the Republic and with one another. But until elections were called at the end of 1935, the left and the Republicans could do little more than consider their next moves for when they emerged from under the shadow of repression. CNT leaders and militants could also not do much more than reflect on the past actions of their movement and what future direction the organization should take. One of the most fundamental changes that would come about when the CNT emerged with the rest of the left from the restraints placed upon it by the right-wing government was a totally new stance on the UGT.

### The socialists after October 1934

After October 1934 it is difficult to speak of a coherent PSOE-UGT position on any matters – even the agreement to join the Popular Front was fraught with difficulty and infighting – due above all to the rapidly developing factional splits that beset the movement. These splits complicated not just the socialists' wider stance on the issues of the Republic, the right and revolution, but also on how the movement positioned itself with regard to the questions of unity and relations with the CNT.

The split within the socialist movement that began developing more openly in 1933 – but of course had existed in some form or another since much earlier – reached unprecedented levels after October 1934. Whilst the followers of Julián Besteiro continued to plough the same gradualist furrow, faithful to the tenets of Pablo Iglesias, it was the factions that lined up behind Indalecio Prieto and Francisco Largo Caballero that represented the two most important currents of opinion within the organization, but also increasingly conflicted with one another. For the *Prietistas* the revolutionary posturing prior to October and the event itself had been a tragic misadventure, the remedy for which was a reconciliation with the Republicans and a consolidation of a stable, democratic state. For the *Caballeristas*, however, October 1934 merely confirmed the analysis that had initially led them to adopt such a confrontational stance against the government after November 1933, namely that proletarian participation in bourgeois democracy was a dead-end that would only lead to a capture of power by fascism.<sup>20</sup>

As will be discussed, the different perspectives of these latter factions would lead to both presenting different formulations and emphases on unity and alliances. However, in late 1935 and early 1936, once socialist newspapers were in publication once more, both factions offered a reconciliatory hand to the CNT. Those more aligned to the *Prietista* position gravitated around *El Socialista*, whilst the *Caballeristas* set up, during the summer of 1935, their own paper, entitled *Claridad*. From its reopening, *El Socialista* attempted to forge a positive relationship with the CNT, with an eye firmly on the upcoming elections and with the goal of trying to dissuade the anarcho-syndicalists from running the same sort of pro-abstention campaign as the one they had promoted in the 1933 election. In December 1935, the paper appealed to the organization to recognize the importance of the upcoming election, whilst being at pains to emphasize that it was not taking issue with its anti-politicism.<sup>21</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*'s cordial response led *El Socialista* to express the

hope that a positive dialogue could be ‘the beginning of a brotherhood that the interests of the working class and the current circumstances require’.<sup>22</sup>

However, there was certainly recognition on the part of *El Socialista* that there were definite limits to the extent of cooperation between the CNT and the socialist movement. Even before the February election victory for the Popular Front, the paper periodically voiced its displeasure at the criticisms against the socialists made by *Solidaridad Obrera* – even if they were made against Largo Caballero – on the grounds that they jeopardized the united front of the left in the context of the election battle.<sup>23</sup> *El Socialista*’s support for unity was not tied to the idea of a revolutionary alliance or the fusion of different organizations – even though it was certainly in favour of the general premise of unity in the face of fascism – but was instead grounded much more in a support for the Popular Front.

From its founding in the summer of 1935 until early 1936, the *Caballerista* paper *Claridad* in its editorials argued that the question of unity between the CNT and the UGT on the national level was a more complicated one than the ongoing issue of unification between the UGT and the CGTU on the grounds that the theoretical gap between anarchists and socialists was far greater than that which divided the Marxist camp, especially in terms of the difference it implied with regard to political activities.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, some of the paper’s editorials at the end of 1935 seemed to be faintly overwhelmed by the possibilities of bringing about a unity of labour organizations in the short term, given the number of ideological and organizational divisions between them.<sup>25</sup>

However, from the beginning of 1936, the paper turned its attention slightly more to the question of the UGT’s relationship with the CNT. This had much to do with the bombastic rhetoric of Largo Caballero upon his release from jail. A component of Largo’s revolutionary rhetoric during 1936 was based upon the idea of left-wing organizational unity, and a sub-theme of this was his assertion that outright fusion of the CNT and the UGT was possible. Largo announced in a front-page interview in *Claridad* that he would not be satisfied until ‘all the revolutionary Spanish proletariat is grouped together in one union’. In his public pronouncements, Largo was extremely – and arguably disingenuously – positive about not just the possibilities of some form of agreement between the CNT and the UGT, but also his willingness to bring it about, saying that ‘the UGT would be willing at any moment to name a commission, not just to mutually aid one another in any joint actions that might arise, but also to study immediately the grounds for a fusion’ of the CNT and the UGT. He also remarked that this fusion would be ‘as full and cordial as has been

that between the UGT and the CGTU'.<sup>26</sup> This latter assertion would have set alarm bells ringing in the ears of any *cenetista*, carrying the implication, intentionally or not, that the CNT would merely be absorbed into the UGT.

The public courting of the CNT on the national level embarked upon by Largo needs to be placed into the context of his wider stance of 1936, which was one of making speeches that declared the imminence of proletarian revolution, whilst at the same time making virtually no preparations in this regard. Espousing a discourse of unity between the CNT and UGT had similar mobilizing and support-winning functions as did his projection of a revolutionary message, not least because it implied that it would give the working classes the necessary collective strength to carry out revolution. And like his talk of proletarian revolution, it did not need to be backed by any actions. There is scant evidence that Largo had any intention of entering into a formal dialogue with CNT representatives, let alone any specific ideas of his own – other than a fanciful idea of the CNT dissolving into the UGT – on the matter of CNT-UGT unity.<sup>27</sup>

However, whilst it is clear that Largo's public pro-unity stance over the CNT was part of his wider rhetoric of revolution, and ultimately without substance, it is also important to recognize that CNT-UGT relations did not constitute a central plank of the *Caballeristas'* platform, rhetorical or otherwise, during 1936. As Helen Graham argues, Largo's pursuit of a socialist convergence with the communists was a tactic deployed against the *Prietista* sectors of the socialist movement.<sup>28</sup> Largo's rhetoric on unity with the CNT must also be seen as a part of this courting of the Marxist left. However, the bulk of Largo's efforts centred around mobilizing those already within the socialist camp, or incorporating elements from outside it who would back his position, hence his backing of the fusion of the UGT with the CGTU and his initial support for the fusion of the socialist and communist youth movements. The question of the CNT's relationship with the UGT could only have ever had a very limited role in this strategy. Whilst speaking in favour of a single labour federation was a crowd-pleasing message, it did little towards helping bringing the balance of forces within the socialist movement in his favour. Consequently, whilst Largo did present himself as being in favour of a fusion of the CNT and the UGT at the national level, this was certainly not a major component of his platform during the months prior to the Civil War.

This lack of an interest specifically in the CNT with regards to the contrasting positions on unity within the socialist movement was matched by a relative lack of consideration of the



anarcho-syndicalist labour federation within the UGT's decision-making processes after October 1934. In December 1935 the National Committee of the UGT discussed its participation in the Popular Front electoral alliance. At one point the discussion moved towards the matter of whether or not the CNT and the *treintista* organizations should be invited to participate in the Popular Front. Whilst some members of the Committee were in favour of at least making a gesture towards the CNT, others, such as Ramón Lamóneda and Luis Viesca, were deeply hostile to the idea of the CNT being included in any form of joint action with the UGT, principally motivated by what they viewed as the CNT's 'treachery' of the October movement.<sup>29</sup>

Overall, then, the socialist movement had no formal position on the CNT to speak of after October 1934, with the question of relations between its labour federation and the anarcho-syndicalists playing a fringe part in discussions within the movement. Nevertheless, a general sentiment towards unity was publicly expressed by the movement, and in the case of the *Caballeristas*, this extended to calling for alliances and even fusion of worker organizations, including the CNT, for the purposes of revolution. This espousal of unity was equally present at this time amongst the dissident communists and the Soviet communist parties.<sup>30</sup> In combination with the enthusiasm that developed for the Popular Front, the overall result was that from late 1935 onwards, virtually all of the left was promoting the idea of pan-left alliances and unity, whether to preserve the Republic, fight fascism or bring about proletarian revolution.

#### The CNT after October 1934

Although the CNT was badly damaged by the government onslaught against the left that occurred from October 1934, it was still able to publish some newspapers, including *Solidaridad Obrera*. It was also possible for the organization to hold plenums over late 1934 and 1935. For *cenetistas*, the most immediate priority was to keep the organization functioning in some form. However, it would have been impossible for no comment to have been passed on the events of October. This was equally the case with regard to the days of the uprisings, as well as over the course of 1935, when the left in both Spain and abroad busied itself with analysing the uprising.

The initial analysis of October 1934 that was carried out in the pages of *Solidaridad Obrera* certainly did not view the insurrections, neither in Catalonia, Asturias, nor anywhere else, as particularly heroic, and saw them as having not been fought for a

legitimate cause. In the immediate aftermath of the events – and indeed whilst workers in Asturias were still fighting the army – the stance taken in *Solidaridad Obrera* was that the loss of life was a tragedy, but that the CNT had made the right decision not to participate in the uprising. This initial analysis was unsurprisingly carried out overwhelmingly with regards to Catalonia; in October full information about events in Asturias and their ramifications were very difficult to obtain from elsewhere in the country.<sup>31</sup> On 10<sup>th</sup> October an editorial on the front page of *Solidaridad Obrera* explained that ‘faced with a conflict that was not initiated by the CNT, and without it having common objectives with our own, it was logical’ that the CNT did not back the revolutionary movement in Catalonia.<sup>32</sup>

Elsewhere in its immediate post-insurrection coverage, the paper voiced the argument that the uprising had failed because ‘without the participation of all the people, undertakings of such magnitude are impossible’.<sup>33</sup> This observation was undoubtedly made to imply that it was only the CNT who had the sufficient popular backing to carry out such an insurrection. Another article on 14<sup>th</sup> October argued that

the failed movement has served to show the lack of capability of those who were leading it. The boastfulness, conceit, lack of revolutionary technique and the absolute ignorance of the psychology of the people made it so that what could have been a triumph turned into a defeat.<sup>34</sup>

From October onwards, sectors of the Marxist left, both from Spain and other countries, publicly attacked the CNT for not having thrown its full organizational weight behind the various insurrectionary initiatives. The French communists in particular took up the cause of attacking the CNT and the FAI over their stance in October. Reporting on events in Spain, *L’Humanité* on 10<sup>th</sup> October informed readers of the ‘treachery of the anarchist leaders’.<sup>35</sup> This highly damaging – and in some respects distorted – depiction of their role was put forward in subsequent months, in tandem with the notion that ordinary workers in the CNT had in many cases happily united with socialists and communists during the movement.<sup>36</sup> Spanish socialists who fled to France were also publicly quoted in relation to the CNT’s non-participation in events outside of Asturias. Whilst in some cases, such as that of Indalecio Prieto, it is arguable that their words were presented as being more critical of the anarcho-syndicalists than they may have been to fit in with the paper’s overall interpretation of events,<sup>37</sup> others were more unequivocal, such as Margarita Nelken, who opined that ‘the anarchist leaders have always betrayed the workers’ movement’ and suggested that they were in alliance with Alejandro Lerroux.<sup>38</sup> In an August 1935 report to

the AIT, the CNT National Committee wrote that it had expended much of its efforts after October 1934 fighting a propaganda battle against the ‘defamatory campaign by the communists and socialists’.<sup>39</sup>

The *faísta* Diego Abad de Santillán’s newly launched *Tiempos Nuevos* took on the mantle of defending the CNT and the organization’s anti-alliance position. A key journalist and intellectual in the Argentinean anarcho-syndicalist movement, Abad de Santillán had only entered Spain in 1933, but quickly rose to prominence within the FAI.<sup>40</sup> The stance of Abad de Santillán and other key sectors in the CNT illustrates that the starting point for the turn towards endorsing a pro-alliance line between the CNT and the UGT that would occur in early 1936 was not the events of Asturias in October 1934. Far from viewing the rebellion in Asturias as a testament to the power of unity of action, Abad de Santillán depicted the events in the region as having been characterized by socialist and communist betrayal of the movement.<sup>41</sup> He conjectured that had the workers in Asturias successfully fended off the authorities, the socialists and communists, due to the authoritarian nature of Marxism, would have most likely turned their attentions towards destroying the anarchist strongholds of La Felguera and Gijón.<sup>42</sup> He also argued that Asturias was one of the few regions where libertarianism was the minority force amongst workers, and as such *cenetistas* and *faístas* were forced to cooperate with socialists and communists, whereas elsewhere in Spain this would not be the case.<sup>43</sup> Overall, therefore, the *faísta* current of the CNT took the view that the events of October 1934 were not merely an invalid argument for pro-unity positions, but actively demonstrated the treachery of the Marxist left and thus the inadvisability of any cooperation with it whatsoever. This interpretation of October 1934 was echoed in the CNT newspaper *Revolución Social*, which began to be published in Madrid in late 1934.<sup>44</sup>

*Solidaridad Obrera* for its part reprinted some of the articles on Asturias from *Tiempos Nuevos*,<sup>45</sup> as well as publishing articles by individual CNT unions or militants in which they drew attention to ‘low manoeuvres of the supporters of the false *Alianza Obrera* and of the much lauded *frente único*’<sup>46</sup> in their field of union activity, or argued more generally that the CNT could not ally with those ‘who have not abandoned their work tools’, which was to say those connected with political organizations.<sup>47</sup> At root, then, the rebuttal of alliances expressed in late 1935 was the same as it had been in the years leading up to October 1934. As 1935 drew to a close and the possibility of an election became increasingly likely, this opposition to the alliance and unity movements being promoted by the rest of the left was modified to the effect that these sectors were promoting alliance for

their self-serving political ends of gaining electoral support. In an article on 28<sup>th</sup> December, the paper noted the proliferation of alliance initiatives – from both left and right – arguing that they were a product of the upcoming election and that all were essentially symptomatic of the same ill, namely that of politicians manoeuvring to further themselves.<sup>48</sup>

The positions adopted in *Solidaridad Obrera* and *Tiempos Nuevos* were matched by an equally strong suspicion of unity initiatives amongst both the National Committee and the Catalan Regional Committee of the CNT. In June 1935 the Regional Committee produced a report for an AIT congress, at which one of the items for discussion was the position to be taken on ‘united fronts’. The committee wrote that

we consider the *frente único* to be an incongruity that brings terrible results. The *frente único* is always proposed by political sectors in opposition to the ruling power, but the desire for this front disappears when the political parties proposing it come to enjoy office and impunity that the power of being in charge provides. Reason suggests to us to reject this course of action because it is a chain that links all, from the Muscovite communists and the Largo Caballero and Prieto-style socialists, who have committed so many betrayals of the revolutionary and anarchist cause, to the most blatant fascists and the enemies of liberty.<sup>49</sup>

A similar position was expressed by the National Committee in its own report to the same AIT congress, reasoning that ‘expecting that we are going to fight with enthusiasm for a cause outside of our libertarian convictions, or that the authoritarians [i.e. Marxists] would collaborate towards our goals, is a fantasy’.<sup>50</sup>

*Faístas* outside of Catalonia remained similarly defiant in their stances on alliances. In Madrid, where the anarchist groups of which the FAI was composed were beset by factional infighting, one of the key sources of division was the question of alliances, with some continuing to maintain a staunchly anti-socialist position. In June 1935 the anti-alliance faction sent out a circular to the anarchist groups of the city in which they stated that ‘we do not believe in the possibility of realizing [an alliance] unless we agree to subordinate ourselves to the manoeuvres of the eternal traitors of the proletariat’.<sup>51</sup> In May 1935 the FAI’s Regional Committee for the Paris region wrote to the CNT National Committee and the FAI Peninsular Committee to warn them of cases of *cenetistas* who had fled Spain attending public meetings at which other exiled socialists and communists spoke. Such was their vigilance that even the presence of two *cenetistas* at a funeral that was also attended by Indalecio Prieto was deemed worthy of reporting.<sup>52</sup>

The basic stance of defiance over the CNT's actions in October and a position of continued hostility to alliances also had a decisive influence over the CNT's formal decision-making processes during 1935. In November 1934 a plenum was held, at which only a handful of regions were present due to the effects of repression on the organization's ability to operate. Here, the emphasis was almost exclusively on attempting to re-erect previous organizational structures across Spain and to attempt to allow CNT papers to return to publication.<sup>53</sup> But in June 1935 another national plenum was held, at which all regions except the Canary Islands attended. At this meeting the key issues to the CNT at this juncture, namely alliances, healing the factional split with the *treintistas* and the calling for an amnesty for social prisoners were addressed, albeit in limited form. Owing to the ongoing crackdown against labour unions, the plenum was called with a fairly limited mandate, as the normal process of consultation of the CNT's unions was impossible in the current political climate. Accordingly, the plenum decided instead to release a manifesto in which the above issues were mentioned, but in which it was made clear that positions on them would only be formulated with the proper consultation of the CNT's unions. On the matter of alliances, the tone struck was one that expressed scepticism over the intentions of the rest of the left in proposing alliances, but which also conceded that sectors of the CNT's grassroots may have been in favour of a more pro-unity position. The manifesto stated:

On the part of those who shout from the rooftops for alliances, they are not fully aware of their purposes, and neither do they point out the fundamental motives that exist for alliances not being established between disparate ideological sectors. We sincerely believe that if the next elections were not close, neither the socialists nor Republicans, and much less the left-Republicans would be interested in speaking about alliances or united fronts. Despite being exhorted by some sectors to sign up to such campaigns, we have not paid heed to such requests out of respect for our ideas and above all because the bulk of the confederal organization in Spain, except for the Asturian region before October, declared itself, in principle, against any alliance. It is the *sindicatos* who will have to decide the path to follow.<sup>54</sup>

The manifesto illustrates, then, that even the events of October 1934 had not fundamentally altered the attitude, grounded in the movement's anti-political ideas, of the most important leadership sectors within the CNT to the idea of alliance, even if there were certainly those, both within the grassroots and upper cadres of the organization, who had come to favour a change of stance. The attitude adopted in this manifesto is all the more significant given that, as will be discussed, just six months later a regional congress of unions in Catalonia proclaimed an openness towards a revolutionary alliance with the UGT.

The remobilization of the CNT from 1935 and the Popular Front election

Following the lifting of legal constraints towards the end of 1935, the CNT's unions began to reform and remobilize, as did those of the UGT. This process was accelerated by the election result of 1936 as it brought with it a belief that the unions would once again have the upper hand over employers. According to the calculations made at the organization's congress in Zaragoza, held in May 1936, the CNT had at that moment 559000 members.<sup>55</sup> If it is fairly clear that between the summer of 1931 and October 1934 the CNT as a national actor exhibited an avowed intention to sweep away the Republic with libertarian communism, and moreover that various elements of the organization attempted insurrections and general strikes during those years, the prevailing outlook of the movement in 1936 and until the start of the war is more difficult to gauge. The more established view of the CNT's stance in the pre-war period is perhaps best summarized by Gerald Brenan's assertion that the organization sought to keep up 'the revolutionary tempo in the country by lightning strikes',<sup>56</sup> a position that has recently been challenged to varying degrees.<sup>57</sup> These newer analyses point out that the movement's leaders were interested first and foremost on consolidating the organization, with Jordi Getman-Eraso going as far as to argue that 'the CNT persisted in its determination to defend the political *status quo* right up to the start of the Civil War'.<sup>58</sup> Whether anarcho-syndicalist militants were driven by a wish to defend the Republic specifically or were simply biding their time until the organization and the circumstances were right to attempt libertarian communism, it is clear that in early 1936 a key priority, especially in Catalonia, was a reunification with the *treintistas*.<sup>59</sup> And as the year progressed and political and social tensions mounted, emphasis in the CNT press moved increasingly away from general revolutionary rhetoric towards calling for preparedness for a fascist attack.<sup>60</sup>

Although the CNT's leading militants would not have wished to admit it, the February 1936 election contest was the event that really captured the public's imagination and was the main focal point of the ever-more open confrontation between the increasingly polarized left and right.<sup>61</sup> Towards the end of 1935, moves were made, spearheaded by Manuel Azaña, to form an electoral alliance between Republicans and the rest of the left. The *Prietista* wing of the socialist party was the most enthusiastically in favour of joining this alliance, and managed to steer the party into it. At the same time, the Communist Party had turned towards a pro-Popular Front direction. The Popular Front's electoral platform was a fairly narrow one of promising amnesty for those arrested during the right's tenure in power and a promise to put back in place the reforms carried out by the Republican-

socialist government and since repealed by the right.<sup>62</sup> The right coalesced around its own electoral bloc, the *Frente Nacional*. Perhaps worryingly, from the point of view of some *cenetistas*, the Popular Front, in its electoral campaign, inspired a huge amount of interest on the part of the working classes. Crowds in their tens of thousands attended Popular Front rallies across the country, and the Republican and left-wing press spoke of little else, when they were not attacking the right.

The phenomenon of the Popular Front and the adherence of the vast majority of the rest of the left to it presented a problem for the more radical factions that continued to be at the helm of the CNT. Whilst more moderate CNT regions and the *treintistas* were able to pragmatically accept the idea of getting behind the Popular Front, for the radicals the Popular Front was a preoccupation because it was causing workers to place their hopes in political parties.<sup>63</sup> However, attacking the Popular Front outright would have been suicidal for the CNT. The battle with the right seemed so finely balanced that an attack on it by the CNT would have been presented by the rest of the left as tantamount to backing fascism. In the event, the CNT decided at a national plenum held in January 1936 not to sabotage the electoral campaign of the Popular Front coalition by agitating for workers to abstain in their propaganda, as they had done during the 1933 election.<sup>64</sup> Such restraint would have been unthinkable in previous years, and was effectively an acknowledgement that the previous stance of being as unyieldingly hostile to the left as well as the right was unworkable in the present climate.

On 16<sup>th</sup> February 1936, elections were held, at which the Popular Front coalition swept to victory in terms of the number of seats it gained, based on a relatively narrow victory in terms of votes cast. A turnout of seventy-one percent illustrates the extent to which the battle of left and right gripped the country.<sup>65</sup> The socialists were once more the biggest single party in the Cortes, as they had been in 1931. However, as a result of the *Caballeristas*, the PSOE did not participate this time in government.<sup>66</sup> Instead, from outside of it, the *Caballeristas* continued to talk the rhetoric of proletarian revolution.<sup>67</sup> The socialist leadership was so badly factionalized by this point that it is impossible to speak of a coherent socialist stance regarding its support or opposition to the Republic. The business of government was left to representatives of Republican parties, which simply did not have the same mass backing as did the socialists.

Amongst much of the right, the electoral defeat effectively marked the end of any final attempts to participate in the Republic and a turn towards advocating an outright overthrow

of the system by force. Even before the election result, elements within the military were planning a response to a Popular Front victory, whilst Gil Robles solicited a military intervention after the election.<sup>68</sup> The ranks of the Falange, youth organizations and paramilitaries swelled, and the battle between militants of the right and those of the left commenced in the street. Political assassinations became increasingly prevalent from March onwards, with an estimated 269 political killings taking place between then and July.<sup>69</sup>

This political instability was equally matched by the social instability that was unleashed upon the election victory of the Popular Front, in the form of land occupations in the countryside and strikes both there and in cities. There was understandably the expectation amongst the grassroots of the labour movement that the advantages gained – or in the case of rural reform, had been promised – should now be immediately be given back. However, with faith in the ability of the Republic to provide and safeguard these gains badly eroded, workers and peasants took the initiative instead at the grassroots level. In the countryside, the FNTT began to organize land occupations.<sup>70</sup> In the cities, CNT and UGT unions alike – the latter acting much more according to their own instincts in these months rather than according to a line of discipline laid down by the socialist leadership – made immediate demands and resorted to strikes to achieve them, even if, in the case of CNT strongholds, this propensity for strikes was in fact less strong than it had been in the first months of the Republic's lifetime. As will be seen, in some instances these strikes were a product of joint action between CNT and UGT unions.

#### The genesis of a new CNT position on the UGT

If even in late 1935 *Solidaridad Obrera* was presenting a position of CNT hostility to any alliances with other organizations on the left, by the end of January 1936 it was heralding the prospect of a revolutionary, national CNT-UGT alliance. It is clear that the decisive change to turn the CNT as a national actor around from being flatly opposed to other organizations of the left to publicly proposing an alliance with the UGT emanated from Catalonia, the region that had been most consistently against such ideas throughout the Republic, including in 1935. The way in which the militants of Catalonia achieved this was through their own formulation of an alliance initiative with the UGT at a regional congress, combined with the actions of the Regional Committee's representatives at a national plenum and the propaganda efforts of leading CNT militants from the region and *Solidaridad Obrera* to promote the idea.



The key turning point towards a pro-alliance position was the CNT's regional congress, held at the end of January 1936. The handling of the question of relations with the UGT was, like much of the rest of the congress, marked by eyebrow-raising procedural irregularities. The congress had been convoked very quickly, meaning many CNT organisms did not have time to hold assemblies of their members to agree positions on the items on the agenda. In other cases, some unions were not able to attend at all as they were still shut. Some delegates at the congress complained about this. The conformity of the congress to CNT procedures was cast even further into doubt by the Regional Committee's insistence that delegates were not allowed to reveal what procedures of consultation had been undertaken by the organizations they were representing in formulating the positions they expressed at the congress.<sup>71</sup>

It was on this basis that the question of the possibility of alliances with other organizations was handled.<sup>72</sup> Some delegates, in particular the purist anarchist *faístas*, questioned the validity of the issue of alliances being discussed in this forum, arguing that it was only a national congress that could decide such issues, a concern that was also voiced by the representative of the National Committee at the congress.<sup>73</sup> This was precisely the stance the Catalan representatives had taken at the national plenums in 1934. Now, however, the Catalan region saw fit to decide a national question at a regional congress.

Aside from the position of declaring the discussion invalid, three basic other positions on the question of alliance were revealed when each delegate voiced an opinion on the matter.<sup>74</sup> The simplest position, expressed by a significant minority of the delegates, was that there should be no form of pact or alliance with any other organizations on the left, as this would represent a negation of the CNT's principles and the final goal of libertarian communism.<sup>75</sup> This position was grounded in the same basic premise as the hitherto prevailing anti-alliance position of 1933 onwards, though stripped of the explicit anti-socialist sentiment that had characterized it prior to October 1934. At the other end of the spectrum, a sector of delegates exhibited not just a willingness for the CNT and the UGT to enter into a pact with one another, but also for a CNT-UGT alliance to be formulated through a process of negotiation. This position was thus fairly similar to that which the Asturian CNT had defended at the national plenums of 1934. The final main body of opinion was that the CNT should enter into some form of revolutionary alliance with the UGT, but that any move towards alliances should be governed by some strict conditions so as to ensure the CNT's objectives and principles were not compromised. Many also

stipulated that the pact could not bring about 'authoritarian ends' or be 'with politicians'. For this current of opinion, any alliance with the UGT would have to bring the socialist labour federation into line with the anti-political principles of the CNT.<sup>76</sup>

What is highly revealing about this part of the discussion is that the Barcelona construction union gave a much fuller and more detailed position than all other delegations, with the exception of the Badalona manufacturing and textiles union. The Barcelona construction union was a stronghold of the radical tendency that was centred around Juan García Oliver and the *Nosotros* group. *Nosotros* (formerly *Los Solidarios*) was perhaps the most influential – and infamous – of the *grupos de afinidad*, who earlier in the Republic had been at the vanguard of attempts to organize insurrections against the Republic. Its leading figures, such as García Oliver and Buenaventura Durruti, were unskilled workers, and had often been drawn to Barcelona on the basis of it being the epicentre of proletarian revolutionary activity.<sup>77</sup> Their comprehensive plans for relations with the UGT in the context of other delegates offering only vague ideas hint strongly that the García Oliver faction was using the congress to impose a newly formulated position on the question of CNT-UGT relations, a perspective taken by Felipe Alaiz in his complaint to Federica Montseny in a February 1936 letter of the congress being 'captured by the new orientations of [García] Oliver and company'.<sup>78</sup> Alaiz and Montseny belonged to what is often considered a 'purist' current of anarchism, for which the CNT's adherence to anarchist theory was paramount. What set them apart from the militants of *Nosotros* was that, as middle-class intellectuals, they were not involved in the unskilled unions that formed the backbone of the Catalan CNT. The two sides of the debate over relations with the UGT in Catalonia were represented by these two radical currents. While the purists viewed any willingness to ally with the UGT as compromising anarchist theory, García Oliver and his followers would put forward a formula, via the construction union, that would attempt to make an alliance proposal with the UGT that would not negate their anti-political convictions.

The construction union argued that the current climate had compelled the socialists to 'undertake a revolutionary line if they did not wish to lose control of their members', though this was not to say the socialists were at this point genuine revolutionaries. To the contrary, they were exhibiting 'a double personality' by talking the rhetoric of revolution whilst also 'signing a pact with the bourgeois left'. The CNT needed to 'pose them the dilemma: either with the bourgeoisie or with the people'. This would be done through proposing a revolutionary pact with the UGT. Part of this pact would require all workers to

join the CNT or the UGT to facilitate their collective ability to bring this revolution about, an idea that would subsequently be promoted by García Oliver and his allies.<sup>79</sup>

After each delegate had outlined their opinions, a team was named to create a draft resolution on the question of relations with the UGT. The Barcelona construction union was part of the team. The resolution that was drafted was clearly influenced by the ideas that the construction union had brought to the congress, with the alliance proposal that they presented also seeking to satisfy the stipulations of those who opposed the idea of the CNT entering into an alliance with ‘authoritarians’ or ‘politicians’. The resolution stipulated that the UGT recognized that a revolutionary destruction of the current regime was the only viable option for the Spanish proletariat, and that as a consequence it would need to break all ‘political and parliamentary collaboration with the bourgeoisie’. The resolution also empowered the Regional Committee to request that an alliance proposal with the UGT be discussed at the next national congress. The resolution ended with the demand that all autonomous unions join either the CNT or the UGT.<sup>80</sup>

At the same time as the unions of Catalonia were agreeing upon a formula for a revolutionary alliance of the labour federations, the representatives of the regional committees of the CNT and the National Committee were meeting in Madrid to discuss the orientation of the organization in the present moment. There were two key issues which they discussed that would have a direct bearing on the matter of the CNT’s relationship with the UGT: the issue of the CNT’s stance on the upcoming election, and the matter of the agenda for an upcoming national congress. With regard to the second of these, all regions were agreed on the need to discuss the issue of alliances at a national congress, partly because some had strong views on the matter, and partly because all were agreed that public disagreements on the matter had been going on for too long and that a definitive solution to the matter was required.<sup>81</sup>

However, it was through the discussion of the CNT’s stance on the upcoming election that the Catalan CNT put forwards its ideas for a revolutionary CNT-UGT alliance. Unsurprisingly the discussion of the election hinged around whether or not the CNT should formally support the Popular Front, or indeed whether it should make a concerted effort to promote abstention, as it had done in the 1933 election. It was in discussing this element of the CNT’s stance on the election that the Catalan delegate informed the plenum of the agreement reached on alliances at the regional congress. The proposal was put forward to the plenum in the form of arguing that the CNT should promote such an alliance, whilst at

the same time running, if not an outright pro-abstention campaign, then at least one that denounced the validity of political participation and process.<sup>82</sup>

In other words, Catalonia was proposing that the CNT should offer a revolutionary alliance to the UGT that rejected any cooperation with political organizations or the Republic's political process, and that all unaffiliated workers should join the CNT or the UGT as part of this, whilst at the same time campaigning against worker participation in the upcoming election. The revolutionary alliance was being used, in effect, as an alternative to supporting the Popular Front. The idea was largely rejected by other delegates. Nevertheless, the Catalan delegate's contribution to the discussion certainly indicates that a CNT-UGT revolutionary, anti-political alliance was used by a faction of the Catalan leaders to compete against the Popular Front coalition.

At the end of the Catalan regional congress, a selection of the region's most famous militants spoke about the resolution on revolutionary alliance with the UGT. The majority of the keynote speakers, such as Juan García Oliver, Buenaventura Durruti and Manuel Pérez had not participated in the congress as delegates, but it is difficult to escape the conclusion that it was them, rather than the congress delegates, who had played the decisive role in creating the new position on the UGT. Their speeches reveal a mentality of believing that it was the Catalan region that determined the CNT's overall relationship with the UGT, with the agreement on alliances created at the regional congress being treated virtually as a *fait accompli*. All the speakers promoted not just the premise of an alliance with the UGT under which the UGT would abandon political activities, but also promoted the related idea of all workers joining the CNT or the UGT. In the words of Juan Doménech, those who did not do this would be 'traitors to the revolution'. Some speakers also directly addressed UGT members in telling them that their organization could no longer endorse the Republic and the support of it by socialist politicians, and instead needed to unite with the CNT to bring about revolution.<sup>83</sup>

*Solidaridad Obrera's* first presentation of the congress agreement on alliances came in the form of a publication on its front page of the resolution on 28<sup>th</sup> January. The resolution was billed by the headline as 'an agreement of historical transcendence'.<sup>84</sup> The front page of the paper on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1936 gave further attention to the pact proposal, as well as the congress's position in favour on the upcoming election, which was effectively an explicit rejection of political methods that stopped just short of instructing workers not to vote. The headline highlighted that the congress had simultaneously approved a rejection of the

political process, whilst at the same time stating that: 'The CNT proposes solutions: A CNT-UGT revolutionary pact, which is to say a coincidence in an insurreccional line [and] the abandonment of all political activity'. What is also worth noting about the editorial's presentation of the alliance agreement was that it spoke of it as though it were something that would now be carried forward on a national level, which is to say it gave the impression that the Catalan regional congress's agreement on the matter meant that it would automatically become a national-level goal for the CNT.<sup>85</sup>

In the weeks following on from the regional congress, both *Solidaridad Obrera* and the region's leading militants continued to promote the CNT-UGT alliance from the congress. It is crucial to stress, however, that they were very specific in terms of how they promoted the alliance, insisting that it was a national-level alliance, with exclusively revolutionary ends, and that it amounted to a rejection of political means and also required the entry of all workers into either the CNT or the UGT. On 31<sup>st</sup> January 1936, for example, the headline of the front page of *Solidaridad Obrera* proclaimed: 'Worker! Your place is in the union! The end of slavery depends on the alliance without politics of the CNT and the UGT'.<sup>86</sup> On 1<sup>st</sup> February, its front page argued that all the problems of exploitation experienced by the working classes would continue regardless of which party was in power, but that 'all these problems will disappear if workers put their strength behind the unions'.<sup>87</sup> The alliance proposal thus became tied up in attempts to convince workers that the CNT's anti-political stance was the correct one by the alliance and the revolution it would bring being presented as the final outcome of workers abandoning political parties for unions. Meanwhile, the paper also emphasized through its editorials the need for all workers and union entities to be within the CNT or the UGT, with groups that remained outside the two labour federations being branded 'parasitic forces in the workers' movement'.<sup>88</sup>

At the same time as *Solidaridad Obrera* endorsed a CNT-UGT alliance along these aforementioned lines, the CNT's most influential militants from Catalonia also spread the same message at CNT propaganda meetings. For example, speaking in Santander in February, Juan Doménech promoted alliance between the CNT and the UGT, 'but to carry out a revolution that liberates us all'. Doménech told his audience that the previous years had illustrated that neither the CNT nor the UGT alone could bring about revolution individually, and that the way forward was for the two organizations to expand through all workers joining one or the other according to their natural ideological affiliations, before then entering into the pact as outlined by the Catalan region's congress and carrying out a

revolution that would not prejudice the ideological principles of either labour federation.<sup>89</sup> It would appear that, based at least in part around the lead taken by militants in Catalonia, *cenetistas* from other regions also started to promote the same line of argument. In a meeting in Madrid in February, for example, a local militant spoke of ‘the sincerity of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, which not fearing the responsibility of the crossroads of the current moment, has not hesitated for an instant to throw a fraternal line out to our brothers of the UGT’, a claim based on the alliance offer made at the Catalan regional congress, which the militant claimed would be the basis of the alliance of the two labour federations.<sup>90</sup>

Following on from the January 1936 regional congress in Catalonia, less than three months after the Popular Front’s electoral victory, came a CNT national congress, held in Zaragoza at the beginning of May 1936. It was here that the formula for CNT-UGT revolutionary alliance that had been created in Catalonia at the start of the year would become the CNT’s official, national position on the UGT.

Part of the team of delegates who had drawn up the draft proposal that was a basis for discussing CNT-UGT relations at the congress were attached to the same Catalan unions whose delegates at the January 1936 regional congress had been involved in formulating the resolution on alliance with the UGT at that congress. The draft resolution that was drawn up was critical of the UGT’s past actions, especially with regard to its role during the Republic. Not only was the UGT held responsible for the divisions amongst the working classes in the draft resolution’s preamble, it was also argued that had this division not existed the Spanish working classes would have inevitably committed themselves to revolution. The preamble concluded that the lessons of the preceding years demonstrated ‘the inevitable necessity of unifying the Unión General de Trabajadores and the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo in revolutionary action’.<sup>91</sup>

Having established that an alliance of some form with the UGT was necessary to bring about revolution, the draft resolution then outlined how alliance with the UGT would be brought about and what its goals were. It insisted that the revolution that the alliance would bring about would ‘completely destroy the social and political regime that regulates the life of the country’. However, the draft resolution contained no detail as to precisely how the alliance would bring revolution about, nor how an alliance would be structured and organized. More significant than this, however, was the first point of the draft resolution, which generated a significant amount of debate at the congress. This point stated that

the UGT, on signing the revolutionary alliance pact, will explicitly recognize the failure of the system of political and parliamentary collaboration. As a logical consequence of this recognition, it will cease to offer any type of political and parliamentary collaboration to the ruling regime.<sup>92</sup>

In the key respect that this revolutionary CNT-UGT alliance would be an anti-political one, the alliance proposal formulated at this congress would fundamentally follow that which had been agreed upon at the Catalan regional congress.<sup>93</sup>

The discussions of the pact led to the expression of broadly the same three positions on the matter as those that had emerged at the Catalan regional congress, with the most purist anarchist delegates arguing that the proposal would compromise the CNT's libertarian principles,<sup>94</sup> the delegates from Asturias most forcefully supporting the idea of alliance but rejecting the notion that the proposal placed demands on the UGT to turn its back on political participation, and other delegates supporting the draft resolution in its original form.<sup>95</sup> On the surface, therefore, three seemingly irreconcilable positions regarding revolutionary alliance with the UGT were expressed. However, it would have been virtually impossible for the congress to have concluded without a firm position on alliance being taken that presented the CNT's credentials as a champion of unity. As several delegates pointed out, the general atmosphere amongst workers was for there to be greater unity between the CNT and the UGT, and within the Confederation the majority were in favour of some form of alliance proposal being created. Unsurprisingly, therefore, a final stance regarding alliance with the UGT was reached relatively quickly, in spite of the seeming difference of positions.

It was Juan García Oliver, representing the Barcelona manufacturing and textile union, who proposed the amendment to the draft resolution on *Alianza Revolucionaria* that succeeded in reconciling the different positions amongst the majority who were in favour of some form of alliance proposal being made.<sup>96</sup> Whilst the first article of the draft resolution insisted that the UGT formally renounce its recourse to political methods, García Oliver proposed the insertion of an additional article that would apparently place the overall process of negotiation of an alliance between the two labour federations onto a more consensual footing. The additional article clarified that the preceding points of it were 'provisional' and that the UGT at its next congress could draw up its own proposals for an alliance with the CNT. The addition of this point managed to satisfy both those who demanded that alliance with the UGT be linked to the UGT turning its back on any

involvement in the political sphere and taking to the street to bring about change and those who did not wish to deter the UGT from an alliance that could bring about revolution, or give them a pretext to accuse the CNT of derailing unity initiatives. Essentially the additional article reframed the whole of the rest of the resolution so that, whilst it continued to demand that the UGT rectify its erroneous participation in politics, the whole basis for alliance was in fact open to negotiation. Consequently it is difficult not to see the resolution ending up as a fudge that was designed to achieve consensus but in the process created a somewhat confused and contradictory end result.<sup>97</sup> With the approval of this proposed amendment, discussion of the *Alianza Revolucionaria* at the Zaragoza congress quickly came to a close, with the resolution being approved.<sup>98</sup> The proposal marked a watershed moment in the history of the CNT, and a particularly crucial turning point in terms of its official stance on the UGT during the Second Republic. Never before had the CNT on the national level formulated an offer of alliance of this nature to the UGT. The proposal set a precedent that would be referred back to by the CNT during the Civil War as its apparent blueprint for proposing a wartime alliance with the UGT.<sup>99</sup>

The outcome of the Zaragoza congress was heralded in the CNT press as a groundbreaking initiative that would lead the Spanish proletariat towards revolution. *Solidaridad Obrera* took the lead of the alliance resolution made at Zaragoza in May and promoted the notion of CNT-UGT alliance. On its front page on 10<sup>th</sup> May, the headline thundered: 'Not one minute more! The CNT and the UGT can, and must, end with the fascists and with the danger of a possible installation of fascism in Spain. We cannot wait another minute!'.<sup>100</sup> On 13<sup>th</sup> May, an editorial in the paper declared that the *Alianza Revolucionaria* 'has resolved a problem', arguing that the formula for alliance drawn up at the congress represented a definitive solution to a long-unresolved question. As in January, the defining aspect of this formula for alliance was it having a purely revolutionary goal and represented workers achieving revolution without political leaders.<sup>101</sup> As the paper emphasized later in May, '*Alianza Revolucionaria*, yes; but outside the fluctuations and flirtations of political parties and without the interference of *jefes* and leaders'.<sup>102</sup>

There are some important aspects of the CNT's historically unprecedented change of stance over the UGT that are worth commenting on here. Firstly, it is important to stress that the final outcome was a proposal that, by virtue of its preamble that criticized the most basic tenets of socialist principle, namely a participation in political systems and political parties, not to mention made a demand for the UGT to break political connections, was not grounded at all in any serious consideration of what the UGT would consider to be an



acceptable starting point for alliance negotiations. The additional amendment that was added to the resolution at the eleventh hour that implied that the demand that the UGT break its political ties was merely provisional was no more than a concession to those within the CNT who had been campaigning, since 1934, for an alliance with the UGT and who believed this could only be possible if certain aspects of anarchist principles were put on hold. The *Alianza Revolucionaria* proposal was essentially an articulation of the CNT's own revolutionary goals and ideological principles that downplayed their incompatibility with those of the UGT, so that it both satisfied the spectrum of opinion within the CNT without appearing to alienate the UGT.

Secondly, it is important to emphasize the organizational procedures and decision-making mechanisms through which the new stance had come about. The alliance proposal was not a product of the regions of the CNT that had been most consistently in favour of a CNT-UGT pact. To the contrary, it was the historically most anti-alliance region of Catalonia that spearheaded the initiative and ensured it became national policy. True enough, at Zaragoza the traditionally pro-alliance elements of the organization did back the resolution, even if they did have misgivings about the initial insistency on the UGT being forced to break political ties. However, that they and the García Oliver faction came round to endorsing the same position is a testament to the particularities of the CNT decision-making process – through which carefully-worded resolutions could satisfy different factions, as occurred at the February 1934 plenum – and of a convenient convergence of the two groupings' positions as a result of the new fervour for alliance exhibited by the García Oliver grouping, rather than the proposal representing a belated triumph for the unity position that the Asturians had defended since 1934.

For the agreement drawn up at Zaragoza was by-and-large that which had been created at the January 1936 regional congress in Catalonia. The Catalan regional congress set the CNT on a path towards a dramatic shift in its stance on the UGT and alliances. The initiative launched at this regional congress was then converted into a concerted propaganda campaign by *Solidaridad Obrera* and leading CNT militants from the region to promote the idea of an exclusively revolutionary, anti-political CNT-UGT alliance. Initially it would seem that this had been done so that the CNT could fight the Popular Front by other means; but even after the election, García Oliver and his allies played a key role in ensuring that their unity formulation prevailed in Zaragoza. Such a rapid change of position is, to say the least, surprising, and cannot simply be explained because the idea of a revolutionary alliance of the labour federations would fit the CNT's anti-political

principles. Quite why the most historically anti-UGT region would actively seek to turn the organization's position on the UGT on the national level is a question that will be addressed in the next chapter.

The ability of an influential grouping of militants in Catalonia to turn around the entire stance of the organization on the matter of alliances – even if certain sectors of the organization were already open to or outright in favour of a revision – illustrates not just the malleability of the CNT decision-making process, but also the willingness of those who were in the organization to abuse process to suit their own ends. In 1934 the Catalan delegates at national plenums argued that only a national congress could discuss the question of the CNT's stance on alliances; in 1936 they saw fit for their own region to formulate a position on behalf of the entire organization. As in 1934, Catalonia was able to determine the CNT's national-level stance on alliances; whilst in 1934 it had achieved this through an insistence on procedure and principles, in 1936 it achieved it through a disregard for them.

Thirdly, the outcome of the congress was based on a contradictory set of ideas regarding proletarian unity, alliance proposals and revolution. At the congress, the idea that 'the people', 'the working class' or 'the proletariat' wanted unity and were also innately revolutionary was repeated by delegates throughout the discussion, except for those allied to the most classical anarchist position. The location of the desires for both unity and revolution, then, was believed to be the whole Spanish working class, which is to say it was not bound up to any particular organization, but was in fact a desire that existed outside of ideologies or organizational agendas. At the same time, however, the method that was put forward for achieving this unity and in turn revolution was linked explicitly to not just a formal alliance with the UGT, but one that emanated from the leaderships of the two organizations. The CNT-UGT alliance would be drawn up by the National Committee of the CNT picking a delegation that would enter into negotiations with another delegation picked by the UGT leadership. It was therefore very ambiguous as to how such a pact would tap into this sentiment for unity amongst the masses. That such a contradiction existed hints that the alliance proposal that was formulated was not, for some *cenetistas*, the attempt to bring about proletarian unity that it was ostensibly supposed to be. As will be discussed in the next chapter, this ambiguity as to precisely what role the grassroots of the organization would play in this process of CNT-UGT convergence would subsequently serve to be a major problem for those leading militants, especially those from Catalonia, who had encouraged this idea of a revolutionary alliance between the CNT and the UGT,

but were simultaneously opposed to localized cooperation between CNT and UGT organisms.

Finally, it must be highlighted that, although the national congress agreed to send a proposal for a revolutionary alliance to the UGT leadership, the initiative was by no means unanimously supported. Moreover, the most concerted opposition to the new alliance stance emanated from Catalonia, in spite of the fact that it was also from this region that the impetus towards putting the CNT on a pro-alliance footing had been engineered. This somewhat paradoxical situation was indicative of a split that developed amongst *faístas*, with the ‘purist’ anarchists – in particular those whose sphere of activity was the printed word, such as Federica Montseny and Felipe Alaiz – maintaining an abhorrence towards the notion of the CNT debasing its libertarian principles by reaching out to authoritarian Marxists, whilst so-called ‘anarcho-Bolshevik’ figures such as Juan García Oliver and Buenaventura Durruti, who were the protagonists of CNT protest actions and insurrections, drew up a new strategy of advocating a CNT-UGT anti-political alliance. But while the latter grouping may have successfully negotiated the decision-making mechanisms of the organization to implement their position, this did not change the fact that there were still militants in Catalonia who remained strongly opposed to alliance. The Hospitalet de Llobregat delegate led the charge against the alliance proposal in Zaragoza, and a significant number of delegates at the regional congress expressed opposition to any form of alliance with the UGT.<sup>103</sup> The purists’ leading figures were also equally opposed. Felipe Alaiz, for example, refused to write for *Solidaridad Obrera* as a result of the alliance proposal produced at the regional congress, complaining that as a result of it ‘the socialists will establish themselves in Catalonia’.<sup>104</sup> Alaiz’s fears would come to be shared with an increasingly large proportion of the anarcho-syndicalist movement in Catalonia, including those who had masterminded the organization’s change of strategy in the first place.

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<sup>1</sup> Casanova, *The Spanish Republic*, pp. 97-98; Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 161-174

<sup>2</sup> Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, p. 173

<sup>3</sup> Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, p. 162

<sup>4</sup> Souto Kustrín, «*Y¿ Madrid?*», pp. 169-172

<sup>5</sup> Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 174-175

<sup>6</sup> Casanova, *The Spanish Republic*, p. 105

<sup>7</sup> FO 371/18597/W9271/27/41 Report from William Gray to Malaga Consulate, 09 October 1934

<sup>8</sup> Casanova, *The Spanish Republic*, p. 106; Durgan, *B.O.C.*, pp. 283-305; Vega, *Entre revolució*, pp. 373-376

<sup>9</sup> This comparison is made, amongst others, by Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, p. 164.

<sup>10</sup> Casanova, *The Spanish Republic*, pp. 106-109; Adrian Shubert, *Hacia la revolución: orígenes sociales del movimiento obrero en Asturias, 1860-1934* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1984), pp. 204-211

<sup>11</sup> Shubert, *Hacia la revolución*, p. 208

<sup>12</sup> IISG RAP 444 Letter from Ramón Álvarez Palomo to Manuel Grossi-Mier, 14 August 1984

- <sup>13</sup> Juan García Oliver states that the CNT National Committee knew nothing of the October movement until it was underway. His recounting of the start of the uprising highlights the ambiguous nature of the response of leading CNT figures to the events. When asked by the General Secretary of the National Committee how to proceed, he, Liberto Callejas and Horacio Prieto advised that the CNT should support the UGT if the organizers of the movement contacted them, but that they were highly doubtful that they would. (Juan García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos* (Barcelona: Ruedo Ibérico, 1978), p. 157-59)
- <sup>14</sup> Durgan, *B.O.C.*, pp.299-304; Alba, *La Alianza Obrera*, pp. 152-154
- <sup>15</sup> Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, p. 164
- <sup>16</sup> IISG FAI CP Microfilm 181 Letter from the FAI Peninsular Committee to the CNT National Committee, 03 August 1934, in which the Peninsular Committee reported to the National Committee on *faístas* in Asturias allegedly gaining support for their opposition to the *alianza obrera*.
- <sup>17</sup> Barrio Alonso, *Anarquismo*, p. 320
- <sup>18</sup> Casanova, *The Spanish Republic*, p. 109
- <sup>19</sup> Francisco J. Romero Salvadó, *Twentieth-Century Spain: politics and society in Spain, 1898-1998* (Basingstoke: St. Martin's Press, 1999), p. 87
- <sup>20</sup> Heywood, *Marxism*, p. 146; Paul Preston, 'The Origins of the Socialist Schism in Spain, 1917-31' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 12 (1977), pp. 101-132; Preston, 'The Creation of the Popular Front in Spain', pp. 86-87, 100-102
- <sup>21</sup> *El Socialista*, 25 December 1935
- <sup>22</sup> *El Socialista*, 03 January 1936; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 27 December 1935
- <sup>23</sup> *El Socialista*, 18 January 1936
- <sup>24</sup> For example, *Claridad*, 23 November, 14 December 1935
- <sup>25</sup> *Claridad*, 16 November 1935
- <sup>26</sup> *Claridad*, 13 April 1936
- <sup>27</sup> Santos Juliá, *La izquierda del PSOE, 1935-1936* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno, 1977), pp. 217-264 gives a full account of the *Caballeristas'* pro-unity rhetoric during 1935 and 1936.
- <sup>28</sup> Helen Graham, *Socialism and War*, pp. 21-22
- <sup>29</sup> FPI AARD 260-4 Meeting of the UGT National Committee, 11 December 1935
- <sup>30</sup> For example, *La Batalla*, 23 August, 20 September, 11 October 1935, 07 February, 06 March 1936; *Mundo Obrero*, 03, 16 January, 22, 24 February 1936
- <sup>31</sup> Part of the reason for this lack of coverage was undoubtedly the problem of communicating with Asturias; the British Ambassador to Spain gives an account of the difficulties of finding out what was happening during the insurrection itself (FO 371/18596/W9070/27/41 Report from Sir George Grahame to Sir John Simon, 12 October 1934).
- <sup>32</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 October 1934
- <sup>33</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 October 1934
- <sup>34</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 14 October 1934
- <sup>35</sup> *L'Humanité*, 10 October 1934
- <sup>36</sup> For example, *L'Humanité*, 23 October 1934. This idea of the CNT and FAI leadership being detached from ordinary workers was reinforced by articles such as an interview with a French communist imprisoned in Madrid in October, who informed the newspaper that in the Modelo prison grassroots anarchists mixed with socialists and communists, but the anarchist leaders there separated themselves from the rest (*L'Humanité*, 29 December 1934).
- <sup>37</sup> *L'Humanité*, 10 November 1934
- <sup>38</sup> *L'Humanité*, 17 December 1934
- <sup>39</sup> IISG CNT 50A9 Letter from the CNT National Committee to the Secretariat of the AIT, 20 July 1935
- <sup>40</sup> Diego Abad de Santillán, *Memorias, 1897-1936* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1977), pp. 210-220; Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, p. 122
- <sup>41</sup> At the CNT national congress in Zaragoza held in May 1936, *Tiempos Nuevos* was singled out for criticism by Asturian delegates for its 'calumny' of socialists and communists who had participated in the October insurrection (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, *El Congreso Confederacional de Zaragoza, 1936* (Bilbao: Zero, 1978), p. 177)
- <sup>42</sup> *Tiempos Nuevos*, 05 December 1934
- <sup>43</sup> *Tiempos Nuevos*, 10 December 1934, 17 January 1935
- <sup>44</sup> *Revolución Social*, November 1934
- <sup>45</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 20 January 1935
- <sup>46</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 November 1935
- <sup>47</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 22 October 1935. Throughout the discussions of alliances that took place during 1935 and 1936, *cenetistas* recurrently referred to 'politicians' in highly generalized, almost abstract terms. The term seems to have encompassed any figures on the left who operated in a political organization and not solely a labour federation.
- <sup>48</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 28 December 1935

- <sup>49</sup> IISG CNT 68A3 'Acuerdos que la regional catalana presenta sobre el orden del día para el congreso de la AIT', 11 July 1935
- <sup>50</sup> IISG CNT 50A9 'Acuerdos de la CNT que su delegación defenderá ante el V congreso mundial de la AIT', 19 August 1935
- <sup>51</sup> IISG FAI CP Microfilm 149 Circular from the Madrid Local Federation of Anarchist Groups, June 1935
- <sup>52</sup> IISG FAI CP Microfilm 145 Letter from the Seine Regional Committee of Anarchist Groups to the CNT National Committee and the FAI Peninsular Committee, 22 May 1935; Gutiérrez Molina, *Cuadernos de la guerra civil* 6, pp. 25-26
- <sup>53</sup> IISG FAI CP Microfilm 182 Minutes of the CNT national plenum, 11 November 1934
- <sup>54</sup> *La Voz Confederal*, 30 July 1935
- <sup>55</sup> Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, *El Congreso Confederal de Zaragoza*
- <sup>56</sup> Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth*, p. 304
- <sup>57</sup> Casanova, *Anarchism*, pp. 92-93; Ealham, "'Revolutionary Gymnastics" and the Unemployed' pp. 133-155; Jordi Getman-Eraso, "'Cease fire, comrades!" Anarcho-syndicalist Revolutionary Prophesy, Anti-Fascism and the origins of the Spanish Civil War' in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 9:1 (2008), pp. 93-114
- <sup>58</sup> Getman-Eraso, "'Cease fire, comrades!'", p. 106
- <sup>59</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, p. 396
- <sup>60</sup> Getman-Eraso, "'Cease fire, comrades!'", pp. 105-106
- <sup>61</sup> The extensive coverage of the election in the mainstream and partisan press over January and February is testament to this. Of concern to *cenetistas* who were mindful of the CNT being at the forefront of workers minds in such a context were the large crowds that Popular Front rallies filled public venues across Spain. See, for instance, *Heraldo de Madrid*, 10 February 1936 as an example of the prominent coverage given to such events. Above all, cases of orators at such events imploring the CNT to openly support the Popular Front campaign must have been particularly irritating, as occurred, for example, at a Popular Front rally in Madrid on 6<sup>th</sup> February (*El Socialista*, 07 February 1936).
- <sup>62</sup> Santos Juliá, 'The origins and nature of the Spanish Popular Front' in Martin S. Alexander and Helen Graham (Eds), *The French and Spanish Popular Fronts: Comparative perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 24-37; Preston, 'The Creation of the Popular Front in Spain', pp. 84-105
- <sup>63</sup> This preoccupation is highlighted by the contribution of the Catalan delegation at the January 1936 national plenum, which was highly reluctant to accept the arguments of other regions in favour of the organization not organizing another abstention campaign. 'Acta del Pleno Nacional de Regionales de la Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, celebrado en Madrid los días 26, 27, 28, 29, 30 y 31 de Enero de 1936'
- <sup>64</sup> IISG RAP 444 'Acta del Pleno Nacional de Regionales de la Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, celebrado en Madrid los días 26, 27, 28, 29, 30 y 31 de Enero de 1936'
- <sup>65</sup> Casanova, *The Spanish Republic*, pp. 125-126
- <sup>66</sup> Graham, *Socialism and War*, p. 34; Heywood, *Marxism*, pp. 173-174
- <sup>67</sup> Graham, *Socialism and War*, p. 3
- <sup>68</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Politics and the Military in Modern Spain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), p. 311; Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, p. 239
- <sup>69</sup> Francisco Romero Salvadó, *Twentieth-Century Spain: politics and society in Spain, 1898-1998* (Basingstoke: St. Martin's Press, 1999), p. 91
- <sup>70</sup> Edward Malefakis, *Agrarian Reform and Peasant Revolution in Spain: origins of the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 364-387
- <sup>71</sup> Confederación Regional del Trabajo de Cataluña, *Memorias de la Conferencia Regional Extraordinaria celebrada en Barcelona durante los días 25, 26 y 27 de enero de 1936*, p. 51
- <sup>72</sup> Confederación Regional del Trabajo de Cataluña, *Memorias de la Conferencia Regional Extraordinaria celebrada en Barcelona durante los días 25, 26 y 27 de enero de 1936*, p. 35
- <sup>73</sup> Confederación Regional del Trabajo de Cataluña, *Memorias de la Conferencia Regional Extraordinaria celebrada en Barcelona durante los días 25, 26 y 27 de enero de 1936*, pp. 35-36, 45
- <sup>74</sup> The opinions of the different delegates appear in Confederación Regional del Trabajo de Cataluña, *Memorias de la Conferencia Regional Extraordinaria celebrada en Barcelona durante los días 25, 26 y 27 de enero de 1936*, pp. 36-51
- <sup>75</sup> Confederación Regional del Trabajo de Cataluña, *Memorias de la Conferencia Regional Extraordinaria celebrada en Barcelona durante los días 25, 26 y 27 de enero de 1936*, p. 41
- <sup>76</sup> Confederación Regional del Trabajo de Cataluña, *Memorias de la Conferencia Regional Extraordinaria celebrada en Barcelona durante los días 25, 26 y 27 de enero de 1936*, p. 37
- <sup>77</sup> Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, pp. 50-51, 88
- <sup>78</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 809 Letter from Felipe Alaiz to Federica Montseny, 20 February 1936
- <sup>79</sup> Confederación Regional del Trabajo de Cataluña, *Memorias de la Conferencia Regional Extraordinaria celebrada en Barcelona durante los días 25, 26 y 27 de enero de 1936*, pp. 49-50

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- <sup>80</sup> Confederación Regional del Trabajo de Cataluña, *Memorias de la Conferencia Regional Extraordinaria celebrada en Barcelona durante los días 25, 26 y 27 de enero de 1936*, pp. 72-73
- <sup>81</sup> IISG RAP 444 'Acta del Pleno Nacional de Regionales de la Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, celebrado en Madrid los días 26, 27, 28, 29, 30 y 31 de Enero de 1936'
- <sup>82</sup> IISG RAP 444 'Acta del Pleno Nacional de Regionales de la Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, celebrado en Madrid los días 26, 27, 28, 29, 30 y 31 de Enero de 1936'. Quite what the CNT's position was on abstention is very debatable. Santos Juliá argues the organization was much more clearly against abstention than it had been in previous years, based on delegates at the regional congress agreeing with one delegate's assertion that the organization should not approach the election in the same way they had done that of 1933. (Juliá, *La izquierda del PSOE*, p. 234). However, this did not change the fact that, throughout the election period, the CNT press explicitly argued that workers needed to reject political participation.
- <sup>83</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 31 March 1936
- <sup>84</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 28 January 1936
- <sup>85</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 30 January 1936
- <sup>86</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 31 January 1936
- <sup>87</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 01 February 1936
- <sup>88</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 02 February 1936
- <sup>89</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 08 February 1936
- <sup>90</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 11 February 1936
- <sup>91</sup> Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, *El Congreso Confederal de Zaragoza*, pp. 224-225
- <sup>92</sup> Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, *El Congreso Confederal de Zaragoza*, pp. 224-225
- <sup>93</sup> Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, *El Congreso Confederal de Zaragoza*, p. 225
- <sup>94</sup> Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, *El Congreso Confederal de Zaragoza*, pp. 182-185
- <sup>95</sup> Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, *El Congreso Confederal de Zaragoza*, pp. 182-188
- <sup>96</sup> García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos*, pp. 137-139
- <sup>97</sup> Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, *El Congreso Confederal de Zaragoza*, p. 189
- <sup>98</sup> Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, *El Congreso Confederal de Zaragoza*, p. 190
- <sup>99</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 01 October 1936
- <sup>100</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 May 1936
- <sup>101</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 13 May 1936
- <sup>102</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 26 May 1936
- <sup>103</sup> Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, *El Congreso Confederal de Zaragoza*, p. 182
- <sup>104</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 809 Letter from Felipe Alaiz to Federica Montseny, 20 February 1936

## **Chapter Nine: The Return to CNT-UGT Hostilities on the Eve of the Civil War**

### The socialist response to the *Alianza Revolucionaria* proposal

An important stumbling block in the way of a convergence between the CNT and the UGT in 1936 was the position held on the matter by the socialist leadership, who, without rejecting the CNT's *Alianza Revolucionaria* proposal outright, in practical terms gave it short shrift. The editorial writers of *El Socialista*, representing the more moderate tendencies of the socialist movement, were rather lukewarm towards the unity proposal formulated by the CNT at Zaragoza. In an admittedly polite fashion, the *El Socialista* editorial that appraised the CNT's *Alianza Revolucionaria* proposal essentially dismissed it as unviable. As was to be expected, a substantial proportion of its doubt was based on its displeasure at the clauses of the proposal which demanded a socialist disavowal of the political route.<sup>1</sup> The moderate factions of the socialist movement were thus openly unconcerned with the possibility of an alliance between the CNT and the UGT, an unsurprising stance given that their goals in 1936 were certainly not to direct their resources towards a revolutionary activity, and instead continued to hope that the political channels of the Republic could remain open to them.

In spite of the different factional positions that *El Socialista* and *Claridad* represented, the latter was approximately as tepid in its response to the CNT's alliance proposal as was the former, though admittedly for slightly different reasons. *Claridad* lamented that the agreement made at Zaragoza shied away from the more fundamental issue of unity and fusion of workers' organizations, instead of a mere alliance of them. As mentioned in chapter eight, in his pronouncements on unity Largo on occasion argued in favour of a fusion of the CNT with the UGT; the criticism of the *Alianza Revolucionaria* proposal was very much in tune with this proposed objective. It would be unwise not to consider, however, that the paper's lack of endorsement of the alliance proposal may have been motivated at least in part by a more basic wish of not handing a propaganda victory to another organization by endorsing it. For the paper to have applauded a CNT initiative would have undoubtedly run the risk of undermining attempts to position Largo as a champion of proletarian unity.<sup>2</sup>

The indifference of the two main socialist factions to the CNT's *Alianza Revolucionaria* proposal was matched by a lack of interest given by the socialist leadership to the idea in their decision-making processes. No substantial discussion of the proposal took place. The

receipt of the proposal was briefly discussed at a meeting of the Executive Commission on 21<sup>st</sup> May 1936. However, this discussion did not go beyond agreeing that the proposal would be examined fully at a later stage by the National Committee and at a future UGT congress.<sup>3</sup> Whilst this response was a fully necessary one, given that it would have been impossible for the Executive Commission to have entered into a potentially groundbreaking agreement with the CNT at national level without some consultation of the organization's membership, it is certainly also the case that the Executive Commission appear to have been in no hurry at all to bring about this consultation so as to provide a response to the CNT as fast as possible. In May 1936 the political and social situation of the Republic was highly volatile and rapidly shifting. In such a context, the idea of making no efforts to facilitate a speedier discussion of the question of alliance with the CNT and instead integrate it into the ordinary procedural framework of the upcoming November congress can only be interpreted as being a result of a lack of interest on the UGT leadership's part to discuss the matter. The matter was essentially put on the back burner, and no-one within the UGT leadership appears to have had any objections to this.

### Unity as rivalry

However, in many respects the socialist leadership's indifference to the alliance proposal played into the hands of certain sectors of the CNT. For some within the CNT – especially those based in Catalonia – the appeal of launching the idea of an alliance with the UGT was, from the start, in fact a strategy to compete with the UGT.<sup>4</sup> CNT leaders were well aware of the potential of a public pro-unity stance as a method of boosting the CNT's popularity, even before the *Alianza Revolucionaria* proposal had been formulated at the Zaragoza congress. In March 1936, the National Committee sent out a circular to the regional committees which gave details of the agenda for the upcoming national congress. On the matter of *Alianza Revolucionaria*, the National Committee emphasized the importance that the idea of unity held to the working classes, and accordingly warned those who were hostile to pro-unity positions to take care, when formulating a position on the matter 'not to clash with popular sentiments by declaring a firm hostility towards this slogan that inspires numerous proletarians'.<sup>5</sup>

The possibility that an alliance proposal with the UGT could be used not just to appeal to popular sentiment in favour of unity but also to undermine the UGT's own unity credentials was raised at the Zaragoza congress as the alliance question was being debated. The delegate for the Barcelona fishermen, in defending the draft proposal on unity, did not



do so based on the premise that the UGT's leaders would be reliable alliance partners, claiming that, 'we must not let ourselves be taken in by the sectarianisms and prejudices by the leaders of Marxism, who have a bourgeois mentality, and do not want the CNT and the UGT to come to an understanding'. Rather, the desire to take the initiative over an alliance was based on proving that it was the Marxist left and not the CNT who were against unity: 'We do not want to give the pretext to the [socialist] leaders to say to us that we did not want an alliance'.<sup>6</sup>

However, it was after the *Alianza Revolucionaria* proposal was formulated that this perspective really came to the fore amongst some CNT leaders. Unsurprisingly this idea was not voiced publicly, but is clearly visible in the private correspondence of CNT members in positions of responsibility within the organization. In a letter written at the end of May regarding his impressions of the disposition of workers towards the CNT, Manuel Pérez, one of the writing staff of *Solidaridad Obrera*, opined that 'I am sure that if the UGT rejected the *Alianza* the masses would flow towards us'.<sup>7</sup> A similar view was expressed by the Regional Committee of the central region when writing to the National Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> May. The Committee reported that in propaganda meetings in the region they had made promoting the *Alianza* 'a question of honour' and spoke in favour of it at propaganda meetings. However, the Committee made it clear that they did this 'not because we believe that [the UGT] will agree to it, since they have no honesty within them'.<sup>8</sup>

This ulterior motive for championing alliance with the UGT is not something that has thus far been brought out in studies of the CNT. Instead, historians sympathetic to the CNT have commented on the importance of the putative gesture, arguing that it illustrated a genuine desire on the part of the CNT as a whole to enter into alliances with the UGT.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, other historians have simply taken the wording of the alliance proposal at face value.<sup>10</sup> Such superficial appraisals miss perhaps the most important point about the alliance proposal. For it was, for those who truly mattered in the CNT – the propagandists and the militants who could exert control over assemblies and congresses – a vehicle through which the CNT could be promoted by tapping into pro-unity sentiment, not to mention through which the UGT as an organization and its leaders could be discredited.<sup>11</sup>

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there was a significant level of opposition, especially amongst Catalan militants, to the *Alianza Revolucionaria* proposal as it was being discussed. Amongst the National Committee and some regional committees, above

all that of Catalonia, the sending of the *Alianza Revolucionaria* invitation to the UGT Executive Commission certainly did not lead them to become better disposed to a convergence of the CNT and the UGT, least of all on the level of presenting a united propaganda front. In fact, following the Zaragoza congress, the Catalan Regional Committee, and to a lesser extent some other regional committees such as the central region, became more wary of the prospect of uncontrolled shows of CNT-UGT unity across the country. An instance of a prominent *cenetista* from Cádiz sharing a platform with Largo Caballero in May sent the Catalan Regional Committee on the offensive against CNT militants cooperating with *ugetistas* on a propaganda level. On 24<sup>th</sup> May, a propaganda rally was held in Cádiz, organized by the UGT's graphic arts federation. As a UGT-organized event, Largo was the main speaker, and Vicente Ballester, a key figure amongst the Andalusian CNT movement, also spoke at the rally, telling the crowd that the CNT was willing to bring about the unification of the proletariat because it held 'the general interests of the Spanish revolution above all others'. Ballester's presence at the rally clearly served to boost Largo's pro-unity credentials, as *Claridad's* extensive and enthusiastic coverage of the event indicates.<sup>12</sup>

However, the National Committee, various regional committees and even some individual unions were quick to express their horror at Ballester's actions. It would not be an overstatement to classify the 'Ballester affair' as a scandal in CNT circles, particularly amongst militants in Catalonia. Before the national congress, the National Committee had instructed militants not to participate jointly with UGT individuals or organisms in propaganda events, on the grounds that it would compromise the fairness of the deliberations on the matter of *Alianza Revolucionaria* at the congress by pre-empting any agreement made there.<sup>13</sup> Responding immediately to Ballester's appearance with Largo, the National Committee released a public statement that stated that the ban on joint propaganda with the UGT was still in effect, in spite of the congress now having taken place. Indeed, although the justification for the original ban on joint propaganda with the UGT was explicitly based around the upcoming congress, the National Committee argued that the agreements subsequently made at the congress in fact 'strengthened' that ban, on the grounds that at the congress the 'apolitical principles' of the CNT had been reaffirmed.<sup>14</sup> This justification, which perhaps referred to the discussion on the definition of libertarian communism which took place at the congress, was fairly tenuous and seems to have been the product of a National Committee that was seeking to carefully control any shows of unity with the UGT. The National Committee also contacted the Cádiz Local Federation to demand an explanation of the incident.<sup>15</sup> The Local Federation held a local

plenum at which it agreed that its and Ballester's actions had been justified, and that it would reject any punishment handed down to it.<sup>16</sup> The National Committee arranged for the case to be discussed at the next national plenum, with a view to sanctions being made against the Local Federation, but the outbreak of the war intervened before any plenum could be held.<sup>17</sup>

The National Committee was not the only leading body within the CNT that expressed a disapproval of Ballester's actions. Within a day of the event being reported in the press the Barcelona wood workers' union sent a telegram to the National Committee to demand that Ballester be punished.<sup>18</sup> The Regional Committee of the central region also wrote to the National Committee to voice their anger at Ballester.<sup>19</sup> However, it was the Catalan Regional Committee that was most enraged by the Ballester affair. Its anger did not merely lead to it protesting to the National Committee, but to it also actively pursuing the Cádiz Local Federation over the matter, especially after the Local Federation tried to justify Ballester's actions. The Regional Committee contacted the National Committee on more than one occasion to press for a national plenum to be held to determine a punishment for the Cádiz *cenetistas*.<sup>20</sup> It also rejected any justifications of the incident on the part of the Cádiz Local Federation, which argued that it had authorized Ballester's attendance at the meeting, that the meeting had been arranged before the National Committee's April ban on joint propaganda with the UGT, and that it was not for other organisms of the CNT to control its actions, an argument that tallied with the anti-authoritarian principles of the organization.<sup>21</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera* even refused to publish a statement by the Local Federation to argue its case.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, this defiant stance provoked the Catalan Regional Committee to contact the Cádiz Local Federation directly and rebuke them for their actions. Showing a certain lack of self-awareness regarding its own actions, the Regional Committee interpreted the *gaditanos'* refusal to repent for their actions as an attempt to impose their stance on joint propaganda activities with the UGT on the rest of the organization. The Committee advised the Cádiz *cenetistas* that their stance was damaging the CNT in Catalonia by 'favouring the growth of other syndical organizations which we have no reason even to show tolerance towards'. The Committee elaborated on this claim by outlining their interpretation of the balance of power within the workers' movement in Catalonia. Acknowledging that they had no knowledge of the situation in Cádiz, the Committee mentioned that it 'imagines that circumstances oblige you to treat the UGT as equals', a statement that reveals an underlying assumption that compulsion was the only reason that *cenetistas* would

cooperate with their UGT counterparts, echoing the stance taken by Diego Abad de Santillán regarding the events of Asturias in October 1934. But in Catalonia, the Committee argued, treating the UGT as equals ‘neither interests us and nor do we accept it, because we know only too well the elements that the socialist labour federation have cultivated in Catalonia’.<sup>23</sup>

Julián Casanova rightly highlights that during the Civil War the top committees of the CNT came to assert a fairly heavy-handed – possibly even authoritarian – control over the grassroots of the organization, something which went against the premise of grassroots autonomy on which the libertarian movement was supposed to be based.<sup>24</sup> The handling of the question of cooperation between CNT and UGT organisms in early 1936 by the National Committee and the Regional Committee – some of whose members, such as Mariano Vázquez, would run the National Committee during the war – illustrates that this shift towards top-down control of the grassroots was in fact underway before the war had started, with the Catalan leadership in particular viewing itself as having the authority to intervene in the activities of grassroots where they were deemed to be breaking CNT principles, something that in practice amounted to imposing a line of discipline on the base. In a similar vein to the irregular and loaded decision-making process through which the CNT’s new stance on the UGT was brought about, the management of the CNT’s top committees of interactions with the UGT reveals that the CNT was not the non-hierarchical organization that freed its members from being dictated to which it styled itself to be. If the responses of the National Committee and the Catalan Regional Committee are anything to go by, the leaders of the CNT in early 1936 acted in a manner that was not dissimilar to that which they had so vociferously attacked the UGT leadership over in the past, in the respect that they attempted to oppose a line of discipline from above and to overturn the decisions made by organisms at the grassroots level.

### The Catalan CNT and the UGT

The Catalan leadership’s stance on the Ballester affair was just one facet of a wider exasperation on the part of the Regional Committee in response to other manifestations of CNT-UGT cooperation across Spain. The Committee responded to these developments, like it did with the Ballester affair, by attempting to put a stop to them, either through exerting pressure on the National Committee or by contacting the CNT organisms involved directly. In June the UGT’s Sindicato Nacional Ferroviario and the CNT’s Federación Nacional de la Industria Ferroviaria reached a pact to fight for a new set of *bases de*

*trabajo* and the reinstatement of workers who had been sacked following October 1934. The Regional Committee wrote to the National Committee to protest at the actions of the CNT's rail federation.<sup>25</sup> Similar protests were lodged to the National Committee by the Catalan leadership over the CNT's initial cooperation with the UGT in the Madrid construction strike in June, a conflict which will be discussed later in this chapter. Based on an erroneous belief that the *cenetistas* of Madrid had endorsed government arbitration as a result of their cooperation with the UGT, the Regional Committee called on the National Committee to try to intervene and bring these CNT organisms into a disciplinary line demanded by the Catalan leaders.<sup>26</sup>

The Ballester affair and the two aforementioned labour conflicts were for the Regional Committee part of a wider, highly troubling phenomenon. With regards to CNT-UGT cooperation in labour conflicts, the Regional Committee believed that it was unwise for CNT unions to 'enter into circumstantial pacts with the UGT, because from these our principles and tactics will be disrupted'. The Madrid construction strike was used as evidence of this scenario, with the committee saying that what had been a 'good group of militants' had been led astray by the UGT.<sup>27</sup> On more than one occasion the Regional Committee explicitly outlined its rationale for opposition to CNT organisms entering into localized cooperation with their UGT counterparts, as well as chastising the National Committee for not having explicitly forbidden them itself. On 30<sup>th</sup> May, for example, the Regional Committee wrote to the National Committee to complain that a recent National Committee manifesto had permitted such agreements, arguing that

the affirmation that unions can reach an understanding with the UGT over economic and local questions will have the result that they become generalized in such a way that there will be a confusion of organizations, and that there will be no possibility of making minorities in workplaces join the CNT, "because [the UGT] is the same [as the CNT]".<sup>28</sup>

For the Catalan leadership, then, localized cooperation with the UGT had to be stamped out as it ran the risk of damaging the CNT's own chances of reorganization and expansion. The Regional Committee took this stance to such an extreme that it even argued that the appearance of official CNT statements in *Claridad*, as well as being damaging in the respect that it would give off the impression that CNT members read the paper,<sup>29</sup> would also damage the popularity of the CNT by associating it with an organization that 'tries to take our members from us, just as we try to take theirs'.<sup>30</sup> The Regional Committee remained committed to its position on cooperation with the UGT, telling the National Committee on 22<sup>nd</sup> June that 'circumstantial pacts made with the UGT will only be to our

detriment'.<sup>31</sup> As can be seen, these objections voiced by the Regional Committee were all grounded first and foremost in organizational considerations – the fear that the CNT could lose existing and potential members to a rival – and not ones of anarchist or syndicalist principles.

The Regional Committee's agenda of attempting to dissuade grassroots militants from closer ties with their UGT counterparts, as well as repeatedly putting forward the message that workers in Catalonia should feel compelled to join the CNT and that the alliance resolution did not place the organizations on an equal footing, was articulated through several sternly worded and prominent articles in *Solidaridad Obrera*.<sup>32</sup> The paper told workers, for instance, that the alliance did not 'imply a confusion of functions nor ideas, nor an abandonment of principles, which always must be defended, above everything else'.<sup>33</sup> Such clarifications soon came to be expressed with far more emphasis than did promoting the alliance itself.

That this was the prevailing position amongst the Catalan leadership must be considered alongside the fact that it was also the leading lights of the CNT in Catalonia who drew up the idea for the *Alianza Revolucionaria* with the UGT. For them, the question of an alliance with the UGT was simply not one that had a legitimate place in the realm of grassroots cooperation or with aims that were only of a limited scope. There continued to be an assumption on the part of the Catalan leadership that, at root, the CNT was still a rival of the UGT, and that any lower-level cooperation would jeopardize the CNT's fortunes in winning this rivalry. The *Alianza Revolucionaria* proposal was not formulated by the Catalan *cenetistas* as the starting gun for a free-for-all of CNT-UGT convergence, but rather a process to be strictly controlled from above which required other, more spontaneous forms of CNT-UGT unity to be halted. For an ideological current that had previously prized the idea of spontaneous revolutionary cooperation at the foot of the barricade, this position was somewhat contradictory, and reflects the fact that for the promoters of the *Alianza Revolucionaria* the primacy of the CNT could not be sacrificed to such ideals. And by July the Regional Committee had almost discounted even cooperation coming about through a process controlled tightly from above, pointing out in a letter to the National Committee that that 'the reality is that as time passes the UGT has not made a resolution' on the proposal.<sup>34</sup>

### Cooperation and hostilities between CNT and UGT unions

The fear of cooperation between CNT and UGT unions in Spain expressed by the Catalan CNT elite was not merely a figment of their imagination, and nor was it limited to a handful of instances of cooperation. Although *Solidaridad Obrera*, as will be discussed, chose to focus on confrontations between CNT and UGT unions, thus obscuring examples of CNT-UGT cooperation, such instances did occur across Spain in 1935 and 1936, principally outside of Catalonia. To a large extent, this cooperation was made possible by the fact that UGT entities in some regions and industries were willing to resort to strikes without attempting first to go through arbitration mechanisms, thus removing the central barrier between themselves and their CNT counterparts when it came to industrial relations. In December 1935, the metal unions of the CNT and the UGT in Vigo jointly went on strike.<sup>35</sup> In March 1936, CNT and UGT sailors in Valencia formed a joint strike committee in a conflict against Altos Hornos de Vizcaya.<sup>36</sup> In Valladolid in March, the CNT and the UGT jointly carried out a strike in the face of the intransigently anti-union attitude of employers in the province.<sup>37</sup>

In some cases, cooperation between CNT and UGT organisms went beyond the confines of the joint presentation of demands to employers, becoming focused instead on protest actions against the local authorities. The CNT and UGT in Cádiz engaged in a particularly strong process of spontaneous convergence, as José Luis Gutiérrez Molina has highlighted.<sup>38</sup> In April, the CNT and the UGT in the town jointly called a general strike in support of an ongoing strike at the shipyard. The strike resulted in the swift resolution of the conflict, and understandable jubilation amongst the working population. The report submitted to *Solidaridad Obrera* by the *cenetistas* of Cádiz regarding the joint general strike with the UGT was one of the few that appeared in the paper during these months which truly celebrated grassroots-level unity between workers in the CNT and the UGT, emphasizing that the strike represented a major milestone in the unification of the local proletariat and a key factor in the victory.<sup>39</sup>

Even in some areas of Catalonia a change in attitude towards the UGT could be detected, though often this did not extend beyond individual workplaces. In March 1936, for example, the crew of a freighter, who were variously affiliated to the CNT, the UGT and an autonomous union, jointly went on strike in the face of their employer attempting to cut the level of staff.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, CNT and UGT peasants around Mataró jointly entered into conflict in April 1936 to enforce previously agreed pay and conditions arrangements.<sup>41</sup> In

Reus in May 1936, the CNT and the UGT's employees on the tram that linked the town with Salou jointly went on strike to force the tram company to dismiss two employees who had formerly worked in the Guardia Civil and the Carabineros respectively. Like other conflicts in Catalonia in which CNT and UGT militants worked together at this time, although there was mention of the fact of cooperation, there was no particular effort made in the reporting of the events in the CNT press to present this cooperation as indicative of a trend of further CNT-UGT convergence or something that in itself was worth celebrating.<sup>42</sup>

However, cases of cooperation between the CNT and the UGT in Catalonia were certainly not symptomatic of a fundamental shift in how CNT union organizers in the region regarded their UGT counterparts. Even after January 1936, when the CNT unions of Catalonia had agreed that their organization should carry out a revolution in tandem with the UGT, in many cases *cenetistas* across the region continued to regard their UGT counterparts with the same contempt that they had between 1931 and 1934.

The most notable continuity between the outlook of grassroots *cenetistas* between 1931 and the post-October 1934 period was a continuing belief that the CNT could be the only organization in which workers could organize themselves. Writing about the process of rebuilding the CNT in Vic in December 1935, a local militant commented in *Solidaridad Obrera* that 'the workers of Vic organize themselves within the CNT, or they do not organize themselves within any other union'.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, in March 1936 a member of the CNT's construction union in Barcelona argued, through an article in *Solidaridad Obrera*, that 'only the CNT and the construction union will be able to get your moral and material gains'.<sup>44</sup> Sometimes this attitude was linked explicitly to a suspicion of UGT counterparts. For instance, the metro section of the Barcelona transport union asserted that workers needed 'to understand that there was no other way to make gains nor moral and material improvements other than within the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, the only organization that represents a real guarantee for workers', in the context of warning them of 'the manoeuvres of the UGT elements as they look towards the next electoral battle', the stimulus of this accusation being the publication by UGT metro workers of a manifesto calling for the unity of workers in the industry.<sup>45</sup>

The *cenetistas* of San Feliu de Llobregat were similarly flatly opposed to any attempts to accommodate the UGT in their locality after the regional congress. At the beginning of April, the CNT's local construction union held a meeting, at which militants and members discussed the development of a group of workers in the town attempting to set up a UGT



union. Those who spoke were strongly opposed to the development, which, according to the report published in *Solidaridad Obrera* 'cannot be anything other than a divisive manoeuvre against the workers, and in consequence in favour of the capitalists'.<sup>46</sup>

*Cenetistas* in Tarragona were equally opposed to the possibility of a UGT presence in their town. Indeed, their opposition, as expressed by one of the local militants from Tarragona in *Solidaridad Obrera* in May 1936, was an explicit rebuttal of the argument that 'workers must join one of the two labour federations'. The reason this line was erroneous, according to the contributor, was that 'the UGT is not the same as the CNT; the UGT is detrimental to workers'. The event that had prompted this venting of frustration stemmed from the UGT's backing of a recruitment system for the construction industry based on a list of names administered by the Delegado del Trabajo. The fear on the part of the *cenetistas* was that if workers thought that joining the UGT was as acceptable as joining the CNT, they might join the socialist union, thus perpetuating the recruitment systems that the CNT opposed.<sup>47</sup>

*Cenetistas* in the Barcelona construction sector appear to have been particularly opposed to the possibility of workers joining the UGT. At the end of May 1936, members of the union adopted the tactic of disrupting the assembly of an autonomous union of plasterers, at which the principal issue of discussion was to be whether the union should join a labour federation, with the goal of ensuring they joined the CNT. These attempts went as far as criticizing the UGT's industrial relations methods and shouting down the junta of the union as it attempted to discuss options other than joining the CNT.<sup>48</sup> Such activities by the Barcelona construction union are particularly worth drawing attention to given that, as discussed in the previous chapter, it was this union that had presented the idea to the January 1936 regional congress that all workers should join the CNT or the UGT in a bid to strengthen the revolutionary potential of an anti-political CNT-UGT alliance. From the actions of the construction union and several other CNT entities in the region, it would appear that the official adoption of this position did not translate into the UGT being allowed to have a presence in Catalonia. Just two months after the regional congress the Barcelona construction union released a manifesto to assert that suggesting that it was acceptable for workers to join the UGT was a divisive ploy and was designed to prevent the unity of workers in Catalonia. This was not so much an attack on the basic message of workers joining the CNT or the UGT to carry out revolution as espoused by figures such as Juan García Oliver so much as a clarification that the message did not mean that, in

Catalonia at least, where the CNT regarded itself as dominant, it was acceptable for workers to choose the UGT over the CNT.<sup>49</sup>

In the months immediately before the war, the themes of *esquirolaje*, arbitration and legitimacy to handle conflicts that were discussed in chapter seven showed signs of returning to become a key stimulus for hostility between the CNT and the UGT in Catalonia. In June 1936, the junta of the CNT's food union vehemently attacked the UGT as a result of UGT members continuing to work at a chocolate factory at which the CNT had called a strike. The junta's response to these events in *Solidaridad Obrera* was virtually indistinguishable from how CNT juntas of other Barcelona unions attacked the UGT between 1931 and 1934. Workers were warned that the UGT, not just the specific union involved but the organization as a whole, were 'eternal traitors' who were 'using the same low methods as ever'.<sup>50</sup> In July, the CNT barbers attacked their UGT rivals for having negotiated new *bases* for the sector through the 'usual comedy' of the *jurados mixtos*. As well as questioning the legitimacy of the UGT representatives in carrying out this task, since 'it has been a long time since they have picked up work tools' the agreement that they had won was also roundly criticized for being worse than the one that had been in place beforehand. Just as seriously, the agreement had provision for creating a list of workers that would require individuals to get an official work card, a move that the CNT union interpreted as meaning that 'anyone who is not fascist' would be unable to work in the sector.<sup>51</sup> That same month, the wood workers' union launched a stinging attack on the Catalan UGT in response to the UGT's wood workers' union attempting to hold a public assembly to discuss the creation of a set of *bases* to be presented to employers, inviting the CNT to attend and asking them to participate in the venture. The *cenetistas* on the junta of the wood workers' union were incensed that the '*grupito*' of the UGT union were trying to organize a conflict in the industry, believing this to be the job of the CNT, and certainly not one that it would be willing to go about with the UGT as a joint partner.<sup>52</sup>

As 1936 progressed, it was clear that the overall trend in Catalonia with regard to CNT-UGT interactions was of a steady return to the levels of acrimony that had characterized the first three years of the Republic. By July, several CNT unions in Barcelona were openly accusing their UGT counterparts of treachery. The petrol workers in the CNT's transport union made this very accusation against the 'politicians and *jefecillos*' of the UGT, who had entered into agreement with employers to continue working during a CNT strike in the sector. The strike committee accused them through the pages of *Solidaridad Obrera* of being motivated to provide scab labour because they were 'always at the service

of the interests of the bourgeoisie and politics' as well as 'having the aim of knocking down the CNT'. Similar accusations were made on the very same day by CNT metro workers.<sup>53</sup> It was a similar story outside of Barcelona. By July, the CNT in Badalona had grown tired of the developing UGT movement there, and sent a warning to them through the CNT press. Reminding the UGT that the workers of Badalona had 'always' been affiliated to the CNT, a local militant spoke of how the UGT in the town 'uses coercion as a norm, and repugnant political orientations are inserted into its propaganda meetings' as well as accusing the *ugetistas* of routinely attacking the CNT at public meetings.<sup>54</sup> This overall trajectory of return to hostilities and the notion that cooperation between the CNT and the UGT in Catalonia was impossible was most clearly articulated by the wood workers' union in July, who bluntly informed their UGT counterparts through *Solidaridad Obrera* that 'we do not want to work jointly, because we know what you are like'.<sup>55</sup> Such a stance illustrates that the assumption that CNT-UGT grassroots tensions were simply a result of a clash between the two movement's traditional approaches to strikes does not tell the whole story.

*Solidaridad Obrera*'s leader writers and the region's leading propagandists were equally keen to express the notion that the UGT was not welcome in Catalonia. At a rally in Lérida in April 1936, Juan García Oliver lamented to the crowd that 'not only has [the UGT] not answered our requests [on *Alianza Revolucionaria*], but it is trying to organize unions in the face of those of the CNT' and 'dismember our organizations'. It was an ambition that the UGT must drop, according to García Oliver, because, 'Catalonia has been and will continue to be confederal'.<sup>56</sup> In July, *Solidaridad Obrera* published a comment piece on the UGT in Catalonia in which it argued that the UGT had 'always been an outsider in Catalonia, with no rooting in the soul of the Catalan proletariat'. The piece even made the claim, echoing those of the pre-October era, that the Catalan UGT was even recruiting 'the same elements who the yellows previously took on', including 'all those who have come from the Libres'.<sup>57</sup>

It is possible that Catalan *cenetistas*' fears that the UGT would gain ground in Catalonia if the idea was put forward that the two labour federations were equally valid were fuelled in part by a growth of the UGT in the region over the course of 1936. It is generally accepted by scholars that the UGT experienced a very rapid growth in Catalonia during the Civil War, even if this growth is sometimes simplistically put down to being a result of the petite bourgeoisie 'saving themselves' from the CNT's social revolution.<sup>58</sup> What is less well known, however, is that the socialist labour federation grew at a fairly rapid rate in the

months immediately prior to the war.<sup>59</sup> This growth was all the more surprising given that, from the end of 1935 and until just before the outbreak of the war, the upper echelons of the Catalan UGT were in disarray, with different factions vying for control of the organization's apparatus.<sup>60</sup> Although no overall figure exists for prior to the war, immediately after the outbreak of the conflict the Catalan UGT had 86000 members according to Pere Gabriel's calculations, a figure nearly double that of its peak immediately before its spring 1934 schism.<sup>61</sup> The indicator of Catalan UGT growth deployed in chapter five of this thesis also highlights an unprecedented growth of the organization in this period. Between 26<sup>th</sup> September 1935 and 16<sup>th</sup> July 1936, the Executive Commission registered sixty-eight new unions in the region, with 13257 members in total where a membership figure was given.<sup>62</sup> Of these entries, the most revealing is that of a 6000-strong manufacturing and textiles union from Barcelona in early July.<sup>63</sup> This sector was traditionally one of the CNT's core constituencies of support, and whilst the UGT's union was not rivalling the 1931 membership peak of 30000 of its CNT counterpart, by May 1936 the CNT union's membership had fallen to 14500.<sup>64</sup> It is certainly not inconceivable that a proportion of those who had left the CNT ultimately joined the UGT union in 1936.

Part of the reason for the rapid growth of the Catalan UGT could be put down to the organization's new-found willingness to adopt a more aggressive stance in strikes. It was argued earlier in this thesis that between 1931 and 1934 the activities of the Catalan UGT corresponded closely to those of other UGT unions in Spanish cities in terms of its unions seeking first and foremost to work with arbitration systems. It seems that in 1936 the Catalan UGT also underwent the same changes in its outlook on labour conflicts as did UGT unions in other Spanish cities in the respect that, whilst not rejecting the possibilities of the *jurados mixtos*, many UGT unions were more than prepared to convoke strikes. For example, in July the UGT's packaging workers in the lumber industry decided to call a strike to demand a new set of pay and conditions. However, at the same time the CNT's own section of its wood workers' union was in the process of negotiating a new deal with employers, meaning it had to publish a notification in *Solidaridad Obrera* for workers to disregard the UGT's own strike call, a reversal of the usual dynamic of UGT unions counselling against joining CNT strikes as they attempted to persist with negotiations.<sup>65</sup> Even the UGT's more skilled, niche profession unions appear to have embraced this more forthright approach to labour relations. In May, for instance, the UGT's mosaic makers' union in Barcelona contacted its corresponding CNT section in the construction *sindicato único* with an invitation to join them in presenting a new set of *bases* to employers,

counselling their CNT counterparts that ‘we workers must not remain disunited in our struggle because this will only benefit capitalism, which we must all work together to bring down as it is the true yoke of our oppression’.<sup>66</sup>

As has been discussed in this chapter, the period following the end of the *bienio negro* brought with it instances of CNT and UGT local actors cooperating with one another qualitatively and quantitatively as they had never done before during the Republic. Often this cooperation was restricted to specific labour conflicts, but in some cases, such as in Cádiz, the convergence was more closely integrated into the battle against the right. However, it was equally the case that there was also a concurrent trend of CNT and UGT unions in Spain coming into conflict with one another in a manner that had echoes of the most hostile times of the *bienio reformista*. Crucially, these events were picked up on by the CNT and socialist press far more so than the instances of cooperation.

In Oviedo in December 1935, for example, a strike was called in the construction industry, partly to demand the release of local prisoners. The conflict had initially been entered into jointly by the CNT and the UGT, but the UGT representatives then withdrew their support for it. According to the strike committee, this was because the leader of the UGT’s national federation of construction workers de-authorized the conflict. Elements of the local socialist party had apparently also intervened to ensure the release of UGT members, on the condition that they returned to work. All this led, as had happened so frequently in previous years, to accusations of ‘cowardice’ and ‘treachery’ being levelled at the UGT leaders in the sector.<sup>67</sup>

The waiters’ strike in Madrid was another area in which CNT and UGT unions clashed. Here, the CNT’s waiters’ union agreed to strike, but its UGT counterpart refused to second the call. The conflict was given more coverage than instances of CNT-UGT cooperation were in *Solidaridad Obrera*, with the paper suggesting that the UGT were returning to ‘the tactics of the past’. The conflict was one of a selection of clear-cut instances of hostilities between the CNT and the UGT, all of which were given prominence in the CNT’s paper, seemingly as part of an effort to imply that, on the level of industrial relations, the UGT had inexorably returned to the very same methods that had made it the CNT’s greatest enemy in the first years of the Republic.<sup>68</sup>

The CNT’s waiters in Madrid decided to press ahead with the strike despite the CNT’s refusal to back it. The coverage of the conflict in *Solidaridad Obrera*, which was

disproportionate relative to the nationwide significance of the strike itself, was firmly anchored in the premise that the UGT had betrayed the waiters by refusing to participate in it. In a manifesto released by the strike committee and published in the paper, the leaders of the UGT's hospitality union were accused of 'having no scruples over betraying the exploited and the oppressed'. The anti-fascist credentials of the socialists was mocked as they were branded as 'not hesitating to put themselves on the side of the fascists' as a result of their opposition to the CNT strike. The UGT union leaders were also labelled as 'guardians of the bourgeoisie'. Indeed, the strike committee's public statements on the strike were focussed first and foremost on attacking their UGT counterparts in terms that suggested that the entire socialist movement was treacherous and collaborationist. In this fundamental respect, the conflict and the CNT's interpretation of it and the UGT's role in it were no different to countless conflicts that took place during the first years of the Republic.<sup>69</sup>

In some cases, CNT unions started out cooperating with their UGT counterparts, only to then enter into disagreement with them over handling the conflict in question. This was the case in Bilbao in April 1936, where the CNT entered into a conflict in the construction industry with the UGT and Solidaridad de Trabajadores Vascos (STV), the Basque nationalist labour federation, with a strike committee formed out of the three organizations being set up. However, the CNT representatives then left the strike committee after their UGT and STV counterparts voted in favour of accepting a solution to the conflict drawn up by the Civil Governor. Setting up their own strike committee, the CNT then decried the 'low' attempts made by the UGT and STV committee to instruct workers to disregard the CNT's own committee.<sup>70</sup> It was a similar story elsewhere in the Basque Country, where the CNT initially entered into another construction conflict with the UGT in San Sebastián in May. However, in the words of the CNT organizers involved, throughout the three weeks of the conflict 'we have only been able to clearly ascertain one thing: the malice of the elements who call the shots from the UGT against the wishes and the agreements of the strikers and of their own members'. The basis for this accusation was that, after the conflict had been called, local UGT leaders attempted to intervene in it by trying to impose a solution that they had negotiated with the Civil Governor.<sup>71</sup> The CNT's gastronomy union in Málaga was left similarly outraged by the local UGT leadership in June, condemning them as '*arriviste*' politicians who were holding back workers after they forbade the UGT hospitality workers from accepting the CNT's offer of presenting *bases* to employers with them.<sup>72</sup> The CNT's interpretation of these events was almost identical to one of the key threads of the CNT's discourse on the UGT since the start of the Republic, namely that its

leaders interfered in conflicts, in the process betraying the aspirations of the workers involved in them.

What is most significant about *Solidaridad Obrera's* coverage of labour conflicts involving the CNT and the UGT during 1936 was that it prioritized coverage of CNT-UGT hostilities at the grassroots level over instances of cooperation between CNT and UGT unions. As discussed, there were a number of conflicts during 1936 in which CNT and UGT unions either jointly presented terms to employers, or in which one union seconded the strike call of the other. And yet *Solidaridad Obrera* paid relatively little attention to these cases and instead gave far more coverage to incidents in which the UGT was seen to be deploying the same methods as it had earlier in the Republic, damaging the CNT's own handling of conflicts in the process and presenting this as being detrimental to the interests of workers in the conflicts in question.

The coverage afforded to the Madrid construction strike of June and July 1936 highlights this tendency to emphasize instances of conflict over cooperation. The CNT and the UGT construction unions had initially entered into the conflict jointly, having presented *bases* to employers together in May. The conflict began on 1<sup>st</sup> June, with *Solidaridad Obrera* referring to the 'perfect unity of action' that it represented.<sup>73</sup> Initially, the two unions had created separate sets of demands, and the socialist union leaders had wished to put theirs through the *jurados*. However, under grassroots pressure, they reluctantly agreed instead to allow the conflict to be pursued the CNT's way, with the strike committee, in the perspective of *cenetistas* at least, committed to pursuing the conflict to its conclusion through direct action.<sup>74</sup>

After a month of deadlock, however, the government attempted to force a solution to the conflict by setting up a *jurado mixto* for it, with the local socialist leaders agreeing to participate in it. The UGT had somewhat unilaterally attempted to bring a close to the strike, something their CNT counterparts were unsurprisingly incensed about given that it had effectively cut out the CNT as a leading element of the strike. The claim made by *Claridad* that the CNT only refused to accept the solution to the conflict because it emanated from the state, and was thus a knee-jerk, dogmatic response, was certainly not one that the CNT appeared to accept.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, *Claridad* was roundly dismissive of the CNT's complaints, insisting that were the conflict to continue to be fought through direct action, it would inevitably end in total defeat for the workers.<sup>76</sup>

*Solidaridad Obrera* immediately took a far closer interest in the conflict once it became apparent that the CNT and UGT there were at odds regarding how to handle the conflict. The UGT's actions were reported as ones of outright 'treachery' in *Solidaridad Obrera*, with José García Pradas, one of the paper's correspondents in Madrid, devoting a series of lengthy articles to outlining this betrayal in detail. García Pradas came to present developments in the conflict almost exclusively as a set of attempts by the socialist leadership to betray the CNT, such as their advice to UGT members not to attend the assembly convoked by the CNT for construction workers to decide how to proceed with the strike after the UGT leaders had made an agreement through the *jurados*.<sup>77</sup> The CNT claimed to have the overall backing of workers in the industry to continue the strike; though it is difficult to gauge the precise split of opinion, it would certainly seem that the larger proportion of workers did back the CNT's position. By this point, for *Solidaridad Obrera*, there continued to be an emphasis on worker unity attached to the conflict; but now this unity was presented as workers jointly backing the CNT and rejecting the UGT.<sup>78</sup> It is important to note, however, that although *Solidaridad Obrera* was openly hostile towards the UGT's actions in Madrid, presenting the UGT there as essentially treacherous, it did come out strongly against the instances of violence that developed after some UGT members returned to work, demanding that workers from both sides desisted from attacking one another.<sup>79</sup> This explicit rejection of worker-on-worker violence had been largely absent in the CNT press in previous years.

At the same time as emphasising instances of CNT-UGT conflict over cooperation, *Solidaridad Obrera* also started to return to the same interpretations of the UGT that had dominated the CNT press between 1931 and 1934. For example, throughout the pre-war period of 1936, the paper drew attention to instances of UGT unions abandoning the socialist labour federation to join the CNT, just as it had done between 1931 and 1934. In November 1935, for example, a militant in Sevilla proudly reported on how workers were 'deserting' the UGT and the communist labour federation in the city as they became aware that the CNT was 'the only [organization] that defends their interests'.<sup>80</sup> In April 1936, the paper celebrated telephone workers in Santander leaving the UGT for the CNT.<sup>81</sup> Local leaders of the UGT continued to be presented in such terms as 'opportunists'<sup>82</sup> or 'jefecillos'.<sup>83</sup>

The national leaders of the UGT were equally accused of unaccountably controlling the destiny of the workers within the UGT. In April, *Solidaridad Obrera* went on the attack against Largo Caballero's continual public promotion of unity whilst no practical steps



were taken by the UGT to bring it about.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, Largo's role at the head of the UGT was also attacked in June 1936, with an editorial in the paper hoping that 'the workers of the Unión General de Trabajadores go over Largo and his minions' heads' to accept the CNT's alliance proposal, a desire that contradicted both the fact that the CNT had presented its proposal specifically to the UGT national leadership and the paper's support for the currents within the CNT that were attempting to prevent grassroots CNT-UGT cooperation.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, from June onwards, *Solidaridad Obrera* significantly stepped up the frequency of its attacks on the socialist leadership, often linking its criticisms to their non-response to the Zaragoza *Alianza Revolucionaria* proposal.<sup>86</sup> Whilst these challenges laid down to the UGT over its lack of concrete reply to the CNT proposal undoubtedly partly articulated the frustrations of some *cenetistas* who genuinely hoped the two labour federations would work towards an alliance, it must also be highlighted that making such public accusations corresponded to the agenda of those who hoped to discredit the UGT by exposing its lack of commitment to an alliance with the CNT. In effect, *Solidaridad Obrera* was helping to carry out the final part of this strategy.

On the part of the socialists, from late spring onwards there was likewise a creeping return to the sorts of criticisms and attacks that it had directed at the CNT between 1931 and 1934. By July 1936 both *El Socialista* and *Claridad*, in spite of their own differences, had adopted a roughly similar stance in their presentation of the CNT as a national movement, which was characterized by a very restrained re-articulation of the sorts of criticisms that had been made in socialist discourse of the CNT throughout the earlier years of the Republic. These criticisms were made in response to the activities of CNT organisms, especially those in Madrid during the construction strike held there. *Claridad* went as far as criticising the CNT's refusal to accept the settlement of the *jurado* in the conflict under the heading of 'the myth of direct action';<sup>87</sup> their stance over the strike was likewise described as 'suicidal and fratricidal obstinacy'.<sup>88</sup> Whilst the tone adopted was nowhere near as hostile as that of *El Socialista* between 1931 and 1933, an outright rejection of the CNT's methods, not just for the conflict in question but on a general level, was unmistakable.

In any case, even before the construction conflict in Madrid *Claridad* had to a degree lapsed into the critical discourse against anarchism and syndicalism from a theoretical standpoint that had historically been so characteristic of Spanish socialism. In late May 1936, the paper published a couple of different articles of this nature. One labelled the CNT's commitment to direct action as 'mistaken' and in doing so described direct action

as 'seeing in constant and staggered strikes not just a legitimate method of obtaining economic improvements, but also a debatable procedure of agitation and promoting the union'.<sup>89</sup> In another editorial the paper hit back at the criticism of socialism and communism that was expressed at the same time in *Solidaridad Obrera*, in the course of which anarchist objections to the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat were dismissed.<sup>90</sup> At the same time the paper maintained its rhetorical commitment to promoting both alliances in general and also unity specifically between the CNT and the UGT, seemingly with little consideration of how public criticisms of the most fundamental tenets of CNT practice would be perceived by *cenetistas*. Nevertheless, the temptation to revert to the discourse of yesteryear proved to be too strong for the socialists as well as the anarcho-syndicalists. As Santos Juliá argues, the socialist left, for all its rhetoric on unity, did not fundamentally alter its negative interpretation of anarcho-syndicalism between 1934 and 1936.<sup>91</sup>

### Conclusions

By the time an uprising against the Republic seemed imminent, the CNT and the UGT on the national level and between many sections of their grassroots were well on their way to returning to the same open hostilities that had characterized their relationship between April 1931 and October 1934. The socialists failed to show any interest in the *Alianza Revolucionaria* proposition of the CNT, and as Helen Graham highlights, offered no alternative proposal.<sup>92</sup> The actions of the CNT leadership reveal that they were not so much interested in signing an alliance with the UGT as much as they were in exploiting the notion of unity for their own organizational interests. Privately, members on the CNT's top committees, staff at *Solidaridad Obrera* and a whole host of militants expressed the belief that the proposal that they had formulated could be used to win members from the UGT and also discredit the UGT leadership. But it was the leading lights of the Catalan CNT, who had masterminded the *Alianza Revolucionaria* initiative, who proved themselves to be most cynical in their use of the question of CNT-UGT unity. The region's leaders did their utmost to prevent grassroots fraternization between the CNT and the UGT across Spain, citing the goals of the *Alianza Revolucionaria* and the agreed procedures to bring it about as a pretext to try and prevent CNT unions acting in tandem with UGT counterparts. At the same time, *cenetistas* in Catalonia, in spite of their launching of a strategy of instructing all workers to join the CNT or the UGT according to their preferences, were singularly unwilling to accept the expansion of the UGT in their region. The attitude of many CNT militants in Catalonia, and also some elsewhere in Spain, reveals that a significant

proportion of the CNT held fundamentally the same anti-UGT mentality, grounded in the same assumptions and beliefs, as they had held since the start of the Republic and even before. As a manifestation of this, the press of both movements chose to focus on instances of hostility between the CNT and the UGT, presenting them in the same terms as those deployed between 1931 and 1934, rather than promoting cases of cooperation. Across Spain, there were unquestionably instances of CNT and UGT militants converging, not just over labour conflicts, but also in terms of their overall outlook on the possibilities of CNT-UGT unity, as José Luis Gutiérrez Molina has illustrated with regard to Cádiz.<sup>93</sup> But these were decisively pushed into the background by the efforts of the most influential sectors of both the anarcho-sindicalist and socialist movements.

If one event highlights the risky game both the CNT and the UGT were playing in adopting this approach of simultaneously espousing unity whilst treating the other movement as a rival, it is the bloody events that occurred in Málaga in June, stimulated by a conflict in the food production industry, where the CNT had called a strike but their UGT counterparts refused to second it. Beginning with the murder of a socialist, over the following few days Málaga was beset by tit-for-tat murders of socialist, communist and anarcho-sindicalist militants. CNT and UGT leaders in the city hastily convoked a meeting to attempt to bring an end to the violence, with representatives from Madrid and Barcelona travelling to the region to assist. *El Socialista*, *Claridad* and *Solidaridad Obrera* all produced front-page editorials appealing for calm, with each warning that such actions would either help provoke a fascist takeover or were deeply unwise in the context of the mobilization of the extreme right.<sup>94</sup> Whilst these newspapers, as discussed, sought to draw attention to instances of grassroots rivalry, and even used them to discredit the other labour federation, neither side wanted the rivalry to lead to a civil war within the proletariat, nor give a pretext for a right-wing grab for power. This essentially contradictory labour of simultaneously trying to discredit or criticize rival organizations whilst maintaining an overall united front with them against a common enemy would become a much more frequent – and dangerous – aspect of the left's behaviour during the war.

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<sup>1</sup> *El Socialista*, 26 May 1936

<sup>2</sup> *Claridad*, 15 May 1936

<sup>3</sup> FPI AARD 257-2 Meeting of the UGT Executive Commission, 21 May 1936; IISG CNT 50A9 Letter from the General Secretary of the UGT Executive Commission to the CNT National Committee, 21 May 1936

<sup>4</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, it is most likely that the factions of the CNT clustered around Juan García Oliver were the ones who masterminded the implementation of the *Alianza Revolucionaria* position. However, it has not been possible to ascertain whether García Oliver originally conceived of the strategy for this purpose, or whether those who viewed unity as working towards the purpose of discrediting the UGT independently came to this conclusion.

- <sup>5</sup> IISG CNT 50A3 'Hacia el congreso nacional de la Confederación Nacional del Trabajo: Orden del día definitivo y fundamentos del mismo, que el Comité Nacional somete a los sindicatos', 25 March 1936
- <sup>6</sup> Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, *El Congreso Confederal de Zaragoza*, pp. 185-187
- <sup>7</sup> IISG CNT 50A6 Letter from Manuel Pérez to the CNT National Committee, 31 May 1936
- <sup>8</sup> IISG CNT 50A4 Letter from the Secretary of the CNT Regional Committee of the Centre to the National Committee, 27 May 1936
- <sup>9</sup> Juliá, *La izquierda del PSOE*, p. 246; Peirats, *La CNT*, vol. 1, pp. 106-122
- <sup>10</sup> For example, Balcells, *Crisis económica*, p. 237; Barrio Alonso, *Anarquismo*, pp. 420-422; Brademas, *Anarquismo*, pp. 169-170
- <sup>11</sup> This is certainly not to argue that there were not militants and workers within the CNT who were genuinely in favour of a CNT-UGT alliance. There undoubtedly were; but their aspirations were, ostensibly and temporarily at least, fulfilled by the formulation of the alliance proposal.
- <sup>12</sup> *Claridad*, 05 May 1936
- <sup>13</sup> IISG CNT 50A9 Circular from the CNT National Committee, 07 April 1936
- <sup>14</sup> IISG CNT 50A9 Official message of the CNT National Committee sent to the editorial team of *Solidaridad Obrera* for publication, 27 May 1936
- <sup>15</sup> IISG CNT 50A5 Letters from the CNT National Committee to the Andalucía and Extremadura Regional Committee, 27 May and 05 June 1936
- <sup>16</sup> IISG CNT 50A5 Letter from the Andalucía and Extremadura Regional Committee to the National Committee, 18 June 1936
- <sup>17</sup> IISG CNT 50A5 Letter from the CNT National Committee to the Andalucía and Extremadura Regional Committee, 28 June 1936
- <sup>18</sup> IISG CNT 50A6 Telegram from the Barcelona wood workers' union to the CNT National Committee
- <sup>19</sup> IISG CNT 50A4 Letter from the secretary of the CNT Regional Committee of the Centre to the National Committee, 27 May 1936
- <sup>20</sup> IISG CNT 50A6 Letter from the Catalan Regional Committee to the National Committee, 22 June 1936
- <sup>21</sup> IISG CNT 50A5 Letter from the Andalucía and Extremadura Regional Committee to the National Committee, 18 June 1936
- <sup>22</sup> IISG CNT 50A5 Letter from the Catalan Regional Committee to the Cádiz Local Federation, 22 June 1936
- <sup>23</sup> IISG CNT 50A5 Letter from the Catalan Regional Committee to the Cádiz Local Federation, 22 June 1936
- <sup>24</sup> Casanova, *Anarchism*, p. 124
- <sup>25</sup> IISG CNT 50A6 Letter from the Catalan Regional Committee to the National Committee, 22 June 1936
- <sup>26</sup> IISG CNT 50A6 Letters between the Catalan Regional Committee to the National Committee, 26 June 1936, 29 June 1936, 02 July 1936
- <sup>27</sup> IISG CNT 50A6 Letter from the Catalan Regional Committee to the National Committee, 26 June 1936
- <sup>28</sup> IISG CNT 50A6 Letter from the Catalan Regional Committee to the National Committee, 30 May 1936
- <sup>29</sup> IISG CNT 50A6 Letter from the Catalan Regional Committee to the National Committee, 07 July 1936
- <sup>30</sup> IISG CNT 50A6 Letter from the Catalan Regional Committee to the National Committee, 02 July 1936
- <sup>31</sup> IISG CNT 50A6 Letter from the Catalan Regional Committee to the National Committee, 22 June 1936
- <sup>32</sup> For example, *Solidaridad Obrera*, 27, 28, 30 May 1936
- <sup>33</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 30 May 1936
- <sup>34</sup> IISG CNT 50A6 Letter from the Catalan Regional Committee to the National Committee, 02 July 1936
- <sup>35</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 December 1935
- <sup>36</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 March 1936
- <sup>37</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 14 March 1936
- <sup>38</sup> Gutiérrez Molina, *Crisis burguesa*
- <sup>39</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 14 May 1936
- <sup>40</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 03 May 1936
- <sup>41</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 16 April 1936
- <sup>42</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 17 May 1936
- <sup>43</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 December 1935
- <sup>44</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 14 March 1936
- <sup>45</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 28 December 1935
- <sup>46</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 April 1936
- <sup>47</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 27 May 1936
- <sup>48</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 08 June 1936
- <sup>49</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 22 March 1936
- <sup>50</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 20 June 1936
- <sup>51</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 12 July 1936
- <sup>52</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 July 1936
- <sup>53</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 05 July 1936
- <sup>54</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 July 1936
- <sup>55</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 July 1936

- <sup>56</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 23 April 1936
- <sup>57</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 12 July 1936
- <sup>58</sup> Payne, *La revolución española*, p. 232. This analysis is refuted by David Ballester in *Els anys de la guerra: La UGT de Catalunya (1936-1939)* (Barcelona: Columna, 1998), p. 41
- <sup>59</sup> For a closer examination of this growth, see Durgan, 'The search for unity', pp. 116-123
- <sup>60</sup> The infighting ultimately ended in June, with the communists Josep del Barrio and Antoni Sesé prevailing. (Ballester, *Marginalitats i hegemonies*, pp. 194-202)
- <sup>61</sup> Pere Gabriel, 'Sindicalismo y sindicatos socialistas en Cataluña', p. 64
- <sup>62</sup> FPI AARD 257-1 and 257-2 Minutes of the meetings of the UGT Executive Commission, 26 September 1935 to 16 July 1936
- <sup>63</sup> FPI AARD 257-2 Minutes of the meeting of the UGT Executive Commission, 09 July 1936
- <sup>64</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, p. 140
- <sup>65</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 07 July 1936
- <sup>66</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 1419 Letter from the Barcelona UGT mosaic makers' union to the CNT construction union, 25 May 1936
- <sup>67</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25 December 1935
- <sup>68</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 28 May 1936
- <sup>69</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 03, 04 June 1936
- <sup>70</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 01 May 1936
- <sup>71</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 23 May 1936
- <sup>72</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 11 June 1936
- <sup>73</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 02 June 1936
- <sup>74</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 20 June 1936; Juliá, *La izquierda del PSOE*, pp. 256-264
- <sup>75</sup> *Claridad*, 07 July 1936
- <sup>76</sup> *Claridad*, 07 July 1936, 11 July 1936
- <sup>77</sup> For example, *Solidaridad Obrera*, 20 June, 09 July 1936
- <sup>78</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 09 July 1936
- <sup>79</sup> For example, *Solidaridad Obrera*, 18 July 1936
- <sup>80</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 16 November 1935
- <sup>81</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 April 1936
- <sup>82</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 30 January 1935
- <sup>83</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 12 May 1936
- <sup>84</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 April 1936
- <sup>85</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 02 June 1936
- <sup>86</sup> For example, *Solidaridad Obrera*, 02, 07, 12 June, 02 July, 09 July 1936
- <sup>87</sup> *Claridad*, 07 July 1936
- <sup>88</sup> *Claridad*, 11 July 1936
- <sup>89</sup> *Claridad*, 30 May 1936
- <sup>90</sup> *Claridad*, 30 May 1936
- <sup>91</sup> Juliá, *La izquierda del PSOE*, p. 224
- <sup>92</sup> Graham, *Socialism and War*, p. 47
- <sup>93</sup> Gutiérrez Molina, *Crisis burguesa*
- <sup>94</sup> *Claridad*, 12 June 1936, 15 June 1936; *El Socialista*, 16 June 1936; *El Sol*, 12 June 1936, 13 June 1936, 14 June 1936; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 11 June 1936, 13 June 1936; *La Vanguardia*, 14 June 1936; Stanley Payne, *The Collapse of the Spanish Republic, 1933-1936: the origins of the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 277-278

## Chapter Ten: CNT-UGT Interactions in Igualada, 1931-1936

This chapter will provide an analysis of interactions between the CNT and the UGT in Igualada, a town approximately seventy kilometres west of Barcelona. Although it would be unwise to suggest that CNT-UGT interactions in all Catalan towns followed precisely the same path as those of Igualada given the level of variation between different localities in important factors such as the relative sizes of the local CNT and UGT movements at the start of the Republic, there is little to suggest that interactions between the two organizations in the town were unrepresentative or exceptional. Certainly the CNT movement here corresponded in terms of the ideas its militants espoused in their propaganda and their methods of fighting labour conflicts to the Catalan CNT archetype. As such, Igualada serves as a suitable town to use as the subject of a case study of grassroots-level CNT-UGT interactions. The more specific focus of the chapter will allow the CNT and UGT's struggles with one another to be examined with a much greater level of context and detail. Above all, the local CNT movement can be reconstructed more thoroughly, especially with regard to highlighting the role the local *cenetistas* believed that their movement played amongst the *igualadí* working classes and their level of commitment to defending their local organization and the cause they associated with it. In addition to studying interactions between the CNT and the UGT specifically in Igualada, the chapter will study how the local militants of the CNT saw the wider national and regional narratives of CNT-UGT interactions as relevant to their own interactions with the UGT in Igualada, as well as how far their stances on the UGT as a national actor and a presence in Catalonia matched those outlined in the previous chapters of this thesis.

### The Igualada working classes and the CNT

Igualada had a population of 13871 in 1931.<sup>1</sup> The town expanded over the first third of the twentieth century, stimulated by the expansion of the town's industrial sector.<sup>2</sup> Like many towns in Catalonia, Igualada experienced a large industrial growth in particular during World War One. The two industries most predominant in Igualada were leather and textiles, in particular cotton.<sup>3</sup> According to figures provided by Soledad Bengoechea, by 1922 in Igualada there were 250 leather processing businesses, employing some 3000 workers.<sup>4</sup> The *cenetista* militants of Igualada were closely associated with this industry, with many of the Local Federation's most active militants working or having previously been employed in the sector. The textile industry experienced a boom in Igualada over the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, but began to stagnate towards the end of

World War One. By 1922 there were seventeen textile factories in Igualada, employing approximately 3000 workers.<sup>5</sup> As is to be expected, the town also had a local construction industry.<sup>6</sup>

The key development in the Igualada workers' movement was the formation of a *Federación Local Obrera* affiliated to the International Workingmen's Association during the politically turbulent years of 1868 to 1874. This Local Federation and its constituent sections were guided by a Bakuninist, communalist philosophy.<sup>7</sup> This organization remained in existence until 1885; its paper *La Federación Igualadina*, which was in publication from 1883 to 1885, bore the slogan of 'Anarchy, Federation and Collectivism'.<sup>8</sup>

By the turn of the twentieth century trade unions began to form again in Igualada after a period of repression at the end of the nineteenth century; once more they were guided by anarchist ideas, but also incorporated newer syndicalist principles as well. According to the recollections of Joan Ferrer, who was the Igualada CNT's leading militant throughout the 1930s, a significant proportion of the protagonists of this new movement were some of the main militants of the old *Federación Local Obrera*, who provided organizational and ideological guidance to a new generation of labour activists.<sup>9</sup> The ideas of these unions were transmitted locally through their paper *El Obrero Moderno*.<sup>10</sup> Though not of anywhere near the size or strength that the CNT would attain in 1919, the nucleus of the unions and militants that would ultimately go on to form this organization had by this point been formed.

Delegates from Igualada's leather union were present at the founding congress of the CNT in 1910.<sup>11</sup> The Igualada unions were therefore connected to the CNT from the moment of its founding. Over the course of the 1910s, these unions would consolidate within the CNT, culminating in the spectacular growth of the local organization at the end of the decade. Nineteen-ten was also the year in which Joan Ferrer joined the local CNT at the age of fourteen.<sup>12</sup> Over the course of the 1910s many of the individuals who would comprise the key core of militants of the CNT during the Republic and the war, such as Ángel Amenós, Daniel Alcaide, José Anselmo, Ramón Guitart and José Cuatrecasas, also began their long associations with the Local Federation;<sup>13</sup> many of these figures were signatories of the petition by the CNT made to the Mayor in April 1931 for legal restrictions on their union to be removed.<sup>14</sup>

The trajectory of growth for the Igualada CNT corresponds to a large degree to that of the organization in Barcelona, with the organization remaining a small core of militants until World War One, then subsequently experiencing a moderate increase in membership between 1916 and 1918, and then finally experiencing a massive growth in its popularity in 1919.<sup>15</sup> According to the organization's own figures, local membership ballooned from 1607 members in 1918 to 5600 at the end of 1919.<sup>16</sup> Given that the local population of Igualada at this time was 12512, this figure, though perhaps exaggerated, demonstrates the importance of the CNT in Igualada. To a very large extent, then, in 1919 the Igualada CNT represented the working classes of Igualada almost in their entirety, and could call on an unprecedented level of collective strength in local labour conflicts.

The combination of the Igualada CNT's spectacular growth and brief preponderance in the 1910s with the fact of many of the militants of the re-founded CNT of 1930 belonging to the earlier incarnation of the CNT is highly important when considering the position taken by the Igualada CNT over a nascent UGT presence in the town during the Second Republic. Joan Ferrer makes it clear in his memoirs that he viewed the CNT as having a long-standing historical lineage in Igualada. In the view of Joan Ferrer, the re-founded CNT of 1930 was 'indisputably the home of the *igualadí* worker'.<sup>17</sup> Like the CNT elsewhere in Catalonia, its militants viewed their organization and the local working class as synonymous. Just as importantly, Ferrer viewed this implantation of the CNT in the town being a result of not just the receptiveness of the local working classes to anarchist and syndicalist ideas, but specifically down to the efforts of himself and a dedicated group of militants who joined the organization in the 1910s and had continued struggling throughout the dictatorship to ensure the movement's survival in the town.<sup>18</sup> As will be seen, the Igualada CNT were resolutely opposed to the possibility of the UGT developing a presence in Igualada during the Republic; this stance was undoubtedly in part a product of the sacrifices and commitment that the movement's militants had made over the course of decades, in combination with their interpretation of their organization being the current manifestation of a decades-long lineage of the local working classes' union organization.

It is difficult to identify any significant union alternatives to the CNT and its antecedents that existed in Igualada until the contentious arrival of the *Sindicatos Libres* in Igualada in 1920, which was aided by the authorities and employers as it was elsewhere in Catalonia.<sup>19</sup> However, there did exist another convergence point for workers in the town, though not a trade union organization, which outdated the CNT by several decades. This entity was the *Ateneu Igualadí de la Classe Obrera*. Set up in 1863, this was for the most part a cultural,



educational and social institution, though according to Bengoechea also offered advice and encouragement to workers in the event of labour conflicts. The Ateneu in the 1910s had a membership of roughly 1000.<sup>20</sup> It was founded on the notions of worker liberation through education and personal betterment and inter-class cooperation rather than the anarcho-syndicalist emphasis of violent class conflict. The Ateneu offered a very different vision of society and the possible role of the working class in it to the anarcho-syndicalist alternative, and that it continued to flourish even after the CNT had set up their own alternative Ateneu in 1918 shows that although the CNT were the only significant labour union, their doctrine was not the only one endorsed by sectors of the Igualada working class.<sup>21</sup> However, it seems highly likely that the UGT had no representation in Igualada before the Second Republic. Miquel Termens i Graells states categorically that the UGT did not exist in Igualada prior to the Second Republic;<sup>22</sup> David Ballester makes no mention of a local federation in Igualada in this era.<sup>23</sup> There appears to be no documentary trace of a UGT presence in Igualada before the Second Republic.

When the CNT returned to some form of legality in 1930, the CNT in Igualada began to rebuild and take in new members extremely quickly, as happened in towns across Catalonia. The *Sindicatos Libres*, in which many former *cenetistas* had been enrolled, quickly began to disintegrate.<sup>24</sup> As in previous eras, the strongest sections of the Igualada CNT at the beginning of the 1930s were its textile, leather and construction unions, with metal, transport and woodworking unions also having significant membership levels.<sup>25</sup> The Local Federation's newspaper, *El Sembrador*, went into publication on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1930, first on a bi-weekly basis and then weekly from mid-1931. Overall, it is clear that the CNT militants of Igualada had spent the 1920s waiting for the moment in which their organization could be rebuilt, and in the latter days of the Monarchy and the early months of the Republic they set about this task with considerable success.

According to Eulàlia Vega, the Igualada CNT Local Federation was among the more efficient of the CNT local federations in Catalonia in terms of its abilities to organize the local workforce and conduct the internal business of the organization, such as meetings and assemblies.<sup>26</sup> By June 1931, the Local Federation had a total of 5100 members, with this figure representing the peak for the CNT in Igualada before the war.<sup>27</sup> This figure is comparable with that of December 1919, and as such represents an impressive rebuilding of the organization in a relatively short space of time. According to Vega, in late 1931 seventy-five percent of Igualada's working classes were enrolled in the CNT.<sup>28</sup> The Igualada CNT's activities in the first months of the Republic consisted principally of

concentrated verbal and written propaganda campaigns to expand the organization, and also entering into labour conflicts across all industries to gain new pay and conditions agreements, with all eight of the Local Federation's constituent unions initiating strike activity in 1931.<sup>29</sup>

However, the level of dominance that the CNT initially enjoyed was to an extent illusory. By 1932, the organization began to lose members and suffer the effects of government repression. The effects of the factional split within the CNT movement would also play a decisive role, ultimately leading to a split in the local organization. A loss of enthusiasm on the part of the local workforce must also be considered an important factor in the decline in membership. By April 1932 the membership of the Local Federation had fallen to 3230 members; by March 1933 it was as low as 1245.<sup>30</sup> As Vega highlights, this represents a seventy-five percent decline in membership from the June 1931 levels. The most marked decline was experienced by the textile union, the membership of which fell from 3700 members in June 1931 to just 400 in March 1933.<sup>31</sup> Part of this decline, particularly in textiles and leather, can be attributed to the schism that took place in the Igualada CNT in 1934.<sup>32</sup> The collapse in membership shows that, to a large extent, the CNT in Igualada was held together by a small nucleus of committed militants, who had only temporary success in winning the bulk of the workforce over to their cause, rather than the organization enjoying committed widespread support. This was a state of affairs acknowledged and publicly lamented in *El Sembrador* in December 1933.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, however, for the local militants who witnessed this decline in their organization after both the decades they had committed to the organization and the initial, rapid expansion of it, the situation must have been particularly exasperating. Like militants all around Catalonia whose CNT organisms experienced the same setbacks, there must have been a temptation to look to exterior forces – above all competitors to the CNT – to blame.

#### The Igualada CNT and their general perceptions of the UGT, 1931 to 1934

Although the Igualada CNT did come into direct contact with a nascent local wing of the UGT over the course of the Second Republic, it is important to recognize that this more tangible type of contact was not the only way in which the Igualada CNT interacted with the UGT. As members of a national labour federation that articulated goals that had a nationwide impact it is also important to recognize that the Igualada *cenetistas* viewed the UGT and the CNT's relationship with it as something of relevance far beyond the confines of their town.

*El Sembrador*'s stance on the UGT on the national level was to a very large extent the same as that of other CNT newspapers from across Spain which have been outlined earlier in this thesis. The following excerpt of an editorial from *El Sembrador*, referring to Largo Caballero – who was used to personify the UGT as a general entity in *El Sembrador* attacks, in much the same way that he was in *Solidaridad Obrera* – serves as a good initial orientation of the line taken towards the UGT and its national figureheads throughout the period 1931 to 1934:

We have known for some time about [Largo's] actions and life. We know that he belongs to the Unión General de Trabajadores (?), and that he is one of its key members. We are not ignorant of the reformist qualities of this organization, nor the bourgeois or reformist character that drives it. We remember the unconditional support provided by this gentleman during the Primo de Rivera dictatorship. We do not know to exactly what height or depth his statist socialism permits him to go; because in the politics of the state moral flexibility is so dilated that anything can be justified or approved, no matter how unjustifiable it may appear.<sup>34</sup>

Like the rest of the CNT press, the anti-UGT line of *El Sembrador* would only intensify in the following months. The Telefónica strike of the summer of 1931 marked the first point that the UGT on the general level came under sustained attack in the pages of *El Sembrador*. In line with *Solidaridad Obrera*'s interpretation of events, the UGT as a whole was presented as intentionally betraying the CNT. In the midst of the conflict, *El Sembrador* advised its readers that 'who takes the prize in the field of treachery is the UGT'.<sup>35</sup>

Like *Solidaridad Obrera*, *El Sembrador* argued that the socialists in government were out to crush the CNT and replace it with the UGT. The paper's editorials made statements such as 'by the order of a *democratic* government, the CNT will be made illegal because this suits the *enxufistes* of the UGT'.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, a May 1933 editorial spoke of CNT resistance to 'legislation designed to destroy our labour federation to favour the interests of the primates of socialism'.<sup>37</sup> Largo's *jurados mixtos* came under particularly heavy attack, being represented as a method of the socialist leadership to repress the CNT and receiving comparison with the arbitration schemes of Mussolini's Italy.<sup>38</sup> These depictions of the UGT on the national level remained prominent throughout the *bienio reformista* and continued after it, with the paper proclaiming Largo as 'lackey of yesterday's dictatorship and today ex-minister of the Republic',<sup>39</sup> and blaming the UGT ministers' activities in government for the rise of the right.<sup>40</sup>

It is important to consider why the UGT on the national level was such a target for *El Sembrador's* hostility. The most obvious answer, and certainly not an incorrect one, is that the UGT and its leaders were playing an important role in damaging the CNT through repression, and fully endorsed policies which were anathema to the CNT's ideology, such as the *jurados mixtos*. However, this on its own is not a fully satisfactory explanation. As highlighted here, the vast majority of *El Sembrador's* anti-UGT line was a replication of that which was produced in *Solidaridad Obrera*. It is unlikely that the local paper repeated *Solidaridad Obrera's* line because local militants would have otherwise not been exposed to it. Nor is it the case that attacks on Largo Caballero and on the UGT as a whole were made because the Igualada CNT was experiencing any particularly acute local competition from the UGT. As will be discussed later, the local UGT movement, when it did begin in 1932, was very small. Moreover, *El Sembrador's* attacks on the UGT took place from virtually the first days of the Republic, before the UGT had even the smallest presence in the town.

Rather, one of the key reasons the UGT as a national actor was given such heavy coverage in the Igualada CNT's propaganda is due to the pivotal function it played in the organization's promotion of the CNT in the town. The UGT when presented in a generalized fashion in *cenetista* discourse was an embodiment of everything the CNT opposed, and so served in the propaganda of the Igualada CNT as a negative counterpoint against which the CNT could be presented as the only valid representative of the working classes. This function is recurrent throughout the local paper's articles that attacked the UGT. Articles in *El Sembrador* that argued that the UGT was attempting to destroy the CNT, such as its attacks on the *Ley de Orden Público*, also promoted the CNT as being synonymous with the working classes and referred to the CNT method of direct action as the only legitimate course of action.<sup>41</sup> In an editorial entitled 'Two Socialisms' the UGT and Largo were attacked at length, before providing the counterpoint that 'we are socialists, but anarchist-socialists. We possess a confederal organism of libertarian tendency which truly represents the exploited class of Spain: the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo'.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, in August 1931, José Cuatrecasas argued that

in parallel to the repressive methods that are deployed against the CNT, the UGT receives favourable treatment. Why? To divert the revolutionary spirit of the workers towards reformist causes. The Spanish proletariat, organized in the CNT, must move forward, in spite of all the repressions and all the crises that have been provoked, towards the destruction of the oppressive system.<sup>43</sup>

The fact that such a heavy emphasis was placed on criticizing the UGT as part of an attempt to promote the CNT in a town with such a negligible UGT presence as Igualada demonstrates just how important a function the UGT on a general level played in the discourse of CNT militants. Even in Igualada, where the role of these attacks as a means of attacking a local UGT rival was largely redundant, the UGT was a key element of the local militants' discourse. For the local *cenetista* militants the UGT on the general level was not just one of the key props of the system the CNT sought to overthrow; its mention was also a key method of asserting that the CNT was the only legitimate working class organization. Even in the areas of Catalonia that had the strongest historical connections to the CNT, the UGT – if only as a notional entity – was therefore deeply rooted in the consciousness and discourse of the local militants.

The Igualada CNT's public stance on the question of alliances was also a direct re-articulation of *Solidaridad Obrera's* stance on the matter. Joan Ferrer passed comment on several occasions on the issue of anti-fascist unity. In September 1933, for example, he opined in *El Sembrador* that the current anti-fascist unity initiatives were unworkable because they were led by organizations that had proven themselves to be hostile to the CNT and workers.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, Ferrer also shared *Solidaridad Obrera's* line that the CNT was not opposed to working with other members of the left, on the condition that this unity came about spontaneously and in the course of revolution:

Revolutionary unity? For us it is no longer necessary that we be invited to a unity of this sort. Because we never fail. If a revolutionary movement does arise, they will meet us in the street. We make revolutionary unity at the foot of the barricade.<sup>45</sup>

#### Interactions between CNT and UGT grassroots in Igualada, 1931 to 1934

Before examining the hostilities between the CNT and the UGT in Igualada after UGT unions started being founded in the town from 1932, it would be worthwhile to consider first the Igualada CNT's more general position regarding workers who were seen to be dissenting from the Local Federation. Throughout the period stretching from the start of the Republic until October 1934, the Igualada CNT on various occasions ran public campaigns which targeted non-unionized workers in a particular industry or workplace in a bid to force them to join the CNT. These campaigns typically entailed an initial naming and shaming of the targeted workers in *El Sembrador*, followed by the threat of some form of boycott. On 11<sup>th</sup> July 1931, for example, the paper published the following warning to the employees of the Manuel Arolas electrical workshop:

We have invited [these] workers on more than three occasions to join our union and they have always refused. Since they refuse to cooperate in our syndical task, the least that us workers in the CNT can do is likewise refuse to cooperate in any works in which these workers are involved, which is to say: boycott them.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, in January 1934, an article in *El Sembrador* attributed to ‘a group of waiters’ sent a warning out to the employees of a local bar who had left the CNT. Publishing the names of the individuals in question, the article warned them ‘not to forget that we have sufficient influence to have you replaced [in your jobs] with men more sensible and more willing to fulfil their duties to the workers’ cause’. The message ended with a warning to the bar owner that ‘a boycott of your establishment would be very appropriate for you if you try and provoke conflicts’.<sup>47</sup> As can be seen in these two examples, not joining the CNT was effectively equated with opposing it, and as such aggressive measures such as these were deemed acceptable to counteract reluctant workers. These examples also demonstrate that the priority for CNT organizers was to recruit workers into their organization as though it were a form of natural obligation for the working classes, regardless of whether the workers in question endorsed the CNT’s principles or methods.

The minutes of the Igualada CNT’s leather goods union also hint at the possibility that inflammatory accusations were even at times levelled at *cenetistas* by one another. At one meeting of the leather goods union, one CNT member was accused by another of ‘being stained with bad conduct and betrayal of [his] colleagues to the boss’.<sup>48</sup> At another meeting an argument erupted when it emerged that the father of two members of the union was working in the *Casa Vich*, a workplace which the CNT were boycotting. The sons of this individual attempted to defend their father, in the process finding themselves coming under attack from other militants.<sup>49</sup> In this particular case, family ties conflicted with union ones. Such incidents can only have alienated some workers from an organization in which they were the subject of accusations such as collaboration with the bourgeoisie.

This combination of hostile campaigns directed at those who did not adhere to the CNT’s activities and the fact that individuals within the same union were prepared to accuse their fellow *cenetistas* of yellow practices suggests that in no small measure, due to the labour practices of the Igualada CNT and the attitudes of its individual members, a certain level of divisiveness and mistrust was present amongst workers in Igualada. It seems highly probable that although the CNT was by some distance the strongest labour organization in Igualada, this status was maintained at a cost of sectors of the workforce inevitably

harbouring some form of antipathy towards the organization, and others becoming a target of public criticism.

The first instance of definite CNT-UGT interaction in Igualada came about in the construction industry. It stemmed from attempts by the CNT to regulate the control of the allocation of work in the Igualada building trade as a solution to the widespread unemployment experienced by workers in this sector. The CNT initiated a scheme through which work would be distributed evenly amongst workers in the industry, which was formalized in an agreement negotiated with employers. However, nine workers attached to the *Casa Cinto* business refused to adhere to the CNT's scheme, with the business refusing to share its work with unemployed *cenetistas*.<sup>50</sup> These workers had previously been members of the CNT.<sup>51</sup> A boycott in an attempt to marginalize these workers was made by the Local Federation of the CNT.<sup>52</sup> On 6<sup>th</sup> February, the workers of the *Casa Cinto* who were refusing to accept the CNT's work-sharing scheme were named publicly in *El Sembrador*, along with a full account of their 'shameful' activities.<sup>53</sup> Regular updates on the campaign against these workers were then published in the paper, including requests for readers to 'comply as they should in the conflict against the *Casa Cinto*'.<sup>54</sup>

Initially, this campaign against the *Casa Cinto* began as much as one against the owner of the company as it was the workers who continued to work for him and in so doing undermined the CNT's work-sharing scheme.<sup>55</sup> However, once the builders of the *Casa Cinto* had joined the UGT by February 1932 the course of CNT-UGT interactions in Igualada took a markedly more tense turn, with the looming prospect of violence between *cenetistas* and the *ugetista* builders.<sup>56</sup> This already tense situation was inflamed even further when, in August 1932, a bricklayers' strike was called in the town by the CNT over pay and conditions.<sup>57</sup> The UGT bricklayers ignored the call and continued to work, and UGT members from nearby Pobla de Claramunt were also brought in as strike-breakers.<sup>58</sup> *El Diari d'Igualada* in its reporting of the strike indicated that more than one workplace remained operational due to UGT labour, raising the possibility that other workers outside the *Casa Cinto* joined the UGT so that they could continue to work.<sup>59</sup>

Unfortunately, it is difficult to ascertain precise details of incidents of physical confrontation between *cenetistas* and the *ugetistas* of the *Casa Cinto*; both parties made a series of accusations and counter-accusations of attempts at violence by their opponents. *El Sembrador* for its part refuted all accusations against *cenetistas* made by *ugetistas* via the pages of *El Diari d'Igualada*, whilst accusing the *ugetistas* of committing similar acts of

aggression.<sup>60</sup> For example, in April 1932 the CNT publicly accused the local UGT of preparing to usher in an era of *pistolerismo* in the town, stating that ‘some strike-breakers from the UGT’ had acquired ammunition for pistols, for use against ‘the workers of the CNT’.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, the accusations themselves made by the CNT and the language employed in presenting the local *ugetistas* of the construction industry reveal much about the nature of interactions between the two groups. For example, a September 1932 edition of *El Sembrador* carried the following account of an altercation between *cenetistas* and *ugetistas* from the *Casa Cinto* at the height of the bricklayers’ strike:

There was a light skirmish between a turncoat of the CNT, a professional *esquirol* affiliated to the trash of the Igualada UGT [and] worker at the *Casa Cinto* and a group of our comrades, who with kind words informed him of the ignoble role he was playing, which he answered with insulting arrogance. But what shows the rotten core of the *ugetistas* of this town is that following on from this event and over the course of the night, they waited near the home of an important comrade of ours with the benign intention of blowing his brains out.<sup>62</sup>

In the case of this incident it appears certain that some form of altercation did take place, given that the incident was reported to the police on behalf of the individuals in the UGT as an assault by the *cenetistas*.<sup>63</sup> However, the charges against the *cenetistas* were later dismissed in court, diminishing the likelihood that an actual assault took place.<sup>64</sup>

In December 1932 CNT-UGT hostilities reached their apex when there was an explosion in the premises of the Local Federation of the CNT, apparently at a time designed to coincide with a meeting of the CNT construction union.<sup>65</sup> In covering the story in *El Sembrador*, Joan Ferrer conveyed the indignation of the local *cenetistas*, presenting the incident as a continuation of a historical campaign of terrorism against the CNT perpetrated by ‘enemies of ours in the form of workers, but in reality traitors to our cause’.<sup>66</sup> The culprits were specifically identified by the paper as ‘mental deficient’ and ‘a gang of *ugetistas*’ whom the CNT’s construction union had already reported to the police for their links to an armourer.<sup>67</sup>

The interactions between the CNT and the UGT in the construction industry were undoubtedly the most high-profile and intense of the CNT-UGT interactions in Igualada, with the dispute with the *Casa Cinto* workers, intensified greatly by the town’s bricklayers’ strike, running on from the spring of 1932 into 1933. The nature of the *cenetistas*’ stance over the nascent UGT and its activities in the construction industry was a curious mixture of rhetorical and physical aggression and also victimhood. Whilst no



explicit message was made that the UGT nucleus in construction should be destroyed, the nature of the CNT's attacks and the emphasis on the yellow, violent and anti-working classes nature of these workers made it clear that this was their intention, even if it was not formulated into a definite plan of attack. Moreover, it is clear that the *cenetistas* were willing to confront physically *ugetistas* at their workplaces and in the street to prevent them working and to intimidate them with the goal of breaking their allegiance to the UGT. At the same time, however, much of the discourse on the construction workers was focused on illustrating their anti-CNT – and by extension anti-worker – violence. In doing this, the CNT-UGT conflict in construction was presented as a case of *ugetistas* in fact waging a campaign of violence to extinguish the CNT, this violence being presented as '[their] only possible argument against the workers of the CNT'.<sup>68</sup> In effect, the local UGT was presented as *pistoleros* and strike-breakers cut from exactly the same cloth as the *Sindicatos Libres*, with direct comparisons at times being made.<sup>69</sup> Although the truth behind the accusations of violence on either side is difficult to establish, there does appear to have been a degree of weight to the general accusations of yellow practices on the part of the UGT construction workers, given their refusal to participate in the work sharing agreement, their subsequent role as strike-breakers in a local construction dispute, as well as the further provocation of the use of UGT workers from outside Igualada as strike-breakers in the town.

The other main area in which the CNT came to interact with the UGT during the Second Republic was in the printing industry. In late April 1933, it was announced in *El Sembrador* that the town's print workers had joined the UGT.<sup>70</sup> In addition to attacking the printers, the decision was also taken to boycott the local print works, and from henceforth *El Sembrador* was printed in Manresa.<sup>71</sup> By any measure, this decision to boycott immediately the local print works because its employees had joined the UGT was a drastic course of action, and demonstrates the lengths to which the local CNT militancy were willing to go to prevent the spread of the UGT. An important difference between the defection of the printers to the UGT and the incidents in the construction trade was that on this occasion the printers for a time defected *en masse*, rather than a minority of them joining the UGT whilst the CNT continued to dominate the industry.<sup>72</sup> The circumstances of their departure were therefore different, and not based around a dissident minority who could be accused of strikebreaking. And yet the Igualada CNT's reaction to the defection of the printers was of equal vehemence. *El Sembrador* informed its readers that 'the employees of Igualada's printworks have joined the UGT, the union of strikebreaking.

These “workers”, who suffer from the defects of Carlism, Catholicism, vileness and others besides, want to honour the ranks of Spanish socialism with their useless presence’.<sup>73</sup>

The *ugetistas* in this sector were sufficiently well organized and connected to the regional UGT hierarchy as to have published information about their battle with the *cenetistas* in the UGT’s regional paper *Cataluña Obrera*. It is therefore possible to gauge their interpretation of events more accurately than in the case of the construction industry. And in the judgement of these *ugetistas*, they were locked in a battle to free themselves from a tyrannical organization that would resort to any measure to force them to join it. The *ugetista* print workers recounted that ‘such is the phobia that dominates their [the *cenetistas*] minds, they have had no qualms about using all different types of coercion to try and win over the print workers.’ The print workers went on to describe how representatives of the CNT attempted to enter into negotiations and also threatened the bosses of the town’s print works to make their employees join the CNT. According to this account the pressure applied by the bosses to make these workers join the CNT only resulted in them joining the UGT *en masse*. It could not be argued in this situation, then, that the decision of these workers to join the UGT was one done as a measure of collaboration with the bourgeoisie, as could be argued in the case of the construction industry. These *ugetistas* also argued that ‘unfortunately for [the workers in Igualada not yet in the UGT] they let themselves be dominated by the coercion that they suffer on a daily basis at the hands of these ominous and lying anarcho-syndicalists’.<sup>74</sup>

What is perhaps most intriguing about the printers joining the UGT was the reaction of the CNT to the speedy return of the printers of one print works to the CNT fold. This was an event which seems to have come about through pressure exerted by the CNT on the bosses of the business, and is also a fairly clear demonstration of the overall dynamic in Catalonia, discussed in chapter five, of the CNT being able to prevent the growth of the UGT in the region. Having decried the printers as traitors and enemies of the working classes, the Igualada CNT took a triumphalist stance over the return of a portion of these workers to the CNT:

The workers of the Miranda printworks (we don’t know if of their own free will or through the urging of their bourgeois, though it is likely to be the latter), have sought to join our organization. The graphic arts workers, who have little enthusiasm for defending themselves through their own effort (due to their selfish mentality) had trusted their desires for improvement in the *enchufistas* in the UGT. We would like to advise the workers of the Miranda printworks that it would be very uncharitable of them to affiliate to the CNT for solely selfish, material reasons.<sup>75</sup>

The reaction of the CNT militants to the print workers rejoining the CNT also suggests that the hostility to the UGT in this case was based around sectarian, organizational rivalry more than it was around any ideological principle. The Igualada *cenetistas* were adamant that the print workers, including those who had opted to join the CNT from the UGT, were traitors to the working classes and reactionaries; yet they still elected to admit them to their organization. For an organization that presented itself as the only possible representative of the revolutionary working classes, the admission of such suspect characters seems somewhat incongruous, and points to the likelihood that for the Igualada CNT the recruitment of members of the local workforce against their will was seen as a legitimate method of building their organization.

In common with other CNT organisms in Catalonia, the *cenetistas* of Igualada linked their attacks on local UGT rivals to wider discourses on the UGT that were produced by the anarcho-syndicalist movement. For example, the idea that the UGT in Catalonia was a replacement for the *Sindicatos Libres* served to prejudge and undermine the legitimacy of these local rivals before any account of their actions was given. It was announced that while the print workers had adhered to ‘the UGT, the union of strike-breakers’; these ‘cowards’ had historically belonged to ‘the *Sindicato Libre* or the fiefdom of Largo Caballero, according to the circumstances’.<sup>76</sup> The broader discourse on the UGT was used to provide proof of the dangerousness of these local rivals that did not require an account of their actions locally. It was, in effect, used for *ad hominem* attacks on the local *ugetistas*.

The local *cenetistas* viewed the implantation of a UGT entity in Igualada as being a product of their wider interpretation of the UGT on the national level having an agenda of attempting to impose the UGT in areas where it had no influence. Joan Ferrer recounts that the attempt to set up the UGT in Igualada was spearheaded by outsiders who were historically unconnected to the local workers’ movement. Noting that Manuel Villar, the local UGT leader, was a Galician with no knowledge of Catalan,<sup>77</sup> Ferrer also states that ‘with Vila Cuenca [regional leader of the UGT in Catalonia] and a few print worker lads who we would like to believe acted in good faith, Villar had started the “Igualada” UGT, taking as for its base, its “masses”, the strike breakers of the *Casa Cinto*’.<sup>78</sup> Ferrer maintains in his memoir that towards the UGT the population of Igualada had always been ‘indifferent, if not averse’.<sup>79</sup> These accusations were also made in the pages of *El Sembrador* with reference to the *Casa Cinto* dispute, with the paper claiming the affiliation

of these workers to the UGT was a result of the direct intervention of Vila Cuenca, referred to as 'the viceroy of the UGT in Catalonia' in the dispute.<sup>80</sup>

*Cenetistas* in the leather industry also viewed the emergence of the UGT in the town as some form of manoeuvre enacted by those outside the local workers' movement with a view to challenging the CNT. Their discussion of this matter stemmed from a boycott campaign they ran against the *Casa Vich* workshop, during the course of which a contingent of workers, who had formerly been members of the CNT, began to work in the *Casa Vich*, against the instructions of the CNT.<sup>81</sup> The militants of the CNT's leather union were concerned that these individuals had some connection to an emerging UGT movement in the town. In turn, they saw this local UGT movement as linked to wider attempts by the local bourgeoisie and the UGT in general to implant the UGT in the town. At a meeting of the union on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1932, José Rios, who was one of the men who was charged with the alleged assault on the UGT builders, in discussing the case of the *Casa Vich* alluded to 'individuals that act in the UGT' who were 'traitors of the working class'.<sup>82</sup> Another militant in explaining the presence of a local UGT organism argued that it was a 'vehicle of Largo Caballero'.<sup>83</sup>

This position of viewing the UGT in Igualada as a product of individuals from outside the town who were connected to the local bourgeoisie and the regional and national UGT hierarchy was a product of the local CNT's presentation of itself, as discussed previously, as a movement with which the local working classes had a strong historical and spiritual bond, whilst also arguing that all other union movements that had been attempted in the town were a product of outside forces that had intentions of undermining the emancipation of the working classes. This rationale on the CNT's part is to a substantial degree invalidated by the fact that the local CNT, through methods such as boycotting of businesses where workers would not affiliate to the CNT, attempted to ensure that no movement other than the CNT could emerge locally. Those who dissented from the CNT were subject to public attack; under such circumstances it was inevitable that a separate union movement could not have been produced locally. Indeed, the local militants had in certain respects operated as what could be considered 'outside influences' within certain sectors of the local working classes. The case of the print workers was a clear-cut piece of outside interference. The campaign against these workers, all of whom defected from the CNT, was not initiated by *cenetista* print workers, of which there were none at this point. The pressure exerted on the management of the print works further emphasizes the CNT's role as an outside influence in this instance to recruit members.

Moreover, Joan Ferrer and the other local *cenetistas*' premise that the initial organization of a UGT entity in Igualada by outsiders automatically invalidated the UGT as a legitimate local union also requires closer scrutiny. For in making this assertion, the local militants betrayed much about their understanding of what rights and agency individuals had to choose their union affiliation. The *cenetistas* appear to have somewhat illogically reasoned that, just because the first steps to organize the UGT were taken by individuals not historically connected to the local working class labour movement, this meant that the individuals who chose to join this movement and break away from the CNT were not entitled to make or capable of making a decision to affiliate to that movement themselves. The case of the print workers in particular demonstrates that there was a definite local agency amongst certain local workers to join the UGT, rather than them somehow being co-opted or tricked by outsiders into doing so. However, the leading CNT militants did not view the local working classes as entitled to make their own choices as to which labour organization they joined.

#### After October 1934

Following the October 1934 uprising, the Igualada CNT entered into a period of greatly reduced activity until the end of the *bienio negro*. Even before October, however, the CNT in Igualada had become a shadow of its former self, ravaged by a collapse in membership and the effects of the factional schism.<sup>84</sup> After the end of the *bienio negro*, the local organization began to rebuild, though not with as great a momentum as it had at the beginning of the Second Republic. The organization was reduced to a single union as late as January 1936; *El Sembrador* never returned to publication. The level of documentary evidence relating to the Igualada CNT and the local workers' movement more generally is far scarcer in this period of the immediate pre-war than for either the wartime period or the first years of the Second Republic. It is particularly difficult to put together a detailed picture of either the local UGT or the CNT's interactions with it. Indeed, the local CNT's main rivalry was against the autonomous unions in the town, in particular those with links to the POUM and which had been formed as a result of the factional schism that had beset the CNT earlier in the Republic. Through *Solidaridad Obrera* and other papers, local militants wrote of the threat that these organisms posed to the unity of the working classes.<sup>85</sup>

What can be ascertained, however, is the Igualada CNT's participation in the process that began in Catalonia in January 1936 to change the CNT's national-level stance towards the

UGT to one of calling publicly for *Alianza Revolucionaria*. The Igualada CNT sent Joan Ferrer to this congress – though it is not known if the organization had held a meeting beforehand to agree positions on the items on the agenda, as was the case with many other CNT organisms – and the minutes of the congress record Ferrer as arguing that ‘a pact with the UGT is necessary, but with the formal agreement of moving towards the destruction of capitalism and the state’, with this agreement taking place ‘on the national level’.<sup>86</sup> In other words, the Igualada CNT’s position on the matter of CNT-UGT alliance was closely matched to the position agreed upon by the regional congress, as well as the later agreement reached on the matter in Zaragoza. What this position held by the Igualada CNT reveals about the local organization, especially when taken into consideration with their violently hostile line against the UGT on the general level during the period 1931 to 1934, is that the local militants largely followed the prevailing trends within the organization with regards to their position on the UGT on the national level. Previously, the local militants had enthusiastically endorsed and replicated the anti-UGT line of *Solidaridad Obrera*; now they were following the prevailing line of promoting a fairly undefined notion of a ‘national’ revolutionary alliance with the UGT on the condition that it was for the purpose of revolution and libertarian anti-state ends.

The little documentation on the Igualada CNT in 1935 and early 1936 makes it difficult to say with certainty whether the local militants had undergone this shift in stance independently of the rest of the CNT in the region, or whether they simply followed the line put forward by García Oliver and his allies. However, an article written by Joan Ferrer in *Terra Lliure* just before the regional congress would suggest it was the latter. In the article Ferrer set out his opinion on ‘united fronts, syndical unity and workers’ alliances’. Ferrer did not attack the UGT, arguing that it was one of the two ‘traditional’ strands of the Spanish labour movement. However, Ferrer’s overriding argument was that alliance initiatives were the preserve of communist movements, who used them to divide the unity of the working classes. Exactly what Ferrer’s thinking on CNT-UGT relations was prior to the regional congress is therefore somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand his ideas correspond to those that would prevail at the congress of instructing all workers to join the CNT or the UGT; yet at the same time he hardly seemed to be endorsing the idea of an alliance between the two organizations.<sup>87</sup> Given that Ferrer showed little inclination to promote a CNT-UGT alliance, and indeed questioned the intentions of pro-alliance campaigns, it would therefore seem likely that the Igualada CNT’s stance on national CNT-UGT relations was at root one of siding with the regional consensus on the matter.

It does not appear that the Igualada CNT in early 1936 adopted an as aggressively sectarian stance as it had between 1931 and 1934. Although the local movement was critical of the autonomous unions of the town, it did not run the sorts of campaigns against them as it had done to UGT unions or workers who refused to join the CNT. Indeed, the CNT's leather union actually cooperated with its autonomous-*poumista* counterpart in a conflict against employers that took place over the course of the spring of 1936. From April the autonomous and CNT leather goods unions began to draw up a new set of pay and working conditions for leather goods workers in Igualada. In May the conditions were presented to the Employers' Association. An agreement was not forthcoming, and so a strike was called. The formulation of the workers' demands and the subsequent labour dispute were handled jointly by the CNT and the autonomous unions. In May and June public meetings arranged jointly by the CNT and the autonomous union were held in Igualada.<sup>88</sup>

However, this instance of cooperation should not be viewed as indicative of a fundamental shift in stance with regards to the primacy the local CNT viewed itself as having over the local union movement. Through its notices in *Solidaridad Obrera*, local militants continued to attack the leaders of the local autonomous unions and the POUM movement with which they were associated, arguing repeatedly that through not rejoining the CNT they were damaging worker unity in the town.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, the few references the local militants made to the local UGT – whose members continued to be in the construction and printing industries – were not indicative of any efforts to reconcile with a rival, even if they suggested a certain acceptance that the local CNT was not in a position to stop them. In March the CNT construction union agreed to exclude the *Casa Cinto* workers from their attempts to renegotiate *bases* for the industry with employers.<sup>90</sup> In July, the militants mocked the efforts of the UGT print workers to bring about improved working conditions in their industry, suggesting that their adherence to the *jurados mixtos* was holding them back.<sup>91</sup> Just two months earlier, they had accused the UGT printers of attempting to prevent workers from joining the CNT, an accusation that is unfortunately impossible to verify.<sup>92</sup> Even if the Igualada CNT had endorsed the idea of a national CNT-UGT alliance, and likewise cooperated with a rival union in a labour dispute, it would appear that its leading militants still held the same attitude, on the eve of the war, that the CNT was the only legitimate entity in the town.

## Conclusions

Overall, the experience of the Igualada CNT during the Second Republic was similar to the overall trajectory of the CNT in Catalonia during these years. This was as much the case with its growth, decline and factional squabbles as it was with its stance on the UGT. At all times throughout the Republic, the militants of the Igualada CNT closely followed the prevailing consensus of the rest of the organization in Catalonia. The endorsement of the anti-UGT line between 1931 and 1934, as we have seen, suited the Igualada CNT, serving as a rhetorical device through which it could promote itself to the working classes of the town. The stance of the Igualada CNT on national level CNT-UGT relations in 1936 shows the extent of the detachment between the national and local levels of UGT activity amongst *cenetistas* in Catalonia. The CNT in Igualada had only exhibited hostility to the local UGT movement, viewing it as reactionary and anti-worker, yet at the same time its members were prepared to endorse a national-level *volte face* on the UGT.

With regard to the Igualada CNT's interactions with the UGT in the town, it is clear that, throughout the Republic and even on the eve of the war, the local *cenetistas* had an unwavering belief in the unique place they felt that their organization held in the town, based on what they saw as a deep historical and spiritual bond with the local working classes. Their commitment to the CNT was not just based around the ideological posits of anarcho-syndicalism, but was in fact also deeply rooted in the specific role of the CNT in Igualada and the years of commitment of local militants to the movement. Joan Ferrer and his fellow militants were also spurred on by the past successes of the CNT in organizing the local workforce, particularly in 1919, not to mention the initial influx of workers into the CNT in 1930 and 1931.

It is this combination of factors that explain the lengths to which the Igualada *cenetistas* would go to enrol workers in their organization and to fend off what they saw as the 'outside' threats of other possible organized labour movements in the town. The *cenetistas* held the belief that it was the basic obligation of workers in the town to be in the CNT. And although an impressively large number of workers enrolled in the CNT at the start of the Republic, merely acquiring a membership card and having a deep commitment to the ideals, principles and methods of the organization were two different things. This conflict between *cenetista* expectations and the actual commitment of the workforce as a whole to the CNT led the local CNT movement to adopt highly strong-arm measures against those who did not conform to their expectations through the running of public boycotts and



naming-and-shaming campaigns. At the same time, even those who were in the CNT could potentially find themselves pilloried if they were seen to have a loyalty that conflicted with their duties as a CNT member.

These different layers of the Igualada CNT's interactions with the UGT were a key ingredient in the recipe for disaster that was the relationship between the labour federations during the war. The Igualada CNT would enter the conflict with a nominal support for the idea of alliance with the UGT on the national level, yet in their own locality only regarded the UGT with suspicion, often attempting to exclude it from the political and economic administration of the town. At the same time, the aggressive stance adopted by the Igualada *cenetistas* earlier in the Republic helps suggest that there were likely to have been workers who were rather reluctantly in the CNT or who would become alienated from it. In the context of compulsory union membership during the war, this legacy of divisions and hostilities undoubtedly contributed to the mutual antipathy that characterized relations between the CNT and the UGT in the town during the war, not to mention the rapid growth of the socialist labour federation in the town.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Miquel Termens i Graells, *Revolució i guerra civil a Igualada (1936-1939)* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1991), p.19

<sup>2</sup> Soledad Bengoechea, *Les dècades convulses: Igualada com a exemple* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 2002), p.24

<sup>3</sup> Bengoechea, *Les dècades*, pp.23-32

<sup>4</sup> Bengoechea, *Les dècades*, pp.29-30

<sup>5</sup> Bengoechea, *Les dècades*, pp.27-30

<sup>6</sup> Bengoechea, *Les dècades*, pp. 23-30; pp. 281-283

<sup>7</sup> Bengoechea, *Les dècades*, pp.64-65; Joan Ferrer, *Costa amunt: elements d'història social Igualadina* (Montreuil: Terra Lliure, 1975), p.31

<sup>8</sup> Bengoechea, *Les dècades*, p.65

<sup>9</sup> Bengoechea, *Les dècades*, p.65; Baltasar Porcel, *La revuelta permanente* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1978), p.38

<sup>10</sup> Bengoechea, *Les dècades*, p.66

<sup>11</sup> Bengoechea, *Les dècades*, p.74; Ferrer, *Costa amunt*, p.92

<sup>12</sup> Bengoechea, *Les dècades*, p.75

<sup>13</sup> Joan Ferrer, *Vida sindicalista* (Paris: Colección Solidaridad Obrera, 1957), pp.38, 41, 66

<sup>14</sup> ACA 712 Letter from the *Federación Obrera* to the Mayor of Igualada, 10 April 1931

<sup>15</sup> Bengoechea, *Les dècades*, pp.99-117

<sup>16</sup> Bar, *La CNT en los años rojos*, p.768; Bengoechea, *Les dècades*, p.115

<sup>17</sup> Ferrer, *Costa amunt*, p.123

<sup>18</sup> Ferrer, *Vida sindicalista*, p. 34

<sup>19</sup> Bengoechea, *Les dècades*, pp.215-229

<sup>20</sup> Bengoechea, *Les dècades*, pp.52-56

<sup>21</sup> Ferrer, *Vida sindicalista*, p.34

<sup>22</sup> Termens i Graells, *Revolució i guerra civil a Igualada*, p.34

<sup>23</sup> Ballester, *Marginalitats i hegemònies*

<sup>24</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, p.127

<sup>25</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, p.127

<sup>26</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, p.127

<sup>27</sup> Vega, *El trentisme a Catalunya*, p.178

<sup>28</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, p.132

<sup>29</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, pp.127-132

- <sup>30</sup> Vega, *El trentisme a Catalunya*, p.181
- <sup>31</sup> Vega, *El trentisme a Catalunya*, p.181
- <sup>32</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 24 August 1934; Vega, *Entre revolució*, pp. 342-348
- <sup>33</sup> *El Sembrador*, 29 December 1933
- <sup>34</sup> *El Sembrador*, 23 May 1931
- <sup>35</sup> *El Sembrador*, 01 August 1931
- <sup>36</sup> *El Sembrador*, 13 August 1932
- <sup>37</sup> *El Sembrador*, 20 May 1933
- <sup>38</sup> *El Sembrador*, 08 September 1932
- <sup>39</sup> *El Sembrador*, 07 October 1933
- <sup>40</sup> *El Sembrador*, 01 December 1933
- <sup>41</sup> *El Sembrador*, 08 September 1932
- <sup>42</sup> *El Sembrador*, 23 May 1931
- <sup>43</sup> *El Sembrador*, 22 August 1931
- <sup>44</sup> *El Sembrador*, 19 September 1933
- <sup>45</sup> *El Sembrador*, 24 February 1934
- <sup>46</sup> *El Sembrador*, 11 July 1931
- <sup>47</sup> *El Sembrador*, 12 January 1934
- <sup>48</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 1053, Minutes of the meeting of the Igualada CNT's *Sindicato Único del ramo de la piel*, 28 October 1931
- <sup>49</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 1053, Minutes of the meeting of the Igualada CNT's *Sindicato Único del ramo de la piel*, 17 November 1931
- <sup>50</sup> *El Sembrador*, 06 February 1932, 21 May 1932; Termens i Graells, *Revolució i Guerra Civil a Igualada*, pp.33-34
- <sup>51</sup> Ferrer, *Costa amunt*, p.132
- <sup>52</sup> *El Sembrador*, 27 February, 12 March 1932
- <sup>53</sup> *El Sembrador*, 06 February 1932
- <sup>54</sup> *El Sembrador*, 12 March 1932
- <sup>55</sup> *El Sembrador*, 26 December 1931
- <sup>56</sup> *El Diari d'Igualada*, 04 February 1932, p.4; the UGT Executive Commission minutes show that a building labourers' union from Igualada with thirty members officially joined the organization in March (FPI AARD 256-1 Minutes of the meeting of the UGT Executive Commission, 16 March 1932)
- <sup>57</sup> *El Diari d'Igualada*, 01 September 1932
- <sup>58</sup> *El Diari d'Igualada*, 03 September 1932
- <sup>59</sup> *El Diari d'Igualada*, 05 September 1932
- <sup>60</sup> *El Sembrador*, 08 September 1932
- <sup>61</sup> *El Sembrador*, 09 April 1932
- <sup>62</sup> *El Sembrador*, 08 September 1932
- <sup>63</sup> *El Sembrador*, 08 September 1932
- <sup>64</sup> *El Sembrador*, 02 December 1932
- <sup>65</sup> *El Diari d'Igualada*, 28 November 1932; *El Sembrador*, 02 December 1932
- <sup>66</sup> *El Sembrador*, 02 December 1932
- <sup>67</sup> *El Sembrador*, 02 December 1932
- <sup>68</sup> *El Sembrador*, 09 April 1932
- <sup>69</sup> For example, *El Sembrador*, 02 December 1932, 21 April 1933
- <sup>70</sup> *El Sembrador*, 21 April 1933
- <sup>71</sup> *El Sembrador*, 06 May 1933
- <sup>72</sup> *Cataluña Obrera*, 28 April 1933
- <sup>73</sup> *El Sembrador*, 21 April 1933
- <sup>74</sup> *Cataluña Obrera*, 28 April 1933
- <sup>75</sup> *El Sembrador*, 30 June 1933
- <sup>76</sup> *El Sembrador*, 21 April 1933
- <sup>77</sup> Ferrer, *Costa amunt*, p.196
- <sup>78</sup> Ferrer, *Costa amunt*, p.196
- <sup>79</sup> Ferrer, *Costa amunt*, p.132
- <sup>80</sup> *El Sembrador*, 26 August 1933
- <sup>81</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 1053 Minutes of meetings of the Igualada CNT's *Sindicato Único del ramo de la piel*, 28 October 1931, 17 November 1931 and 12 January 1932; *El Sembrador*, 30 January 1932
- <sup>82</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 1053 Minutes of meetings of the Igualada CNT's *Sindicato Único del ramo de la piel*, 20 April 1932
- <sup>83</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 1053 Minutes of meetings of the Igualada CNT's *Sindicato Único del ramo de la piel*, 20 April 1932
- <sup>84</sup> Vega, *Entre revolució*, pp. 346-348

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<sup>85</sup> For example, *Solidaridad Obrera*, 26 January, 26 September, 08 November, 26 December 1935, 16 February, 23 May, 18 July 1936

<sup>86</sup> Confederación Regional del Trabajo de Cataluña, *Memoria de la conferencia regional extraordinaria celebrada los días 25, 26 y 27 de Enero 1936* (Barcelona, 1936), p.46

<sup>87</sup> *Terra Lliure*, 26 January 1936

<sup>88</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 159 Propaganda leaflets by the Igualada CNT's *Sindicato Único del ramo de la piel* and the autonomous *Sindicat de l'indústria de la pell*, May, 30 June 1936

<sup>89</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 16 February 1936, 23 May, 18 July 1936

<sup>90</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 13 March 1936

<sup>91</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 02 July 1936

<sup>92</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 31 May 1936

<sup>93</sup> Details of the hostilities between the CNT and UGT in Igualada appear in Termens i Graells, *Revolució i guerra civil a Igualada*

## Conclusions

### General conclusions

The CNT entered the Republic with a hostile stance towards the UGT; on the eve of the Civil War the organization was, by and large, rapidly on its way to returning to that very same position. In spite of the monumental events of October 1934 and the effects they had on turning the left towards voicing pro-unity positions, viewing the peacetime Republic as a whole, and notwithstanding notable exceptions, in particular the Asturian CNT, the forces that exercised a most influential role in the CNT – its leading militants and its newspapers – not to mention significant sectors of its grassroots militants, retained the same basic stance of viewing the UGT, both in terms of its leaders and its unions, as rivals and even enemies.

The hostilities that characterized much of the interactions between the CNT and the UGT during the Second Republic, at both national and grassroots levels, were not the product of the CNT's decision-making processes. It was only when considering the ideas of alliance with the UGT that a position on the socialist labour federation was discussed; the rest of the time, the attacks on the UGT that appeared in the CNT press and the hostilities between the organizations' unions were not a pre-meditated strategy. To a significant extent, they were simply carried over from the previous decade, though admittedly intensified substantially by the events of the first years of the Republic, and above all by the socialists' legislation and their apparent complicity in government repression of the CNT. Although the hostile stance of the CNT during this period was based to a significant extent around both these events and differences of theoretical underpinnings and principles and different approaches to industrial relations, it is clear that they were also based around a much more emotive set of criteria, most notably the entrenched idea that socialists were 'traitors' and had the intent of undermining the working-classes. Guided by such sentiments, the CNT and its militants by default adopted a resolute hostility towards the UGT, making the formulation of an anti-UGT stance take place outside of the organization's decision-making procedures.

What did fundamentally change between 1931 and 1936, however, was the willingness of the CNT to enter the fray of voicing a pro-unity position on the national level as part of its organizational strategy, just as the other organizations of the left had started to do, to greater or lesser extents, in different fashions and with different degrees of opportunism,

from 1933 and 1934. Somewhat perversely, the discourse of unity was one of the key vehicles through which the rivalries between the different organizations of the Republic attacked one another during the Civil War; the precedents for championing unity in this way must be seen as having been established in the pre-war period. For the CNT, however, its use of the unity question immediately prior to the war would have especially important ramifications during the conflict; throughout the CNT would make a great deal of use of the idea of alliance with the UGT as it attempted to navigate the treacherous political waters of the wartime Republic.

Although there were sectors of the CNT who promoted the idea of alliance with the UGT because they viewed an alliance of the two labour federations as being a necessary prerequisite for either the overthrow of capitalism or a defence against fascism, the CNT's moves towards a pro-alliance position were in fact the product of factions within the movement who had never adopted such a perspective. Instead, they viewed the idea of unity as something that could be exploited to boost the popularity of the CNT at the expense of the UGT. That the CNT could produce a formal position on alliance that was in reality designed to undermine the organization at which the alliance was ostensibly aimed, especially considering that there were in fact genuine pro-alliance sectors in the organization and that by the admission of leading *cenetistas* workers in general seemed to be enthused by the idea of unity, illustrates the bankruptcy of the CNT's decision-making process. The organization, both in 1934 and 1936, produced positions that were designed to appear as being in favour of alliance with the UGT, and were in part designed to placate those in the movement who were, but which in reality served to mask an anti-alliance agenda of the dominant factions of the organization. To a large extent, this state of affairs was due to the Catalan CNT having a decisive influence over the organization at the national level. The Catalan CNT was the most virulently anti-UGT region of the anarcho-syndicalist movement, and yet it played a decisive role in determining the stance that the national movement took on the UGT throughout the Second Republic.

Even before the UGT's own handling of CNT-UGT interactions is fully taken into account, it is clear the CNT and the UGT were overall no closer to any meaningful unity in July 1936 than they had been in 1931. The only major difference was that by July 1936 both the CNT and the UGT publicly spoke in favour of the idea of unity of the organizations of the left. Some sectors within the CNT certainly were in favour of reaching an alliance with the UGT, as undoubtedly were many ordinary workers, but their position had effectively been neutered by the pro-alliance posturing that the Catalan CNT imposed on the organization.

In Catalonia, CNT militants at the helm of unions and local federations, not to mention the elite militants of the region, generally took the view during the Republic – a view that was expressed frequently to the workers of the region – that their opposite numbers in the UGT were the embodiment of a yellow, reactionary unionism that was designed to destroy the CNT and the workers' movement. Although the Catalan UGT has not been the primary focus of the research presented here, this thesis has highlighted that the CNT's depiction of the UGT in the region was a misleading one, with the organization being much more similar to the UGT elsewhere in Spain in the respect that it was not simply a haven for yellow workers, but to a large extent was driven by workers who bought into the 'management unionism' model, in the process leading them into conflicts with the strongest CNT presence in Spain.

The *cenetistas* of Catalonia adopted their stance against the Catalan UGT because, at root, they believed that the CNT was the only legitimate workers' organization in Catalonia and also viewed the CNT and the working classes as synonymous. As the study of Igualada above all demonstrates, this belief was a result, as much as any ideological commitment, to the unwavering dedication of *cenetistas* to building up a local movement in their *milieu*, a commitment in many cases that stretched back to the 1910s and/or had forced operating in clandestinity or even jail or exile upon them. This belief empowered *cenetistas* in Catalonia, between 1931 and 1934 to attempt, in effect, to eradicate the UGT from the region, recurrently making use of practices such as boycotts and verbal threats against workers seeking to join the UGT and disruptions of meetings, not to mention running a sustained campaign through CNT propaganda to depict the Catalan UGT as nothing more than a haven for *pistoleros* and vehicle for Largo Caballero's attempts to destroy the CNT. The extent of militant consensus on this approach was such that as a practice it was widespread and routine – almost a reflex action towards the creation of UGT rivals – but was not the product of any formal strategy created in the movement's decision-making process. As much as any factors cited in existing studies of the workers' movement for the failure of the UGT amongst workers in Catalonia – a perception that to an extent needs questioning, given the growth of the organization throughout the Republic – such as the unsuitability of employer-worker relations in industrialized Catalonia to UGT methods, it is also the case that a significant factor in the (relative lack of) growth of the UGT in the region was the campaign undertaken by *cenetistas* to marginalize UGT organisms.

Whilst such sectarian tactics were generally not adopted in 1936, due to the looming threat of a full conflict with the right leading to a recognition that physical sectarian confrontation

against workers would be deeply damaging to wider working-class interests, CNT militants in Catalonia still held fundamentally the same view that the UGT was an illegitimate entity in Catalonia. That they did so, when considered in conjunction with the fact that it was these militants that had variously formulated, actively endorsed or agreed to go along with a plan for proposing a national alliance with the UGT, illustrates the true intentions of the alliance proposal they drew up in early 1936.

However, in spite of the hatred of the UGT expressed by *cenetistas* in Catalonia, it is clear that the UGT – and especially the anarcho-syndicalist construction of the UGT – served a crucial function for the anarcho-syndicalist movement. The presentation of the UGT – on the national level as attempting to destroy the workers’ movement, and in the region as being a haven for reactionary gunmen – was used heavily to attempt to mobilize workers behind the CNT’s cause, as well as serving as something of an ‘anti-CNT’ through the depiction of which the CNT could be presented as the only legitimate workers’ organization, and indeed the only entity that would save workers from this reactionary menace. Even in Igualada, a town with no UGT presence until 1932, and probably fewer than one hundred members until the outbreak of the war, the CNT movement made heavy use of its construction of the UGT to mobilize workers behind the CNT.

### The CNT and the UGT in the Civil War

It almost goes without saying that the outbreak of the Civil War had a profound effect on the Second Republic, with the state’s existence becoming defined by its struggle against the nationalists and its positioning all over the world as the international focal point of the battle against fascism. The war also had equally profound consequences for the two labour federations, and especially the CNT. Quite apart from the implications of the Social Revolution undertaken by the CNT in Catalonia and other regions and the organization’s initial hegemony in Catalonia, not to mention its allegiance to a state that it had for so long railed against, both the CNT and the UGT found, on a practical level, that their everyday roles changed completely. Having been vehicles for protecting workers in a capitalist system, the labour federations found themselves playing a pivotal role in the management of the Republic’s economy and wartime production. Whilst this thesis cannot provide a full account of CNT-UGT interactions during the wartime, especially with regard to Catalonia, where the configuration of the left changed so rapidly, it can highlight that, crucially, there were important continuities between the pre-war period and the war which to a very

significant extent conditioned how the CNT interacted with the UGT between July 1936 and the end of the conflict.

The most fundamental aspect of the CNT's relationship with the UGT that has its foundations in the pre-war years was that, with the exception of its very first months, the CNT adopted throughout the war a national-level strategy of publicly promoting an alliance with the UGT. In the first two months of the war, the CNT press temporarily went quiet on the matter of alliance with the UGT. With the CNT at this point occupying a pivotal role in the defence of the Republic and the mobilization of militias against the Nationalists, the CNT in Catalonia was as coherent and secure a force as the state or any other organization. Moreover, the movement in its stronghold and birthplace was firmly engaged in furthering the Social Revolution that it had set in train during the first days of the uprising. Although privately some leading CNT figures felt wary that this position would be eclipsed, the public position adopted was nevertheless one of viewing Social Revolution as the method through which the war would be fought.<sup>1</sup> This meant that, in these first few months, the anarcho-syndicalists did not promote an alliance with the UGT. However, its response to the situation was grounded in one important premise of the pre-war months, namely that the ongoing execution of the Social Revolution would be carried out through the convergence of all workers into the CNT and the UGT, which would in turn ensure that political organizations would be swept away. The CNT's newspapers argued that the Spanish working classes would 'through their own free and spontaneous determination join together in one of the two existing federations: the UGT or CNT.'<sup>2</sup> This would ultimately fulfil the anarcho-syndicalist movement's long-term goal that political parties 'will all have to disband. Because politics, once the fascist insurrection has been defeated, will no longer have a reason to exist'.<sup>3</sup> In the first months of the war, then, the CNT's outlook on the future of what it presented as an enduring Social Revolution was grounded in the ideas regarding workers joining the CNT and the UGT that had been presented by García Oliver and his allies in Catalonia at the January 1936 regional congress.

However, later in September, the *Zaragoza Alianza Revolucionaria* proposal was brought back into the CNT's public message in response to the political manoeuvring that took place over the formation of a new government. Having played such a fundamental role in foiling the July uprising, bringing the movement a leading position in Catalonia, there were concerns amongst the leadership that the formation of a government with socialist, communist and Republican participation in the context of the Republican state recovering



from its initial meltdown would put the brakes on the Social Revolution. An alliance of the CNT and the UGT was thus proposed by the CNT as a direct alternative to a Popular Front government, much as the Catalan CNT had hoped to present a revolutionary CNT-UGT alliance as an alternative to the Popular Front coalition in early 1936. A CNT plenum agreed to propose a 'National Defence Council' as an alternative to Largo's cabinet, which would be dominated by the CNT and the UGT. The September plenum formulated the following position:

The CNT proposed the revolutionary alliance at its Zaragoza Congress. Today it redoubles its efforts towards this and believes that if the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo and the UGT do not understand one another the Revolution will be diverted off course and fail. Spain cannot be led by party politics in these decisive moments, but only by a national bloc of those who are struggling at the front and in the rearguard.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the formulation of this stance by the leadership, *Solidaridad Obrera* published editorials to promote the ideas of a National Defence Council and a revolutionary alliance between the CNT and the UGT.<sup>5</sup> However, the initiative was rejected by both the UGT leadership and the rest of the Republican side, and the CNT ultimately agreed to join Largo's government alongside PSOE, PCE and Republican politicians.<sup>6</sup>

However, what was in the autumn of 1936 essentially a gambit by a relatively bullish CNT evolved over the course of the war into a prop on which the CNT increasingly relied to try and maintain some form of influence in the governing of the Republic. In 1937 the Republican side's public façade of unity in the face of a common enemy would unravel. Against a backdrop of setbacks at home and in the diplomatic arena, an ever escalating war of words broke out amongst the different organizations of the left, with the communists at the centre of much of the infighting. The CNT and the communists were at loggerheads over a whole range of issues that were fundamental to the war effort, foremost amongst them collectivizations and the organization of the armed forces. To counteract the communists, the CNT deployed a strategy of publicly calling, once again, for an alliance between itself and the UGT. This sustained propaganda campaign repeatedly presented CNT-UGT unity as being a panacea solution that would wrest power away from political parties, allow the Social Revolution to continue and, as a consequence, lead to victory in the war.

It was agreed at a February 1937 national plenum that it was 'essential' for the CNT to come to 'an understanding' with the UGT, with the National Committee being given the authority to try and bring this about with the UGT leadership.<sup>7</sup> But even before February, the CNT National Committee had written to the UGT Executive in the hope of arranging a meeting with them.<sup>8</sup> Initially the National Committee found it difficult to convince the UGT leaders that a meeting that excluded representatives of political parties would be wise, with a meeting of CNT and UGT delegates not taking place until April. Although this meeting led to the elaboration of some shared positions on the economic management of the war effort, the National Committee warned that PCE members 'with posts in the UGT are torpedoing an understanding' between the labour federations.<sup>9</sup> The crises of May 1937 made this overall process irrelevant.

Although little progress was made in actually bringing about an alliance, the anarcho-sindicalists were keen to publicly promote the idea as much as possible. The key issues that appeared on the front pages of the CNT press in the first half of 1937 were the question of how to consolidate the Social Revolution in the face of attacks on it, and the need for unity between the CNT and the UGT. These two objectives were presented as being, at root, one and the same. According to the CNT's public stance, the CNT and the UGT were the only organizations that could guarantee both victory in the war and the prosperity of the Social Revolution. *Solidaridad Obrera* argued that 'the Revolution and the War demand an immediate alliance between the CNT and the UGT'.<sup>10</sup> It implored the UGT to join it in taking power.<sup>11</sup> Above all, the CNT press identified a CNT-UGT alliance as the 'only efficient antidote' to fight the enemies of the Social Revolution.<sup>12</sup> The CNT also argued that the politicians of the Republic – in particular the communists – were seeking at all costs to prevent an alliance between the labour federations because 'everyone knows that the alliance of the worker organizations will bring the effective consolidation of the Revolution. The enemies of this [Revolution] will do everything they can to ruin the proposals for alliance that strengthen the workers'.<sup>13</sup> The CNT's position on unity simultaneously served as a vehicle for discrediting its political rivals through suggesting that they opposed unity, whilst also suggesting that the CNT and the UGT stood united against these enemies of unity.

The Republic's political nadir came in May 1937, through a combination of days of street-fighting in Barcelona between pro- and anti-Soviet communist factions, and then through the fall of the Largo Caballero government and the subsequent acrimony over its replacement. These events all gravely damaged the influence of the CNT in the Republic;

by June its representatives were out of both the national government and the Generalitat. The CNT's leaders pinned their hopes for fighting against this tide on an alliance with the UGT.

Following the ejection of the CNT and the UGT from the government the CNT began a propaganda offensive that attacked the new government led by Juan Negrín and voiced solidarity with the UGT. Once again the idea of a CNT-UGT alliance was used to this end. The National Committee instructed the CNT's organisms that they should with 'absolute homogeneity' promote 'UGT and CNT as a guarantee of victory' and 'exalt the figure of Largo Caballero as a guarantee of impending victory'.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, throughout the political crisis and in the following months, the front page of *Solidaridad Obrera* recurrently called for a pact between the labour federations.<sup>15</sup> The CNT's pro-unity line in these months amounted to an attempt to win the UGT's backing in standing in opposition to the new government, a strategy agreed upon by the CNT's leadership at a national plenum held on 23<sup>rd</sup> May. At the plenum it was agreed to place unequivocal support behind the UGT and 'to gain agreement with the UGT to jointly take up the task of opposition to the government'.<sup>16</sup>

This strategy of forming an alliance with the UGT was based around the calculation, made by the National Committee, 'that Largo Caballero will emerge victorious from the battle within the UGT' that broke out between himself and the communists after May; a defeat for Largo would inevitably render the strategy meaningless.<sup>17</sup> Making this gamble was something that would be deeply lamented a year later.<sup>18</sup> This strategy of hoping Largo would emerge victorious and thus bring the UGT into an alliance with the CNT was still being followed in August 1937, with the National Committee offering progress reports on his efforts to regional delegates at a national plenum.<sup>19</sup> Its ultimate result was the creation of a national liaison committee between the CNT and UGT leaderships in July 1937, a development that would neither save Largo Caballero in his bid to stave off being ousted from the UGT nor rescue the CNT from its isolation.

Although the CNT's attempts to build an alliance with the UGT in 1937 were based fundamentally around fighting back against the ascendant communist movement and the marginalization of the CNT that this ascendancy brought about, seeking an alliance with the UGT in fact once more formed the basis of the anarcho-syndicalist labour federation's strategy for seeking to come in from the cold once communist dominance over both the government and the UGT had been secured by the end of 1937. At the start of 1938 the

CNT's public stance towards the new pro-communist UGT leadership that had ousted Largo Caballero became much more conciliatory. The anarcho-syndicalist leadership, through the CNT press, indicated a desire to negotiate a pact with the UGT. However, this new initiative was entirely different from those that had been proposed in 1936 and 1937. Rather than being framed as being a pact that would further the Social Revolution or banish politicians, the new pact would be based around

the necessity of an agreement on regulations for the economic development of industries on a national level. The solutions must not refer to doctrinal disparities of principles or tactics, but questions of work, which are the same for everyone.<sup>20</sup>

This strategy of seeking to bring the CNT into an alliance with the UGT based around the labour federations playing a largely practical and logistical role in the Republic reflected a change in perspective in the organization towards viewing the revolutionary battle as lost, and that in such circumstances it would be preferable to play a secondary role in government to prevent further losses than to remain permanently marginalized, a stance that was put forward by the CNT's delegates to the AIT congress of December 1937.<sup>21</sup> After negotiating over the course of January and February, the national leaderships of the CNT and the UGT signed the Pact of Unity in March 1938. This was heralded by Republican and the communist propaganda as a great victory for proletarian unity and a source of strength that would turn the course of the war in the Republic's favour.<sup>22</sup> For the CNT, however, the pact was a measure of how far its original agenda of the early days of the war had been put out of reach.

After the CNT-UGT pact was signed in March 1938, the CNT leadership turned its attention to ensuring that the terms of the pact, especially those relating to economic management, were fully implemented. From the moment the pact was signed, the National Committee instructed CNT unions and local federations to pressure their UGT counterparts into seeking to implement its terms on the local level as soon as possible.<sup>23</sup> It was a process the National Committee found frustrating, reporting to the CNT national plenum of June 1938 that the implementation of the pact was not proceeding as hoped,<sup>24</sup> and also writing to the UGT National Executive in August to complain about what it perceived as a lack of UGT interest in the functions of the national CNT-UGT liaison committee.<sup>25</sup>

It is also worth noting that though the pact was at root a pragmatic measure to maintain some level of CNT influence, even with this objective in mind the National Committee still saw it as an opportunity to present the negotiations of the pact as offering the CNT the

opportunity to win over UGT unions into the CNT through its pro-unity stance, with the National Committee even instructing the grassroots in March 1938 to criticize the UGT leaders in front of their UGT colleagues in the hope that this would place pressure on the leadership to make the pact more revolutionary.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, to try and implement the pact, the National Committee resorted to the same tactic, leading to a strong private rebuke from the UGT leadership.<sup>27</sup> There was thus a continuity with the 1931 to 1936 period throughout the war regarding the CNT leadership's handling of relations with the UGT, namely that it was willing to use the question of CNT-UGT alliances to undermine the UGT's leadership.

Overall, then, the events of 1931 to 1936 conditioned to a significant extent how the CNT interacted with the UGT over the course of the Civil War. On a most basic level, the turn towards an ostensibly pro-alliance strategy at the beginning of 1936 was a key aspect of how the CNT fought its political battles on the national level. Although the pro-alliance stance was adapted and evolved in response to changing circumstances, virtually throughout the entire war the CNT turned to some form of militating for a CNT-UGT alliance. The idea of an alliance was put to use for a wide range of purposes in accordance with present circumstances, including variously using the idea to discredit political rivals, further the Social Revolution and present it as the model for running the Republic, and simply seeking to retain some influence. The change in the ideas underpinning CNT-UGT alliance, not to mention some of its side effects, such as the improbable lionizing of Largo Caballero, are indicative of the extent to which the CNT struggled to cope with the political infighting that beset the wartime Republic. The reliance throughout on the same basic response to all situations of suggesting a CNT-UGT alliance demonstrates the lack of options that an anti-political movement had when it found itself forced into the political arena.

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<sup>1</sup> The message given out by the leadership in Catalonia was somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, the delegates for Catalonia insisted at a meeting of the National Committee held on 29<sup>th</sup> July that the CNT-FAI had total control of Catalonia. The argument was put forward, in spite of the reservations expressed by other delegates, that if CNT militias captured Zaragoza, libertarian communism would be a certainty. Catalonia presented itself to the rest of the CNT as having total 'hegemony' (IISG CNT 79B 'Acta de la reunión del comité nacional celebrada el día 29 de julio 1936') On the other hand, on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1936, Catalan CNT held a plenum, at which Juan García Oliver's proposal to 'go for everything' and declare libertarian communism instead of cooperating with other organizations was rejected, a stance which in García Oliver's view highlighted that the social revolution was already doomed (García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos*, pp. 184-190).

<sup>2</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 11 September 1936

<sup>3</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 11 September 1936

<sup>4</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 1 October 1936

<sup>5</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25, 27 September, 2 October 1936

<sup>6</sup> *Claridad*, 30 September 1936

<sup>7</sup> IISG CNT 51B1 'Acuerdos del pleno nacional de regionales celebrado durante los días seis, siete, ocho y nueve de febrero de 1937'

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- <sup>8</sup> IISG CNT 69A4 Letter from the CNT National Committee to the UGT Executive Commission, 05 December 1936
- <sup>9</sup> IISG CNT 51B2 Minutes of the CNT National Plenum, 15 April 1937
- <sup>10</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 March 1937
- <sup>11</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 March 1937
- <sup>12</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 27 April 1937
- <sup>13</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 2 May 1937
- <sup>14</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 1345 Undated document authored by CNT National Committee entitled 'Documentos que se citan en el informe sobre la tramitación de la crisis'
- <sup>15</sup> See, for example, *Solidaridad Obrera*, 6, 23 June, 11 July 1937
- <sup>16</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 932 'Actas del Pleno Nacional de Regionales, extraordinario, del movimiento libertario, celebrado los días 23 y sucesivos de Mayo de 1937'
- <sup>17</sup> CDMH P/S Barcelona 932 'Actas del Pleno Nacional de Regionales, extraordinario, del movimiento libertario, celebrado los días 23 y sucesivos de Mayo de 1937'
- <sup>18</sup> IISG CNT 34A1 Minutes of the CNT National Plenum, 02 August 1938
- <sup>19</sup> IISG CNT 36D3 Minutes of the CNT National Plenum, 07 August 1937
- <sup>20</sup> *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25 January 1938
- <sup>21</sup> Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, *Informe de la Delegación de la C.N.T. al Congreso Extraordinario de la A.I.T y resoluciones del mismo* (Barcelona : Sección de Información, Propaganda y Prensa C.N.T. Comité Nacional, 1938), p. 43
- <sup>22</sup> See, for example, *Treball*, March 1938; Ralph Bates, *Unidad proletaria U.G.T.-C.N.T.: las dos poderosas sindicales españolas* (México: Sociedad de Amigos de España, 1938)
- <sup>23</sup> IISG CNT 34B1 CNT National Committee Circular no. 5, 13 March 1938
- <sup>24</sup> IISG CNT 36D5 Report by the National Committee to the National Plenum, 10 June 1938
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