

## **Dissident Communism in Catalonia 1930-1936**

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**DISSIDENT COMMUNISM IN  
CATALONIA 1930-1936**

**THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF PhD AT  
THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON, OCTOBER 1988**



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# ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the history of dissident communism in Catalonia during the years of the Spanish Second Republic. It centres on the ideological, organisational and tactical development of the Bloc Obrer i Camperol (Workers and Peasants Bloc) and, from 1935, the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Workers Party of Marxist Unification). It places the dissident communist parties in the context of the turbulent years leading up to the Civil War and the changing fortunes of the Spanish workers movement both in Catalonia and at a national level.

In particular, the history of the BOC and POUM is examined in relation both to other tendencies in the region's labour movement - anarcho-syndicalists, socialists and "official" communists - and to Catalan nationalism. Reference is also made to the Catalan dissident communists' relations with, and ideological differences from, the international communist movement.

The principal aspects of the BOC's and POUM's politics - united front and trade union policies, the agrarian and national questions, concept of the revolutionary party and analysis of the threat of fascism - are placed in their overall context. Finally, the analysis underlying their positions - the impossibility of the middle classes or petty bourgeoisie carrying out the final stages of the bourgeois (democratic) revolution, the choice between revolution or counter-revolution - is assessed critically throughout the thesis.

Andrew Durgan

October 1988

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ACR	Acció Catalana Republicana
ASA	Acció Social Agrària
BOC	Bloc Obrer i Camperol
CADCI	Centre Autonomista de Dependents de Comerç i Indústria
CEDA	Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas
CGTU	Confederación General de Trabajo Unitario
CI	Communist International or Comintern
CNT	Confederación Nacional de Trabajo
CSRs	Comités Sindicalistas Revolucionarios
CYI	Communist Youth International
ECCI	CI Executive Committee
ECPP	Estat Català Partit Proletari
ERC	Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya
FAI	Federación Anarquista Ibérica
FCC-B	Federación Comunista Catalano-Balear
FCI	Federación Comunista Ibérica
FET	Federació d'Empleats i Tècnics
FJS	Federación de los Juventudes Socialistas
FNTT	Federación Nacional de Trabajadores de la Tierra
FOUS	Federació Obrera d'Unitat Sindical
FPTT	Federació Provincial de Treballadors de la Terra
FSL	Federación Sindicalista Libertaria
FUTM	Front Unic de Treballadors Mercantils
IBRSU	International Bureau of Revolutionary Socialist Unity
ICE	Izquierda Comunista de España
ICL	International Communist League
ILP	Independent Labour Party
JCI	Juventut Comunista Ibérica
JSU	Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas
OCE	Oposición Comunista de España
OSR	Oposición Sindical Revolucionaria
PCC	Partit Comunista Català
PCdeC	Partit Comunista de Catalunya
PCE	Partido Comunista de España
PCF	Parti Communiste Français
PCP	Partit Català Proletari
POUM	Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista
PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español
PSUC	Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya
RILU	Red International of Labour Unions
UJC	Unión de Juventudes Comunistas
UGSOC	Unió General de Sindicats Obrers de Catalunya
UGT	Unión General de Trabajadores
UPA	Unió Provincial Agrària
UdeR	Unió de Rabassaires

## ABBREVIATIONS IN FOOTNOTES

ACCPCE	Archivo del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de España
CEHI	Centre d'Estudis Històrics Internacionals
FPI	Fundación Pablo Iglesias
IMHB	Institut Municipal d'Història, Barcelona

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## Glossary of Catalan and Castillian terms used in the text

### Catalan

ateneu	athenaeum.
Ateneu Popular Enciclopèdic	popular Barcelona workers' cultural, educational and sports club.
comarca/comarques	area, important in territorial division of Catalonia (see Map).
escamot	squad, refers to para-military groups of nationalist youth, led by Estat Català.
Estat Català	radical Catalan separatist organisation, forms part of ERC.
Generalitat	Catalan autonomous government.
Lliga	right-wing bourgeois nationalist party.
Institut Agrícola Català de Sant Isidre	Catalan landowners' association.
mitjania/mitjanies	form of leasehold, common in Lérida, whereby peasants handed over half of the harvest to the landowner.
nové	ninth, refers to ninth part of harvest handed over by peasants as rent to Urgell Canal Company.
rabassa morta	agreement whereby rabassaires could cultivate land until vine died.
rabassaires	sharecroppers involved in cultivation of vines.
Sometent	Rural constabulary, composed mainly of small landowners.
Unió de Sindicats Agrícoles	agricultural co-operatives and mutual aid societies.

### Castillian

ateneo	athenaeum.
central	term used for national trade union federations such as the CNT and UGT.
Cortes	Spanish parliament.
jornalero	farm labourer, employed on daily basis.
Jurado Mixto	state-sponsored labour arbitration committees.
latifundio	large landed estates.
pronunciamiento	military rising.
requeté	Carlist monarchists' militia.
Sindicatos Libres	Free Unions, set up with support of employers and authorities to combat CNT.
sindicato único	all-embracing anarchist trade union organisation which cut across trade divisions.
Treintistas	moderate CNT leaders and their supporters opposed to anarchist "extremism".

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## NOTE ON LANGUAGE

In general I have used Catalan or Castillian names or terms depending on which was most commonly used at the time. Thus, I refer to the "Sindicat" Mercantil but the "Sindicatos" Libres, to the "Partit" Català Proletari but to the "Partido" Obrero de Unificación Marxista, to "Andreu" rather than the Castillian "Andrés" Nin. The only exceptions are place names where I have sometimes used the Castillian title because this is normally better known to English readers, hence Lérida instead of Lleida and Gerona rather than Girona. Where there is an English translation, such as in the case of "Saragossa", this has been used in preference to the Castillian or Catalan version. With other place names in Catalonia I have used the Catalan rather than the Castillian title.

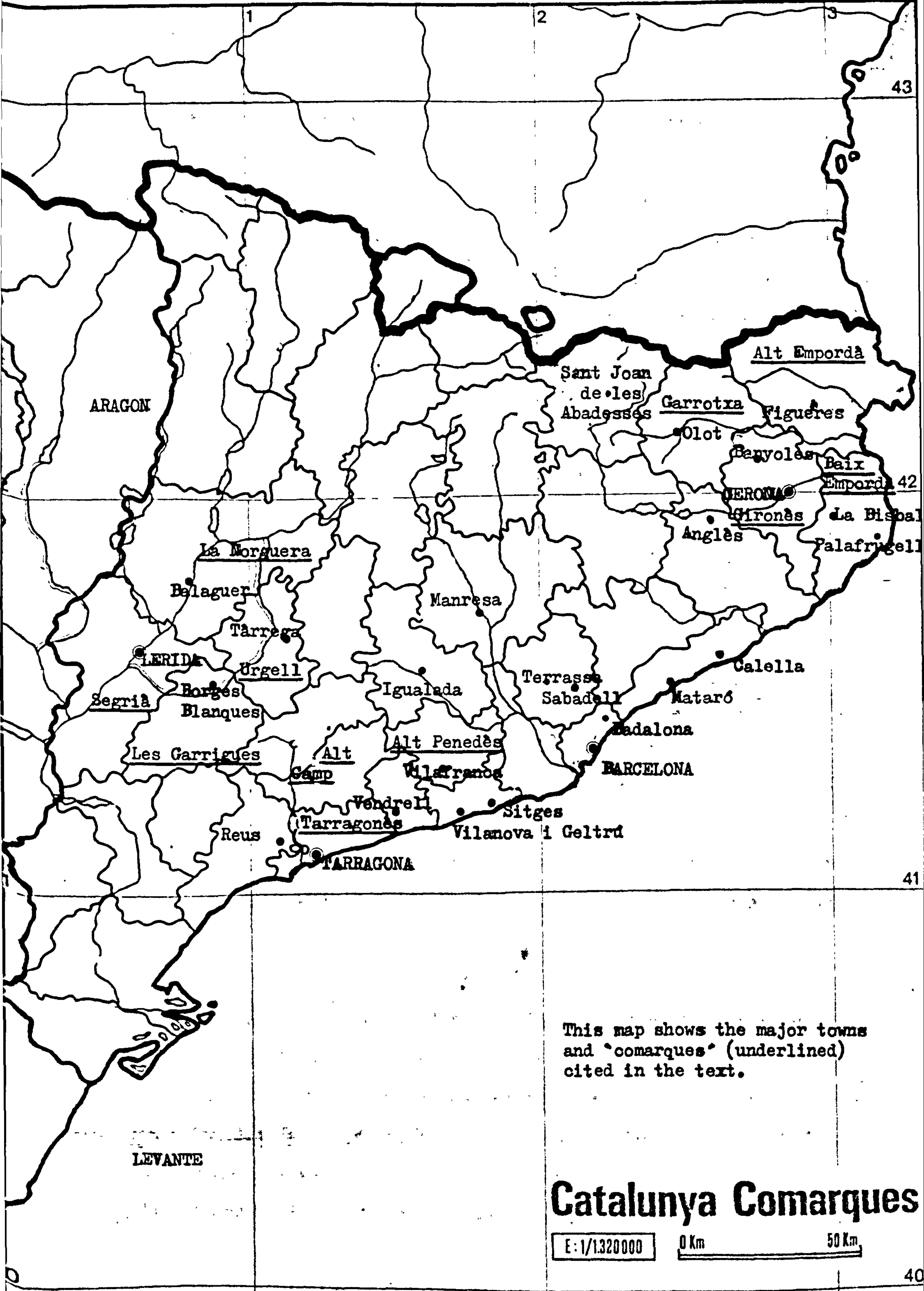
### Acknowledgements.

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Special thanks to Professor Paul Preston, Dr. Reiner Tosstorff, Dr. Pelai Pagès, Angelo Smith, Vicki Anderson, Donald Robertson, Linda Quinn, Maria Morón and last, but not least, my mother to whom<sup>m</sup> this thesis is dedicated.



● Poblacions importants; □ Límits comarcals; ● Capitals de província.



This map shows the major towns and 'comarques' (underlined) cited in the text.

# Catalunya Comarques

E: 1/1.320.000

0 Km 50 Km

LEVANTE

ARAGON

Alt Empordà

Sant Joan de les Abadesses

Garrotxa

Figueres

Olot

Banyolès

Baix Empordà

GERONA

Gironès

La Bisbal

Anglès

Palafregell

La Noya

Belaguer

Manresa

Tàrraga

LERIDA

Urgell

Igualada

Terrassa

Calella

Segrià

Borges Blanques

Sabadell

Mataró

Les Garrigues

Alt Camp

Alt Penedès

Badalona

BARCELONA

Vilafranca

Vendrell

Sitges

Reus

Tarragonès

Vilanova i Geltrú

TARRAGONA

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## Introduction

By the early thirties the international communist movement was in crisis. The continuing strength of social democracy, the isolation of the USSR and the rise of fascism all contributed to undermine the communists' influence. As the prospects for world revolution receded, so the movement had become totally dependent on its Russian backers. The interests of the Soviet state determined the activities of communists throughout the world. Bureaucratic methods and unquestioning discipline were increasingly the norm.

Nevertheless, many communists rejected what they saw as this degeneration of the ideals of the Bolshevik revolution. Some abandoned the communist movement altogether, others formed new independent groupings which spurned Moscow's tutelage. During the thirties, a plethora of such dissident communist organisations came into existence, primarily in Europe. Most were small and generally lacking mass support.

One of the few exceptions was the Bloc Obrer i Camperol (Workers and Peasants Bloc), formed by Catalan communists in 1931. Four years later, the BOC provided the bulk of the membership of a new independent marxist party, the Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista (Workers Party of Marxist Unification). Although both the BOC and POUM aimed to become state-wide organisations, they were almost exclusively based in Catalonia. Hence the conditions under which these dissident communists tried to organise were largely determined by the social and political peculiarities of this region.

Catalonia was the most industrialised part of Spain and around forty percent of the country's proletariat was concentrated there by 1930. It had been one of the main centres of social unrest in the peninsula since the nineteenth century. Engels had, with reason, described the Catalan capital, Barcelona, as one of Europe's most revolutionary cities. In the years leading up to the Spanish Civil War, Catalonia was again gripped by political turmoil. Because of their presence in the region, the BOC and POUM, despite

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never becoming truly mass parties, managed to exercise a limited influence over the course of events in this period.

Marxist thought in Spain had never been very strong. The Socialist Party (PSOE) had not managed to develop beyond a fairly unimaginative interpretation of the political and theoretical postulates of the Second International. The Spanish Communists did little to improve on this poor ideological heritage until the emergence of the dissident groups in the nineteen thirties.

Moreover, marxists in Spain were faced with a powerful revolutionary rival - anarcho-syndicalism. Anarchist ideas had taken root, particularly in the rural south, during the last thirty years of the previous century. Syndicalism later provided the anarchists with a new and dynamic strategic orientation that led to the creation in 1910 of the anarcho-syndicalist trade union federation, the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labour).

In the aftermath of the First World War and the Russian revolution, Spain, like many European countries, was soon engulfed in social turmoil. Yet unlike their comrades in Germany, France, Italy and parts of Central Europe, communists in Spain played little part in these events. Instead, in many places it was the CNT that provided the leadership for working class dissent. By the time the communists had organised their meagre forces, the revolutionary agitation in the peninsula had begun to subside.

The newly-formed Spanish Communist Party found itself vastly outnumbered by its anarcho-syndicalist rivals and nowhere more so than in Catalonia, one of the principal centres of revolutionary agitation between 1918 and 1921. Against this background, a small group of sympathisers of Russian Bolshevism tried to establish a base in the region. The weakness of this group, the advent of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship and the virtual disintegration of the PCE, made this task extremely difficult. It was only after the Catalan communists had broken with the Madrid-led "official" party that they were able to increase their influence.

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The political analysis developed by the dissident communists during the Second Republic contrasts sharply with the generally barren history of Spanish marxism. The writings of their leader, Joaquín Maurín along with those of the Trotskyists, Andreu Nin and Juan Andrade, amount to the only real body, however limited, of indigenous marxist thought in Spain prior to the Civil War. In fact, the history of the BOC and POUM is also the history of Maurín's own political development. Described as, the "best political orator in Catalonia" and bearing the trademarks of the "most outstanding communist leader",<sup>1</sup> his influence on both parties was decisive. Nevertheless, it is not the aim of this study to write a political biography of Maurín, but to place his ideas in their social and political context.<sup>2</sup> This thesis traces the development of the Catalan dissident communist organisations up to the outbreak of the Civil War in July 1936. The first chapter deals with the origins of communism in Catalonia, the differences between the majority of its cadres and the PCE leadership and the foundation of the BOC. Because this chapter provides the background to the dissidents' subsequent development during the thirties, it concentrates on the internal disputes of the small Spanish communist movement rather than the wider socio-political context. The second and third chapters describe the Bloc's progress during the first two years of the Republic. The basic theoretical positions defended by the Catalan dissident communists were elaborated in this period. The BOC's view of the political situation in Spain was centred on Maurín's analysis of the historical development of the Spanish state and the failure of the Republican regime to undermine seriously the power of the country's traditional ruling oligarchy. A "democratic revolution" was needed to break with the past and open the way towards socialism. This could only be achieved by the working class taking power, the dissident communist leaders concluded. However, for this to happen the working class needed, according to the BOC, the support of the peasantry and the national liberation movements.

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1. J. Miravittles, *El ritme de la revolució* (Barcelona 1933) p.126.; R. Vinyes i Ribes, *La Catalunya Internacional* (Barcelona 1983) p.237.

2. Maurín's principal works were *Los Hombres de la Dictadura* (Barcelona 1930, republished in 1977), *La revolución española* (Barcelona 1931, republished in 1977), and *Hacia la Segunda Revolución* (Barcelona 1935), (republished as *Revolución y contrarrevolución en España* in Paris in 1966); other of his writings can be found in V. Alba (ed.), *La revolución española en la practica. Documentos del POUM* (Madrid 1977) and A. Balcells, *El arraigo del anarquismo en Cataluña. Textos de 1926-1934* (Madrid 1977); also see V. Alba, *El marxisme a Catalunya 1919- 1939. Vol IV. Joaquim Maurín* (Barcelona 1975) and A. Monreal, *El pensamiento politico de Joaquim Maurín* (Barcelona 1984).

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Accordingly, great emphasis was placed by the dissident communists on winning support among the peasants and challenging the hegemony of the petty bourgeois parties in the struggle for Catalan national rights. The BOC's activities both in the countryside and in relation to the nationalist movement are thus examined in these two chapters. Building a base for their party among the industrial proletariat was also a major problem for the Catalan dissident communists. Chapter Three covers both the BOC's analysis of anarcho-syndicalism and the battles between the rival tendencies which took place inside the CNT. The attempts by the dissident communists to overcome the divisions inside the Catalan workers movement through the tactics of the "united front" are likewise discussed. This chapter finishes with an account of the important developments inside the Socialist Party and the BOC's changing evaluation of this party's role in the workers' movement.

Chapter Four covers the creation of the Workers Alliance, first in Catalonia then in the rest of Spain, and the growing hostility during 1934 between the autonomous Catalan government and the newly-elected right-wing administration in Madrid. The events of that year culminated in the abortive October uprising in which the dissident communists actively intervened. Chapter Five starts by examining the attempts of the BOC to re-organise itself in clandestinity and Maurín's analysis of the potential revolutionary situation in Spain following the October defeat. The need to extend the unity experienced through the Workers Alliance dominated the Spanish labour movement throughout 1935, leading in Catalonia to attempts to form one united marxist party. As part of this process, the BOC and the Trotskyists founded the POUM in September 1935. This chapter finishes by reflecting on the dissident communists' attempts to win support from the important left Socialist current.

Chapter Six begins with the creation of the "Popular Front" and the elections of February 1936. The POUM's critique of the popular front tactic and its reluctant participation in the left electoral pact are explained. The dissident communists' growing isolation is also dealt with, as are their ideological battles with official communism and the state of the POUM in the spring of 1936. The need for a greater level of working class unity remained central to the dissident communists' politics and

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led them to establish the Federación Obrera de Unificación Sindical (Workers' Federation of Trade Union Unification) in May 1936. This proved a highly controversial move as far as the POUM's anarchist and marxist rivals were concerned. In the weeks leading up to the Civil War, the FOUS's trade unions not only played an important role in the growing strike wave in Catalonia, but also found themselves increasingly in conflict with the rest of the labour movement. Chapter Six ends with the POUM's calls, on the eve of the military uprising, for the working class to take decisive action against the counter-revolution or face the direst of consequences. The party's role in the Civil War and its subsequent suppression are outside the parameters of this thesis.<sup>3</sup>

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3. On this aspect of the POUM's history see, R. Tosstorff, *Die POUM im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg 1936-1939* (Frankfurt 1987).

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# 1. CATALAN COMMUNISM 1920-1930

## Communism and Syndicalism 1920-1924

Following the First World War and the Russian revolution much of Europe was racked by social unrest. Spain was no exception. The main centres of this unrest in the peninsula were rural Andalusia in the south and industrial Catalonia in the north-east. In similar circumstances elsewhere in Europe, the foundations of the new mass Communist parties were being laid.

Sympathy for the Russian revolution was widespread inside the Spanish working class movement among both Socialists and anarcho-syndicalists alike. Yet, the future leaders of the Spanish Communist Party came more or less exclusively from the ranks of the Socialist Party.<sup>1</sup> Once the Communist International (CI) had been founded in Moscow in 1919, an acrimonious debate began inside the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) over whether to align with the new international organisation. Impatient with the reticence of the majority of Socialists to abandon the Second International, the most ardent pro-communist militants, based mainly in the Socialist Youth Federation, the Federación de Juventudes Socialistas, broke away in April 1920 to form the Partido Comunista Español (Spanish Communist Party). The more cautious communist sympathisers fought on inside the PSOE for another year before leaving to establish the Partido Comunista Obrero de España (Workers Communist Party). The new party's militants, by having stayed on inside the Socialist Party, had earned only the contempt and distrust of the youthful enthusiasts of the Partido Comunista Español. Faced with the existence of two small, mutually hostile, communist factions in Spain, the CI set out to impose their unification. An uneasy truce was arrived at and the two parties united in November 1921 to form the Partido Comunista de España (Communist Party of Spain). Despite the agitation that had rocked the peninsula since 1917 and the extensive support that existed for the Russian

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1. For the origins of the PCE, see G. Meaker, *The Revolutionary Left in Spain 1914-1923* (Stanford 1974); P. Pagès, *Historia del Partido Comunista de España* (Barcelona 1978); L. Portela, "El nacimiento y los primeros pasos del movimiento comunista en España", *Estudios de Historia Social* no. 14., Madrid, July - September 1980.

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Revolution, the new united Communist Party claimed a membership of only 1,200. In contrast, the PSOE had 8,215 members by 1923.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in the major centres of revolutionary activity, Andalusia and Catalonia, the PCE had gained very few adherents. Only in the north, principally in Vizcaya, did the Communists have any significant base.

The failure of the Spanish Communists to build a mass party, in what appeared to be favourable circumstances, was due to various factors. The Communists' own tactical ineptitude, in particular the Partido Comunista Español's ultraleftist sectarianism, had hindered their efforts to win support. However, it was the resilience of both the Socialists and anarcho-syndicalists, albeit for different reasons, that really undermined the attempts to form a mass communist party in Spain.

Their country's non-intervention in the First World War meant that the Spanish Socialists had not suffered the loss of credibility incurred by some of their European counterparts as a result of backing their respective governments' war effort. In addition, the PSOE had maintained a certain leftist image, in part, aided by its virtual exclusion from institutionalised political life. Yet, it was the existence of a mass revolutionary alternative to communism - anarcho-syndicalism - that was the main obstacle to the new party's success.

Catalonia was the anarcho-syndicalists' principal stronghold. Industry in the region had benefited considerably by the new markets opened up to it during the war. The subsequent boom had led not only to a major increase in production but also to a substantial expansion of the working class. Over 200,000 people emigrated to Catalonia from elsewhere in Spain between 1910 and 1920 and soon constituted nearly ten percent of the region's total population. Most of these went to work in Barcelona, as did a steady trickle of former peasants from the Catalan countryside.<sup>3</sup> As profits rose so did the workers' ability to force concessions out of the employers. In this context, the anarcho-syndicalist unions of the CNT had managed to gain an important foothold among Catalan workers, particularly in Barcelona. The post-war contraction of the

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2. J. Bullejos, *La Comintern en España* (Mexico 1972) p.27; M. Tuñón de Lara, *El movimiento obrero en la historia de España* (Madrid 1977) vol.II, p354.

3. J. Termes, *La immigració a Catalunya i altres estudis d'història del nacionalisme català* (Barcelona 1984) pp.192-193.



European labour market soon produced a crisis in Catalonia and in the rest of Spain. A decline in wages and a rise in unemployment combined with the examples of Russia and other revolutionary movements in Europe to provoke a massive upsurge of social discontent in the peninsula. Moreover, dwindling profits made employers determined to put an end to the relative toleration that the trade unions had enjoyed during the boom. An explosive situation was created in Catalonia by, on the one hand, the concentration of industry, and, on the other, the growing strength of anarcho-syndicalism. Agitation in the region reached a climax in 1919 with the dramatic strike at the Anglo-Canadian hydro-electrical company, known as "La Canadiense". Solidarity strikes and other disputes greatly boosted the Catalan CNT's prestige and its membership increased from 75,000 to 350,000 in the space of a year.<sup>4</sup>

The above situation was the backdrop against which a handful of militants began to lay the basis for the first communist organisation in Catalonia. Their efforts, however, owed little to the activities of the PCE or its forerunners.<sup>3</sup> The syndicalist origins of the Catalan Communists, combined with the specific characteristics of the region's labour movement, would set this group apart from the rest of Spanish communism.<sup>11</sup> The point of departure for these pro-communist activists in the Catalan CNT was, as elsewhere, support for the Russian revolution. Initially, many anarcho-syndicalists in Spain were very impressed by events in Russia. So much so, that, lacking any detailed information about the revolution, they tended to portray the Bolsheviks as in some way anarchists and themselves as "true Bolsheviks".<sup>5</sup> Enthusiasm for the Russian experiment was probably greater in Spain among the anarcho-syndicalists than among the Socialists, but the Communist International's supporters were more concerned with splitting the PSOE than working inside the CNT. This initial lack of foresight by both the Spanish Communists and their CI advisors would be another reason for the PCE's inability to win workers away from anarcho-syndicalism.

The impact of the Russian revolution on the CNT was most clearly reflected at its tumultuous Second Congress, held in December 1919 in Madrid. The Confederation had grown massively in the previous year - it would soon claim over one million members

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4. M. Buenacasa, *El movimiento obrero español 1886-1926* (Madrid 1977), pp.164-165.

5. *Ibid* p.70.

throughout the peninsula - and the Congress's proceedings were dominated by the belief in the imminent victory of the socialist revolution. In this militant atmosphere, the future Valencian Communist leader, Hilario Arlandis, proposed "provisional adherence" to the newly-formed Communist International and this was carried overwhelmingly. Communist ideas seemed set to make serious inroads into the most militant sectors of the Spanish labour movement. This enthusiasm for <sup>the</sup> Bolshevik revolution was both a reflection of the radicalised social situation in Spain itself and a very vague understanding of what was actually happening in Russia. The wane of the revolutionary movement in the peninsula and the harsh realities of the Bolshevik rule would soon tip the scales against the communist sympathisers in the CNT.

In Catalonia, it was the decline of the CNT's fortunes during 1921, that allowed the pro-communist elements in the unions to gain more prominence. Following hard on a series of defeated strikes in 1920, the government gave the new military governor of Barcelona, General Severiano Martínez Anido, a free hand in dealing with the anarcho-syndicalists. Apart from banning the Confederation, the authorities helped set up the so-called Sindicatos Libres (Free Unions) to counter-balance the CNT. There now began an all-out war by the Libres against the anarcho-syndicalists. Hired gunmen murdered many CNT leaders and anarchist groups replied in kind, assassinating employers, government officials and policemen alike. Mass action increasingly gave way to individual terrorism. To this background, lesser-known militants, some of whom identified closely with the ideals of the Bolshevik revolution, replaced the many CNT leaders jailed or murdered at this time.

One of the most prominent activists among this group was a young teacher from the Catalan-speaking area of Huesca (Aragón), Joaquín Maurín. Initially involved in the republican movement, Maurín had been converted to syndicalism during the winter of 1917-1918 under the impact of the Russian revolution. In 1920, having finished his military service, he returned to his job in Lérida and became Secretary of the CNT's Provincial Federation and editor of its paper, *Lucha Social*. This publication soon became the focus of pro-Bolshevik sentiment inside the CNT and gathered around it a group of capable militants who described themselves as "revolutionary syndicalists".

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They were heavily influenced by the writings of the French syndicalist Georges Sorel, whose concept of "collective revolutionary violence" appeared to Maurín and his friends to be embodied in the Bolsheviks' victory.

The revolutionary syndicalists' principal base was in Lérida, which had always been a centre of socialist rather than anarchist tendencies in the Catalan workers movement. Due to the intense activity of Maurín's group, the CNT was soon organised in many towns and villages in the province. The Lérida revolutionary syndicalists' proselytism at this time prepared the ground for the future growth of communist influence in the area. Maurín's personal contribution to this process was such that the anarchists would later disdainfully refer to Lérida as "Maurígrado". Nevertheless, the local labour movement was very small and in terms of the Catalan CNT's total membership *Lucha Social's* supporters only amounted to an "infinite minority".<sup>6</sup> Outside of Catalonia the revolutionary syndicalists had some limited support in Asturias and the Levante.

During the spring of 1921, the revolutionary syndicalists' influence was strengthened inside the CNT when Maurín joined the important Catalan Regional Committee and another outspoken supporter of the Russian revolution, Andreu Nin, replaced the imprisoned Evalio Boal as Secretary to the National Committee. At about the same time, the government suspended the CNT's newspaper *Solidaridad Obrera*, and *Lucha Social* now became the Confederation's principal mouthpiece in Catalonia, as well as beginning to gain a circulation throughout Spain. Nin had met Maurín at the CNT's Congress in Madrid and was also a teacher by profession. These two men now began working closely together to extend revolutionary syndicalist influence inside the CNT, and they would soon become two of the most important figures in both Catalan and Spanish communism. An opportunity arose to strengthen further the revolutionary syndicalists' position at the Confederation's National Plenum on 28 April, 1921, where it was decided to send a delegation to the founding congress of the communist Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), scheduled to take place in Moscow that July. Four prominent pro-communist syndicalists were chosen to represent the CNT - Maurín, Nin, Arlandis and Jesús Ibañez from Asturias. The French anarchist Gaston Leval was

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6. J. Maurín, *El Bloque Obrero y Campesino* (Barcelona 1932), p.19.

later added to the delegation in representation of the Barcelona Federation of Anarchist Groups.

The main debate at the Congress was between communist and non-communist delegations, of which the CNT's was the most important, over the relationship between the RILU and the CI. The syndicalists and anarcho-syndicalists vigorously opposed the subordination of the new trade union International to its communist counterpart. In the end, a compromise solution was agreed on which accepted co-operation between the two bodies to avoid the danger of a "dual revolutionary leadership".<sup>7</sup> Despite the CNT delegation's role in trying to moderate communist dominance of the RILU this did not save it from the wrath of the more traditionally anarcho-syndicalist sections of the Confederation which were increasingly shocked by reports of the persecution of Russian anarchists and the Bolsheviks' dictatorial methods. The whole legitimacy of the CNT's support for the new International was soon thrown into doubt when another National Plenum, held in Logroño, disowned the sending of the delegation in the first place. Yet, at a further Plenum, held this time in Lérida in October 1921, Maurín was able to get accepted a preliminary report of the delegation's activities in Moscow. A more definitive decision on the CNT's relationship with the RILU was postponed until the membership could be properly consulted. A furious debate now raged inside the CNT press over the question of supporting the RILU and the authenticity of the various Plenums. The significance of this debate was that it exposed the limitations of pro-communist support inside the Confederation.

Through the pages of *Lucha Social*, the revolutionary syndicalists championed the idea of uniting all revolutionary tendencies, both inside the CNT and the RILU. They accused the anarchists, in turn, of wanting to exercise their own "dictatorship" inside the unions, excluding all those who disagreed with them. It was not a question, they argued, of being completely in agreement with Moscow, but of lining up with the RILU and all those who had clearly shown they wanted to defeat capitalism. Those who refused to do so and rejected the RILU were accused of siding with reformism.<sup>8</sup>

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7. *Lucha Social* 24.9.21; *Acción Sindicalista* 13.10.22.

8. A. Nin, "Los Sindicalistas Revolucionarios Españoles y la Internacional" *Lucha Social* 11.6.21; La CNT y la Confederación Regional de Trabajo de Cataluña, "A todos los trabajadores", *ibid* 19.11.21; Maurín, "La CNT delante de la ISR. Las dos tendencias", *ibid* 10.12.21.

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Unfortunately for the revolutionary syndicalists, the majority of CNT activists were strongly anarchist in outlook and were unimpressed by such arguments. However, a hasty decision over international affiliation was avoided by Maurín's personal influence. Given that Nin had stayed in Moscow to work for the RILU, Maurín had been named provisional Secretary to the CNT National Committee in his place. However, in February 1922, Maurín was arrested, victim of a general crackdown on the workers movement, and another obstacle to the anarchists' position was removed.

The re-establishment of constitutional guarantees in April 1922 and the CNT's subsequent return to open legal activity, further helped the anarchists win back control of the organisation. The stage was now set for a final showdown with the pro-communists at the Confederation's National Conference in Saragossa in June. The main item on the agenda was the CNT's relations with the CI and the RILU. With Maurín still in prison and Nin in Russia, only Arlandis was present to put the pro-communists' case. In contrast, the influential CNT leader, Angel Pestaña, who had represented the Confederation at the CI's Second Congress in 1920, was now out of jail and able to present his highly unfavourable report of his trip to Russia. With the exception of the Asturian and Lérida Federations and a small number of local delegations,<sup>9</sup> the Conference voted to break with Moscow. Delegates were now elected for the forthcoming Congress in Berlin of the anarcho-syndicalist International Workingmen's Association. Overall, the prospects for building a mass base for communism inside the ranks of the CNT were fast receding by 1922. Not only had the Saragossa Conference marked the end of the Spanish anarcho-syndicalists' brief flirtation with the international communist movement, but objective circumstances in Spain were increasingly unfavourable for revolutionaries of all tendencies. Repression directed against the workers movement, in part provoked by the anarcho-syndicalists' own tactics, had continued unabated and the CNT's unions were rapidly losing the influence they had enjoyed two years previously. In these circumstances, the aspirations of the small group of communist sympathisers inside the CNT appeared all the more difficult to fulfil.

Following the RILU's founding congress, the revolutionary syndicalists had begun to evolve even more rapidly towards communism. Apart from a whole series of articles

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9. *Ibid* 24.6.22.

in *Lucha Social*, this development was most clearly reflected in a long pamphlet written by Maurín in early 1922, on the influence of the Russian revolution on syndicalism.<sup>10</sup> The whole experience of the revolution had, in Maurín's words, opened up the possibility of a new definitive revolutionary theory, based on the most positive aspects of syndicalism, anarchism and state socialism. As he believed at the time that "no other country was so similar to Spain as Russia", there was obviously a great deal to be learnt from the Bolshevik experience. Ironically, Maurín would later berate those who made a "grotesque equation" between Spain and Russia.<sup>11</sup> Taking the Sorelian concept of collective violence as their starting point, the Spanish revolutionary syndicalists vigorously defended the need for coercion once the workers had seized power. They thereby accepted the need for the "dictatorship of the proletariat", describing it as the "concentration of revolutionary violence". In contrast with Russia, the mass revolutionary organisations of the working class in Spain that would exercise this dictatorship would be the CNT's unions rather than soviets. This typically syndicalist view of the basis of revolutionary power would become a recurring theme in Maurín's writings, even when he had accepted most aspects of communist orthodoxy.<sup>12</sup> Arlandis was to claim that this view of the CNT as providing the basis of any future dictatorship of the proletariat in the peninsula was not incompatible with the position adopted by the CNT's Congress in 1919 in favour of a "transitional revolutionary dictatorship" of the unions.<sup>13</sup> The pro-communist syndicalists were also critical of the growing tendency in Russia of the party to substitute itself for the rule of the working class "as a whole". Maurín, in fact, described the "Workers Opposition" inside the Russian Communist Party as having a "syndicalist orientation" because it had made similar criticisms.

The strength of syndicalism, Maurín and his comrades declared, lay in its supposed openness; it was a "doctrine in formation", in contrast to the "preconceived dogmas" found in anarchism and Second International socialism. Syndicalism, they believed, could be the key to consolidating the revolution because, although the Bolsheviks had successfully seized power, they lacked the revolutionary economic superstructure which the unions could provide. In turn, syndicalism as a body of theory could be strengthened by the

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10. *El sindicalismo en la luz de la revolución* (Lérida 1922).

11. See page 53.

12. See pages 51-52.

13. *Lucha Social* 8.4.22.

revolutionary political lessons to be learnt from the Russian experience. The Bolshevik revolution demonstrated, Maurín's group argued, that it was not sufficient just to fight the bourgeoisie on an economic level, but it was necessary to destroy the totality of the capitalist system, in particular its state machine.

At this stage, the revolutionary syndicalists were still in the process of evolving towards a more coherent communist outlook. Despite frequent references to the Russian revolution, it continued to be Sorel, rather than Lenin, who was most frequently cited in *Lucha Social*. None the less, references to the need for a revolutionary party of some sort, a "union of combat" or "league of proletarian revolutionaries", as Maurín described it, brought his faction potentially even closer to the Communists.<sup>14</sup>

In early 1922, relations between the Spanish revolutionary syndicalists and the communist movement were mainly through the RILU. Maurín and his collaborators, despite formally favouring the "unification of all revolutionary forces" in Spain, were fairly indifferent, if not hostile, towards the Madrid and Northern-based Communists and there was virtually no co-operation between the two tendencies. The fact that the PCE initially neglected serious work inside the CNT and concentrated more on the Socialists, did not help matters.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the revolutionary syndicalists were understandably irritated at having to play "second fiddle" in the eyes of Moscow to the Spanish Communists. Hence the CNT delegation to the RILU's founding Congress had tried hard to convince the Bolshevik leaders that any serious revolutionary movement in Spain could only be constructed on the basis of the Confederation.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the ideological development of the revolutionary syndicalists and their growing isolation, after their defeat at the CNT's Saragossa Conference, brought them increasingly within the orbit of the PCE. This was most clearly reflected when the focus for pro-RILU sentiment in the CNT became the Valencia-based *Acción Sindicalista* once *Lucha Social* had ceased publication in October 1922. The Lérida paper had fallen heavily in debt, itself a sign of the revolutionary syndicalists' weakness. *Acción Sindicalista* was more openly communist in its outlook than its predecessor. It was in

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14. Maurín, "La organización de combate" *Ibid* 29.4.22. and *El sindicalismo...* Op.cit. pp.86-91.

15. J. Humbert-Droz, *Mémoires De Lénine à Staline. Dix ans au service de l'Internationale Communiste 1921- 1931* (Neuchâtel 1971) p.189; Bullejos, Op.cit. p.41.

16. *Lucha Social* 26.11.21.

fact financed by the RILU and produced by Arlandis, who had joined the Partido Comunista Español in 1920, and Julián "Gorkín" (Gómez), the secretary of the Levante Federation of the PCE.<sup>17</sup> The new paper, which openly aimed at combating anarchist ideas in the CNT, carried regular features on what was seen as the "treacherous" role of the anarchists in the Russian revolution. The next step in the revolutionary syndicalists' evolution towards the Spanish Communist Party would be to formalise on an organisational level the growing contacts between the two factions inside the unions.

While in Paris, on his way to the RILU's Congress in 1921, Maurín had been particularly impressed by the work of the French pro-Bolshevik syndicalists, who had established "revolutionary syndicalist committees" to bring together communist sympathisers in the unions. It was now proposed to organise similar committees in Spain. Although it is generally claimed that the creation of such committees was Maurín's idea, this initiative undoubtedly reflected a Moscow-inspired change in the orientation of the PCE. During the autumn of 1922, the CI urged the Spanish Communists to pay more attention to winning over the anarcho-syndicalists and proposed the establishment of pressure groups inside the CNT. In September 1922, González Canet, a founder-member of the PCE's Levante Federation, advocated, in *Acción Sindicalista*, the creation of Comités Sindicalistas Revolucionarias (CSRs) inside the anarcho-syndicalist unions. A manifesto supporting this idea, signed by the CNT's Lérida Federation and various Communist-influenced unions and opposition groups, was published a few weeks later. Accordingly, on 24 December 1922, a conference to found the CSRs took place in Bilbao. The assembled delegates called for the unity of all revolutionary tendencies - anarchist, syndicalist and communist - inside the CNT. An earlier proposal to create similar groups inside the Socialist trade union federation, the Unión General de Trabajadores (General Workers Union) had to be dropped. A fracas involving Communist militants at the UGT's Fifteenth Congress in November 1922 had resulted in a young Socialist being shot dead and had led to the expulsion of fifteen PCE-led unions from the UGT, hence making any form of systematic work by the Communists inside the UGT very difficult.

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17. Portela, Op.cit.; J. Gorkín, *El revolucionario profesional* (Barcelona 1975) pp.55,59.



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The CSRs were to be affiliated to the RILU and this was clearly reflected in their programme. Thus, the "defence of the Russian revolution" was to be a high priority for the new committees. The advocacy by the CSRs of "direct action" and "collective violence" reflected their rejection of both reformist gradualism and individual terrorism. The new committees' mouthpiece, and consequently the RILU's in Spain, was to be *La Batalla*. This paper had just been launched in Barcelona by the pro-communist syndicalists to replace both *Lucha Social* and *Acción Sindicalista*.<sup>18</sup>

The CSRs were created when the revolutionary movement in the peninsula was on the decline. With the CNT by 1923 a shadow of its former self, Maurín's group could no longer sustain the optimistic line of two years previously, when it had believed that the Confederation, under revolutionary syndicalist guidance, would soon unite most of the Spanish proletariat.<sup>19</sup> Instead, *La Batalla* now saw the need for a more defensive policy in order to overcome the movement's weakness. This involved the formation of a "united front" of all proletarian tendencies - the CI's central strategy since late 1921 and one previously championed by *Lucha Social*. At the same time, *La Batalla* argued against what it described as a growing tendency towards "passivity" by anarchist elements inside the CNT as a response to both repression and a dependence on armed "action groups". While the number of strikes in 1923 was the lowest since 1919, the number of politically-motivated assassinations had increased tenfold. Instead, the CSRs' supporters advocated "mass mobilisation" in order to help resuscitate working class militancy.

If the communist-syndicalists (as the revolutionary syndicalists had begun to call themselves) had any lingering hopes that the revolutionary movement could be rekindled, these were dashed by the military coup d'état headed by General Miguel Primo de Rivera in September 1923. Humiliation in the Moroccan war, the continuing social unrest and a general loss of faith in ineffective politicians by the ruling classes, had laid the ground for a military take-over. The very survival of an already beleaguered labour movement was now at stake.

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18. *Acción Sindicalista* 22.9.22, 11.11.22., 18.11.22; Comités Sindicalistas Revolucionarios, "A todo el proletariado" n.d. (FPI); "Resolution on the Spanish Communist Party", *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International* (London 1980) p.358; L. Portela, "Introducción", in Maurín, *Los Hombres...* Op.cit. p.12.

19. *Lucha Social* 24.9.21.

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Meanwhile the anarchists, who constituted the most vociferously anti-communist sector inside the unions, had strengthened their hold over the Catalan CNT. This led some of the more "moderate" anarcho-syndicalists to collaborate briefly with the communist-syndicalists. Not only did these "moderates" share the pro-communists' opposition to anarchist methods, but some of them, including certain leaders of the Barcelona CNT's important metal, transport and textile unions, had already expressed their sympathy for the RILU. This collaboration culminated in the joint publication of a new daily newspaper, *Lucha Obrera*, during December 1923, after the non-anarchist elements had been excluded from the editorial board of the CNT's daily *Solidaridad Obrera*. The new paper broadly defended the line of the CSRs in regard to "freedom of tendency" inside the CNT and opposed the supposed "adventurism" of the anarchists. In particular, *Lucha Obrera*, fought for what it claimed was the opinion of the majority of CNT members, that the unions should continue to work legally and not, as the anarchists wanted, dissolve themselves in order to avoid being pulled into collaboration with the dictatorship. Such a danger existed because the new regime aimed to eliminate all forms of labour unrest not just through outright repression but also by introducing certain social reforms. Benevolent acts by the government such as the provision of cheap housing and medical services were designed to undermine working class militancy. More important were the state-run arbitration committees in which the UGT agreed to participate. More moderate CNT leaders, most notably Angel Pestaña, also advocated collaboration to try and keep union organisation intact but this was rejected out of hand by most of his comrades.

Unfortunately for the communist-syndicalists, *Lucha Obrera's* existence was short-lived. Following an overwhelming anarchist victory at the Catalan CNT's Conference in Granollers in late December 1923, the new paper was "provisionally suspended" because its editors claimed that they did not want their opposition to be blamed for the "Confederation's downfall".<sup>20</sup> Despite this setback, collaboration between the communist-syndicalists and some CNT leaders continued. In July 1924, Desiderio Trilles and Josep Grau of the Barcelona Transport Workers' Union, and Josep Jover and Manual Vall of the Metalworkers', accompanied Maurín and PCE leader Oscar Pérez Solís to the RILU's Third Congress in Moscow. However, the CSRs'

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20. *Lucha Obrera* 1.1.24.

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possibilities continued to diminish, both because of growing state repression and because of the disintegration of the CNT.

At the end of 1924, *La Batalla* calculated that the Confederation had little more than 50,000 members in the whole of Spain, compared with a million four years previously. This contrasted sharply with the UGT, which, by collaborating with the new regime, had maintained its membership of around 200,000.<sup>21</sup>

The Revolutionary Syndicalist Committees themselves never had any form of mass base. Although usually identified with the Catalan communist-syndicalists,<sup>22</sup> no doubt because the Committees' paper, *La Batalla*, was more or less exclusively produced by Maurín and a few of his closest collaborators, the CSRs were in fact effectively sustained by the PCE. At the Committees' founding conference the majority of the fifteen unions and twenty-six opposition groups which sent delegates were party-controlled, most being from Vizcaya and Asturias. The only Catalan delegations came from the Lérida and Falset CNT. Furthermore, only a few hundred of the 3,000 copies of *La Batalla* printed every week were distributed in Catalonia. In fact, the CSRs were to be more important retrospectively, because of later developments inside Catalan communism. A RILU report on PCE trade union activity in late 1924 made no reference to these Committees at all.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, when *Lucha Social*, relaunched in January 1925 after the suspension of *La Batalla*, published a manifesto calling for the unity of the CNT, ex-UGT and autonomous unions, of the thirty-eight signatories only two, the Barcelona Transport and Textile Unions, were from Catalonia, the rest being mostly PCE-led bodies from northern Spain.<sup>24</sup> This apparent support from two of the most important unions in Barcelona must be considered as purely symbolic, not only because the Catalan CNT was totally decimated by 1925, but also because most of those anarcho-syndicalist leaders who had briefly supported the RILU soon turned against the Communists altogether.

With the establishment of the CSRs and the growing isolation of the communist-syndicalists inside the CNT, Maurín's group had inevitably moved closer to

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21. *La Batalla* 6.11.24.

22. Maurín himself gives this impression in "Apendice. Sobre el comunismo en España", *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. p.266

23. *Lucha Social* 22.7.22; *La Batalla* 6.1.24; "Delegación de los grupos sindicales comunistas al III Congreso de la ISR", July 1924, (ACCPCE); Maurín, *El Bloque...* Op.cit. p.9.

24. *Lucha Social* 8.1.25.

the PCE during 1923. Articles by prominent Russian and other foreign Communists, soon to be joined by contributions from the Spanish Communist Party's leaders, began to appear regularly in *La Batalla*. Maurín, in turn, had begun to write for the CI's journal, *La Correspondence Internationale* and he had visited Moscow again in June 1923 to attend a meeting of the RILU.<sup>25</sup> Even so, relations between the Catalan group and the PCE remained ambiguous. An attempt to clarify the situation in December 1923 came to nothing because the Central Committee delegates sent to Barcelona were arrested before they could make contact with the communist-syndicalists. It was not until May of the following year that a clear and public statement in favour of the Communist Party appeared in *La Batalla*.<sup>26</sup> After Maurín's attendance at the RILU's World Congress, two months later, it was finally decided by the CI Executive Committee (ECCI) that the "existence of two parallel communist organisations" had to come to an end and the communist-syndicalist faction be integrated into the PCE. Yet even at this late stage, a certain amount of mutual hostility still persisted and the party leadership in Madrid described those around *La Batalla* as not "completely communist" and counselled an "intelligent orientation" in order to win them over. An added problem, according to the PCE, was not just the different origins and methods of work, but also the communist-syndicalists' desire to form the leadership of any new Catalan Federation of the party. The local section of the PCE, based almost exclusively in Barcelona, where it had been formed in 1920 originally as part of the Partido Comunista Español, had only thirty members at most and was not taken too seriously by the *La Batalla* group. An agreement was finally reached and in October 1924 and the communist-syndicalists joined the PCE, forming its "Catalan Federation", the Federación Comunista Catalano-Balear (FCC-B).<sup>27</sup>

The new Federation had barely one hundred members<sup>28</sup> and was created at a time when the fortunes of the revolutionary left in both Catalonia and Spain in general were

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25. *La Correspondence Internationale* 20.7.23

26. Maurín, "En marcha hacia el Partido Comunista" *La Batalla* 1.5.24. and "El partido comunista el único camino" *ibid* 9.5.24.

27. A. Pérez Baró, *Els "feliços" anys vint. Memòries d'un militant obrer* (Pàlma de Mallorca 1974) p.165; V. Alba, *Dos revolucionarios* (Madrid 1975) p.104; Ballejos, *Op.cit.* p.44; Portela, "Introducción" *Op.cit.* pp.14-15; *La Antorcha* 10.10.24.; J. Andrade, "Al Comité Regional... Muy confidencial carta del CC del PCE" 28.8.24. (ACCPCE).

28. Alba, *Dos Revolucionarios* *Op.cit.* p.104. puts the figure at between 150 and 200; *La Antorcha* 10.10.24 announced that about 50 of the "La Batalla group" had joined the party; the FCC-B had 100 members in December 1925, "Conference du Partit Comunista Espagnol" 25.12.25 (ACCPCE).

rapidly declining. Circumstances, both in terms of the general political situation, with the advent of the dictatorship, and inside the workers movement, were now very unfavourable to building any form of mass revolutionary organisation. In particular, the Catalan Communists had failed to capitalise on the earlier support for the Russian revolution inside the CNT. In some respects this was unavoidable because the real wave of enthusiasm for the Bolshevik cause had already begun to subside in the Confederation's ranks by 1920. By the time the pro-communist militants began to gain any influence, many anarcho-syndicalists were already having their doubts about the Russian revolution's methods. The organisation of the pro-communist group inside the Catalan CNT also took place when the unions themselves were already on the defensive following the great upsurge of agitation during 1919 and 1920. As it happened, the revolutionary syndicalists actually benefited from the weakening of union organisation, finding themselves suddenly catapulted into the Confederation's leadership. The very fact that the anarchists, once re-organised, had little problem during 1922 in putting an end to any formal links with the international communist movement, reflected the weakness of Maurín's group. Nor were the Catalans helped by the activities of the PCE elsewhere in Spain, which paid little attention at first to serious work inside the CNT. In the end, the principal achievement of Maurín and his comrades was to have brought together a solid nucleus of militants who would provide the backbone of Catalan communism for years to come.

### **The origins of dissent**

Following the turmoil of the post-war years, the establishment of the military dictatorship marked the beginning of a particularly barren period for revolutionaries in Spain. The new regime directed most of its fire against anarcho-syndicalists and Catalan separatists. The PCE was too small to be considered a serious threat, and until the end of 1923 its activities had been tolerated by the dictatorship. Despite the communists' offices being taken over by the police, the party's press, albeit censored, continued to appear. However, this official toleration came abruptly to an end when the majority of the Central Committee was arrested on fake charges of having prepared

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a *coup d'état*.<sup>29</sup> The party's increasingly precarious existence was further aggravated by internal dissent.

The distinct origins of the Federación Comunista Catalano-Balear (FCC-B) and the objective political circumstances were to make the Catalan group's integration into the Spanish Communist Party very difficult. From the outset the Catalan Federation, along with the Vizcayan Federation, was at odds with the national leadership, whose "passivity" was blamed for the party's ineffectiveness. In an attempt to resolve the internal unrest, the CI delegate in Spain at the time, Jacques Doriot, proposed an ambitious campaign against the war in Morocco. The Central Committee unanimously rejected this proposal as unrealistic and called a special Conference in November 1924 in Madrid to reaffirm its position. The opposition was equally unimpressed by Doriot's plan but decided to use it as a focus for getting rid of the leadership. The Conference thereby supported the CI delegate and the majority of the Central Committee were forced to resign. A new "leftist" leadership was then elected which included, among others, Pérez Solís, Arlandis, González Canet and Maurín.<sup>30</sup>

Unfortunately for the PCE most of the new Central Committee was almost immediately arrested. Leadership of the party now briefly passed to the FCC-B in Barcelona, before it too was decimated by police activity in January 1925. Around forty or fifty of the Federation's better known militants, including Maurín who had been appointed Party Secretary, were imprisoned as a result of the police crackdown.<sup>31</sup> For the next few years, the PCE's work was extremely limited and a temporary leadership was established in Paris. The party now had little more than five hundred members in the whole of Spain, over half of whom, according to Gorkín, were in prison by early 1925.<sup>32</sup> Apart from repression, desertion back to the PSOE had also contributed to the PCE's more or less complete disintegration. For the next five or six years, the development of the PCE centred on its internal disputes and crises. Not only was the party's influence on events minimal in this period, but its political orientation would

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29. *Lucha Obrera* 25.12.23.

30. Bulejos *Op.cit.* pp.58-9; J. Andrade *Historia del PCE* (n.p. 1974) p.18.

31. Maurín was Secretary from 17.11.24 until 12.1.25, see his letter, "Al Comité Ejecutivo del PCE" 5.7.30. (ACCPCE).

32. J. Estruch, *Historia del PCE* vol. 1., (Barcelona 1978) p.49; L. García Palacios, *Los dirigentes del Partido Comunista al desnudo* (Madrid 1931) p.28; Maurín, *El Bloque...* *Op.cit.* p.19; Gorkín, *Op.cit.* p.117.

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become increasingly out of touch with reality. This situation, in part, was a result of its isolation, but the misguided advice of the CI to its Spanish section was probably more decisive.

Internal bureaucratisation, a reflection of a similar process in the Russian Communist Party and hence inside the CI, further damaged the PCE's prospects. The increasingly dictatorial methods of the Russian party and the struggle against any internal opposition resulted at an international level in the stricter control by the CI over national Communist parties. What was described as the "Bolshevisation" of national parties meant in effect the adoption of an even more subservient attitude to the Comintern's directives. In the Spanish situation, this was translated into the unquestionable acceptance of the Executive Committee's authority; an attitude that was justified by the fact that the party's clandestine existence necessitated "Bolshevik iron discipline".<sup>33</sup> From early 1926 onwards, the PCE's recently appointed General Secretary, José Bullejos, with the backing of the CI, expelled a series of former party leaders who objected to what were often seen as the unrealistic policies of the party leadership. It was the first time that arbitrary expulsions had been used to resolve political differences in the PCE. Henceforth, it would be the norm.

Among those who soon came into conflict with the new leadership's methods was the FCC-B and, in particular, its principal leader, Maurín. Bullejos had barely taken over as General Secretary when, at the party's "National Conference" in Bordeaux in December 1925, he severely criticised, among others, the imprisoned Maurín.<sup>34</sup> The PCE leadership now seemed determined to put an end to the limited autonomy which the Catalan Federation had enjoyed since its foundation a little over a year beforehand. During this brief period, the FCC-B had not yet fully integrated into the Spanish party. Clandestinity and widespread arrests had made this even more difficult, but it was the Catalan Federation's distinct political origins that had contributed most to its virtual independent existence. Both the strictures of illegal work and the CI's new orientation meant that this independence could no longer be tolerated. Moreover, Maurín, in particular, given his abilities as a leader, was a potential threat to Bullejos.

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33. *La Antorcha* 16.4.26.

34. M. Tuñón de Lara, "De la Dictadura de Primo de Rivera al Congreso de Sevilla", *Para una historia del PCE, Conferencias en la F.I.M.* (Madrid 1980) p.110.

The Catalan Communists themselves were soon wary of the new party leaders' methods. The expulsion a few months later of the Valencian communist leader, González Canet, who had briefly served as the PCE's Organisation Secretary, and the FCC-B's young Secretary, Josep Teixidó, brought into the open the extent of the Catalan Federation's discontent with the party leadership. The Catalan communists now threatened to place themselves "outside the party" unless the CI reinstated those who had been replaced or expelled by the current Executive Committee, which they accused of "trying to destroy the party".<sup>35</sup> In what appears to have been an attempt to head off the Catalans' opposition, Pérez Solís, who despite being in prison held the position of PCE agent in Barcelona, urged Maurín to participate in the leadership's discussions regarding the party's internal problems. Maurín's reply left little doubt as to his hostility to the new leadership.<sup>36</sup> His attitude was hardly surprising given that, by now, Bullejos and the Executive Committee had initiated a campaign to undermine Maurín's influence in the Catalan Federation, attacking as "unmarxist" a series of articles in the PCE's press by the FCC-B leader about the historical formation of the Spanish state.<sup>37</sup> Far from discrediting him, these attacks further incensed the Catalan Federation and relations between the FCC-B and party leadership continued to deteriorate. In December 1926, the rift came into the open when the PCE Executive Committee publicly attacked the "completely negative" attitude of the Catalan Regional Committee.<sup>38</sup> In January 1927, it appeared that the CI agreed with the Catalans, when it sent a letter criticising the PCE's leaders. None the less, such criticism was soon forgotten and attacks by the party leadership on the opposition continued unabated in the PCE newspaper *La Antorcha*.<sup>39</sup> By September 1927, the majority of the executive Committee favoured expelling the Catalan dissidents, although this was not carried through for another three years.

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35. "Al CE del PCE" 30.9.26. (ACCPCE).

36. "Carta de Oscar Pérez Solís a Maurín" 25.9.26, "Carta de Maurín" 25.9.26., "A los afiliados del Partido" 28.9.26, and Secretariado de la FCC-B y delegado del CE, "Al partido, a las federaciones, a todos los militantes comunistas" 9.10.26 (ACCPCE).

37. Maurín's five articles were published in *La Antorcha* between 29.1.26 and 9.4.26, Bullejos's replies, *ibid*, 30.9.26, 22.10.26, 29.10.26 and 3.12.26.

38. "Al camarada Arroyo, director de *La Antorcha*", Carta de la Federación Catalano-Balear, 18.10.26 and "CR de la FCC-B. A todos los comunistas de Catalunya" 18.10.26. (ACCPCE); *La Antorcha* 17.12.26.

39. García Palacios, *Op.cit.* p.22; Maurín, "A propósito de mi expulsión del Partido Comunista", *La Batalla* 13.8.31; *La Antorcha* 4.3.27, 11.3.27, 25.3.27 and 27.5.27.



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Meanwhile, Maurín and his supporters had been accused of being in contact with the ex-French Communist leader, Boris Souvarine,<sup>40</sup> who had been expelled from the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) in late 1924 - an early victim of "Bolshevisation". Like Maurín, Souvarine came from a syndicalist background and had also fought against the bureaucratisation of the party. In contrast, Souvarine saw the roots of this bureaucratisation in the degeneration of the Russian revolution itself and consequently the CI, which the Russian Communists dominated. Maurín, however, still believed the problem was principally internal to the Spanish party and not stemming from the policies of the Comintern. The most obvious link between the two men was in fact a family one - in November 1927 Maurín married Souvarine's sister Jeanne.

Maurín had been released from prison in late 1927 and allowed to go to Paris. He now took advantage of his freedom to travel to Moscow to defend himself against the Spanish party leadership's latest accusation - that he was a "police informer". He succeeded in convincing the International of his honour and the PCE Executive was duly censored, but not expelled as Maurín had demanded.<sup>41</sup> Clearly the CI, as yet, did not share Bullejos' hostility towards Maurín. The fact that in Paris he worked for the International's publishers and was correspondent for *Izvestia*<sup>42</sup> was a further reflection of this. Even so, once in France, Maurín was deliberately excluded from party activity and relations between him and the PCE continued to deteriorate. Despite its efforts, the actions of the Executive Committee not only failed to break Maurín's influence over the FCC-B but actually hardened the Catalans' opposition.

There now took place a major shift in CI policy which created the basis for even greater divergences between the FCC-B and the party leadership. The International, by this time firmly under Stalin's control, formally introduced at its Sixth World Congress in the summer of 1928, the political orientation that became known as the CI's "third period". It was now argued that a new revolutionary crisis was developing internationally and the proletariat must go on the offensive. The main characteristics

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40. "Acta de la reunión del CE del PCE" 7.9.27, and "Al CR de la Federación..." 9.7.27 (ACCPCE).

41. It is not clear when this journey took place. In "A proposito..." Op.cit. Maurín gives the impression that it was soon after his release but in his letter to the Executive Committee of 5.7.30. (ACCPCE) it seems to be March 1929.

42. Maurín to Nin 15.9.28., "Andreu Nin al Moscou de Stalin" *L'Avenç* nos. 50 and 51, July-August 1982.

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of this new policy were the concept of "class against class", the "united front from below" and the view that the Socialist parties were the principal obstacles to the imminent revolution and hence were objectively "social fascists". This ultra-left turn was essentially to do with the internal needs of the Russian party, although events in Germany, where the Communist Party had actually suffered at the hands of local social democratic-run authorities, helped reinforce this sectarian line.<sup>43</sup>

The formal adoption by the Spanish Communists of this new orientation was hindered by further attacks on their fragile organisation. By early 1928, most of the PCE's leadership, including Bullejos, had been imprisoned after having returned to Spain and the party as such "hardly existed". It was now led from Paris by Vicente Arroyo, the only Executive Committee member still at liberty, and two delegates from the French Communist Party (PCF). It was not until August 1929 that the PCE held its Third Congress in Paris, but with very little preparation and only a few delegates managing to attend due to the fact that many were arrested at the border.<sup>44</sup>

The Congress marked a crucial turning point in relations between the PCE and its Catalan Federation. Since Maurín's release from jail the FCC-B's opposition had moved beyond being solely against the leadership's bureaucratic methods to take on a more general political nature. The Federation presented its own political thesis to the Congress. This argued that, because the bourgeois revolution had never been consummated in Spain, any revolutionary movement would inevitably have a "democratic character". Hence the party had to call for the "Democratic Federal Republic" in order to win the leadership of the revolution. However, under the influence of the CI's delegate, Ruggiero Grieco ("Garlandi"), the FCC-B's position was rejected as "rightist" and, in line with the then current international policy, the slogan for a "workers and peasants' democratic dictatorship" was accepted. The party's decision to back the official line was no surprise. Moreover, the FCC-B's delegates, Maurín and his closest collaborator since the days of *Lucha Social* in Lérida, Pere Bonet, had their credentials rejected on the grounds that, because they resided in Paris, under CI rules,

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43. E. H. Carr *The Twilight of the Comintern* (London 1982) p.7.

44. Juan Andrade to G. J. Geers 22.3.28., J. Andrade, *Recuerdos personales* (Barcelona 1983) p.176; Bullejos, *Op.cit.* pp.90-92.

the two erstwhile Catalan delegates should have been members of the PCF.<sup>45</sup> The significance of the Catalan Federation's arguments would become apparent during the next two years. Maurín's theory of the "democratic revolution" was soon the corner-stone of his political analysis.<sup>46</sup>

New opportunities arose for the Spanish labour movement with the fall of Primo de Rivera in January 1930. The dictator's erratic and sometimes eccentric attempts to improve Spain's economic and political well-being had only led to the gradual alienation of his former ruling-class allies. Landowners, bankers, industrialists, the church, conservative politicians and finally, and most importantly, the army and monarchy, all had reason to be dissatisfied with Primo de Rivera by the end of 1929.<sup>47</sup> His resignation led to the establishment of a new government headed by General Berenguer and a limited liberalisation from which all opposition factions, including the workers movement, benefited. The Spanish Communists, hampered by the CI's ultra-leftism, refused to accept that anything fundamental had changed and saw the Berenguer government as merely an extension of Primo de Rivera's "fascist" dictatorship. This analysis was echoed by the International, when Manuilski dismissed the events in Spain as unimportant because neither the PCE nor the proletariat had played a leading role.<sup>48</sup>

As part of the process of re-organising its meagre forces, the party held a National Conference in early March 1930 near Bilbao, known, for security reasons, as the "Pamplona Conference". The PCE's leaders were criticised by Grieco, the CI representative, for their inactivity in the weeks following the fall of the dictatorship,<sup>49</sup> but the Comintern did not question Bullejos's continued dominance of the party. None the less, the growth of discontent inside the PCE meant his leadership was no longer guaranteed. According to the FCC-B, when the new Central Committee was convened after the Conference, the outgoing Executive Committee could only ensure its re-election by "forgetting" to inform the Catalan and Levante delegates that the meeting was going to take place.<sup>50</sup> During the Conference itself it was clear that the FCC-B

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45. Maurín, "A proposito..." Op.cit.; Letters from the FCC-B Regional Committee to the Executive Committee 8.5.29 and 22.8.29. (ACCPCE).

46. See pages 44-47.

47. R. Carr, *Spain 1808-1975* (Oxford 1982) pp.581-591.

48. I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast* (Oxford 1970) p.160.

49. "Carta al CE del PCE" 5.7.30. (ACCPCE).

50. *La Batalla* 19.9.30.

seriously disagreed with the party line. Despite the decision of the Third Congress a year previously, the Catalan Federation had continued to defend the position that the coming revolution would be "democratic" and once more its representative unsuccessfully tried to persuade the other delegates to adopt this analysis.<sup>51</sup>

In order to try and decapitate the growing opposition of the FCC-B, the party's leaders used the National Conference to move more decisively against Maurín, who had recently returned to Barcelona. By strictly interpreting CI rules that Maurín's two year residence in France made him eligible to be a member of the PCF only, the PCE Executive Committee was now able to pose the question of his "re-entrance" into the party. The Conference decided that in order to be "re-admitted" Maurín would have to write several articles against "Trotskyism" and sign a declaration of his agreement with the policies of the CI, later adding that he should also break relations with all opposition elements and recognise "his past political errors."<sup>52</sup>

Obviously the aim of the Bullejos faction was to make it impossible for Maurín to reintegrate into the PCE. Maurín, in reply, objected strongly to these accusations and the conditions placed on him. Because he had to "re-join" the party, he asked rhetorically if this meant he had been expelled. Maurín defended his "tireless activity" in the communist movement and his loyalty to the CI, while making clear his rejection of the current party leadership because it was "completely incapable of following the political situation in Spain."<sup>53</sup> As for the accusation of "Trotskyism", neither Maurín nor the FCC-B had shown the slightest sympathy for the former Bolshevik leader's positions. In fact, the FCC-B had previously tried to use the very same accusation to call for the removal of one of Bullejos' closest allies, Gabriel Trilla, who had flirted with Trotskyism as early as 1924. The Trotskyists themselves denounced Maurín as a "bureaucrat" and his group as being quite prepared to "submit themselves unconditionally to Stalin's will", if it could only win the party leadership.<sup>54</sup>

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51. "Carta del CR al Comité Ejecutivo. Firma: Renart" 19.10.29. and "CE al CR de la Federación de ..." 20.9.30. (ACCPCE); *La Batalla* 27.8.31.

52. H. Arlandis, "Contestando a una falsedad" *ibid*, 27.8.31; "CE al camarada Maurín" 25.6.30. (ACCPCE).

53. "Maurín al CE" 5.7.30. (ACCPCE).

54. *ibid*; "Carta de Renart al Comité Ejecutivo" 22.8.29. (ACCPCE); *La Vérité* 13.6.30.

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If the Executive Committee had hoped to isolate Maurín from the rest of the FCC-B it clearly failed because the Catalan Regional Committee soon declared its unequivocal support for him.<sup>55</sup> In fact, it was quite obvious that the Federation had for some time effectively existed outside the authority of the PCE. By late 1929, the FCC-B's leading bodies had already begun to meet without notifying the party leadership and the Catalans had practically ceased paying their dues.<sup>56</sup> Contrary to the Spanish Communist Party's radical line of calling for a "workers' and peasants' democratic dictatorship", the FCC-B had continued to talk of a "democratic revolution". At a practical level, the Catalan Federation, unlike the PCE as a whole, had loosely collaborated with Republican and Catalan nationalist groups during the late twenties and, in March 1930, it had even signed the thoroughly moderate and democratic "Inteligencia Republicana" manifesto.<sup>57</sup>

The expulsion of the Catalan dissidents, who were described as "bourgeois agents" and "counter-revolutionary elements", was finally decided on by the Executive Committee on 5 June 1930. Yet as the PCE leadership still believed that disaffection among the Catalan members was principally due to ignorance of the party line, it was hoped that an outright split could be avoided. To this end, a new Barcelona Committee of the PCE was established which promptly announced on 14 July 1930, the expulsion of the FCC-B's "rebel" Regional Committee.<sup>58</sup> This effectively meant the separation of nearly the whole of the Catalan Federation because, despite the Executive Committee's hopes to the contrary, the vast majority of militants identified with the local leadership, as was confirmed at the Federation's Regional Plenum in October.<sup>59</sup>

Initially, the FCC-B Regional Committee did not react to its expulsion, perhaps hoping to reverse this decision. During the next few weeks, *La Batalla*, which had reappeared in May 1930, continued to support the PCE line and even carried articles by leading party members. It was not until 5 September that the FCC-B publicly aired its differences with the party leadership in response to an attack on the Catalan organisation in the PCE's newspaper, *Mundo Obrero*. The Federation now accused the party's

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55. "Resolución sobre el caso Maurín" 5.7.30. (ACCPCE)

56. "CE a la FCB" 20.1.30; and "Acta de la reunión del CE del PCE" 14.8.30.

57. See page 47.

58. "Como se liquida un partido" *La Batalla* 17.10.30; "Acta de la reunión (extraordinaria) del PCE" 5.6.30; "CE a los CRs" 14.8.30. and "CE al CR de la Federación de..." 20.9.30. (ACCPCE).

59. *La Batalla* 10.10.30.

leaders of being "a gang of bureaucrats who did not represent the Spanish communist movement". The FCC-B also openly criticised, for the first time, the party's decision to set up the so-called "Committee for the re-construction of the CNT", which it now described as "an attempt to split the trade union movement". Then, in a more lengthy account of the crisis inside the PCE, the Catalan Federation accused the Bullejos leadership of having "terrorised the party for six years". None the less, the Federation's leaders still insisted on their loyalty to the CI, despite a Comintern telegram to the Executive Committee condemning the Catalans' position. The FCC-B, in turn, called for the restoration of internal democracy and the removal of the present leadership as the only way to save the PCE from total collapse.<sup>60</sup> Notwithstanding these protests, the reality was that the FCC-B was now both organisationally and politically separated from the "official" communist movement.

### **The Workers and Peasants Bloc**

By 1930, the PCE had done little to drag itself out of the more or less permanent crisis from which it had suffered since 1924.<sup>61</sup> Membership still amounted to only a few hundred throughout Spain and opposition to the national leadership was endemic. Apart from in Catalonia, there were reports of discontent from local organisations in Asturias, the Levante, northern Castile and even in Madrid. In contrast to the sagging fortunes of the PCE, communist ideas were gaining new adherents in Catalonia - albeit outside the party's ranks. In late 1929, the FCC-B had already commented on the "many workers who call themselves communists". Supposedly, only lack of financial aid from the PCE in Madrid had prevented the Catalan Federation from recruiting these workers.<sup>62</sup> Far more important had been the founding in Lérida in November 1928 of a new independent communist grouping, the Partit Comunista Català (Catalan Communist Party). Some of this party's two hundred or so members came from the FCC-B or the Catalan separatist organisation, Estat Català, but the majority were new to organised political activity. The Catalan nationalist movement had radicalised during recent years as a result of the persistent persecution it had suffered at the hands

60. *Ibid* 5.9.30, 12.9.30, and 19.9.30; "Como se liquida un partido" *Op.cit.*; *Mundo Obrero* 13.9.30.

61. See page 57.; R. Cruz, *El Partido Comunista de España en la II República* (Madrid 1987) p.58.

62. FCC-B Regional Plenum, November 1929 and "Acta de la reunión del CE del PCE" 14.1.30. (ACCPCE).

of the dictatorship. Not only had sympathy for left nationalist groups grown considerably, but some activists were now attracted to communism. Dissatisfied with, on the one hand, the nationalists' failure to relate to the revolutionary aspirations of the working class, and on the other, the anarchists' hostility to any national liberation movement, these young activists had discovered Leninism. Communism appeared to offer a coherent "solution" to both the social and national questions. But, although identifying closely with the Russian experience, they had little time for the "intrigues" of the Madrid-based PCE and therefore opted for the idea of a separate Catalan party.<sup>63</sup>

In Barcelona, the PCC drew its strength largely from young shop and office workers, who during 1926 and 1927 had organised a study group on Marxism under the auspices of the influential workers' education and cultural centre, the Ateneu Enciclopèdic Popular. From here they extended their influence to other local "ateneus" in the city, building a network that formed the basis of the new party.<sup>64</sup> It was through such contacts that the PCC was able to begin publishing its own paper, *Treball* in April 1930, after having taken over a cultural magazine in the Sant Andreu district.<sup>65</sup> The PCC's other principal centre was in Lérida, where the new party was established by several founder members of the FCC-B, including the teacher Victor Colomer, one of Maurín's closest collaborators during the days of *Lucha Social*. The Lérida branch also involved a group of railway workers, who in September 1929 had begun to publish *La Señal*. This paper aimed to provide a focus for those militants who were opposed to the "reformist leadership" of the UGT's railwaymen's union. The local railwaymen's leader, PCC member Joan Farré, was soon expelled from the UGT because of this opposition and most of the local union then left in protest, later joining the CNT.<sup>66</sup>

Rather than a tightly organised Leninist party, the PCC was a fairly loose organisation. Despite the existence of both local and regional leadership bodies, no membership dues were paid.<sup>67</sup> Faced with problems of censorship, the PCC opted to organise itself through groups of sympathisers, for instance the "Friends of *La Señal*";

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63. Maurín to Nin 16.11.28. "Andreu Nin al Moscou..." Op.cit.; *La Batalla* 26.2.31.

64. F. Bonamusa, *El Bloc Obrer i Camperol 1930-1932* (Barcelona 1974) p.52; J. Coll and J. Pané, *Josep Rovira. Una vida al servei de Catalunya i del socialisme* (Barcelona 1978) p.24; "Conversa Josep Soler i Vidal", *L'Avenç* no. 30, September 1980.

65. Interview with Josep Coll, 6.12.84.

66. *La Señal* 15.10.29, 15.11.29, 1.1.30.

67. Bonamusa, Op.cit. p.53; Interview with J. Coll, Op.cit.

based on the Lérida railwaymen's paper. The embryonic nature of the party's organisation was clear from its announcement in May 1930 of the setting up of an "organising commission". The latter claimed support from all over Catalonia and had called for a "constituent assembly" to establish the "programme and statutes of the Workers Political Party"<sup>68</sup> - a title which the PCC, for reasons of legality, usually used to describe itself.

The FCC-B was initially critical of the decision of some of its former comrades to participate in the creation of the PCC. Maurín, writing to his friend Andreu Nin in November 1928, described the new party as a "split" that would only help perpetuate the current PCE leadership. However, Maurín had always been optimistic that marxist ideas could gain a mass audience in Catalonia. Thus, he described the foundation of the PCC as "symptomatic of the great ideological transformation that was slowly taking place in the heart of the [region's] workers movement".<sup>69</sup> Personal contacts between militants of the two Catalan communist groups were quite common and these increased as the Federation drew further away from Madrid. By January 1930, although describing the PCC as "pseudo communists", the FCC-B, had begun seriously to investigate the possibility of integrating its rivals into the Federation. The fact that the new party now had grown to around four hundred members, nearly four times that of the FCC-B, must have contributed to Maurín's group's interest in a possible fusion.<sup>70</sup>

The PCE leadership in Madrid was unimpressed by the PCC, which it described as "petty bourgeois". In fact, contacts between the two Catalan groups had provided a further reason for the Executive Committee's dissatisfaction with the FCC-B's leadership. By the summer of 1930, these contacts were already so advanced that the PCE accused the Catalan Federation of "preparing to break with the party to form an independent organisation with the PCC".<sup>71</sup> The basis for unity certainly existed. Both Catalan factions differed with the "official" party over such crucial issues as the democratic nature of the Spanish revolution, opposition to "splitting" the CNT and a

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68. *Treball* 3.5.30.

69. Maurín to Nin, 16.11.28, "Andreu Nin al Moscou..." Op.cit.

70. "Acta de la reunió del CE del PCE" 14.1.30 and "FCB al CE del PCE" 26.1.30 (ACCPCE).

71. "CE a los CRs", 14.8.30, "CE al CR de la Federació de..." 20.9.30, and "Acta de la reunió del CE del PCE" 14.1.30. (ACCPCE)



general distrust of Madrid's bureaucratic and centralist methods. Also, both the PCC and FCC-B were ambiguous about developments inside the international communist movement and still hoped to win recognition from the CI.<sup>72</sup> Once the Federation had been effectively expelled from the PCE, an agreement was soon reached to unify the two organisations. Only a handful of intellectuals in the PCC, headed by the editor of *Treball*, Amadeu Bernadó, opposed the agreement.

The formal unification of the two parties did not take place until 1 March, 1931, because several of their leading members had been imprisoned during the autumn of 1930 as a result of the government's crackdown on the growing social and political unrest.<sup>73</sup> The united organisation decided to keep the name FCC-B, both for historical reasons and to avoid the confusion with the PCE that the title "PCC" could have created.<sup>74</sup> For similar reasons *La Batalla* was chosen to be its principal "official" mouthpiece. The FCC-B and PCC had also begun to publish a theoretical journal, *La Nueva Era*, in October 1930 and a Catalan weekly, *L'Hora*, in December. *La Nueva Era*, of which one copy had already appeared in Paris in January 1930 under Maurín's auspices, aimed at developing "revolutionary doctrine and consciousness", rather than dwelling on "episodic politics or party struggles".<sup>75</sup> *L'Hora* was less of a "party paper" than *La Batalla*. To begin with, the new Catalan weekly involved non-party militants and quite consciously tried to model itself on Henri Barbusse's leftist magazine in France, *Monde*. Apart from general articles on the actual political situation, particularly in relation to Catalonia, *L'Hora* also had a more cultural orientation which reflected the involvement of most of its contributors in the Ateneu Enciclopèdic Popular.

The united FCC-B had some seven hundred members at its foundation, four to five hundred of whom had been associated with the PCC.<sup>76</sup> Outside of Barcelona, the Federation, which had had a total of 194 members in July 1930, had maintained important nuclei in Gerona, Manresa and Terrassa.<sup>77</sup> In the province of Lérida, the FCC-B had lost quite a number of its cadres to the PCC, which also had built up relatively

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72. Coll and Pané, Op.cit., p.29.

73. See page 43.

74. Interview with J. Coll, Op.cit.; "Conversa Josep Soler..." Op.cit.

75. *La Nueva Era*, October 1930.

76. Federación Comunista Iberica, *Tesis aprobadas por el II Congreso de la Federación Comunista Catalano-Balear* (Barcelona 1932) p.2; Humbert-Droz Op.cit. p.409; Maurín, "Au Comité Executif de l'IC" 5.5.31. (ACCPCE); *La Batalla* October 1968.

77. "CE a los CRs" 14.8.30 (ACCPCE); See Apendix One

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strong groups in Sabadell, Sitges and the Catalan capital. The importance of the new unified party did not lie in its membership as such, but in that for the first time there existed a working class party in Catalonia based on a whole number of experienced militants. However meagre its forces at the beginning of 1931, the FCC-B possessed a relatively solid political base in the region in comparison with anything that either the Socialists or Communists had ever been able to establish in the past.

One of the conditions established by the PCC for the fusion of the two groups was the creation of a broader organisation of sympathisers which it hoped would become the basis for a truly mass communist party, a "great Workers and Peasants Political Party".<sup>78</sup> The Unification Congress therefore decided to set up, parallel to the FCC-B, a "Workers and Peasants Bloc", the Bloc Obrer i Camperol (BOC). The term Workers and Peasants Bloc had originally been conceived by the Comintern during 1923-1924 as a form of alliance between the workers and peasants and as a step towards winning the rural masses to communism. In Spain, the PCE had raised the idea of forming such a bloc in 1924, although given the political circumstances, it remained purely at a propaganda level.<sup>79</sup> This policy had most impact in France, with the formation of the "Bloque Ouvrier et Paysan" in late 1923, although in practice this was little more than an electoral front for the PCF. More recently, Maurín had spoken in December 1930, in terms reminiscent of the CI's former line, of the need for the workers to form such a bloc with the peasantry in order to carry through the democratic revolution.<sup>80</sup>

The conception of the Workers and Peasants Bloc formulated by the Federation's First Congress was substantially different from that originally expounded by the communist movement. Basically, the BOC would act as a broad peripheral organisation which would enable the FCC-B to draw into activity "all the workers of the city and countryside who, while not yet communists themselves, still accepted the slogans formulated by the communists". Maurín explained a year later that the Catalan Federation's leaders had,

"arrived at the conclusion that the rigid adoption of the organisational methods of the Communist parties in a country like Spain, where there was so little tradition of

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78. *Treball* 8.11.30, 15.11.30; *Federación Comunista Ibérica, Tesis...* Op.cit. p.52.

79. *La Antorcha* 18.7.24; *La Batalla* 25.7.24, 2.10.24.

80. *Ibid* 11.12.30.

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political organisation, would condemn us to failure.(The) slavish copying of the Bolshevik system had produced disastrous results in the majority of countries. In France (for example) "Bolshevisation" had led to the Communist Party losing three quarters of its membership. It was therefore necessary to find an organisational formula that related to the peculiarities of our workers movement. This formula was the Workers and Peasants Bloc."

In particular, the establishment of the Bloc was seen as a way of reaching the "exploited peasants", who, according to Maurín, "naturally could not directly join the party." Within this scheme the FCC-B was to act as the "brain and nervous system" and the BOC was to be "where those workers close to communism could congregate", thereby passing through a process of selection before becoming fully-fledged communist militants.<sup>81</sup>

The creation of the BOC has been presented as a break with orthodox communism.<sup>82</sup> Certainly Maurín's explanation, written in early 1932, seems to confirm this in his references to the "disastrous results" incurred by trying to imitate the Bolshevik model and the need to take into account the political peculiarities of Spain. However, even within Maurín's theoretical exposition of the concept of the Workers and Peasants Bloc there is also a great deal of orthodoxy involved. In particular, the separation of sympathisers and militants was presented as a return to a purer Leninism. Unlike the PCE, the FCC-B proposed limiting membership to those "who had given proof of their convictions, activity and discipline",<sup>83</sup> hence forming a true communist vanguard. The Federation's structure, in fact, was classically Leninist, organised on the basis of functional cells and democratic centralism. The only difference from the "official" communist movement at this time was that the FCC-B retained a reasonable level of internal democracy and discussion which was seen by the dissident communists as being completely in line with traditional Bolshevik practice. Modifications such as the election of the General Secretary by party congresses or the election of local *comarcal*<sup>84</sup> and provincial committees from below, though a break with the communist

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81. Maurín, "El Bloque Obrero y Campesino", *Ibid* 12.3.31; V. Colomer, "La Federación y el Bloque" *ibid* 24.12.31; Maurín, *El Bloque...* Op.cit. pp.22-23.

82. Monreal, Op.cit. p.46; I. Molas, Introduction to *Ibid*. p.8

83. Federación Comunista Iberica, *Tesis...* Op.cit. p.52.

84. Historically, Catalonia was territorially divided on the basis of areas known as *comarques*, see the map on page 7.

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practice of election of such posts from above, did not in themselves contradict the Federation's declared adherence to "democratic centralist" principles.

Despite its pretensions, the BOC never became a particularly broad organisation of sympathisers. Its structure mirrored that of the FCC-B at practically every level and both organisations gradually became one and the same. Rather than the Federation's Leninism become diluted by the Bloc, the latter "became more communist everyday"<sup>85</sup> in its orientation and way of working. Within the next few years, only in some rural areas did the BOC really retain the separate and looser characteristics under which it was originally conceived. Both the leadership of the FCC-B and BOC were the same and very soon there was little difference in practice between the two organisations.<sup>86</sup>

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85. Colomer, "La Federación ..." Op.cit.

86. See later references to this question, pages 68, 198, 345-346.

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## 2. REVOLUTION AND REPUBLIC 1930-1932

### The Democratic Revolution

The removal of Primo de Rivera was accompanied by a deepening economic, social and political crisis. Divisions among the ruling classes and the growth of republicanism among the middle class meant that General Berenguer's government could only be a stop-gap measure. The dictator's fall led to a general, if limited, liberalisation and there soon began an unprecedented wave of strikes over economic grievances that often by-passed the traditional working class organisations altogether. Politically it was the Republican parties, rather than a divided workers movement, which gained most from this growing social turmoil.

Most sections of political opinion by now wanted to see an end to the authoritarian regime and a return to some form of parliamentary rule. Even conservative political leaders blamed the monarchy for the state the country was in and now actively sided with the Republicans. The army could no longer be depended on to save the King and many officers were in close contact with the opposition. After a series of meetings between Republican and Socialist leaders and rebel army officers, it was agreed to stage a national uprising to finish off the tottering regime. A military rebellion was to be accompanied by a general strike. The possibility of success was greatly enhanced by the tacit, if not open, support for the movement of many CNT leaders. The uprising was scheduled to begin on 15 December, but a premature insurrection by Republican army officers in Jaca on the twelfth and Socialist passivity in Madrid prevented the movement from achieving its objectives. However, the strike went ahead in most of the country and, according to Maurín, amounted to the most "formidable mass movement that the Spanish working class had ever known".<sup>1</sup> The days of the monarchy were numbered. Faced with mounting pressure from all sides, the King, having dismissed Berenguer, was persuaded to call municipal elections for the 12 April 1931. These resulted in a landslide victory for the Republican-Socialist alliance in most major cities and the King saw little alternative but to leave the country. Two days after the elections, the Second Republic was declared amid scenes of wild enthusiasm.

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1. Tufón de Lara, *El movimiento obrero...* Op.cit. vol III, pp.106-108; Maurín, *La revolución española* Op.cit., pp.73-74.

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The separation of the FCC-B from the PCE and its eventual unification with the PCC took place in the context of this revolutionary movement. Maurín's analysis of the "democratic revolution" became the theoretical framework within which the Catalan dissident communists began to develop a political practice distinct from the official party. The BOC's leader had first defended his analysis in 1929,<sup>2</sup> but it was most fully expounded in his book, *La revolución española*, which was published towards the end of 1931. At the centre of his analysis was the problem that confronted all marxists in Spain - the "unfinished bourgeois revolution". Hence, any revolutionary movement was faced with resolving the problems of this "democratic revolution". This meant not just getting rid of the monarchy but distributing land to the rural masses, achieving self-determination for the national minorities, breaking the power of the church and dismantling the army. Unlike most other Spanish marxists, Maurín argued that the bourgeoisie, or any part of it, was incapable of carrying out this revolution. Because of the backward nature of capitalism in the peninsula, the Spanish ruling class, he explained, was an alliance between semi-feudal and bourgeois forces which had held back the development of a genuine bourgeois democracy. The whole experience of the Restoration period and now the Primo de Rivera dictatorship seemed to confirm this line of argument.

The crisis of the previous regime, aggravated by the deteriorating economic situation at an international level, the BOC leader wrote, had allowed a section of the petty bourgeoisie, in the form of the Republican parties, to fill the power vacuum. However, according to Maurín and his co-thinkers, this class was equally incapable of finishing the democratic revolution. The petty bourgeoisie lacked the solidity or power needed to challenge the entrenched interests of the traditional ruling oligarchy. According to Maurín, in his eloquent denunciation of the former regime and its supporters, *Los Hombres de la Dictadura*, the Republicans' weaknesses had been clearly illustrated by their inability to exploit the very favourable situation in the weeks following Primo's fall.<sup>3</sup> Instead, the dictatorship had lasted another year before disintegrating as much through its own ineptness and lack of ruling class support as through the activities of the Republicans.

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2. See pages 32.

3. Maurín, *Los Hombres...* Op.cit. pp.228-230.

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During the next five years, Republican governments found their plans for even minimal social and political reform sabotaged by entrenched ruling class interests. Maurín's analysis of the petty bourgeois parties appeared vindicated. If the latter held power, he explained, it was because the working class was divided and lacked a coherent revolutionary ideology. The Republicans were in power thanks to the workers' organisations' benevolence or political confusion, and without their support the petty bourgeois forces were all but finished.

Outside of Catalonia, left-wing republicanism had little independent mass base. The 1933 elections, the only time when the left Republican parties stood without a general coalition with the Socialists, would demonstrate this weakness very clearly.<sup>4</sup> The Republican groups had little influence over what happened outside of parliament. The mass struggles that began in 1930 - from strikes through to sporadic armed insurrections - were to play a far more important part in determining the course of the Republic's history than the reforming pretensions of middle class politicians. Nevertheless, as Maurín and his comrades never tired of pointing out, the principal workers organisations were politically incapable of providing a viable revolutionary alternative to petty bourgeois republicanism.

Only an armed working class, the Catalan Federation declared, with the support of the peasantry and the national liberation movements, would be capable of imposing, through "revolutionary workers and peasants juntas", the democratic revolution. "The taking of power by the working class, thanks to the co-ordination of these three forces", Maurín commented, "would mean the end of a nightmare that has lasted centuries".<sup>5</sup> The power of the proletariat and the confirmation of the classic marxist evaluation of its revolutionary potential, had been most recently shown during 1930, the FCC-B claimed. Accordingly, under the leadership of the working class, the dissident communists argued, the revolution would inevitably move on from completing its "democratic stage" directly to the establishment of socialism. The failure of the workers to seize the leadership of the democratic revolution from the petty bourgeoisie would lead in only one direction - the re-organisation of the forces of reaction and the eventual victory of the

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4. See page 158.

5. Maurín, *La revolución española* Op.cit. p.204.

counter-revolution. As Maurín pointed out, there were already far too many authoritarian regimes and movements for the Spanish ruling class to copy. Such regimes were on the increase in response to the growing instability of capitalism internationally and there was no reason at all to suppose that a weak and relatively backward Spain would be any different.<sup>6</sup>

There were two major obstacles to which the FCC-B pointed that prevented the Spanish working class from fulfilling the historic role assigned to it. The first was the lack of a genuine mass communist party which could counter the influence of reformist socialism and anarchism and act as a revolutionary vanguard in the struggle for power. The massive increase in strength of all workers' organisations and growing social unrest throughout 1931 convinced the Federation that the possibilities for building such a party were excellent.<sup>7</sup> The second obstacle was the false hopes entertained by many workers and peasants with regard to "bourgeois democracy", especially in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the monarchy.

In this context, to talk about the need for a "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" as the PCE did, Maurín later reflected, was so out of touch with the realities of the Spanish working class movement, that it might as well have been "speaking in Chinese".<sup>8</sup> Given the faith that most workers had in democracy, the party would only isolate itself further if it continued to defend this position, because the masses would not relate to the idea of fighting to get rid of one dictatorship only to replace it with another. What was needed, the FCC-B's First Congress declared, was a series of democratic demands which any petty bourgeois government would be powerless to put into practice thereby showing the workers and their potential allies that they had no choice but to break with the Republicans. Such a programme was encapsulated in the united party's Political Thesis and included:

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6. Maurín, *Los Hombres...* Op.cit. pp.40-42.

7. See page 64.

8. *La Batalla* 13.8.31.



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- the land to those who worked it;
  - self-determination for the national minorities;
  - the arming of the workers;
  - trade union control of production;
  - the nationalisation of the banks, mines and transport;
  - the separation of church and state;
  - dissolution of all religious orders and confiscation of their wealth;
  - the establishment of a Workers and Peasants Republic.

With the fall of the monarchy the BOC added a number of more immediate demands, such as the dissolution of the Civil Guard and the Catalan rural militia - the Sometent, abolition of the former regime's labour arbitration committees, subsidies for the unemployed and the extradition of the King and for his trial by a "Popular Tribunal".<sup>9</sup> This programme of "revolutionary democratic demands", along with certain modifications, became the core of the BOC's political agitation during the next few years.

The FCC-B and PCC, although extremely hostile to the petty-bourgeois Republican parties, had been, unlike the PCE, prepared to work with them on practical questions. As early as June 1928, the FCC-B had participated in the formation of a "Revolutionary Committee" in the region with the CNT, Unió Socialista de Catalunya, and various Republican and nationalist groups. In March 1930 leaders of the two Catalan Communist groups had signed, along with Republicans and anarcho-syndicalists, the "Inteligencia Republicana" manifesto, which called for a wide range of democratic reforms to bring Spain up to "the level of the most advanced capitalist states".<sup>10</sup> Yet this was a somewhat uneasy alliance, as was clear from the continued criticism in the FCC-B's and PCC's press. Subsequently, in June 1930, the PCC actually withdrew its support for the "Inteligencia Republicana" manifesto in protest at its Republican co-signatories' continued moderation.

Nevertheless, both Catalan Communist groups had formed part of the "Pro-Freedom Committee", set up with Republican, Socialist and anarcho-syndicalist support following a giant rally of 20,000 in Barcelona on 14 September 1930 to call for an immediate

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9. "Proyecto de Tesis Político", *La Batalla* 12.2.31; *ibid* 26.3.31 and 18.4.31; *L'Hora* 15.4.31.

10. *Treball* 19.4.30; *L'Opinió* 2.5.30; B. Pou and J. R. Magriña, *Un año de conspiración* (Barcelona 1933) pp.18-21; A. Ossorio y Gallardo, *Vida y sacrificio de Companys* (Barcelona 1976) p.70.

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amnesty for all political prisoners. Maurín and PCC leader Colomer were among those who addressed this meeting, which was chaired by Dr. Tomas Tussó of the FCC-B. In October, the Pro-Freedom Committee transformed itself into the "Revolutionary Committee of Catalonia", again with dissident communist support. But relations between the Catalan Communists and the Republicans continued to be uneasy as became clear when the Revolutionary Committee produced a manifesto during the December movement calling for people to support the army and for a peaceful transition to a Republic. The FCC-B reacted angrily to the manifesto's moderate tone and vigorously denied that Maurín had authorised his name to appear among the signatories.<sup>11</sup>

At a local level, there was a closer level of collaboration between Communists and Republicans. During the late twenties, many communist militants had participated in local Republican Centres as a cover for their political activities. This was the case, for instance, with the FCC-B in Gerona and the PCC in Sabadell. In Terrassa, the local FCC-B group was involved in the "Workers Republican Centre" and collaborated during 1929 and 1930 with Republicans and nationalists in the publication of a leftist newspaper, *Terrassa*. PCC militants were particularly active in anti-government activity in Lérida, where they formed part of the "United Left Front" with local Republican groups.<sup>12</sup>

However, these were only tactical alliances. When offered places in the lists of the left nationalist-republican Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) for the municipal elections, the BOC turned them down. The dissident communists preferred to run "independent working class" candidates instead. The BOC's electoral programme, under the slogan "not a penny for the rich districts, all the money for the poor districts", centred on a series of specific demands aimed at alleviating such social problems as bad housing, unemployment, the lack of hospitals and poor education. In Lérida, its programme also related directly to the difficulties facing local peasants.<sup>13</sup> The Bloc's

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11. *Treball* 28.6.30 and 20.9.30; *La Batalla* 19.9.30 and 12.2.31; Pou and Magriña, Op.cit. p.111.

12. Interviews with, M. Gayrolà 14.5.84, and Josep Marimon and Pere Vignes 28.9.85; *La Batalla* 14.9.33; A. Castells, *Sabadell. Informe de l'oposició. Del terror a la Segona República 1918-1936* (Sabadell 1980) p.17.30.

13. "Als Treballadors i Pagesos de Balaguer", *L'Espurna* 9.4.31.

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intervention in the elections was essentially a propaganda exercise and its three thousand or so votes<sup>14</sup> were completely overshadowed by the Republican-Socialist landslide.

The FCC-B enthusiastically greeted the establishment of the new Republican regime - albeit with the warning that the provisional Republican-Socialist government would be unable to satisfy the needs of the masses. This relatively positive attitude was in strict contrast to that of the PCE which called for the immediate overthrow of the "bourgeois Republic". Instead, the FCC-B demanded the arming of the people and announced it would organise a "Civic Guard" of two hundred workers to defend the newly-established Catalan regional government.<sup>15</sup> Such bravado aside, the mass support for the new regime and the temporary disarray of the reactionary forces seemed to open unlimited possibilities for revolutionaries of all tendencies. For the BOC, conditions were ripe for the working class and its allies to impose the "democratic revolution". Given the level of social conflict in the country during 1931, the dissident communists' optimism was understandable. Even so, as was all too often the case, events did not develop exactly as the Bloc's leaders had hoped.

The Republic brought with it an inevitable expansion of political and trade union freedoms, as well as certain limited social reforms. Yet given the unstable economic situation in which Spain found itself, these measures could do little to stem the rising expectations of the masses. The elections of 28 June 1931 not only demonstrated the overwhelming support enjoyed by the Republican-Socialist coalition but also marked the beginning of a whole new wave of strikes and social unrest. The BOC launched itself energetically into the election campaign and stood candidates in all four Catalan provinces. From the outset, the dissident communists recognised that they were unlikely to win any seats because the electoral system made it "more or less impossible for revolutionary minorities to do so." Instead, the Bloc declared its aim was to expose what it saw as the reactionary nature of the provisional government and simply "put forward [its] programme". The latter consisted of twenty-five points based on those "revolutionary democratic" demands the dissident communists had defended since April

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14. *La Batalla* 18.4.31, 4.7.31.

15. J. Miravittles, *Ha trait Macià?* (Barcelona 1932) p.19.

and before.<sup>16</sup> In the extremely agitated atmosphere of the Republic's first elections, the BOC could not help but make an impact and this was reflected in the numerous and well attended meetings it organised throughout the region. As expected, the Bloc's votes, some 10,000, could in no way match the massive electoral support for the ERC. The dissident communists were not demoralised, however, by the result and pointed to their success in a number of localities, particularly in the province of Lérida.

The BOC's "revolutionary optimism" was encouraged by the growing number of strikes during the summer of 1931. These stoppages were, in part, a product of the employers' intransigence in the face of workers' demands. More importantly, workers themselves were far more confident following the advent of the Republic and the subsequent re-organisation of the unions. These disputes often resulted in violent clashes between workers and the authorities. In the case of the bitter two-month strike in the US-owned national telephone company, CNT militants not only fought with the police and army, but also with UGT members who continued working.

Organisationally the Bloc was too weak to affect the outcome of these struggles and its intervention in the strikes was mainly propagandistic. The radicalisation of many sections of the working class led Maurín's party to believe that new revolutionary possibilities were rapidly opening up. This view was encouraged by the fact that Barcelona was one of the main centres of the strike wave. Apart from in the telephone company, there were major stoppages in the Catalan capital during 1931 among dockers, metal, textile and transport workers. Not only had the CNT's ranks swelled enormously since the fall of the monarchy, but the more moderate anarcho-syndicalist leadership, which had headed the Confederation in recent years, was increasingly unable to control a young and militant membership. As the radicalisation of the masses continued unabated, the authorities, backed by the Socialists, increasingly resorted to outright repression to deal with working class militancy.

In order to curb social unrest the Government introduced legislation such as the Law for the Defence of the Republic which allowed for the suspension of all types of

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16. "El Bloque Obrero y Campesino y las elecciones a las Constituyentes. A los obreros y campesinos" n.d. (IMHB); "Proyecto de Tesis Político" Op.cit.; *La Batalla* 26.3.31 and 25.6.31; *L'Hora* 20.6.31.

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Constitutional rights and gave extensive and arbitrary powers to the Minister of the Interior. If the gains made by the masses since April 1931 were to be protected, the Bloc argued, then the workers' organisations had to take decisive action.

Despite the government's attacks, the dissident communists remained confident throughout 1931 that the revolutionary movement would continue to grow. The Bloc now believed that the "democratic illusions" that were so rife among the masses in the first months of the Republic were beginning to crumble. This belief in the imminent collapse of working class support for the Republic was a recurring theme in the BOC's propaganda at this time. Given the radicalisation of sectors of the masses, it is understandable that the dissident communists could reach such conclusions. However, the relationship between the working class and the Republican regime was to prove more durable, despite its coming close to breaking point during the next five years.

The real problem was not so much the level of support for republicanism as the lack of a coherent mass revolutionary alternative. The BOC was extremely conscious of the absence of such an alternative and initially hoped the CNT could provide it, albeit under dissident communist leadership. Thus, despite its basic distrust of the CNT leaders, the Bloc called on the Confederation as a whole to go on to the offensive while objective circumstances were still favourable. But it would not be sufficient, the dissident communists warned, for the unions to restrict themselves to taking over the factories and workplaces because the Italian experience in 1920 had shown this was not enough. Consequently, at the height of the bitter telephone workers strike in late July 1931, the BOC called for "all power to the workers' organisations" and the establishment of a "Workers and Peasants Government". This seizure of power would be achieved through the creation of "workers and peasants councils" and a "revolutionary united front", based on the CNT and the dissident communists.<sup>17</sup>

There remained the problem of the CNT's leadership, which in the summer of 1931 was still dominated by more moderate anarcho-syndicalist elements. The dissident communists hoped that the Confederation's militant rank and file would by-pass its moderate leaders and impose a clearer revolutionary orientation. In fact, much to the

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17. *La Batalla* 30.7.31.

BOC's initial delight, the more radical anarchist faction took over most leading bodies of the Catalan CNT during the autumn of 1931.<sup>18</sup> Prior to this, a one-day general strike on 3 September in solidarity with CNT members on hunger strike in Barcelona's Modelo Prison further encouraged the BOC's hopes in the Confederation's unions' revolutionary potential. The strike took on near insurrectionary proportions, which certainly had not been the unions' leadership's intention. *La Batalla* described the day's events in Barcelona as having really "interpreted the masses' feelings against the government and against the reformism and defeatism of the CNT leaders". Inspired by this latest demonstration of militancy, the BOC now called on the CNT itself to "take power". The dissident communists believed that if the Confederation did not take this step, the UGT would.<sup>19</sup> Such a prospect was seen by the BOC at this time as representing a serious setback for the revolution, although, in reality, the Socialist unions were unlikely to make a bid for power. The dissident communists' attitude is of interest because it reflected quite clearly their totally hostile evaluation of the Socialists during 1931. The BOC leadership would be forced to modify this view within the next few months.<sup>20</sup>

To call for the CNT to "take power" seemed to represent a break with Leninist politics. The whole experience of the Russian revolution had produced a communist orthodoxy in which workers councils or "soviets" would provide the basis of any proletarian dictatorship. Such bodies would be built outside existing workers' organisations, being directly elected by the workers or peasantry of any particular locality, or in the case of soldiers' soviets, by the regiment or other military unit. For Lenin and his comrades, trade unions were essentially defensive and economic, rather than offensive and political organisations. Therefore, according to the communist movement, the unions could not act as a means of uniting the proletariat, regardless of its trade or situation, to carry through the socialist revolution. To believe that unions could execute this function had always been condemned by communists as "syndicalism" and hence alien to marxism.

Certainly there already appeared to be some confusion in the call made by the BOC in July 1931 for the creation of workers and peasants councils on the hand, and for the

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18. See page 113-116.

19. Oposiciones Sindicales Revolucionarias, "La huelga general y las minorías", September 1931, (IHMB); *La Batalla* 3.9.31, 24.9.31.

20. See pages 132-133, 148-150.

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workers organisations to take power on the other. The BOC itself explained that such councils or soviets would have to be created or set up through "what comes to the same thing, a congress of all working class organisations".<sup>21</sup> The hegemony of the CNT in the strike movement, coupled with radicalisation of its rank and file, led the BOC to conclude by September that the CNT would perform the role which soviets had played in Russia. This apparent return to "revolutionary syndicalism" would, Maurín stated, horrify the mimics of "fossilised marxism" with their "grotesque equation of Spain with Russia". In the same way as a soviet system had developed in Russia, he argued, a "syndicalist system" could develop in Spain.

The fact that the CNT was generally organised on the basis of *sindicatos únicos* which cut across traditional craft divisions, probably encouraged the dissident communists to hope that these unions could go beyond being solely defensive bodies. Recent experience seemed to confirm this viewpoint. In particular, the involvement of the Barcelona Building Workers Union in street fighting during the 3 September general strike, Maurín claimed, proved that the CNT unions could rapidly develop into insurrectionary bodies.

The BOC was forced to recognise, however, that the Confederation was, given its anarcho-syndicalist principles, not interested in "taking power". Thus, the Bloc saw its task as "creating an atmosphere" through its propaganda whereby the present CNT leadership would be swept aside and the unions would pass into the hands of the dissident communists.<sup>22</sup> Supposedly, under the BOC's guidance the Confederation would fulfil its revolutionary destiny, but the limited nature of the dissident communists' influence in the Catalan, let alone Spanish, working class movement at this time hardly justified such optimism.<sup>23</sup> At best, the Bloc could have hoped to attract to its ranks those CNT militants looking for a revolutionary alternative that went beyond the a-political radicalism of the anarcho-syndicalists.

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21. *La Batalla* 30.7.31.

22. *ibid* 15.10.31, 19.11.31; Maurín, *La revolución española* Op.cit. p.168.

23. re: BOC in CNT see pages 108-113, 120-129.

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The confusion of the Catalan dissident communists' propaganda during the latter half of 1931 over the question of working class power alarmed the Bloc's rivals.<sup>24</sup> Even an assembly in July of BOC members in Barcelona had objected to the slogan "all power to the workers' organisations" because it gave the impression that the dictatorship of the proletariat would be based on the trade unions.<sup>25</sup> The emphasis placed by the BOC on the revolutionary role of the CNT alone excluded vast sections of workers, whether they were members of other unions, or as in the case of the majority, still unorganised. In particular, the BOC placed little importance on the massive growth of the Socialist trade union federation, the UGT, during the first months of the Republic. This coincided with the dissident communists' view of the Socialists as simply an obstacle to the triumph of the revolution. *La Batalla* reflected this hostility quite clearly when it declared during the telephone workers' strike that "social democracy had shown itself as the fiercest enemy of the working class revolution" and was "being used by the bourgeoisie as a bridge to fascism".<sup>26</sup>

The BOC's revolutionary optimism in the summer and autumn of 1931 and its hostility towards the Socialists were due to a number of factors. Certainly social unrest in the country was such that it is easy to understand how many revolutionaries saw themselves presented with tremendous opportunities. The radicalisation of the CNT in Barcelona was, in this sense, particularly influential. The BOC itself grew very rapidly during this period,<sup>27</sup> hence encouraging the belief that it was only a matter of time before it had more of a decisive influence. Both the Catalan dissident communists' initial hatred of the Socialists and their continued underestimation of the PSOE's and UGT's working class support were the product of political conceptions inherited from the CI. "Third period" sectarianism, although rejected in many ways by the BOC, had left its mark on its view of Spanish social democracy. The Socialists' participation in the government and their prior collaboration with Primo de Rivera's dictatorship greatly encouraged the Bloc's attitude. In contrast, the BOC's independence from the "official" communist movement resulted in a generally more flexible approach which allowed

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24. For example see, A. Nin, "Los comunistas y el momento presente. A propósito de unas declaraciones de Maurín", *El Soviet* 22.10.31, "A donde va el Bloque Obrero y Campesino?" *Comunismo* Sept. 1931 and "La huelga general de Barcelona", *ibid* Oct. 1931; Ferson, "El congreso del BOC", *ibid*, March 1932.

25. N. Molins i Fàbrega, "Los zigzags del Bloque" *ibid*, March 1932.

26. *La Batalla* 13.8.31.

27. See page 64.



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**Maurín and his comrades to soon make a partial adjustment of their totally negative view of the Spanish Socialists.**

The revolutionary outlook of some sectors of the CNT was dramatically illustrated by the anarchist putsch in the Alt Llobregat area in January 1932. This had its origins in a solidarity action with striking textile workers, but soon developed into a full-scale insurrection in a number of mining villages, where "libertarian communism" was declared. Isolated, the movement was quickly put down by the army. The insurrection, as far as the BOC was concerned, merely illustrated the severe limitations of its leaders, who were influenced by the anarchist Federación Anarquista Ibérica (FAI). The Bloc saw the uprising as nothing more than a politically incorrect, but heroic, gesture that could only be damaging to working class organisation. Any serious revolutionary movement, it argued, had to start in Barcelona, not outlying villages. Above all, the movement showed the weakness of the libertarians' rejection of the need to seize state power. Faced with the realities of revolution, workers in a number of villages had organised revolutionary committees, which in some cases acted in a decidedly non-libertarian and dictatorial fashion. The significance of this was not lost on Maurín or other marxists, such as Andreu Nin, who claimed that these committees represented the spontaneous response of the workers to the problem of power.<sup>28</sup>

The Alt Llobregat uprising, combined with the decline in the number of more spectacular strikes, forced the BOC to modify its political outlook by early 1932. It was increasingly obvious that the CNT was not going to realise the historic mission attributed to it by the Catalan dissident communists. Nevertheless, the economic situation continued to deteriorate and the Republican-Socialist government continued to try and suppress the radical sections of the working class. The BOC remained confident during the first half of 1932 that the working class would lead the democratic revolution and thereby proceed to the establishment of socialism. Yet its attitude towards the Socialists, although still hostile, was beginning to change. Maurín, writing in late 1931, while accusing the Socialists of having "suffocated the revolution" during the first months of the Republic, recognised that Socialist participation in the government was preferable

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28. Special supplement of *La Batalla* no. 79, 11.2.32; also interview with Maurín in the *New York Times* reproduced in *ibid*; Nin "La huelga general de enero y sus enseñanzas" *Comunismo*, March 1932.

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for the working class to that of the republican Right, led by Alejandro Lerroux or Miguel Maura.<sup>29</sup> Such a position may seem fairly logical but it was in stark contrast to the abuse heaped on the Socialists, still often referred to as "social fascists", in the BOC press at this time.

As the working class offensive began to subside, the Right was beginning to re-organise. For the BOC and FCC-B this growing threat from the "counter-revolution" was a result of the failure of the working masses to take over the leadership of the revolution from the republican petty bourgeoisie. The dissident communists had argued since 1930 that the Republicans were incapable of undermining the power of the old ruling classes, since they lacked either the social base or political will to do so.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, the reactionary Right was beginning to re-emerge as a real contender for power. The BOC's Second Congress in April 1932 was more explicit when it declared that, "the remnants of feudalism and the bourgeoisie" would soon "try and use the Civil Guard to launch a coup and strangle the revolution".<sup>31</sup> Four months later, on 10 August, the BOC's fears were partly confirmed when the Civil Guards' commander-in-chief, General José Sanjurjo, led an attempted coup d'état.<sup>32</sup>

This was the first serious challenge from the Right to the new regime, but it failed because of lack of support in the army. The defeat of Sanjurjo's uprising marked an important change in the political situation. At a governmental level it acted as a spur to push through the long awaited Agrarian Reform and the Catalan Statute of Autonomy. For the BOC it meant a far more defensive policy had to be adopted by the labour movement. Instead of calling for the immediate seizure of state power, the dissident communists now increasingly emphasised the need for a united front of all workers organisations to oppose the threat of the "counter-revolution".<sup>33</sup>

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29. Maurín, *La revolución española* Op.cit. p.196.

30. See page 44.

31. *La Batalla* 7.4.32.

32. See page 130.

33. See Chapter Three, pages 129-145.

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## The missing party

Central to Maurín's and the FCC-B's analysis of the political situation in Spain was the need for a mass revolutionary, or communist, party. Without such an organisation, they argued, the working class would be unable to seize power and carry through the democratic revolution. By 1930, the PCE was in complete disarray, with as few as one hundred and twenty members, according to one CI leader.<sup>34</sup> Apart from the Catalans, the Madrid, Levant, Asturias and Duero (Palencia) organisations, albeit for different reasons, were also all in opposition to the party leadership. Such was the disintegration of the PCE that *La Batalla* could comment in October 1930, that "the immense majority of communists in Spain were now outside the party".<sup>35</sup> The Catalan Federation was nevertheless optimistic that, given the developing revolutionary movement, it would be possible to build, in the short term, a mass communist party. Subsequent events would show that these hopes were ill-founded.

After the FCC-B, the next most important opposition group was based in Madrid, where discontent with the PCE Executive Committee's methods had existed for some time. This dissent came to a head during the summer of 1930 when three members of the Local Committee were expelled after a quarrel with the leadership over finance. The one hundred or so members of the Madrid Communist Group, the Agrupación Comunista de Madrid (ACM), immediately expressed their support for the Local Committee, and the Executive Committee responded by expelling more or less all of them. For the next seventeen months, the ACM existed as an independent organisation outside the PCE. It soon aligned itself closely with the FCC-B, with whom it shared not only a rejection of the current party leaders but also of the PCE's trade union policy.<sup>36</sup>

Both the ACM and FCC-B also remained, publicly at least, loyal to the CI, appealing to the International's leadership to intervene in the party's internal crisis. In September 1930, the Catalan and Madrid organisations, with the support of the Levante Federation, published a manifesto calling for a special Congress to resolve the crisis in the party. In February 1931, these calls were repeated. The FCC-B, on the eve of uniting with the

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34. cited in S. Juliá, *La Izquierda del PSOE(1935-1936)* (Madrid 1977) p.194.

35. *La Batalla* 17.10.30.

36. "A las federaciones regionales del PCE. A todos los comunistas de España", *Ibid.* 19.9.30; re: PCE trade union policy see page 38.

PCC, now stipulated that any such congress be prepared under a commission of the CI, that all expulsions since 1925 be rescinded, that internal democracy be re-established and the party end its tactic of trying to "split" the CNT. These appeals for a unification congress were repeated after the fall of the monarchy and again in June 1931, when the FCC-B and ACM put forward a full agenda of political discussion to be presented by leading militants of the two groups.<sup>37</sup>

The PCE was uniformly hostile to all these appeals for unity by the opposition. This was not surprising given the conditions under which the dissidents insisted that any such re-unification should take place. However, the PCE was faced with the danger of being left with very few members, especially in Catalonia, if it did not find any way of undermining the opposition's support. Consequently, in an attempt to take advantage of the FCC-B's continued loyalty to the international communist movement, the CI invited the Catalans in June 1931 to send a delegation to Moscow to discuss their differences with the party leadership. The FCC-B accepted the invitation but only if the PCE withdrew its candidates for Barcelona in the forthcoming elections and ended its "campaign of slander" against the Catalan Federation. In addition, the delegation would not include, as the CI wished, either Maurín or Arlandis. These conditions were too much for the Comintern's representatives in Barcelona and contacts of any form with the FCC-B were immediately broken off. The following day, 3 July 1931, the ECCI confirmed Maurín's expulsion from the PCE of a year earlier, accusing him of "liberal menshevism", "collaboration with Trotskyism" and having wanted to "subordinate the workers movement to the petty bourgeois parties".<sup>38</sup> The swiftness of this announcement clearly showed that it had been planned beforehand and exposed the proposed negotiations as having been little more than a manoeuvre.

The formal break with "official communism" was now complete. A few weeks later a Regional Plenum gave its full backing to the FCC-B leadership and hence put beyond any doubt its complete separation from the PCE. Maurín and most other FCC-B leaders had held few illusions, since at least mid-1930, that unity with the Spanish

37. *La Batalla* 17.2.31, 26.2.31, 5.3.31, 23.4.31, 20.6.31; "Carta abierta al Comité Ejecutivo de la Internacional Comunista" *Ibid* 1.5.31; *Comunismo* August 1931.

38. "Resolución del CE de la FCC-B" 24.6.31 (ACCPCE); Maurín, "A propósito ..." *Op.cit.*; *La Batalla* 9.7.31; "El Ejecutivo de la IC y la expulsión de Joaquín Maurín", reproduced in P. Broué, *La Revolución Española* (Barcelona 1977) pp.157-158.

Communist Party was possible.<sup>39</sup> However, it had been necessary to make such calls because of pressure from the PCE on the dissidents' base, especially outside of Catalonia. Even following Maurín's expulsion from the CI the dissident groups maintained the fiction of calling for a "Unity Congress", albeit organised by all "communist nuclei" rather than as a special congress of the PCE. To break completely with the CI's "official section" in Spain was still difficult to contemplate for many militants. By continuing to call for the unity of all communists, Maurín and others hoped to expose the PCE leadership's refusal to allow anyone back into the party who did not blindly accept its current line.

Publicly the PCE rejected any idea of a "unity congress". Such an initiative it claimed, would only bring together "renegades and enemies of the International in order to drag the workers along the road to counter-revolution".<sup>40</sup> None the less, the PCE still called on the dissidents to rejoin the party and made attempts to approach the FCC-B's rank and file directly. Thus, in the autumn of 1931, aided by FCC-B militants still loyal to the PCE, a joint party-CI delegation visited the Federation's Lérida and Mataró organisations.<sup>41</sup> Yet these efforts had little visible effect and only hastened the departure from the Bloc of a group of thirty or so militants already committed to returning to the PCE. This group was led by veteran communist Hilario Arlandis, who had been resident in Barcelona since the end of the twenties. Once Maurín had been expelled from the CI, Arlandis's faction had begun openly to oppose the FCC-B leadership's decision to form an independent party in Catalonia. The opposition group was soon expelled from the Catalan Federation for "factional work" and it passed more or less immediately over to the PCE.<sup>42</sup>

The incorporation of Arlandis's faction boosted the PCE's meagre organisation in Catalonia, where it had been reduced to little more than a dozen loyal members following the expulsion of the FCC-B leadership in the summer of 1930.<sup>43</sup> In an attempt to relate

39. *Federación Comunista Ibérica, Tesis...* Op.cit. p.2; *Acta del Comité Central del POUM* 5.6.1.36 (CEHI).

40. *Heraldo Obrero* 28.8.31.

41. *La Batalla* 12.11.31; "A todos las células de la FCC-B" 1.10.31 (ACCPCE).

42. "Oposición del Bloque, resolución" 26.10.31; and "Carta abierta a los camaradas de la Federación Comunista Catalano- Balear" 1.11.31 (ACCPCE); "Manifiesto de los CE y Comité Local de Barcelona de la FCC-B, aprobado por el pleno de células" *La Batalla* 12.11.31.

43. "Acta del CE del PCE" 5.6.30 (ACCPCE); Humbert-Droz, Op.cit. p.403.

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more seriously to local conditions the Catalan section of the PCE converted itself in May 1932 into the Partit Comunista de Catalunya (Communist Party of Catalonia). The "new" party soon claimed an unlikely three hundred members,<sup>44</sup> but it was still completely overshadowed by its dissident communist rivals. Fresh attempts were now made to attract the BOC's rank and file, in the form of inviting them to enter *en masse* into the PCE. This campaign had little effect and only a few isolated individuals were won over. Throughout 1932 and into 1933, Madrid complained about its Catalan section's ineffectiveness. Yet this lack of success in wooing the BOC membership is hardly surprising given not only the frequent sectarian attacks on the dissidents' in the Communist Party's press but also the latter's increasing tendency to try and violently disrupt its rival's meetings.<sup>45</sup>

All the various local dissident groups that emerged at this time initially agreed that the PCE's problems were a direct result of the failings of its leadership. The only faction which put the blame squarely on the CI was the small group of Trotskyists who had begun to organise in the peninsula during 1930. The Trotskyist Left Opposition had been slower to emerge in Spain than in some other countries. Not only had the PCE's general activity been severely curtailed by the dictatorship but the party's near collapse meant that internal discussion had effectively ceased to exist. Hence the whole question of the struggle inside the Russian party was hardly touched on by the PCE press until late 1927.<sup>46</sup> A Spanish section of the Left Opposition, the Oposición Comunista de España (OCE), had finally been established in February 1930 by a small group of exiles in Belgium. During the following months, its members had returned to Spain to take advantage of the new political possibilities presented by the fall of Primo de Rivera. The OCE initially had few supporters but it attracted to its ranks a number of very able communist cadres and the clarity of Trotsky's ideas meant that from the outset his Spanish supporters had a political coherence that the other opposition factions in the peninsula lacked.

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44. "Relación de los delegados que asistieron al Congreso Nacional, número de afiliados que representaban y su composición social" (March 1932) (ACCPCE).

45. "Circular de la Federación Catalana del PCE" 22.2.32, "Reunión del Buró Político" 18.8.32, "Acta Buró Político" 2.12.32 and "Sobre el trabajo en la organización de Cataluña" (1933) (ACCPCE); *La Batalla* 26.11.31, 17.3.32, 14.4.32, 24.6.32.

46. P. Pagès, *El movimiento trotskista en España* (Barcelona 1977), pp.35-38.

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The attitude of the Trotskyists towards the FCC-B, ACM and other "national" oppositionists was generally very critical. The International Left Opposition saw the CI, and hence its national sections, as the political "centre" of international communism and most other non-Trotskyist opposition currents as "rightist" because they saw the problem as a "national" rather than an "international" one. More importantly, the Trotskyists saw themselves as a "faction" of the CI and therefore opposed the creation of new independent communist parties. Accordingly, the OCE declared that, despite all its inadequacies, the PCE remained ideologically firmer and closer to true Bolshevism than oppositionists such as the FCC-B.

This view of the PCE was not completely shared by the OCE's most prominent leader, Andreu Nin, who had become a Trotskyist during his stay in Moscow. He returned to Barcelona in 1930, after several perilous and isolated years in the Soviet capital, and renewed his friendship with Maurín. In contrast to the official position of Trotskyism internationally, Nin argued that, given the disarray of Spanish communism, the party would be reconstructed outside the ranks of the PCE. In addition, he believed that through Maurín, with whom he had maintained correspondence during the late twenties, he could influence the FCC-B.<sup>47</sup> Nin's optimism was partially confirmed when he began to contribute regularly to the Federation's press. Then, when Maurín and Nin found themselves in prison together after the movement of December 1930, the Federation's leader read Trotsky's letters to his Spanish followers. More significantly, Nin helped Maurín write the FCC-B's first Political Thesis.<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, this apparent Trotskyist influence was confined to Nin's personal contact with Maurín and the FCC-B leadership as a whole was fairly hostile to the International Left Opposition. This enmity became even clearer when Nin's formal request to join the BOC was turned down in May 1931 because of his increasingly open work in favour of the Trotskyists' positions.<sup>49</sup> Trotsky's doubts as to whether Nin would be able to influence the FCC-B were now confirmed... The former Bolshevik leader was

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47. Nin to Trotsky 12.11.30, 3.12.30, and 17.1.31, L. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution* (New York 1973) pp.370-372; re: Correspondence between Nin and Maurín, see "Andreu Nin al Moscou de Stalin" Op.cit.

48. Nin to Trotsky 17.1.31, Trotsky, Op.cit. pp.371-372; N. Molins i Fàbrega, "Una línia política: el Bloque Obrero y Campesino", *Comunismo* April 1932.

49. Nin to Trotsky, 4.4.31. Trotsky, Op.cit. p.374; Alba, *Dos revolucionarios...* Op.cit. p.361.

unimpressed by what he saw as the Catalan Federation's "vacillating" and "ambiguous" politics. Their lack of an international perspective, he claimed, would condemn the FCC-B and BOC to an "inevitable and shameful" collapse. Instead of collaborating with the Catalan Federation, Trotsky urged his Spanish supporters to "submit Maurín to pitiless and incessant criticism" because events would soon show that the FCC-B leader was only "a comical figure with provincial reflections, corroded doctrines and primitive slogans".<sup>50</sup>

Nin publicly attacked Maurín's political line for the first time when they both spoke at the Madrid Ateneo in June 1931.<sup>51</sup> This attack marked the end of any illusions Nin and his comrades had of influencing the Federation and from now on relations between the two factions deteriorated rapidly. A handful of OCE members who, much to Trotsky's distaste, had entered the BOC soon found themselves expelled for "factional activity aimed at destroying the party".<sup>52</sup>

Despite accusations by the PCE leadership of Maurín's "Trotskyism"<sup>53</sup> and the brief collaboration with Nin, the FCC-B was quite contemptuous of the Trotskyists, although not of Trotsky himself. The Federation saw the OCE as a divisive and irrelevant sect, condemned to the sidelines of the working class movement from where it would blindly follow the positions handed down by the old Bolshevik leader. Nin was also now subjected to scathing attacks in the FCC-B's press. He was accused, in an obvious reference to his stay in Russia in the twenties, of having deserted the Spanish workers movement in its "most difficult moments" and of having at first sided with the PCE leadership against the Catalans. "History had shown", however, wrote *La Batalla* in September 1931, that Nin had the ability to change his position and "within four months" he would be "knocking on the door of the BOC".<sup>54</sup>

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50. Trotsky, Op.cit. pp.135-138, 146, 151-154, 164-167, 391.

51. See page 75.

52. Pagès, *El movimiento trotskista..* Op.cit. pp.77-78; "Manifiesto de los CE y Comité Local ..." Op.cit.; Organización Comunista de Izquierda, "Por la unidad de todos los comunistas de España", December 1931 (IMHB).

53. "CE al camarada Maurín" 25.6.30, "CE a los CRs y todos los células" 1.8.30 and 17.12.30. (ACCPCE); also see page 34.

54. For attacks on Nin and the Trotskyists, see *La Batalla* 20.8.31, 17.9.31, 11.2.32, 7.4.32; *L'Hora* 30.4.31.



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The hostility shown by the Catalan dissident communists towards the Trotskyists was in part a product of the Federation's own lack of clarity about developments inside the communist movement internationally. In addition, the political straitjacket imposed by Trotsky on his followers equally prevented the OCE from initially developing an analysis of the Catalan dissidents which did not automatically pigeon-hole them as some form of "rightist" or "centrist" deviation. The OCE's attacks on the BOC's "confused" and "localist" politics now became increasingly vehement. "Maybe it would not be possible" the Spanish Trotskyists wrote in April 1932, "to find in today's working class movement an organisation crippled by a more unhealthy opportunism than the Catalan Federation suffers from". "Homemade" and ambiguous organisations like the BOC, Nin claimed, not only could not make the revolution but were a great obstacle to the development of a powerful communist movement in Catalonia.<sup>55</sup> Events over the next four years, however, would force the two dissident factions to re-evaluate not only their analysis of the political situation in Spain but also of each other.

The rapid growth of the FCC-B's and BOC's influence and membership during 1931 strengthened the Catalan dissidents' belief that they could exist without the help of the PCE. The general revolutionary atmosphere in the months following the declaration of the Republic combined with the Federation's apparent successes, led its propaganda to take on an increasingly demagogic character. Already having seen its vote increase from three to ten thousand between April and June 1931, it had declared that despite the BOC's youth it was the "great party of the Catalan working class".<sup>56</sup> Three by-elections in Barcelona, one in July and two in October, gave the Bloc another chance to test its electoral support. On a very low turnout, and without an ERC candidate, Maurín won 12,005, 8,412 and 13,708 votes in the three respective polls.<sup>57</sup> This was four or five times the vote gained by the dissident communists in the June elections and *La Batalla* interpreted these results as a sign of the BOC's inexorable rise. The last of these votes, it claimed, demonstrated the support for communism in the city and represented the vanguard "of the revolutionary sectors that would soon write, with their

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55. Nin, "Los comunistas y el momento presente..." Op.cit.; L. Ferson, "Acerca del congreso de la FCC-B" *Comunismo* April 1932; "Textos de la III Conferencia de la OCE", *ibid.*

56. *La Batalla* 4.7.31.

57. I. Molas, "Les eleccions parcials a Corts Constituents d'Octubre del 1931 a la ciutat de Barcelona", *Recerques* No. 1. 1970.

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action (the) most brilliant pages of the revolutionary struggle". These 14,000 votes, the Bloc declared, could be 100,000, "in a matter of months".<sup>58</sup>

The sudden expansion of the BOC's membership obviously encouraged these wild over-estimations of its potential strength. With around 1,000 members in April 1931, the Bloc claimed 4,000 four months later. Of these, a thousand were in Barcelona, where the BOC was supposedly recruiting "ten or twenty a day" by October. Quite probably these figures were exaggerated - a common enough aspect of most political organisations' propaganda at this time. For instance, despite this supposed growth, even according to the BOC's own information, the number of copies of *La Batalla* printed remained at about 7,000 a week, except during the first weeks of the Republic when this figure rose to 30,000. A more realistic estimate seems that of one former militant many years later, who maintained the Bloc had around 2,500 members by the end of 1931.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, the new party's influence was certainly growing; as was further confirmed by a series of meetings throughout Catalonia in December, which attracted a total of some 25,000 people. Maurín now predicted his party's definitive conquest of the "leadership of the Catalan working class" in the coming year, when the BOC expected to double its membership. A few weeks later, after a meeting of 8,000 in Barcelona, *La Batalla* spoke of a "true avalanche of workers" towards the Bloc. No other Catalan workers party, Maurín wrote in early 1932, had ever sustained such activity as the BOC during its brief existence and, unlike the PCE, done so without any financial aid other than its members' own contributions.<sup>60</sup>

By late 1931, it was clear that it would not be possible to re-unify the various warring factions of Spanish communism. Even the Trotskyists were soon forced to recognise the impossibility of re-building the Communist Party on the sole basis of the PCE. This led them in March 1932 to declare themselves a separate and independent organisation, the Izquierda Comunista de España (Communist Left), rather than a "faction" of the official party. Maurín and other FCC-B leaders had realised, at least privately, that they would be unlikely to reach an agreement with the PCE. Once Maurín was formally

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58. *La Batalla* 16.7.31, 15.10.31; *L'Hora* 9.10.31.

59. *La Batalla* 13.8.31, 15.10.31; Alba, *Dos revolucionarios...* Op.cit. p.155; C. Rosa-Roc, *Quan Catalunya era revolucionaria* (Salt 1986) p.57.

60. *La Batalla* 24.12.31, 14.1.32; Maurín, *El Bloque...* Op.cit. pp.26, 28-29.

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expelled from the CI in July 1931, the FCC-B's immediate future as an independent communist grouping had become clearer still. The problem was whether the Catalan dissident communists could extend their organisation to the rest of the peninsula. Although exclusively a Catalan organisation, the Federation's leadership had always defended the need for a state-wide party. This position had also been shared by most of the PCC leaders, despite their original decision to form an exclusively Catalan organisation and in November 1930, the PCC press had called for the unity of "all Spanish communists" into one great party.<sup>61</sup>

Maurín, in particular, was optimistic about the BOC's chances of national expansion. He frequently referred to the tendency for innovations in the Spanish working class movement to start in Catalonia, as had been the case with both the UGT and CNT, and saw his party's growth in the region as another example of this. The Federation, Maurín claimed, had been able to save an important part of the working class from the catastrophic policies of the PCE and now had a "great historical responsibility" in Spain. The FCC-B was confident of being able to win over to its side many communists who were not prepared to join either the "Stalinist or Trotskyist sects".<sup>62</sup> The existence of communist groups in Madrid, Levante and Asturias which appeared to support the FCC-B's line of argument, strengthened the Catalans' belief that the building of a peninsula-wide organisation was a real possibility. Consequently, the FCC-B's Second Congress in April 1932 took the formal decision to construct the party outside of Catalonia and found the Federación Comunista Ibérica (Iberian Communist Federation). However, by 1932 the opportunities to establish an independent communist base of any importance elsewhere in Spain were declining. The PCE had managed to re-organise itself and although small, could no longer be dismissed out-of-hand. Between April and July 1931 the PCE claimed to have grown from three to seven thousand members.<sup>63</sup> In contrast, the various "national" opposition groups, apart from the Catalans, had found it difficult to maintain themselves.

Unlike the FCC-B, these other groups, with the possible exception of the Levante Federation, had not always maintained a degree of independence from the PCE

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61. *Treball* 8.11.30, 15.11.30.

62. *La Batalla* 14.4.32; Maurín, *El Bloque...* Op.cit. pp.28-29.

63. "Hoja de encuesta..." July 1931 (ACCPCE); *La Batalla* 31.12.31 gives a figure of 3,600.

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leadership. The revolutionary syndicalist origins of the Catalan Federation had set it apart from the rest of the Communist Party and allowed it to develop its own political line. Also, the national question had provided a further basis for dissent and had not only reinforced the FCC- B's oppositional tendencies,<sup>64</sup> but had even led to the creation, as early as 1928, of a new independent party, the PCC. Consequently, the Catalan Federation had both the political confidence and the experienced cadres none of the other opposition factions possessed. The only exception were the Trotskyists but their origins were quite different from those dissident groups which had developed exclusively inside Spain itself.

Outside of Catalonia the most important dissident group was the Agrupación Comunista de Madrid (ACM). The Madrid opposition had pinned its hopes on a CI intervention to re-establish "true democratic centralism" in the PCE and hence allow its return to the party's ranks. But the ACM's aim of creating a strong bargaining position in relation to the PCE was seriously undermined by the June 1931 election results. Having failed to get a united candidacy, the ACM presented its own list, which included Maurín, and went under the title of the "Workers and Peasants Bloc". Despite well attended meetings, the dissident list in Madrid won only some 700 votes compared to 2,500 for the PCE.<sup>65</sup> This blow was swiftly followed by the collapse, after only five issues, of the ACM's paper *La Antorcha*, due to heavy debts and fines. It had been hoped that this publication would help build the Agrupación's independent presence but instead it failed to find an audience and those who sold it "did so with little enthusiasm".<sup>66</sup>

The Communist Party, realising that most of the ACM's membership had little desire to remain outside the party, refused to countenance any form of unification. Instead, the PCE leadership offered re-integration into the party only on an individual basis. The ACM continued to hold out until early 1932, but in the end most of its members succumbed and returned to the PCE's ranks. A tiny group, including Luis Portela, a founder-member of the Communist Party, and the former Valencian communist leader,

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64. See page 78.

65. J. Tusell Gomez, *La Segunda República en Madrid: elecciones y partidos políticos* (Madrid 1970) p.208.

66. L. Portela, "Vida y muerte de la Agrupación Comunista de Madrid", *La Batalla* 21.4.32.

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Gorkín, favoured the formation of a new independent organisation and converted itself, in October 1932, into the Madrid section of the Federación Comunista Ibérica (FCI).<sup>67</sup>

The FCC-B had slightly more success in the neighbouring Levante region in its search for allies outside of Catalonia. Like the Catalan Federation, many of the Levante leaders came from a syndicalist background and there had always been close links between the two regions' communist organisations. Since the mid-twenties, the Levante Federation had also been a centre of opposition to the PCE's leadership. Eventually, almost the whole of the party's former organisation in the province of Castellón went over to the FCI. In Valencia, however, the PCE maintained some loyal support and only a small group of experienced militants joined the new organisation.

The PCE in the northern region of Asturias had also been opposed to the Bullejos leadership since the mid-twenties. Here the main point of dispute centred on the powerful CNT Miners' Union, the Sindicato Unico de Mineros, which had been organised by communist miners after they were expelled from the UGT in the early twenties. During the first months of the Republic, the miners leader, Benjamín Escobar, had resolutely opposed separating the Sindicato Unico from the CNT to form part of the party's so-called "Committee for the Reconstruction of the CNT". Escobar's opposition resulted in his expulsion from the party in 1931, along with a group of his supporters in the union's stronghold of Mieres. This group, which numbered some twenty or thirty, formally adhered to the FCI in September 1932, although it was not until 1934 that it began to have any limited success elsewhere in the region.<sup>68</sup>

By late 1932, the FCI and BOC were still overwhelmingly Catalan organisations. Apart from the small groups of ex-PCE members in the Levante, Asturias and Madrid, the only other region where the Federation began to have some limited success was in the Catalan-speaking area of Huesca, close to the province of Lérida. The Catalan dissidents' earlier hopes of constructing a mass communist party on the ruins of the PCE

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67. *ibid.*, see rest of Portela's account in *La Batalla* 1.5.32 and 12.5.32; "Manifiesto del Comité de la Agrupación Comunista de Madrid" *ibid.* 12.11.31; Bonamusa, *Op.cit.* p.123.

68. "El CN a las células y a todos los comunistas de Asturias", *Boletín Interior* 7.9.31. (ACCPCE); *La Batalla* 22.9.32, 29.9.32.

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had not been realised. Instead, they were left with a small, although not unimportant, base in Catalonia on which to build.

Maurín's party had established a distinct political identity for itself. It was now increasingly known solely as the "BOC", as there was little practical difference on a daily basis between the Bloc and the Communist Federation. The trend towards the two organisations becoming one and the same, was reinforced when it was decided at the FCC-B's Second Congress in March 1932 to strengthen the Bloc's system of cells, hence bringing it even closer to the Leninist structure of the Federation. This tendency to blur the original difference between the BOC and FCC-B had already been noted by the Trotskyists in January 1932.<sup>69</sup> With few exceptions, this continued to be the case over the next three years.

In terms of the international divisions in the communist movement, it was not easy to define where the BOC stood. The Catalan dissident communists have often been presented as being influenced by the "rightist" tendency associated with Bukharin's period of ascendancy in the USSR. The Trotskyists in particular, insisted in applying the epithet "Bukharinist" to the new party.<sup>70</sup> For instance, the OCE claimed that by confusing the difference between a broad front and a communist party the BOC was committing the same heresy that had led to the terrible defeat of Chinese communism in 1927. A defeat which the International Left Opposition had blamed on Bukharin's policies.<sup>71</sup>

Maurín himself reinforced the idea that his party was "Bukharinist", when he wrote, some thirty-five years later, that the BOC was "influenced ideologically by Marx and Engels, by Lenin and Bukharin, very little by Trotsky and not at all by Stalin".<sup>72</sup> Both the FCC-B and PCC shared the view of the "right oppositionists" in the late twenties, that the problems facing the Communist Parties could be solved at a "national" level.

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69. Nin, "¿Bloque, partido u organización de simpatizantes?" *Comunismo* January 1932.

70. For accusations of such "Bukharinism" see, M. Bizcarrondo, *Octubre del 34* (Madrid 1977) p.60; Molas, introduction to *Monreal* Op.cit. p.8; P. Broué, *La Revolución Española* (Barcelona 1977) p.247; *El Soviet* 15.10.31; H. Lacroix, "De Brandler a Maurín. La fenecida Agrupación Comunista de Madrid" *ibid* 12.5.32.

71. Nin "¿Bloque partido..." Op.cit.; F. Morrow, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain* (New York 1974) p.103.

72. Maurín, "Introducción", *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. p.3.

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Hence the Catalan dissident communists hoped to avoid any direct clash with the CI, to which until late 1931 they had still claimed to be loyal. The BOC's "national" orientation also included the rejection of both the PCE's and OCE's tendency to compare the Spain of 1931 with Russia in 1917.<sup>73</sup> This did not mean a rejection of communist orthodoxy as such, but rather an attempt to adapt this to local conditions.

There were, in fact, no direct allusions to Bukharin in the BOC's publications, apart from one innocuous article by him reproduced in *La Nueva Era* in January 1931.<sup>74</sup> The Catalan dissident communists' "Bukharinism" therefore supposedly lay in their distinctive politics and to a certain extent "guilt by association" - the BOC developed relations with various foreign non-Trotskyist communist opposition groups, some of which were influenced by Bukharin's ideas. In particular, the conception of an alliance or "bloc" between the workers and peasants was closely associated with Bukharin's period of influence during the mid-twenties. Yet, as has been shown, the FCC-B's conception of the Workers and Peasants Bloc rather than consist of an alliance between two classes, took into account Spain's particular socio-political conditions in the early thirties and intended it to act as a peripheral organisation which could organise the Federation's sympathisers. Only briefly, in late 1930, did Maurín speak of the "bloc" in terms similar to those originally proposed by Bukharin and other Communist leaders.<sup>75</sup> Certainly the relationship between the BOC and the FCC-B (and FCI) was never very clear in practice. However, by the time of their unification with Nin's group in 1935 the Federation and Bloc were effectively the same thing and more closely resembled a Leninist communist party than any kind of amorphous or inter-class front organisation.

Assertions that the BOC accepted Bukharin's thesis that it was possible to construct "socialism in one country"<sup>76</sup> are difficult to justify. As with other questions which divided the communist movement internationally, the FCC-B and PCC had initially taken no clear stance one way or another. Yet they were conscious of the problem inherent in the Russian Communist Party's defence of this position and later explicitly

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73. *La Batalla* 5.11.31; *L'Hora* 6.11.31; Maurín, prologue to E. Morera, *La burguesía en el poder* (Barcelona 1932) p.3.

74. N. Bujarin, "El camarada", *La Nueva Era* January 1931.

75. See page 40.

76. Blzcarrondo, *Op.cit.* p.60.

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denounced the slogan of "socialism in one country" as against interests of the world revolution.<sup>77</sup>

Where the BOC may have been influenced by Bukharin's ideas was over the question of agrarian policy. There were similarities between Maurín's defence of small-scale private ownership in agriculture alongside the nationalisation of large scale industry and NEP in the USSR in the early twenties. Thus, it is possible to make a connection between Maurín's position and that of Bukharin, the principal theoretician of NEP.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, the BOC's central slogan of "the land to those who worked it" was simply a repetition of the Bolsheviks' own policy of 1917. Similarities between its analysis of the importance of Spanish agriculture in the future development of socialism in the peninsula and the Soviet government's policies in the mid- twenties do not necessarily mean the BOC was following in Bukharin's footsteps. The justification for the specific economic policies adopted by the Russians at that time had little to do with the political context within which Maurín and the BOC found themselves.<sup>79</sup>

The BOC's supposed "rightist deviation" stemmed above all from its highly ambiguous relationship to the international communist movement, at least until late 1932. Not that there is anything surprising in this, given the prestige of the Soviet Union and hence of the CI. Even the Trotskyists, who had by far the clearest analysis of the degeneration of the Russian party, saw themselves until early 1933 as a faction of the CI, rather than an independent international tendency. But unlike the Trotskyists, the BOC was obviously hampered by not accepting, or at least not publicly, the CI's responsibility for the Spanish party's inadequacies. In fact, the FCC-B went to some lengths to prove its loyalty to Moscow. Only after Maurín's expulsion from the CI in July 1931 did its leaders begin to distance themselves from official communism at an international level. The PCE was justified in claiming that it was only carrying out the CI's mandate in Spain, regardless of what the Catalan dissidents liked to believe.

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77. J. Miravittles, *El discurso de Stalin* (Barcelona 1931) p.23; also see pages 245-246.

78. This point is taken up by Monreal, *Op.cit.* p.121.

79. See page 89.



It was also not the case that the FCC-B broke with official communism on the basis of a clear rejection of Stalinism or even of the CI's "ultra-leftism".<sup>80</sup> For instance, the Catalans' publications continued to refer to the Socialists as "social fascists" well into 1932, when all ties with Moscow had long since been broken. However, Maurín never used this term in his writings and neither did the BOC accept the tactical consequences that stemmed from the "theory" of social fascism. This appears to have been a general term of abuse in the workers movement at this time and even the anarcho-syndicalists sometimes referred to the PSOE as "social fascist".<sup>81</sup> In fact both the FCC-B and the PCC, and subsequently the BOC, refused to take sides in the international communist movement's internal struggles. The Catalan dissidents initially published articles by most leading figures of world communism, regardless of current orthodoxy. This was most clearly demonstrated in November 1930 on the thirteenth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution, when *La Batalla* carried pictures of both Stalin and Trotsky without the slightest comment. Before 1932 there was little question of publicly attacking Stalin. One PCC leader, Jaume Miravittles, described the Soviet leader in early 1931, as "a man that personified the most interesting moments in history". Miravittles concluded, however, that this did not mean that communists should accept uncritically everything Stalin said. Thus, although *La Batalla* printed an article in October 1931, claiming that Stalin "was more marxist" than Trotsky, the Catalan dissident communists' general attitude was still one of quiet neutrality. Essentially, the BOC leaders' position was to distance themselves from either side, claiming to be neither "Stalinists" nor "Trotskyists" but "communists".<sup>82</sup>

While it is quite likely that Maurín and his followers were well aware of what was happening in the USSR by 1930<sup>83</sup>, they refrained from openly criticising the Russian leadership. They were conscious during 1931 of the constant pressure on their supporters by the PCE - the legitimate representatives of communist orthodoxy. Yet such ambiguities could not last and the BOC leadership was soon forced to clarify its position with regard to events inside communism internationally. The first reflection.

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80. As claims V. Alba, *Dos revolucionarios...* Op.ct. p.109.

81. *Solidaridad Obrera* 14.1.32; J. Jiménez Campo, *El fascismo en la crisis de la II República* (Madrid 1979) p.54.

82. For articles by Trotsky see *L'Hora* 4.2.31 and *La Nueva Era* June-August 1931; by Stalin, *Ibid*, January 1930 and June- August 1931; Miravittles, *El discurso..* Op.ct. p.23; *La Batalla* 24.10.31, 7.11.31; *L'Hora* 7.5.31.

83. Coll and Pané, Op.ct. p.30.

of this came in an interview with Maurín in the *New York Times* in February 1932, where he spoke of the CI having degenerated "since Lenin's death" - that is, under the leadership of Zinoviev and Bukharin and not just since the beginning of the "Third Period" in 1927-8. This was quickly followed by attacks on the "suicidal sectarianism" of the CI's policies in Germany in refusing to build a united front with the Socialists against the Nazis. A more general critique of the International's mistakes since 1924 was subsequently published by *La Batalla* in June 1932. Six months later, in a series of three articles about the state of the communist movement, Maurín provided his first real analysis of the development of the Russian situation. Under Stalin, a bureaucratised party had been "turned into a machine of blind obedience", he wrote, that was now carrying out a "terrible repression" against its communist opponents inside the Soviet Union. Despite the fact that the world economic crisis was creating a favourable climate for revolutionary ideas, the bulk of the workers movement remained outside communist ranks because of the failings of the Russian party and hence the CI. The root cause of this degeneration, Maurín explained, lay in the triumph of the theory of "socialism in one country" which had led to the subordination of the International to the Soviet state.<sup>84</sup>

This growing rejection of Stalinist positions did not automatically lead to any softening in the BOC's attitude to Trotskyism. Instead, the Catalan dissident communists continued to describe the Left oppositionists as being, the "mirror image of Stalinism...", whose same "mechanical centralist methods" the Trotskyists had copied. In contrast, Trotsky himself, despite his "mistakes" was defended by the BOC from Stalinist slanders as "Lenin's best comrade... the man of the October revolution... a great fighter for the communist cause..." and "one of the most extraordinary brains of world socialism...". Extracts from his address to young social democrats in Copenhagen were enthusiastically reproduced in *La Batalla* in December 1932; while care was taken by the Bloc to differentiate between the former Bolshevik leader and his followers, whose activities often "undermined" him.<sup>85</sup> By the beginning of 1933 the most important tenets of the BOC's communism were, according to *La Batalla*, those established by the first four Congresses of the CI<sup>86</sup> - that is during the era of Lenin and Trotsky. This

84. *La Batalla* 11.2.32, 10.3.32, 2.6.32; Maurín, "Necesidad de la unificación nacional e internacional del movimiento comunista" *ibid* 29.12.32, 12.1.33, 9.2.33.

85. *ibid* 22.12.32, 29.12.32, 27.4.33., 26.10.33.; Maurín, prologue to Morera Op.cit. p.3.

86. *La Batalla* 12.1.33.

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"orthodoxy" was to become even more marked over the next two years as the BOC consolidated its political identity.

## **National Liberation**

For the Spanish working class to conquer state power, it needed, according to the BOC, an alliance with both the peasantry and the national liberation movements. Spain was divided into a number of different nationalities and regions which historically had suffered at the hands of Castilian centralism. The Catalan dissident communists believed that, as in Russia, these oppressed nationalities could become powerful allies in the proletariat's struggle against the bourgeois state. Moreover, it was only the destruction of capitalism that would provide the basis for ending this oppression. This analysis had been developed by Lenin and formally, at least, was the position defended by all communist parties since the foundation of the CI.

By far the strongest nationalist movement in the peninsula was based in Catalonia and this had been reflected in the development of the FCC-B. The distinct syndicalist origins of the Catalan communists had already contributed to their estrangement from the Madrid-based PCE. The national question was another source of disagreement between the Catalan Federation and the party leadership. This became even clearer when Maurín developed his theory of the "democratic revolution" within which the national liberation movements would play a central role. By breaking with official communism and then fusing with the exclusively Catalan and nationalist-influenced PCC, the FCC-B became even more sensitive to the importance of the national struggle. Basing their position on the experience of the USSR, the Catalan dissident communists envisaged the working class, having laid the basis of the democratic revolution, moving directly on to the establishment in the peninsula of a free union of "Socialist Republics". The choice of the title Iberian Communist Federation, when the FCC-B formally decided in 1932 to build a state-wide organisation, was very significant. The use of the term "Iberian" was intended to emphasise the dissident communists' federalism and anti-imperialism compared with the position of the "Spanish" Communist and Socialist parties.

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Many on the Left hoped that with the declaration of the Republic in April 1931 the "national problem" would at last be resolved. This was particularly the case in Catalonia where the further curtailing of national rights and the persecution of the Catalan language and culture under Primo de Rivera's dictatorship had led to the radicalisation of the nationalist movement. The communists could not afford to ignore this movement if they wanted to influence the Catalan masses.

Accordingly, the BOC's leaders dedicated some time to analysing the nature of Catalan nationalism. Maurín, writing in July 1931, identified three stages in this movement's development. In the first, the struggle for national freedom had been monopolised by the big bourgeoisie, or more exactly the right wing nationalist party, the Lliga. The latter had tried, unsuccessfully, to pressurise Madrid into making certain concessions towards local autonomy. This strategy having failed, Maurín explained, the movement had undergone a process of radicalisation and passed into the hands of the petty bourgeois left. This second stage was epitomised by the rise of the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), which had been founded in March 1931 on the basis of various left nationalist groups. Maurín predicted that, pushed by an increasingly impatient and militant base, the petty bourgeois parties would attempt to negotiate with the Spanish ruling class the creation of a "Federal Republic". Such a scheme, the BOC leader believed, was doomed to failure because the oppressive and semi-feudal Spanish state could not tolerate any form of separation. The only alternative was the destruction of the central state itself - something which the petty bourgeoisie would not contemplate. The national liberation movement would, according to Maurín, then pass on to its third stage where, under proletarian leadership, national freedom would finally be achieved through the violent overthrow of Spanish imperialism.<sup>87</sup>

Clearly the bulk of the Catalan nationalist movement had, as Maurín described, passed from under the leadership of the bourgeois to petty bourgeois parties. The Lliga was by now far too compromised in its dealings with the aggressively centralist Spanish

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87. Maurín, "Les tres etapes del problema Català", *L'Hora* 11.7.31. and *La revolución española* Op.cit. pp.120-129; Federació Comunista Catalano-Balear, *La "Federació Comunista Catalano-Balear" davant el problema de les nacionalitats Ibèriques. Projecte de tesi sobre la qüestió nacional* (Barcelona 1932).

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Right to maintain its prior support among certain sections of the Catalan masses. Events in 1934<sup>88</sup> would, in part, confirm Maurín's analysis; not only of the treacherous role of the Catalan bourgeoisie but also of the petty bourgeois parties' lack of interest in seriously fighting the central state. It was one thing, however, for the dissident communists to diagnose the nature of the Catalan national movement and another actually to win its leadership.

The ERC's support was dramatically illustrated by its overwhelming electoral victory in June 1931 which was described by the Bloc as a "popular plebiscite for a Catalan Republic". The scale of the Esquerra's victory would later lead Maurín to describe the new party as representing the "unanimous desire of the Catalan people to break with the monarchist state and proceed to a revolutionary structure". Caught up in the upsurge of nationalist populism in the first months of the Republic, the BOC began to move beyond the traditional communist defence of the "right to self-determination" to advocating outright separatism. Maurín qualified this, however, when at the Madrid Ateneo in June 1931 he defended "separatism" not from Spain but from the Spanish state, the disintegration of which could give way to genuine Iberian unity. "To say communists should not foment separatism", the BOC leader stated some weeks later, was "to capitulate to social democracy", which had never understood the importance of the national question. It was not sufficient, the Catalan dissident communists concluded, to win over the leadership of existing national liberation movements. Instead, it was actually necessary to participate in their formation.<sup>89</sup> By taking such a stance in Catalonia the BOC hoped to outflank the ERC which, because of its class nature, the dissident communists expected, would soon capitulate to Spanish centralism.

In advocating "separatism" and the active involvement of communists in the formation of nationalist movements, the BOC appeared to be going beyond the more limited defence of "self-determination". However, the BOC leaders were careful to locate this apparent innovation within communist orthodoxy and referred to the role of "revolutionary separatism" in the Russian revolution. By defending the "right to separation", the Bolsheviks, according to Maurín, had managed to win over the national

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88. See pages 194-212.

89. Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. p.70. and "La cuestión de las nacionalidades" *La Batalla* 3.9.31; *ibid* 4.7.31.

minorities to the side of the proletariat thus leading to a true "Russian unity". This line of argument was reinforced at the BOC's Second Congress in April 1932. Once the working class had seized power, the Bloc's "Thesis on the National Question" claimed, there would be no need for "suicidal separation" or "Balkanisation", because all the Iberian peoples would now enjoy effective freedom. It would now be possible genuinely to unite the peninsula, incorporating Portugal and Gibraltar into an "Iberian Union of Socialist Republics".<sup>90</sup> Whether or not the Bolsheviks had really "solved the national question" was never considered by the BOC. Like communists of all tendencies at this time, the Catalan dissidents had a completely uncritical view of this aspect of the internal development of the Russian revolution.

The BOC's unorthodox position in 1931-1932 was based on the belief that the process in Catalonia would inspire similar movements towards national and regional freedom throughout Spain and hence speed up the disintegration of the state. Maurín believed "the socialist revolution's prospects were greatly favoured by the presence of a national problem". So much so that, "if it did not exist it would be necessary to create it". Consequently, the BOC spoke of the need to foment the struggle for national liberation, not only in the "historic nationalities" of the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia, but also in Andalusia, Aragon, the Balearic Islands, Castile, Murcia and Valencia.<sup>91</sup> Such a position was somewhat incongruous given the lack of national consciousness in most of these areas at this time. By 1933 the BOC, perhaps facing up to reality, had ceased to make references to such hypothetical movements. The dissident communists' agitation was now confined to the need for the proletariat to support and eventually win the leadership of the national liberation struggle in the "historic nationalities" and equally to defend the Moroccan people's right to independence.<sup>92</sup> This return to a more orthodox position was to cause some friction inside the party. What can be described as the more "Catalanist" elements, principally certain ex-PCC leaders, would later complain that the BOC had "abandoned the national question".<sup>93</sup>

90. Maurín, *La revolución española* Op.cit. pp. 128-129; FCC-B *La "Federación..."* Op.cit. section 17.

91. *Ibid.* section 2; Maurín, *La revolución española* Op.cit. p.128, "Les tres etapas..." Op.cit. and "La cuestión de las nacionalidades" Op.cit.

92. "Resolución aprobada por la Federación Comunista Ibérica sobre la cuestión nacional", *La Batalla* 27.7.33.

93. See page 251.

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Notwithstanding these complaints, compared with the rest of the Spanish labour movement the BOC's defence of national rights was quite uncompromising. Both the anarcho-syndicalists and the Socialists were hostile to nationalist movements, principally from a standpoint of abstract internationalism. Historically, the Spanish Socialists had turned their backs on the "bourgeois" nationalist movements as having nothing to do with the working class. This enmity had not only contributed to the PSOE's lack of success in Catalonia but also, according to former PCC leader, Jordi Arquer, to turning workers elsewhere in Spain against the national liberation movement. The Socialists "as good supporters of pan-Spanish imperialism", the BOC declared, opposed the wishes of the hispanic peoples "in the most brutally imperialist way".<sup>94</sup> It was this hostility to Catalan national aspirations that had led in 1923 to a split in the Catalan section of the PSOE and the foundation of the *Unió Socialista de Catalunya* (Socialist Union of Catalonia). The new party was far more sensitive to the national movement but it never managed to attract any significant mass support. In fact, its moderation led the USC to become little more than a left appendage of the ERC.

The attitude of the CNT at first appeared more contradictory, given that many of its militants voted for the ERC and some were even party members. This contradiction can be explained on several levels. The rank and file of a mass organisation like the CNT was not uniformly anarchist by any means. Anarcho-syndicalist methods may have been acceptable to a considerable number of Catalan workers but not necessarily all its ideas. So regardless of the Confederation's leaders' disdain for "petty bourgeois nationalism", many CNT members were sympathetic to the nationalist cause. Also electoral support for the republican nationalist Left against the bourgeois Right appeared logical enough to many workers. Especially as a number of republican politicians had distinguished themselves in their defence of workers rights during the dictatorship. In addition, some anarcho-syndicalists, while rejecting the "authoritarianism" of the marxist parties, felt sympathy for the radical individualism and social reformism of certain leading Republicans.<sup>95</sup> It was the more militant anarchists who most vehemently opposed the nationalists. Thus, once this faction had

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94. Arquer, "Catalanisme reaccionari i proletari catalanitzats" *Treball* 21.4.30; FCC-B, La "Federació...  
Op.cit. section 9.

95. See page 107.

re-established itself during 1931 as the leadership of the Catalan CNT<sup>96</sup> it consistently opposed any fight for national rights. The anarchists even threatened, in the name of the "revolutionary unity of the Spanish proletariat", to organise an armed insurrection if there was any attempt at separation from the rest of Spain. The BOC bitterly denounced such "reactionary and suicidal" positions as placing the anarcho-syndicalists on the side of "feudal centralism" and therefore completely against their own libertarian principles.<sup>97</sup>

The dissident communists were particularly critical of the PCE's approach to national movements. According to the BOC, the "official" party had consistently failed to relate the Leninist position on the national question to the Spanish situation. This "failure" had contributed to the Catalan Federation's departure from the party. More importantly, the Spanish Communist Party's lack of sensitivity over the question had convinced an important group of militants in the late twenties of the need to establish the PCC. The BOC accused the PCE of a mechanistic repetition of the CI's slogans, which reflected little understanding of the actual situation in the peninsula; a problem illustrated by the fact that the Communist Party's first manifesto following the declaration of the Republic did not even mention the national question. Thus, if the Catalan separatist movement was "bourgeois", as the PCE claimed, this was the case only because, the dissident communists argued, the party had neglected this movement and not fought to give it a proletarian leadership.<sup>98</sup> Even the CI described the PCE's "complete failure" to win any influence in the national liberation movements as an important reason for the party's lack of support in Catalonia.<sup>99</sup> This criticism, in part, led to general hardening of the Spanish Communist Party's position and to the foundation in 1932 of its "new" Catalan section, the Partit Comunista de Catalunya. As a consequence of this change in orientation, the official Communists later managed to gain sympathy among some radical left-wing separatist elements. Even so, the PCdeC found it difficult to compete with its dissident communist rivals, who not only had many

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96. See pages 113-116.

97. FCC-B, *La Federació...* Op.cit. section 8; Arquer, "Els anarquistes i les nacionalitats oprimides" *L'Hora* 21.5.31.

98. FCC-B, *L Federació...* Op.cit. section 10; "Proyecto de tesis sobre la cuestión nacional", appendix to J. Arquer, *Los comunistas ante el problema de las nacionalidades ibéricas* (Barcelona 1932) pp.38-39; *La Batalla* 27.3.31.

99. R. Arnaú, *Marxisme català i qüestió nacional catalana* (Paris 1974) vol. 2. pp.273-274.



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more members but were organised throughout the whole of Catalonia. Prior to the Civil War, the official party remained centred, almost exclusively on Barcelona.

The BOC's uncompromising defence of Catalan national rights helped it gain a small, but important, audience among certain sectors of the nationalist masses. This was particularly the case in the provinces, where some of the more radicalised workers and peasants soon became dissatisfied with the ERC's moderation. Moreover, the anti-nationalism of the anarchists made little headway in these totally Catalan-speaking areas. They were more successful in Barcelona, where the high level of immigration during the last thirty years meant a linguistically and culturally mixed industrial working class less susceptible to the appeal of Catalan populism. This is not to say that these immigrants, who made up a quarter of the population in the province of Barcelona, led a separate existence from the indigenous proletariat. Apart from other considerations, it is worth noting that the majority of immigrants were from the Levante and eastern Aragon and therefore usually spoke Catalan.<sup>100</sup> Of course, the anarchists' influence in Barcelona was not just determined by their supporters' geographical origins, but also by a whole number of other social and historical factors.<sup>101</sup>

Central to the popular appeal of nationalism was the question of language, accordingly this needed to be taken seriously by any revolutionaries who wished to make gains among the Catalan masses. Thus, for instance, the young PCC leader, Arquer, had in the late twenties defended the use of Catalan inside the unions. If the anarcho-syndicalists had understood the importance of the language question, he wrote later, they could have undermined the ERC's influence on the working class.<sup>102</sup> Instead, Arquer claimed, the CNT, PSOE and PCE had all, by their insistence on always publishing in Castilian, acted as a "transmission belt of pan-Spanish imperialism" into the masses. In contrast, the PCC had become, in 1930, the first revolutionary working class party to publish its newspaper, *Treball*, in Catalan. During the Republic the BOC continued this tradition with its weeklies, *L'Hora* and *Front*. These publications were aimed at a slightly different section of the masses than *La Batalla*, which concentrated on trade union and general political news, as well as attacking other tendencies in the

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100. *L'Hora* 26.7.35; J. Termes, *Op.cit.* pp.130-131.

101. See pages 104-107.

102. *Front* 13.12.35.

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labour movement, in particular the anarcho-syndicalists. The BOC's Catalan press paid more attention to cultural matters, regional politics and criticism of the USC and ERC. This orientation reflected quite clearly the dissident communists' attempts to win a base among the more nationalist sectors of the masses.

The BOC's position over the national question provoked some harsh criticism from its communist rivals in the PCE and the Trotskyist Izquierda Comunista de España (ICE) who denounced the Catalan dissidents for having capitulated to "petty bourgeois nationalism". The Trotskyists accused the Bloc of winning support on the basis of "going furthest with separatist rather than class politics" and of being "more Catalanist" than the ERC itself.<sup>103</sup> Such accusations were in reality difficult to substantiate. In fact, the Bloc rejected the symbols of "Catalanism", such as the national flag, the *senyera*, which it described as "the flag of the Catalan bourgeoisie".<sup>104</sup> In contrast, BOC militants were often ardent defenders of the right to use Catalan, although the party's most well known and popular leader, Maurín, despite speaking the language rarely used it in public or wrote in it. Nevertheless, Maurín's reluctance to express himself publicly in Catalan was the exception rather than the rule, and for the bulk of the BOC's supporters this was their first language. Furthermore, there were undoubtedly sectors of the BOC, particularly among the ex-PCC members, who were more nationalist in outlook. These militants tended to dominate the party's commissions on the national question and the editorial boards of *L'Hora* and *Front*. Later they provided the basis for the opposition to the BOC's pretension of becoming a state-wide organisation.<sup>105</sup> The existence of this sector appeared to give some credence to the Trotskyists' accusations but the influence of such "Catalanists" in the leadership was to some extent counter-balanced by Maurín and others from a more orthodox communist background. Overall, without stepping outside the bounds of Leninist orthodoxy, the BOC was far more sensitive in regard to the question of national liberation than other revolutionary organisations in Spain at that time.

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103. "Tesis sobre las nacionalidades" *Comunismo* April 1932; N. Molins i Fàbrega, "La posición política y fuerzas del Bloque Obrero y Campesino", *Ibid*, December 1931.

104. *La Batalla* 15.6.33.

105. See page 251.

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The BOC's attitude towards the Catalan nationalist groups as such was, in general, quite antagonistic. None the less, on a practical level, there had always been a considerable amount of contact between communists and nationalists, especially in 1930 with the creation of the Revolutionary Committee of Catalonia.<sup>106</sup> Considerable sympathy also existed in the labour movement by 1931 for the ERC leader, Francesc Macià, who had maintained contacts with both the PCE and CNT during his exile in France in the twenties. Moreover, a number of PCC leaders had been militants in the separatist organisation Estat Català, which Macià had led, and some had participated in his unsuccessful attempt to launch a military invasion of Catalonia in 1926. The BOC's initial respect for the nationalist leader had been made clear when the Republic was declared in April 1931. Both *L'Hora* and the dissident communists' *L'Espurna de l'Empordà* carried Macià's picture on their front pages without making any critical assessment of his political stance. Estat Català members had, in turn, worked with the BOC during the Barcelona by-election in October 1931.<sup>107</sup>

At a local level, these contacts had always been even stronger - especially through the "Republican Centres".<sup>108</sup> In at least two places, Lérida and Figueres, the BOC won over important nuclei of left nationalist and republican youth. A group of young activists in Lérida had broken with the local equivalent of the ERC, the Joventut Republicana (Republican Youth), in May 1930 to form the Joventut Esquerrana (Leftist Youth). These activists were mainly students and white-collar workers, with supporters in a number of other towns and villages in the province. Several PCC members were directly involved in the new organisation and communist influence was evident when the first edition of its newspaper, *L'Espurna*, stated that the Joventut Esquerrana were, "marxists... thoroughly proletarian and anti-reformist". This group worked closely with the FCC-B and PCC over the coming months and eventually voted overwhelmingly to join the BOC soon after it was formed in March 1931.<sup>109</sup>

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106. See page 48.

107. Maurín, "Hombres e Historia" CNT (Mexico) January 1960; *L'Hora* 15.4.31; *L'Espurna de l'Empordà* 16.4.31; *La Batalla* 6.4.33; Miravittles, "De Prats de Mollo al Cementerio Nuevo" *Adelante* 2.1.34; Coll and Pané Op.cit. p.19.

108. See page 48.

109. *L'Espurna* 24.7.30, 2.4.31; J. Barrull, *Les comarques de Lleida durant la Segona República 1930-1936* (Barcelona 1986) pp. 211-212.

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Around Figueres, in the province of Gerona, supporters of the local left nationalist paper, *Avant...!* also evolved towards marxism. Having become disillusioned with the ERC, they had reached the conclusion that it was necessary to "base the struggle for Catalan freedom in the struggle of the proletariat". Consequently in October 1932, this group of young militants converted itself into a "proletarian party", the *Avançada d'Empordà* (Vanguard of Empordà). The new party soon began to collaborate with the BOC and in March 1933 converted itself into the Figueres section of the dissident communist organisation.<sup>110</sup>

The attraction of marxism for some sectors of the nationalist movement was not just confined to the provinces. A part of the nationalist students' organisation in Barcelona, the *Esquerra Universitaria*, (University Left) also joined the BOC during the first year of the Republic.<sup>111</sup> Sympathy for marxism was also reflected in the growth of a small pseudo-marxist faction inside the *Estat Català*, which eventually split off in October 1932 to become the *Estat Català - Partit Proletari* (ECP). The new party never had more than a hundred members and was based principally in Barcelona. Despite its small membership, the ECP won influence in the autonomous Hostelry Workers Union and the important office and shop workers association, the *Centre Autonomista de Dependents de Comerç i Indústria* (CADCI).

The new party's declared aim was the establishment of a revolutionary workers and peasants government in an independent Catalonia, which would unite with "existing socialist republics". While the *Estat Català* leftists were prepared to co-operate with the BOC in the trade union sphere, there were two major problems for any greater political collaboration. Firstly, the BOC desired to become a state-wide and therefore "Spanish" rather than exclusively Catalan organisation. Secondly, the ECP sympathised with the Comintern and hence did not share the BOC's criticism of the communist movement at an international level. None the less, the Madrid-led PCE was not an attractive alternative for these radical nationalists at this stage. The dissident communists, in turn, saw the ECP as being politically confused because it failed to understand that to win Catalan freedom it would be necessary to destroy the capitalist

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110. *Avant...!* 5.10.32, 30.11.32, 22.3.33.

111. E. Ucelay Da Cal, *La Catalunya populista. Imatge, cultura i política en l'etapa republicana (1931-1939)* (Barcelona 1982) pp.141-142

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state on a national level as both the Spanish and Catalan bourgeoisies' interests were completely intertwined.<sup>112</sup> This peninsula-wide orientation meant the BOC won few recruits from the ECPP, although both parties worked together on more practical issues.

The *cause célèbre* of the Catalan nationalist movement in general was the demand for some form of autonomous self-government. Some nationalists saw a regional administration as an end in itself, others as a step towards total separation from Spain. Prior to the fall of the monarchy, the left Republicans had committed themselves to granting Catalonia its own Autonomy Statute and in June 1931 a regional assembly, elected by town councils and dominated by the ERC, set about drawing up such a document. The result was a fairly limited set of proposals which were to be submitted to popular approval in a referendum in the region on 2 August 1931. Consequently, political discussion in Catalonia was dominated by the planned statute, not just throughout the summer of 1931, but until its final approval by the Spanish parliament a year later.

The BOC considered that this document was woefully inadequate and advocated a far more radical line of action. Accordingly, when the ERC won the elections of June 1931, the BOC had immediately called on Macià to declare the foundation of a "Catalan Republic" and not wait for the "reactionary" Spanish parliament to grant the region's autonomy. Such a declaration, the Bloc believed, would inspire the other oppressed Iberian nations to "break the yoke of the semi-feudal state" and prepare the ground for the "Union of Iberian Republics".<sup>113</sup> The left nationalists, however, had no intention of going so far and contented themselves with awaiting the outcome of the forthcoming referendum. The Autonomy Statute, as it stood, was attacked by the BOC because it, "renounced the right" of the Generalitat (the Catalan government) to legislate on social matters or to form a "Catalan Popular Army". Notwithstanding these criticisms, the Bloc advocated voting in favour of the regional assembly's document because "mass support" for it would represent an important step forward in the struggle for national rights.<sup>114</sup> The overwhelming vote in favour of the Statute in the referendum - 99.4 percent of all votes cast - confirmed its political importance.

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112. Arnau, *Op.cit.* vol. 2. pp.38-60; *Front* 16.7.32.

113. *La Batalla* 9.6.31.

114. *Ibid* 2.8.31; *L'Hora* 1.8.31.

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It soon became clear that even this moderate project would not be accepted in Madrid and that the final version would be further diluted. The BOC responded by waging a virulent campaign, not only for a more far-reaching Statute but also against the central government having any say whatsoever in its elaboration. So, when a modified version was finally presented in the summer of 1932, the dissident communists called on the Generalitat's President, Francesc Macià, to organise another plebiscite to see if the revised Statute was acceptable to the Catalan people. This new document was undoubtedly a compromise on the original Statute presented by the ERC in 1931<sup>115</sup> and was described by the Bloc as a "miserable betrayal" that left all the real power in the hands of Spanish imperialism. The fact that its first article spoke of Spain as an "integrated state" was, according to the dissident communists, in itself a complete denial of Catalan nationality.<sup>116</sup> In the end, the Generalitat's "real powers were not markedly greater than those of an English county council".<sup>117</sup>

As it became apparent that the ERC was going to accept the dictates of Madrid so the BOC increasingly attacked such "treachery" as leaving Catalonia in a position of "little more than a colony". Following the Statute's formal approval by parliament in September 1932, *La Batalla* published an "open letter" to Macià which denounced the "shameful cowardice" of the ERC deputies who had completely sold themselves to the Spanish bourgeoisie. The Statute was now no more than a fiction, the dissident communists claimed, because it had merely de-centralised some aspects of administration and it would leave Catalonia as subject to the central state as ever.

The crux of the BOC's argument was that in 1931 the Catalan masses would have been prepared to back Macià in any attempt to extend seriously the region's autonomy. However, this would have meant a dangerous clash with the Spanish state and the ERC was not prepared to face the consequences of such an option. Instead, the dissident communists claimed, Macià's "paternalism" and "demagogy" had diverted this popular support into more passive channels and hence avoided any mass mobilisation that could

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115. Ucelay Da Cal, *Op.cit.* p.154.

116. *Front* 1.7.32; *La Batalla* 8.9.32; FCC-B, *La "Federació..."* *Op.cit.* section 12.

117. N. Jones, "Regionalism and revolution in Catalonia", in P. Preston (ed) *Revolution and War in Spain* (London 1984) p.109.

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have threatened the status quo. Consequently the Spanish bourgeoisie, according to the BOC, had good reason to be thankful to the Generalitat's president.<sup>118</sup> Henceforth, the Bloc would repeatedly insist on the ability of the ERC leadership to hold back sectors of Catalan workers and peasants. It is debatable whether this was really the case or whether the left nationalist leadership reflected, in part, its own supporters' moderation. What is certain, is that many of the workers and peasants who voted for the ERC were prepared at times to take militant action despite the Esquerra's cautious leadership. This militancy would become clear both during the *rabassaires'* struggle and in October 1934.<sup>119</sup> The problem for the BOC, or any other marxist organisation, was to win these masses away from the ERC's influence once and for all.

It was not just opposition to the Statute of Autonomy that turned the BOC so violently against Macià and the ERC. The dissident communists had already begun to denounce the left nationalists, like the rest of petty bourgeois republicanism, as "serving the interests of the bourgeoisie". This hostility intensified as it became clear the ERC was quite prepared to support, what the BOC saw as, the repressive policies of the Republican-Socialist government. The Bloc's press increasingly referred to the fact that some ERC leaders were landowners and industrialists. Macià himself was singled out as being the product of a "typical Spanish (upper class) family... a landowner and ex-army officer".<sup>120</sup>

An opportunity arose for the BOC to challenge the ERC's influence over the Catalan masses when, as a consequence of the granting of the Statute of Autonomy, elections were called in November 1932 for the new regional parliament. During the election campaign considerable emphasis was placed by the Bloc on exposing the role of Macià and the ERC in "capitulating to Madrid". By going to the polls under the banner of the Statute, the BOC argued, the Esquerra was now no different from the Lliga or the moderate republican Acció Catalana Republicana (ACR) and hence, Macià's party "had become the main base for the "counter-revolution" in Catalonia. Not only did the dissident communists hope to undermine the left nationalists' electoral support, but also to persuade those workers under the influence of the anarchists not to listen to the CNT's

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118. FCC-B, *La "Federació..."* Op.cit. section 12; *La Batalla* 22.9.32.

119. See pages 91-95, 194-212.

120. Miravittles, *Ha trait Macià?* Op.cit. p.43.

campaign for electoral abstention. Moreover, the anarchist FAI took this even further and openly agitated not just against voting as such but specifically against the workers' parties which were trying to win proletarian support. In particular, this meant attacking, verbally or otherwise, the BOC and violent clashes involving anarchists occurred at a number of the dissident communists' electoral meetings. Conscious of the possible effects of the CNT's and FAI's propaganda especially on immigrant workers in Catalonia, the BOC issued an appeal from the Secretaries of the FCI's nuclei in Asturias, Levante, Madrid and Aragon explaining the importance of the Catalan elections for workers elsewhere in Spain and calling for support for the party's candidates.<sup>121</sup>

The BOC's electoral programme included general demands such as the confiscation of the wealth of the church, abolition of the army and police and economic improvements for the workers and peasants. It also called for the Statute to be nullified and for the establishment of a Catalan Republic.<sup>122</sup> In this sense the BOC stressed the significance of these elections for the rest of the Spain. A "Red Catalonia", as Arquer called it, would inspire the workers and peasants of the whole peninsula and convert the Bloc into the "revolutionary guide of the Hispanic peoples". Yet for this to happen, he claimed in a broadcast on Radio Barcelona, it would need the direct intervention of the masses, otherwise the Catalan parliament would be no more than a tool of "Spanish centralism". The BOC aimed to act as the representatives of these masses - using parliament as a tribune to denounce the bourgeoisie and the "treachery" of the ERC.<sup>123</sup>

Demagogy apart, it could not have been much of a surprise when, on 20 November, the ERC achieved another overwhelming victory. Although the left nationalists' share of the vote had dropped compared with 1931; of the eighty-five deputies elected the Esquerra and its allies won sixty-seven, the maximum possible. The BOC's 20,000 or so votes, although double that of 1931, were still quite insignificant compared with the

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121. "Davant les eleccions al Parlament de Catalunya. La posició del Bloc Obrer i Camperol" November 1932 (IMHB); "Llamamiento que las organizaciones españolas de la Federación Comunista Ibérica dirigen a los obreros no catalanes que viven en Cataluña" *La Batalla* 17.11.32.

122. "Davant les eleccions..." Op.cit.

123. Arquer, "Las futuros constituyentes de Catalunya" *La Batalla* 20.10.32; *Front* 19.11.32; Miravittles, *Los obreros y la política* (Barcelona 1932) p.45; Bloc Obrer i Camperol, "Parlament burgés i diputats obrers" Sabadell, November 1932 (IMHB).



200,000 gained by the ERC.<sup>124</sup> Only in Gerona had the BOC hoped to capture a seat due to the local popularity of Jaume Miravittles, one of the party's most accomplished propagandists. The dissident communists only presented three candidates in the province, thus hoping to take advantage of the open list system, whereby voters could distribute their votes between different candidacies. The BOC's calculations were partially justified because Miravittles' personal vote rose by some 6,000 to 7,720. This increase in part reflected the BOC's work among local peasants in previous months<sup>125</sup> but it was still 9,000 short of winning a seat. In Barcelona, the BOC's vote more than tripled. Maurín, who headed the dissident communist list, won 3,800 compared with 1,215 in 1931; although this only amounted to less than two percent of the total votes cast. The results in the Catalan capital exposed the absurdity of the Bloc's wild optimism after the by-elections in July and October 1931.<sup>126</sup>

Although remaining a small minority electorally, the BOC evaluated its intervention in terms of the 100,000 people with whom it calculated it had been in contact during twenty days of campaigning and over three hundred meetings.<sup>127</sup> Despite the bold assertions of their electoral propaganda, the dissident communists had not seriously expected to win any seats for a number of reasons. Even before the election they had pointed out how the Republican electoral system, by discriminating against minorities, made this very unlikely. In addition, many of the party's youthful supporters were disenfranchised as the minimum voting age was twenty -three.<sup>128</sup>

The ERC had managed to maintain its support, the dissident communists believed, because of two factors - fear of a Lliga victory and the FAI's campaign both for abstention and against the Bloc. Even so, conscious working class abstention probably had less effect on the BOC's vote than it appears, as many CNT members, when they did vote, tended to support the petty bourgeois left. Notwithstanding Communist Party claims that only thirty percent of Barcelona workers actually voted as a result of the anarchists' agitation,<sup>129</sup> the actual level of participation did not drop in the city compared with 1931.

124. For 1932 election results see, I. Molas, *El sistema de partidos políticos en Cataluña (1931-1936)* (Barcelona 1974) pp.140-156.

125. See pages 95-98.

126. See page 63.

127. *La Batalla* 24.11.32.

128. "Davant les eleccions ..." Op.cit.

129. "Sobre el trabajo en la organización de Cataluña" Op.cit. (ACCPCE).

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Although the Catalan elections again showed the extent of mass support for the ERC, the BOC remained confident that this was a temporary phenomena. The disillusionment of tens of thousands of workers who had voted for the ERC, declared *La Batalla* would be "deep and rapid" - it was up to the Bloc to win them over to communism.<sup>130</sup> Nevertheless, the ERC's popularity would not decline as rapidly as the dissident communists had predicted, and during the next few years they continued to be faced with the problem of breaking the hold of petty bourgeois nationalism over important sectors of the Catalan masses.

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130. *La Batalla* 1.12.32.

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### **3. PEASANTS, WORKERS AND THE UNITED FRONT THE BOC AND THE REPUBLIC 1932-1933.**

#### **Agrarian revolt**

In the alphabet of the Spanish revolution, Maurín wrote, "A" was for the agrarian revolution.<sup>1</sup> This was the democratic revolution's greatest challenge and the very existence of the Republic depended on its solution. Historically, the Spanish economy had been completely dominated by the country's agrarian structure. The monarchy had done nothing to change this situation. "While there is no radical and deep transformation, destroying the actual agrarian status quo", Maurín argued, "Spain will be condemned to lead a miserable life. There will be (neither) industry, (nor) bread... in a word there would be no civilisation".

Every aspect of Spanish backwardness had its roots in the agrarian system. The BOC's solution to this state of affairs was based on the policy adopted by the Soviet government in the early twenties. Handing the land over to the peasantry, Maurín believed, would immediately lead to an increase in the rural masses' capacity to consume, which in turn would provide the necessary impetus to pull Spanish industry out of its lethargy. However, the Spanish ruling class's vested interests in the existing system of land ownership meant that only the revolution could bring about such a change.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the BOC relentlessly criticised the government's projected Agrarian Reform because it would do nothing to solve the problem of property relations, oppression and misery that existed in the countryside. The increasing difficulties faced by the Republican authorities in implementing even their timid programme of reform only helped confirm the dissident communists' view. Yet given the faith that many peasants had, at least initially, in this projected reform, it served, in Maurín's words, as a "legal dike" against revolution in the countryside.<sup>3</sup> Therefore the slogan, "the land to those who worked it" was an indispensable part of the BOC's programme for the democratic revolution. The dissident communists hoped that the contradiction

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1. Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. p.56.

2. *Ibid* pp.56-59.

3. *Ibid* p.57.

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between the desire for land and the government's ineptitude would lead the peasants to see the need for a revolutionary solution.

In a country where agriculture was so central to the economy, the proletariat, the BOC argued, could not take power without the support of the rural masses. The peasants, in turn, could not carry out the agrarian revolution without the leadership of the industrial working class. This schema, of course, was one of the fundamental tenets of Leninist politics and the problem for the BOC was how it could be applied to the situation in Spain. More specifically, the problem was how Maurín's party was to develop a revolutionary marxist programme in rural Catalonia.

In comparison with the situation on the great landed estates in the south, the Catalan countryside appeared relatively calm, although it would be a mistake to believe that there was no agrarian problem in the region. Catalan agriculture was highly productive and based on a complex system of sharecropping, tenant farmers and small property owners. There were very few large landowners and hence few *jornaleros* (day labourers), the main base of rural radicalism in other parts of the peninsula, particularly Andalusia. Apart from the long term aim of land ownership itself, the main cause of dissatisfaction among most peasants in Catalonia was the "completely feudal"<sup>4</sup> agrarian contracts under which they were forced to work. The revision of such contracts - in order to keep a greater share of the harvest or to lengthen the terms of tenancy - soon became the battlecry of the Catalan peasantry during the Republic.

The peasantry as such, unlike the agrarian proletariat of landless labourers in the south, was seen by the BOC as essentially petty bourgeois. This meant that the party had to develop a series of demands which would relate directly to the peasants' needs and at the same time show them that these could be achieved only through fighting at the side of the proletariat for the social revolution.

The central planks of the Bloc's agrarian programme were state expropriation of all major landowners without compensation and the proportional redistribution of the land

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4. Maurín, "El problema agrario en Cataluña", *Leviatán*, June 1934.

to the peasants. Added to this were demands such as: the creation of a state-run "Agrarian Bank" to provide credit with low interest rates, the foundation of agrarian schools in every *comarca*, special machinery stations at the service of the peasants, and the cultivation of abandoned land by state-controlled experimental farms. Such a programme, the BOC stated in 1931, would never be implemented by a petty bourgeois Republican administration because of the opposition of the ruling classes. Only a revolutionary workers' and peasants' government, the dissident communists believed, would be capable of carrying out these measures.<sup>5</sup> Certainly the experience of the Republican governments' attempts to implement agrarian reform, between 1931 and 1933 and in 1936, lends credence to the Bloc's arguments. The determined opposition of the landed oligarchy and its allies, both inside and outside of parliament, would seriously curtail the left's reforming zeal.

The diversity of socio-economic conditions in the Catalan countryside produced its corresponding ideological differences. It also presented very specific problems for communists or any other revolutionaries who sought to organise in this environment. Before the Republic, the only peasant organisation of importance in Catalonia was the Unió de Rabassaires (UdeR), formed in 1923 by left nationalists. The *rabassaires* worked in the region's fertile vineyards and were undoubtedly the most important sector of the Catalan peasantry. They worked under a system of limited leasehold, the *rabassa morta*, whereby the peasant cultivated the vines for some twenty or thirty years until they dried up. During the Republic the Rabassaires' Union became one of the principal bulwarks of the ERC and by 1932 claimed 21,542 members.<sup>6</sup> The establishment of peasant unions with a clear revolutionary orientation, however, would prove more difficult.

Historically, revolutionary working class organisations, principally the CNT, had failed to build a base in the Catalan countryside. According to the BOC, the anarcho-syndicalists had tried to approach the peasants as if they were industrial workers. The CNT tended to dismiss the *rabassaires'* struggle as "petty bourgeois" and hence of

5. "Proyecto de tesis agraria" *La Batalla* 26.2.31; V. Colomer, "Els comunistes i el problema agrari" *L'Hora* 1.8.31. and *El Bloque Obrero y Campesino y la cuestión agraria* (Barcelona 1932)

6. A. Balcells, *El problema agrari a Catalunya. La cuestió rabassaire (1890-1936)* (Barcelona 1982) p.139.

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no interest to the proletariat. In contrast, the BOC understood that a flexible strategy was needed in organising among the Catalan peasants, that revolutionaries had to "concern themselves with the different characteristics not only of each province, but each *comarca*". For instance, unlike in the case of urban workers, the Bloc did not argue that rural unions should automatically affiliate to the CNT. Instead, the dissident communists thought it preferable that, given their distinct interests, peasants, though not day labourers, should organise outside the Confederation.<sup>7</sup>

Initially then, the BOC was open-minded over the question of rural trade union organisation and urged its supporters to enter any existing peasant unions, be they autonomous, the UdeR, CNT or UGT, and organise "revolutionary opposition groups" inside them. Where such unions did not exist, as was the case in many places, the dissident communists aimed to organise them and, depending on local circumstances, form sections of sharecroppers, labourers and so on. Given the favourable political climate and the corresponding expansion of all forms of mass organisation during the first years of the Republic, the BOC's efforts to organise in the countryside proved relatively fruitful.

This was particularly evident in areas where it already had established nuclei in the main urban centres, as was the case in the provinces of Lérida and Gerona. Moreover, given the relative novelty of most peasant organisations, the dissident communists were able to exert a considerable influence over some local unions, simply by having been the first people to set them up. At its Second Congress in April 1932, the BOC's "Agrarian Thesis" optimistically claimed that the party had, "placed itself at the head of the peasants' struggle in Catalonia" and had thereby "been able to influence broad zones of rural workers". The dissident communists were confident that, if they improved their tactics and methods of organisation, the majority of Catalan peasants would be prepared to follow their slogans. The truth was, however, that the BOC's success in some rural areas was often due to a certain pragmatism which other working class organisations had lacked when they had attempted to win support in the countryside. For instance, the Bloc did not oppose its members intervening in co-operatives or the *Sindicats Agrícoles* (agrarian syndicates), which were so important throughout rural Catalonia. None the less, it

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7. *La Batalla* 28.5.31; "Tesis Agraria" *ibid* 7.4.32.

advocated caution when working in such institutions because of their tendency "to degenerate rapidly in a conservative sense". After realising the benefits of involvement at such levels, the BOC later encouraged its members actually to help establish, where necessary, co-operatives, mutual help societies and similar organisations.<sup>8</sup> This helped the most militant peasants to identify with the dissident communists' agrarian programme and hence aid the subsequent expansion of the party's influence in rural areas.

The advent of the Republic led to an upsurge of agitation throughout the Catalan countryside. Most peasants believed that the moment had at last arrived to improve dramatically their situation. The *rabassaires* were the most coherent sector of the Catalan peasantry, due to both their common economic circumstances and their geographical concentration. Hence they soon formed the vanguard of the peasant movement in the region. The main form of action chosen by the *rabassaires* in 1931 to force a change in their cultivation contracts was to hand over only half of the stipulated share of the harvest to the landowners.

The ERC-dominated regional government, in order to placate its rural supporters issued, during June and August 1931, decrees favouring the revision of contracts and legitimising the *rabassaires'* action. However, a massive campaign by the landowners' association, the Institut Agrícola Català de Sant Isidre, and the right-wing nationalist Lliga forced the Generalitat to step back. By the autumn of 1931, the number of favourable revisions of contracts had been generally cut back because of the attitude of unsympathetic judges. This created immense frustration among the *rabassaires* who now launched a militant, and often violent, campaign in the weeks leading up to the harvest of 1932. The establishment by the Generalitat in August that year of special arbitration tribunals did little to head off this movement and most peasants distributed the harvest as they had the previous year. Only the promise of a thorough-going reform of the contracts system, once Catalan autonomy had been granted, prevented the situation from getting totally out of hand.

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8. "Proyecto de tesis agraria" Op.cit.; "Resolución Agraria", *La Batalla* 29.6.33.

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The BOC enthusiastically supported the peasants' struggle for the revision of their contracts, seeing it as opening up new revolutionary possibilities in the countryside, "which hardly seemed possible a little while ago". When the peasants had begun to submit revisions *en masse* in early September 1931, the BOC even spoke of the "beginning of a general insurrection of *rabassaires*". By an intransigent defence of the peasants' demands for the maximum reduction or, where possible, for the abolition of their contribution to the landowners, the Bloc hoped to win over the most radical sections of the peasantry. Similarly it agitated for the tenant farmers to pay the lowest possible rents and for a general extension of their leases. The BOC combined this agitation with consistent denunciations of the ERC's moderation. A pact in September 1931 between the Generalitat, the owners and the *rabassaires*' leaders in support of the arbitration procedure was denounced by the dissident communists as having "strangled the peasant movement".<sup>9</sup>

In the principal vine-growing areas in the province of Barcelona, the BOC's direct influence was limited, in part, due to the disorganised state of the dissident communists' work inside the UdeR. A conscious effort was made to rectify this situation and in October 1932 *La Batalla* reported that BOC members were now actively intervening in the *rabassaires*' struggle in many parts of the province.<sup>10</sup> However, the BOC had more influence among the *rabassaires* in the province of Tarragona. Here the number of large landowners was greater and the vast majority of peasants were landless and generally poorer than in Barcelona and hence less susceptible to "petty bourgeois" attitudes. The BOC's strength was mainly concentrated in Vendrell. This was historically one of the most militant areas of the *rabassaire* movement and it became the centre of its struggle in Tarragona during the Republic. Some 3,000 of the province's 4,461 petitions to revise contracts were presented in the Vendrell district. The extent of the Bloc's influence could be seen at the height of the struggle in September 1932 when the local *rabassaire* leader and BOC militant, Pau Padró, was arrested and the party's local offices closed. The threat of a general strike quickly brought about the release of Padró.<sup>11</sup> The dissident communists were also prominent in a militant

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9. "Tesis Agraria" Op.cit.; "La revolució agrària", *L'Hora* 25.9.31; Comisión Agraria, "El movimiento de los rabassaires ha sido estrangulado" *La Batalla* 22.10.32.

10. "Tesis Agraria" Op.cit.; *La Batalla* 6.10.32.

11. *Ibid* 6.10.32, 8.12.32; *Front* 22.10.32; Balcells, *El problema agrari ...* Op.cit. pp.145-146.



demonstration of 2,000 peasants in the city of Tarragona in November, protesting about attacks by the Civil Guard.<sup>12</sup> The party seemed to be gaining even more ground when Padró was briefly elected President of the UdeR at about this time.

Nevertheless, despite a minority of *rabassaires* being prepared to accept the BOC's leadership, mainly in Tarragona, the great majority remained politically identified with the ERC. The vineyards in the province of Barcelona proved particularly impenetrable to dissident communist influence. Rabassaires in this area, although poor, were slightly better off than most other peasants in Catalonia and tended to have a more petty bourgeois outlook. The populist and idyllic view of self-sufficient peasants living comfortably off their own plot of fertile land, had more of an appeal to those working in the region's prosperous vineyards. Accordingly, the ERC as the party that best reflected the aspirations of the Catalan petty bourgeoisie understandably received more support from the peasantry, especially the *rabassaires*, than the BOC or other revolutionary organisations. Even when the dissident communists did seem to be gaining influence inside the UdeR, its pro-ERC leadership managed to undermine this challenge. When Padró was elected as the union's president in late 1932 the left nationalists soon managed to get his election annulled. Instead, the Bloc's rural support tended to come from the poorer peasants, away from the economically important wine producing areas. This was particularly the case in the provinces of Lérida and Gerona, where dissident communist nuclei had existed since the twenties.

The number of sharecroppers in Gerona was proportionally the highest in Catalonia. The first attempt to organise them on a provincial level was initiated by the local peasant organisation in Banyoles, the Acció Social Agrària (ASA). As a result of its agitation representatives of one hundred and fifty different villages came together in May 1932 to establish the ASA as a provincial organisation. Its main base was to be found in those *comarques* with the highest concentration of sharecroppers, Lower and Upper Empordà, Gironès and Garrotxa.<sup>13</sup> The new organisation sought to represent "all opinions" among the local peasantry and concerned itself almost exclusively with the question of the revision of contracts. The political influence of the ERC and other Republican

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12. *La Batalla* 10.11.32.

13. *El Camp* 25.3.32, 5.6.32.

factions was evident in the ASA's declared faith in the possibility of achieving its aims through legal channels, although it did not rule out violence if the landowners proved unwilling to make concessions. In accordance with the law, in January 1932, the courts had begun to hear the 1,577 cases for revision of contracts presented in the province and it was around this legal process that the ASA began to organise.

Faced with the landowners' intransigence and increasing difficulties in the courts, the attitude of the Gerona peasants, like that of their *rabassaire* counterparts, hardened. However, unlike the position of the *rabassaires* elsewhere in Catalonia, union organisation in the province of Gerona was more or less completely new. Given that the BOC had established various nuclei in the province this meant that it often played a leading role in setting up local ASA branches in a number of important towns and villages. The dissident communists were therefore well placed to take advantage of the organisation's radicalisation. There now began to develop a split inside the ASA leadership between those who, basically, remained loyal to the ERC and those who favoured a more radical line of action as advocated by the BOC. This split was most clearly reflected when the ASA journal, *El Camp*, published, in August 1932, two complementary manifestos. One was signed by three union leaders and the other by the BOC's "Agrarian Commission", which called on the peasants to end their "illusions" in the ERC.<sup>14</sup> The moderate faction of the ASA leadership denounced its rivals' manifesto to the Civil Governor as "unauthorised" and he had all the signatories arrested. However, the radical faction's leaders were promptly released when their supporters threatened to cut the province's telephone lines.<sup>15</sup>

The pro-ERC ASA leaders now called a general assembly in September with the intention of putting an end to this opposition. None the less, the assembly, claiming to represent some 12,000 peasants, proceeded to throw the moderates out of the union's leadership. Although agreeing that the ASA would be "a-political", local organisations were to be allowed to intervene in political struggles as they saw fit. The Assembly also accepted a proposal by the BOC and its sympathisers to campaign throughout the

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14. *Ibid* 13.8.32.

15. Miravittles, "La radicalización de los campesinos" *La Batalla* 25.8.32; *L'Espurna* (Gerona) 1.9.32.

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province for a fifty percent reduction in contribution-in-kind to the landowners, as had already been done by the *rabassaires* in Barcelona and Tarragona.

It proved difficult for the ASA, under a more militant leadership, to build on the euphoria of September's assembly. The union's base turned out to be a lot more susceptible to the ERC's influence than had appeared in recent weeks and some local groups broke away with the ASA's former leaders to form a provincial section of the UdeR.<sup>16</sup> More importantly, the promise of a far-reaching reform in Cultivation Contract Law, once the regional elections had taken place, also helped undermine the union's more militant elements. The Catalan elections in November 1932 exposed the fragility of the BOC's alliance with some of the ASA's leaders. The union's influential Secretary, Baldiri Juscafressa, broke with his Bloc allies when he failed to get their backing as a candidate for the regional parliament.<sup>17</sup> Trying to capitalise on the ASA's apparent support, Juscafressa then organised a hybrid electoral list, the Esquerra Federal Agrària Obrera (Workers Agrarian Federal Left). The BOC also tried to win peasant support with its own revolutionary candidacy headed by Miravittles who had gained a certain popularity in the province when imprisoned for political activities in early 1931.<sup>18</sup> Neither list did particularly well in comparison with the ERC and Juscafressa resigned from the peasant organisation's leadership as a consequence of his electoral failure.

The ASA was never a particularly solid organisation but rather the product of a movement for the revision of agrarian contracts. Once the ERC won the regional elections with such a decisive majority, it appeared that this problem would now be resolved in the peasants' favour.<sup>19</sup> Political in-fighting had also taken its toll, and by early 1933 the ASA had effectively disintegrated as a coherent force. The Gerona peasants had, according to the BOC, been victims of the "adventurer Juscafressa", a "greedy opportunist of the worst kind".<sup>20</sup>

Bloc militants now played a leading role in re-organising the local peasant unions and in September 1933 this culminated in the establishment of the Federació Provincial de

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16. R. Pujol and J. Clara, "Acció Social Agrària de les terres Gironines", *Revista de Girona* no. 84, 1978.

17. *L'Espuma* (Gerrona) 15.11.32

18. See pages 86-87.

19. See pages 85-88.

20. *Adelante* 24.10.33; *El Camperol* 4.11.33.

**Treballadors de la Terra (Provincial Federation of Land Workers). The new federation's president was a BOC member, as were several other of its principal leaders. It would be wrong, nevertheless, to say that the FPTT was actually controlled by the BOC. Its leadership, in fact, consisted of a majority of non-communists and even included some ERC members.**

In contrast to the principal vine-growing areas around Barcelona, the mosaic of different property relations and social conditions in Gerona impeded the consolidation of the province's peasant organisations. Despite claiming 8,000 members by December 1933,<sup>21</sup> the FPTT was never as influential as the UdeR in Barcelona province or even the smaller BOC-led peasant unions in Lérida. Like the ASA, the new Federation seems to have been a fairly loose organisation and had, in the words of one of its former leaders, a "relatively ephemeral existence". Moreover, its work was seriously disrupted by the events of October 1934 and many of its members later went over to the local UdeR.<sup>22</sup> The importance of the dissident communists' agitation in the Gerona countryside in this period was that it allowed them to build up an extensive network of party nuclei and sympathisers in scores of villages.<sup>23</sup> While not being able seriously to challenge the ERC on an electoral level, the BOC did manage to attract to its ranks a sizeable minority of radicalised peasants. This in itself was quite an achievement, given both the lack of revolutionary political organisation in rural Gerona before the Second Republic and the power of the landowners and the church in many villages.

The only place where the BOC really seemed to begin to undermine the ERC's massive rural support was in the province of Lérida. Both climatic and socio-economic factors helped produce a relatively coherent peasant movement in the *comarques* surrounding the provincial capital. The main problems facing Lérida's impoverished peasantry were the fear of drought, land ownership and prices of the area's main produce, wheat. Because of the power of several large landowners, the land problem was, according to Maurín, "as important as in Andalusia or Estremadura". Moreover, the

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21. *El Socialista* 13.12.33.

22. Letters from J. Quer 15.8.85 and J. Soler 22.12.86.

23. See Appendix Three.

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terms of the Republic's cautious agrarian reform did not cover most of the province's peasants.<sup>24</sup>

Since the twenties, the Catalan communists had maintained a number of important nuclei in the principal agricultural centres in the *comarques* of Segrià, Urgell, La Noguera and Les Garrigues. It was here, on the plains surrounding the provincial capital, that nearly fifty percent of Lérida's largely rural population lived. This placed the BOC in a good position to take advantage of local peasant militancy in the first years of the Republic. Another factor which aided the dissident communists was the apparent lethargy and conservatism of the ERC in the province. Unlike the case in most other parts of Catalonia, various prominent Esquerra leaders, including Macià himself, were local landowners and this probably contributed to their caution over agrarian matters. The urban-based and thoroughly petty bourgeois nature of the Lérida equivalent of the ERC, the Joventut Republicana, was another important factor in determining this conservatism. Not that this meant that the ERC lacked a mass base in the Lérida countryside, but it did provide the Bloc with a potential political space that they did not enjoy elsewhere in Catalonia. Furthermore, the backwardness of local agriculture opened up considerable possibilities for a progressive policy which the middle-class nationalists were not prepared to carry through.<sup>25</sup>

Like those in most of rural Catalonia, peasants in Lérida were more or less totally disorganised before the Republic was established. The anarcho-syndicalists had shown little interest in the local peasantry's problems and the CNT only existed in a handful of villages - usually due to the efforts of Maurín's group in the early twenties. With the fall of the monarchy, BOC members threw themselves into the task of organising among peasants in the province. At first, this was a slow process because confidence in the new regime's intentions was still widespread. However, local unions were gradually set up. Some were based on former CNT groups, but most were totally new organisations. This activity led, in February 1932, to the foundation of a provincial peasants union, the Unió Provincial Agrària (UPA). The development of this peasant movement was paralleled by a growing disenchantment with the Republic among many peasants in the province,

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24. Maurín, "La cuestión de la tierra", *La Batalla* 19.5.32.

25. Barrull, *Op.cit.* p.171.

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which aided the extension of the dissident communists' influence. The BOC itself grew rapidly at this time in the area and at its provincial Plenum in March 1932 already claimed a thousand members, organised in thirty or so local groups.<sup>26</sup>

The BOC's organisational work culminated in March 1933, with an assembly in the provincial capital of some one thousand peasants, claiming to represent thirty-two different local unions with a total of 4000 adherents, as compared to only 600 a year beforehand. The principal aim of the assembly was to formalise the UPA's structure and programme. Membership of the union would be open to any peasant "who lived from his own work". The assembly declared itself in favour of legal action "without renouncing direct action" and for a general alliance with similar organisations. Agitation was to be centred on securing an improvement in pay and an eight hour day for agricultural labourers, and, above all, the problems of the *mitjanies* and the Urgell Canal. These were all issues on which the BOC had fought since at least early 1931.<sup>27</sup> The *mitjania* was a common form of tenant farming in the province, whereby the peasants handed over to the landowners half of their total harvest in the form of rent. This system was extremely prejudicial to the peasants in question. Accordingly, the UPA's assembly decided to call on its supporters to present only a third of their harvest with the intention of forcing the government to convert such an arrangement into law. In the long term, the UPA favoured the abolition of such systems altogether.

The other great burden for some 16,000 Lérida peasants was their dependence on the privately-owned Urgell Canal, the largest and most extensive in the whole of Spain. This was controlled by a "General Syndicate of Irrigators", which, because of economic restrictions on the election of its junta, was in the hands of a small unrepresentative and wealthy clique. In order to benefit from the Canal, the peasants were required to pay a ninth part of their harvest, the *nové*, as rent. This was particularly humiliating because the peasants could not use the rest of their harvest until the company's carts had passed and selected the ninth they wanted.<sup>28</sup> The convergence of a drought and the changed socio-political situation in 1931 laid the basis for a general revolt against the "Syndicate". The UPA therefore decided to organise a campaign to withhold payment of the *nové* and

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26. *La Batalla* 31.3.32, 13.10.32.

27. See Appendix Five; *La Batalla* 23.3.33; *L'Espurna* (Balaguer) 9.4.31.

28. Maurín, "Por los campos del Urgell", *La Batalla* 19.5.32.

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in favour of a monetary payment instead. A telegram was also dispatched to the Catalan Regional Government, the Generalitat, calling on it to seize the canal in order to carry through its nationalisation.

The assembly of March 1933 provided a great impetus for the UPA and it marked the beginning of an agitated campaign that brought together both the question of the *mitganies* and the *nové*. Action began in late April 1933 when peasants in at least twenty-six villages refused to hand over to the owners their share of the alfalfa (lucerne) harvest. The Civil Governor, an ERC appointee, Antoni Ventós, made it clear from the start he intended to "enforce the law" and the Civil Guard were sent to restore order. Battle really began in earnest with the wheat harvest in July. This coincided with the promulgation in the Catalan Parliament of the so-called "Llei Petita" (literally "small law") concerning agrarian contracts which was vigorously denounced by the BOC and the UPA for favouring only the *rabassaires* of Barcelona and Tarragona.

The effective exclusion from the new law of peasants in Lérida was seen as a direct consequence of the ERC's landed interests in the province. As the newspaper of the moderate nationalist Acció Catalana Republicana, *El Diluvio*, commented, the situation in the Lérida countryside showed up the ERC's duplicity. The repression meted out to the province's peasants for not handing over the landowners' share of the harvest, this newspaper observed, contrasted starkly with the tolerance shown towards the *rabassaires*.<sup>29</sup>

The centre of the struggle was the village of Bellvís. On 7 July 1933 local women, who played an important role in the unrest, stoned company carts as they entered the village to collect the *nové*. Within a week over fifty villages in the Urgell plain had joined the movement, withholding two thirds of the harvest instead of a half and refusing to pay the *nové*. By 12 July it was estimated that only twenty percent of the payments owed had been collected. The Civil Governor, Ventós, responded by trying to repress the movement and on 13 July one hundred Civil Guards arrived in Bellvís and arrested the peasants' leaders. This was a clear attempt to undermine the twenty-four hour

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29. *Ibid* 13.7.33; *El Diluvio* 2.9.33; re: "Llei Petita" see page 187.

general strike called for the following day throughout the province. Notwithstanding this intimidation, the strike was extensive and affected scores of villages.<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile, the UPA had elaborated a programme of demands to present to the province's mayors. Despite the union's general aim to change the "feudal regime" in the countryside with the abolition of cultivation by sharecropping and all that was based on payments "in kind" most of the demands were more specific. As regard<sup>s</sup> the canal, it called for a monetary levy - and for the dismantling of the "Syndicate" and its substitution with "Irrigators Committees" based on the peasants themselves. The UPA also demanded the release of those detained, the withdrawal of the Civil Guard from the countryside and the dismissal of Ventós.<sup>31</sup>

Apart from trying to suppress the movement, it was obvious that the Generalitat would have to make some form of political gesture to the peasants, if only to undermine the growing strength of the UPA and the BOC. In mid-August, Macià received a UPA delegation, accompanied by BOC leader Doctor Tomas Tussò, to whom he promised to intervene on behalf of those detained. In Lérida itself, the ERC was noticeably silent, only later excusing the Generalitat's initial inactivity because control of the canal was not under its jurisdiction. A combination of factors meant that the agitation began to subside by late August 1933. These included the ending of the harvest, the apparent willingness of the Generalitat to negotiate with the peasants and the attempt by the Canal Company to undermine the union by approaching peasants individually.

The situation also became calmer once the UPA's popular President, Sabastian Garsaball, who had been imprisoned in July, was released from jail. The prospect of general elections in November further encouraged the ERC to try and diffuse the situation. Moreover, in Lérida as elsewhere in Catalonia, the promise of an imminent extension of the Generalitat's legislation regarding agrarian contracts<sup>32</sup> temporarily placated many sharecroppers and tenant farmers. Then, with the appointment of USC leader, Joan Comorera, as "Councillor of Agriculture" for the Catalan Regional Government in January 1934, there began discussions which led to a decree concerning

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30. *El País* 7.7.33, 8.7.33; *El Correo* 12.7.33; *La Batalla* 13.7.33.

31. *Ibid* 20.7.33.

32. see page 187.



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the Canal. This agreement, accepted by an assembly of peasants' representatives, abolished the *nové* in favour of a monetary payment and instigated other changes in the Canal's administration.<sup>33</sup> Neither the Company, nor the UPA, were satisfied with the final outcome, but a more definitive solution was postponed by the events of October 1934.

The exact strength of the UPA is difficult to ascertain. It undoubtedly expanded rapidly during 1933 and by August it claimed to have sections in around fifty villages, with a total of 8,000 members. While in reality the UPA's membership was probably half that, the union had definitely built a solid base in the central *comarques* of Segrià, Urgell and La Norguera. Above all, the UPA's achievement lay in that it represented the "introduction for the first time into the Lérida countryside of an organisational platform with a revolutionary character".<sup>34</sup>

The BOC's influence in building this movement was undisputed. Indeed, in many places the identification between the Bloc and the UPA was so close that they were effectively the same thing. The authorities certainly saw the dissident communists as a threat and throughout the summer of 1933 "systematically prohibited" the BOC's meetings. The pragmatic nature of the party's agrarian policy in the province was central to its influence. Involvement in the setting up of co-operatives and other mutual aid associations was an important example of this. Such bodies had always been generally sparse in Lérida and revolutionaries had traditionally been opposed to organising them as some form of petty bourgeois deviation.<sup>35</sup>

Despite its relative success in the province the BOC, as elsewhere, was still faced with continuing mass support for the ERC, especially in electoral terms, although many peasants put their faith in the UPA when it came to defending their rights. Given the ERC's record locally, it was probably no coincidence that when it belatedly tried to organise a rival peasant organisation it was a complete failure.<sup>36</sup> Even so, some

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33. Barrull, *Op.cit.* pp.319-321; M. Uadonosa, "Un conflicte agrari: el canal d'Urgell i el pagament del *nové*", *Recerques* no.7, 1977-1978.

34. *La Batalla* 31.8.33; See Appendix Five; Barrull, *Op.cit.* p.446.

35. *La Batalla* 17.8.33; *Front* 10.7.36.

36. Barrull, *Op.cit.* p.172.

Esquerra members played a leading role at a local level in the peasants' struggle<sup>37</sup> and the Generalitat's promise of radical agrarian reform was an important means of maintaining popular support. The relationship between the Lérida peasants and the ERC therefore remained contradictory.

For the BOC to convert this relatively isolated rural unrest into an effective revolutionary movement, they needed the support of the urban proletariat and this meant challenging the phenomenal influence of anarcho-syndicalism.

### **The BOC, anarcho-syndicalism and the unions.**

Since 1930 the CNT had yet again demonstrated that it continued to enjoy the allegiance of the great majority of class conscious workers in Catalonia. Half of the 600,000 members claimed by the Confederation in June 1931, were from this region. Even taking into account the unreliability of these figures<sup>38</sup> there is no doubt as to the organisation's dominance of the local working class movement. What is more debatable is the extent to which anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist ideas really held sway over these masses.

Understandably, the Catalan communists, especially Maurín,<sup>39</sup> dedicated some time to analysing the basis of anarchist success in Catalonia. Maurín argued that there were two principal reasons why this ideology had taken hold: economic and political backwardness and the development and characteristics of Spanish socialism. Anarchism was above all, in his opinion, an "agrarian and pre-capitalist ideology" which had its roots in the Andalusian countryside. It was simplistic and based on what Maurín called a "village mentality" which was confronted with social problems of "little complexity". The "established factory worker" on the other hand, the true proletarian,

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37. Uadonosa, Op.ct.

38. S. Tavera, *La ideología política del anarcosindicalismo catalán a través de su propaganda (1930-1936)* (Doctoral Thesis, Facultat de Geografia i Història, Universitat de Barcelona, 1980) pp.30-44.

39. In particular see his pamphlets, *L'anarcosindicalisme en Espagne* (Paris 1924) and *El fracaso del anarco-sindicalismo. La crisis de la CNT* (Barcelona 1932) and his articles in *L'Opinió* during 1928, reproduced in A. Balcells, *El arraigo del anarquismo...* Op.ct.

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thought in an another way and "understood intuitively the interdependence and close relation between different activities of production" and hence, he argued, was open to socialist conceptions of political activity. Furthermore, to comprehend scientific socialism needed a political education that these newly proletarianised layers did not possess.<sup>40</sup> "The Spanish proletariat", wrote another prominent BOC member; "thinks like the European proletariat did a century ago". This was, he claimed, because the infra-structure on which anarchism supported itself, especially in Catalonia, was the same as that of Europe during the last century.<sup>41</sup> According to Maurín, it was the massive waves of rural immigrants into Barcelona, since the beginning of the century that had provided the human material for local anarchism. These immigrants had no political education or experience of the class struggle, the BOC leader explained, but they were rebellious and showed a "great capacity for struggle". Anarchist propaganda was more suited to this transient and unskilled mass who lacked experience of stable or continuous work.

Maurín drew a parallel between the two most important labour milieus in Spain, industrial Barcelona and rural Andalusia. The mentality of these two sets of workers, despite their completely different circumstances, was strangely similar. "The Barcelona proletariat" Maurín claimed "was a thousand times closer to the Andalusian peasants than those of Matorell or Granollers" from whom "there was a complete separation".<sup>42</sup>

This comparison between the working masses of Barcelona and Andalusia did not imply that anarchist ideas had come to the Catalan capital directly from the southern countryside. Most immigrants, in fact, came from the neighbouring regions of Aragon and Levante.<sup>43</sup> Instead, it was a question of these newly-proletarianised workers in Barcelona being more susceptible to anarchist ideas, especially given the lack of any real opposition to the anarcho-syndicalists inside the city's emergent labour movement. Although, as Maurín and other marxists argued, there was nothing intrinsically anarchist about Catalan workers as such, as the growth of radical republicanism in the early years of the century clearly illustrated. Thus, there seems little doubt that the great influx of immigrant workers into Barcelona at this time did provide the basis for a highly

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40. Maurín, "Socialisme i Anarquisme: El proletariat català no es anarquista", *L'Opinió* 7.7.28.

41. Miravittles, *Los obreros...* Op.cit. p.29.

42. Maurín, "Socialisme i anarquisme..." Op.cit.; Maurín, *La revolución española* Op.cit. pp.152-153.

43. See page 79.

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radicalised working class movement. However, the fact that many non-immigrant workers also accepted anarcho-syndicalist ideas, and above all methods, meant that there had to be other reasons for this doctrine's success.

Apart from the effects of mass immigration, the other crucial factor that had contributed to the growth of anarchism in Catalonia was, according to Maurín, the role of the Socialists.<sup>44</sup> After founding the UGT in Barcelona in 1888, the Socialists had at the end of the last century "abandoned" the region for Madrid. This was, Maurín argued, because the UGT's founder, Pablo Iglesias, was more suited to the "bureaucratic and petty bourgeois" atmosphere of the Spanish capital than to "revolutionary" Catalonia. The artisans and skilled workers of Madrid and the heavy industry of northern Spain proved more conducive to the bureaucratic and gradualist methods of Socialist trade unionism. Anarcho-syndicalism, in various guises, fared better in the socially radicalised atmosphere of Andalusia and Barcelona. In addition, the actual reformist nature of the PSOE had, Maurín claimed, allowed anarchism to sink its roots in the peninsula. Elsewhere in Europe, the existence of revolutionary socialism had undermined anarchism, showing it to be the obsolete ideology that Maurín and his comrades believed it was. Yet in Spain the alternative of revolutionary socialism had not existed, so given the historical circumstances the majority of radicalised workers had turned to anarcho-syndicalism.

The missing factor in Maurín's otherwise orthodox marxist explanation of the roots of Catalan anarcho-syndicalism was a serious examination of the region's socio-economic structure. Andreu Nin, writing in the late twenties, had criticised this omission in his friend's analysis. He pointed to the importance of agrarian capital in Catalonia, which had led to the dominance of small property owners. The subsequent abundance of small workshops and relatively backward technology had led to a "petty bourgeois" mentality among the masses. In contrast, according to Nin, large concentrations of workers, such as in Russia or Germany, had led to a tradition of collective co-operation and discipline which worked against the implantation of

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44. Maurín, "Socialisme i anarquisme: Pablo Iglesias i Anselmo Lorenzo" *L'Opinió* 14.4.28 and "Pablo Iglesias i el Pablologuesisme" *ibid.*, 22.12.28.

**anarchist individualism. This petty bourgeois character of the Catalan economy, he explained, was the root cause of anarchism's success.<sup>45</sup>**

The same theme was later taken up by Jaume Miravittles, who also pointed to the lack of "mass consciousness" in Catalonia being a product of its particular economic structure. In smaller workplaces, there was a far greater level of contact with the owners and a tendency to see them as "good" or "bad" rather than in general class terms. This "economic individualism" had created a general climate, despite the existence of some larger factories, in which anarchism could flourish.<sup>46</sup>

Once the dictatorship had fallen, the most militant workers had flocked back into the CNT. However, the anarcho-syndicalists' unions' strength was not, by itself, enough to guarantee the victory of the social revolution. In the BOC's opinion, the CNT had been unable to take advantage of the great strike waves of 1930 and 1931 because of its leaders' "lack of revolutionary theory". Thus, the anarcho-syndicalists' "a-politicism" meant they did not see the need to "seize power" and faced with extensive social unrest they had done little more than follow the workers' spontaneous actions. The latter course of action, the Bloc argued, had resulted in the anarcho-syndicalists becoming like the Socialists, effectively, "a brake on the workers movement". Worse still, from the dissident communists' point of view, the "individualistic" and "petty bourgeois" nature of anarchism had led sections of the CNT leadership to adopt an often ambiguous attitude in relation to both the left Republicans and the new regime. This was particularly the case with the more moderate elements that dominated the Catalan CNT until autumn 1931, and who were sympathetic towards certain local Republican and petty bourgeois politicians, even convincing themselves "that Macià, Companys and the rest were their instruments". It was this absence of, what the BOC described as, "true class consciousness" that had led many anarcho-syndicalists to effectively support the republican alliance in the 1931 elections and their subsequent flirting with some of the most demagogic and "adventurist" elements of left-wing republicanism, such as Ramon Franco, Eduardo Barriobero and Antonio Jiménez.<sup>47</sup>

45. Nin, "Perque el nostre moviment obrer h'estat anarquista?" *L'Opinió* 11.8.28 and "Las arreles d'anarquisme a Catalunya" *ibid* 25.8.28.

46. Miravittles, *Los obreros...* Op.cit. pp.30-31.

47. *ibid* p.21; Maurín, *El fracaso...* Op.cit. pp.43-46; "Tesis Sindical" *La Batalla* 24.3.32.; also see page 77.

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Despite all their criticisms of the anarcho-syndicalists, the dissident communists could not ignore the fact that the CNT constituted the principal revolutionary working class organisation in Spain. Winning over its members to communism was, therefore, of primary importance. None the less, the dissident communists' analysis of the nature of anarcho-syndicalism may have been relatively coherent, but it suffered from an over optimistic evaluation of the possibilities for marxists to influence the CNT's base.

At first, the Bloc leaders had been confident that given the "superiority" of marxism it would only be a matter of time before they actually won the leadership of the Confederation. Such optimism, encouraged by the social turmoil during much of 1931,<sup>48</sup> completely underestimated the anarcho-syndicalists' grip on much of the Catalan labour movement. Believing in their own unlimited expansion, the dissident communists had begun frequently to speak of the CNT by late 1931 as the workers' "economic organisation" and the BOC as the "political organisation". Under this schema the future of the revolution depended on a "united front" of these two organisations. The march of events, however, would invalidate the BOC's pretensions and it was soon obvious that its grandiose vision bore little relation to the real balance of forces inside the CNT.

At a practical level, the Catalan dissident communists had always worked inside the CNT. Indeed, the syndicalist origins of most of the FCC-B's cadres meant that they had maintained a small base in a number of local union federations. The decision by the PCE to build its own separate trade union federation, first as the "Committee for the reconstruction of the CNT" and later the Confederación General del Trabajo Unitario (General Unitary Confederation of Labour), had been one of the principal reasons for the FCC-B's dissent in 1930.<sup>49</sup> Instead, both the Catalan Federation and the PCC had insisted that all their members were affiliated to the CNT and urged any autonomous unions under their control to do likewise. Moreover, the dissident communists argued it would be a mistake to ignore, as they claimed the PCE did, the vast mass of unorganised workers. Eighty percent of the workforce fell into this category and given the political

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48. See page 49.

49. See page 38.

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climate by early 1931, the FCC-B believed that many of these workers could be won over to a revitalised and revolutionary CNT.<sup>50</sup>

In order to consolidate its influence in the CNT, the BOC began in the first half of 1931 to organise its supporters into the Oposición Sindical Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Trade Union Opposition) groups. The idea of such groups obviously derived from the communists' work in the unions in the early twenties, in particular the CSRs.<sup>51</sup> The similarity was such that at first the OSR even claimed to defend the programme of the RILU. Yet with the FCC-B's estrangement from Moscow completed by the summer of 1931, this position was soon dropped.<sup>52</sup> The OSR claimed groups in most of the important unions in Barcelona, although only those among printers and office and shop workers (Sindicat Mercantil) had any real strength. The main thrust of the Opposition's propaganda during 1931 was to call for revolutionary united front between communists and the most militant sections of the CNT, such as the FAI and other anarchist factions. At the same time, the OSR denounced the ineffectiveness of the Confederation's leadership, which until autumn 1931 was in the hands of the more moderate syndicalist tendency.

In contrast, the BOC sided with the syndicalists against the radical anarchists over the question of trade union structure. As in the twenties, the communists continued to favour the construction of "industrial federations" as opposed to the anarchist *sindicatos únicos*. The building of such industry-wide federations had been formally adopted by the CNT at its National Congress in June 1931 but this often remained a dead letter because the anarchists consistently obstructed their organisation. Instead, most sections of the CNT were organised through the all-embracing *sindicato único*, which brought together sections in a given locality into one union. In the workplaces, the OSR favoured the formation of factory committees which would not only unite all workers but prepare the proletariat's "political, technical and administrative" organisation of production and thereby lay the foundations for the workers to "carry out their revolutionary historical mission".<sup>53</sup> The OSR's principal fight though, was over the

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50. "Proyecto de Tesis Sindical" *La Batalla* 17.2.31.

51. See page 23.

52. *La Batalla* 14.5.31, 15.10.31; Oposiciones Sindicales Revolucionarias, "La huelga..." Op.cit. (See Chapter Two note 19)

53. "Tesis Sindical" Op.cit.

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*cause celebre* of the communist-syndicalists in the early twenties, the question of the "freedom of tendencies". In plainer language, the dissident communists' struggle to remain an organised faction within the CNT.

Despite the BOC's optimism during 1931 that it would be capable of winning the CNT's leadership, life inside the Confederation was becoming increasingly difficult. In fact, the anarcho-syndicalists were determined to prevent the BOC or any other communist organisation from gaining influence inside the CNT. The mechanism by which they sought to do this was by excluding from positions of authority within the union any affiliate who had stood as a candidate in parliamentary or local elections. This had been successfully proposed to the CNT's National Congress in Madrid in June 1931 by the Catalan unions, with only the handful of communist delegates protesting.

These measures, referred to as the "Madrid Agreements", were in line with the CNT's traditional a-politicism, but it soon became clear that any pretext was valid in driving the communists out of the unions. In Catalonia, the struggle between communists and anarcho-syndicalists really began in earnest in the most important Local Federations dominated by the BOC, those of Lérida and Gerona. The ensuing battle revolved not only round the electoral question but also that of union structure.

In Lérida, the dissident communists had re-asserted their influence in the city's CNT when they re-established the Local Federation in August 1930.<sup>54</sup> Likewise, both the PCC and FCC-B were prominent in organising unions in most other important towns in the province. The anarchists, hoping to overcome their weakness locally, counter-posed the establishment of *sindicatos únicos* to the dissident communists' scheme to organise the CNT on the basis of *comarca*-based groups with a Local Federation in the capital. An attempt to impose this traditionally anarchist structure was defeated at a Provincial Plenum in October 1931. The anarchists then responded by setting up their own Provincial Union Federation to try and counter-balance the influence of the BOC-led Lérida Local Committee.

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54. *L'Espurna* (Lérida) 24.7.30



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Having lost over organisational questions, the CNT's provincial leaders tried to impose the "Madrid Agreements" against electoral candidates holding union posts. The Provincial Federation now demanded that Francesc Aguilar, President of one of the city's best organised unions, the woodworkers, be removed from his post on the grounds that he had been in the BOC's list in the municipal elections of April 1931. His union, backed by the Local Committee, refused and the issue was taken to the CNT's Catalan Regional Conference that December.

The BOC's twenty-seven delegates at the Conference, mostly from Lérida unions, were easily outvoted and an ultimatum was given to the woodworkers to replace Aguilar. The woodworkers, with the support of the majority of the city's unions, again refused to comply. Instead, the BOC-led Local Committee responded by calling for the resignation of both the CNT's National and Regional Committees in protest at their sectarian policies.

This call was guaranteed to anger the anarcho-syndicalists further and in April 1932 the Lérida Local Committee was expelled from the CNT for refusing to comply with union instructions. The Committee's expulsion left nearly all the city's unions, with a membership of around 1,500 workers, outside the CNT. Only the construction and transport unions remained loyal to the anarcho-syndicalists. Elsewhere in the province those few local unions of any relative importance also sided with the dissident communists.<sup>55</sup>

Meanwhile, in Gerona, a similar division had developed, which, despite references to the "Madrid Agreements", was also fundamentally about different conceptions of trade union organisation. The FCC-B had been instrumental in organising a "General Autonomous Union" in the city in 1927 and when the CNT was formally re-constituted in 1930 this union immediately affiliated to it. The dissident communists soon controlled the most important sections of the Gerona CNT... But it was the anarchists who made up the majority of the local leadership and this led to clashes between the two factions. A bitter dispute developed throughout 1931 as to whether the city's CNT

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55. *Solidaridad Obrera* 8-10.12.31; *La Batalla* 17.12.31, 3.3.32; Appendix Four.

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should remain organised as a *sindicato único* or, as the BOC advocated, be transformed into a Local Federation of distinct unions. This dispute resulted in late November 1931 in seven of the city's ten CNT sections, amounting to 2,500 of its 3,500 members, voting to establish such a Local Federation.<sup>56</sup> The division of Gerona's trade union movement between a pro-communist majority and an anarcho-syndicalist minority later led to a series of bitter recriminations, each faction accusing the other of betrayal and acting as blacklegs. As in Lérida, this dispute had its repercussions throughout the province and many local CNT unions sided with the BOC against the anarcho-syndicalists.

In reply to the mounting campaign against them, the BOC-led Local Federations of Gerona, Lérida and Tarragona issued, in April 1932, on the eve of another Catalan Regional Plenum, a manifesto addressed to all CNT members.<sup>57</sup> After a preamble referring to the difficult situation in which both the Confederation and the working class in general found themselves, the document went on to explain the divisions in the Gerona and Lérida CNT. It attempted to point out that if the CNT was not capable of drawing in all proletarian tendencies it would never become a truly revolutionary trade union federation. As could be expected this manifesto only further enhanced the anarcho-syndicalists' desire to rid the CNT of the dissident communists and their supporters. Thus, as soon as the Plenum began in Sabadell on 24 April, the Regional Committee disqualified without discussion both the Gerona and Lérida Local Federations as being "outside the CNT". The Tarragona Federation also had most of its delegates rejected because of its support for the rebels and its representatives felt obliged to leave the meeting to avoid being assaulted.<sup>58</sup> The remaining ten or so BOC delegates were completely marginalised from the proceedings.

The exclusion of the BOC-led Federations seriously undermined the dissident communists' work in the CNT. Moreover, in various other unions a similar struggle was now taking place. The BOC continued to see the CNT as the mainstay of any revolutionary movement in the peninsula, - so it followed that its militants had to fight hard to stay inside the Confederation. Even so, according to the Trotskyists, the BOC

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56. Interview with M. Gayolà 14.5.84; J. Soler, *L'evolució dels Marxistes Independents de Girona* (Perpignan 1986) pp.6-7; *La Batalla* 21.4.32; see Appendix Four.

57. *La Batalla* 21.4.32.

58. *Ibid.*, 1.5.32.

had not seriously resisted being excluded from the CNT in some localities. Apparently this lack of opposition reflected the desire of these unions' members, rather than the Bloc's own militants, to break away from anarchist influence.<sup>59</sup> Formally the dissident communists maintained, for the time being at least, the aim of combating their exclusion from the Confederation. Consequently, the three expelled Federations called a congress in Tarragona on 12 June 1932 of those unions and opposition groups that rejected the anarcho-syndicalists' methods. In all, twenty-eight union supported the Congress representing more than ten thousand workers. Apart from the Gerona, Lérida and Tarragona Federations, a number of other important provincial unions were represented, as well as eighteen OSR groups. The Congress stressed that the dissident unions did not intend to form a new federation because their aim was to fight for their "re-integration into the CNT". In order to co-ordinate their efforts a "Federation of unions excluded from the CNT" was established, with its headquarters in Lérida.<sup>60</sup> Despite their proclaimed intentions, this marked the beginning of the separation of nearly all the BOC-influenced trade unions from the Confederation. This process, was, as shall become clear, due as much to the BOC's disillusionment with the CNT's revolutionary potential, as to anarchist sectarianism.

The separation from the CNT of various provincial unions under BOC control reflected a growing disquiet inside the Confederation over the orientation of the Barcelona-based leadership. The latter, by the autumn of 1931, was in the hands of radical anarchists, in particular members of the Federación Anarquista Ibérica. The upsurge of social unrest combined with the massive influx into unions of mostly young, inexperienced and militant workers, had created the conditions for the anarchists to win back control of the Confederation in Barcelona.

There now developed a bitter struggle inside the CNT between, principally, the FAI and the more syndicalist elements. At one level, this was a dispute about ideological and strategic differences which had divided the Confederation since its foundation and cut through many Catalan unions. However, there was a strong tendency for the anarchists to be based mainly in Barcelona and the syndicalists and dissident communists

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59. *El Soviet* 16.6.32, 23.6.32.

60. *La Batalla* 16.6.32; Appendix Four.

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in the provinces. Hence it is possible to point to a number of social, economic and cultural factors that help to explain further this division. The mass base of the radical anarchists tended to be non-Catalan, unskilled and concentrated in Barcelona. This provided the context for the growth in influence of the most revolutionary elements inside the CNT, as it had in the early twenties. It also set the parameters for anarcho-syndicalist activity in this period. Yet the fact that the anarchists found it hard to win the leadership of the majority of provincial unions must be of great significance. The domination of immigrant and unskilled labour in the CNT's assemblies in Barcelona was the subject of hostile comment by the anarchists' critics in the workers movement at this time.<sup>61</sup>

There seems little doubt as to the importance of these sectors to the FAI's rise to prominence inside the Barcelona unions. Of equal relevance must be the nature of the more moderate or traditionally syndicalist faction's base. This was fundamentally provincial, hence Catalan-speaking and among a more stable work force. It is no coincidence that the most important unions under syndicalist control, in particular in Sabadell, were also the CNT's most solidly organised sections, with the highest percentage of dues-paying members in Catalonia.<sup>62</sup>

In Barcelona itself, the few consistent pockets of opposition to the anarchists in industry tended to be among more skilled workers, such as printers, metalworkers and artisans. Anarchist methods of direct action and insurrectionary general strikes appealed little to these workers. Revolutionary ideas were, however, common among many workers who opposed the FAI but it was generally accepted that any revolutionary movement needed preparation and tactical sense and should be combined on a daily basis with more traditional trade union practices. Such a "conservative" orientation was common to syndicalists and dissident communists alike.

The BOC's influence inside the CNT was, in general, based on sectors similar to those controlled by the syndicalists. With a few exceptions, the dissident communists

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61. For example see: *La Batalla* 21.4.32.; Miravittles, *Los obreros.. Op.cit.*; R. Vidiella, "Causes del desarrollo, apogeo y decadencia de la CNT" *Leviatan* February 1935.

62. A. Balcells, "La crisis del anarcosindicalismo y el movimiento obrero en Sabadell entre 1930-1936" in *Trabajo Industrial y organización obrera en la Cataluña contemporánea (1900-1936)* (Barcelona 1974) p.204.

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dominated the much smaller labour organisations outside the province of Barcelona. The Bloc also had important minority support in the main industrial towns around the Catalan capital, such as Manresa, Sabadell and Terrassa. Whether some local sections of the CNT were under BOC or syndicalist influence was also often quite arbitrary, as the case of Terrassa or the Regional Power Workers Union clearly illustrated.<sup>63</sup>

Away from Barcelona there existed a working class milieu much closer to rural influences and which was, in particular, more sensitive to the national question. Hence anarchist hostility to making any concessions to national consciousness provided the BOC with further possibilities of winning workers' support in provincial centres. The opposition of *Solidaridad Obrera* in December 1931 to the so-called "Catalanisation" of the CNT, is indicative of the anarchist attitude<sup>64</sup> and contrasted sharply with the dissident communists' strident defence not only of the Catalan language but also of national rights in general.

In a move to combat the growth of anarchist influence, a group of thirty prestigious CNT members had issued a manifesto in August 1931 which attacked any conception of revolution as the work of small audacious and dedicated groups and counterposed a patient building of the unions' forces. The "Treintistas", as they became known, favoured a more traditional syndicalist orientation, with an emphasis on education rather than "wasteful" revolutionary strikes. The FAI, in turn, were determined to get rid of the syndicalist leaders of the CNT, who they saw as holding back the revolutionary movement.

Relations between the two factions deteriorated further after the Alt Llobregat uprising of January 1932 and in September the Treintista-led Sabadell Local Federation was expelled from the CNT for withholding its dues. This was followed during the first months of 1933 by a succession of expulsions and resignations of unions which supported the Sabadell Federation, culminating in the first Regional Plenum of "Opposition Unions of the CNT" in June that year which claimed to represent 35,000 workers, mainly from the province of Barcelona. Apart from the Sabadell unions, the opposition included

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63. See pages 125-126.

64. *Solidaridad Obrera* 13.12.31; J. Sabater, *Anarquisme i Catalanisme* (Barcelona 1986) p.34.

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other important CNT organisations such as those of Manresa and Mataró.<sup>65</sup> The majority of the powerful Valencian CNT also sided with the Treintistas' cause. The new grouping was not ideologically homogeneous but reclaimed for itself the CNT's traditional apoliticism and the syndicalist conception of Industrial Federations as the economic basis of future libertarian society.

Parallel to the organising of the Opposition Unions, various syndicalists founded, in January 1933, the *Federación Sindicalista Libertaria* (Libertarian Syndicalist Federation). Despite rigorous denials of the similarity, the FSL acted as the Treintistas "political wing" in much the same way as the FAI did for the anarchists inside the CNT.

Initially, the BOC did not hesitate to side with the FAI against the Treintistas, whom the dissident communists denounced as a "reformist tendency" whose leadership of the CNT had only "served the counter-revolution".<sup>66</sup> According to the Bloc, the anarchists represented far better than the syndicalists the "historically necessary revolutionary movement". The anarchists' growing influence was seen by the BOC as a rejection of the CNT leadership's collaboration with the petty bourgeois Republicans during 1930 and early 1931. Even when the anarchists began in earnest to try and push the dissident communists out of the Confederation, the BOC still maintained this position of support for a lesser evil. The FAI, *La Batalla* declared in September 1932, because of its "catastrophic policies" was a bad influence on the working class but its supporters "had more class sense" and were hence preferable to the Treintistas who "were a thousand times worse" than the anarchists.<sup>67</sup>

The Treintistas had been equally zealous in attempting to keep the dissident communists out of the Catalan CNT, so there was certainly no subjective reason for siding with them against the anarchists. By late 1932, however, the BOC leadership considered that there was little to choose between the two major factions of anarcho-syndicalism. As Miravittles commented, "the most negative element about the Treintistas is their positive programme, while the most positive element of the FAI's is its negative

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65. *Sindicalismo* 9.6.33.

66. *Oposiciones Sindicales Revolucionarios*, "La huelga..." Op.cit.; *La Batalla* 3.9.31, 10.9.31.

67. *Ibid* 29.9.32.

programme".<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, many BOC trade union activists increasingly found themselves collaborating with the Treintistas on a day to day level against both the employers and the anarchists. In fact, the dissident communists were soon to drop their previously, albeit limited, favourable evaluation of the FAI. The anarchists' own actions saw to this.

Under the influence of the FAI the CNT rushed from confrontation to confrontation. Anarchist leader Juan García Oliver described this as the "revolutionary gymnastics" necessary to train the working class in the art of insurrection while maintaining its revolutionary sentiments. The year 1933 began with another attempted putsch, when the FAI took advantage of a planned railway workers' strike to organise a general revolutionary uprising. This was a debacle which the CNT felt necessary to disown. It provoked only even more government repression and the subsequent weakening of union organisation. However, this latest defeat did not deter the more radical anarcho-syndicalists, and the number of both strikes and terrorist attacks reached a new peak during 1933. This agitation was combined with an intense campaign against Azaña's "dictatorship" and against the CNT's principal enemy, the Socialists. The effect of all this feverish activity, far from strengthening the anarcho-syndicalists' position, led to their progressive decline. Repression took its toll with some 9,000 CNT members in prison by mid-1933 and the frequent suspension of its press. At the Catalan Regional Plenum in March 1933 the delegates claimed to represent 208,821 members - two thirds of the 1931 membership.

Significantly, given the growth of opposition during the previous year, there were no representatives from outside of the province of Barcelona. Even in its stronghold of Barcelona, membership had dropped from 162,000 to 72,000 during 1932. Also, the Confederation's real membership in Catalonia was probably lower than given at the Plenum. According to a former leading anarcho-syndicalist, Ramon Magre, who had joined the BOC in 1932, by mid-1933 the CNT had lost sixty percent of its dues-paying members nationally and seventy-five percent in Catalonia. In Barcelona, there were, according to Treintista sources, only 23,800 fully paid-up members by the beginning of

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68. Miravittles, *Perque soc comunista* (Barcelona 1932) p.29.

1933.<sup>69</sup> The FAI's "adventurism", combined with its persecution of any opposition inside the CNT, led the BOC to harden its attitude towards the anarchists. The uprising of January 1933 proved beyond doubt the "absolute incapacity of the FAI as a revolutionary force". It was a badly organised affair and lacked any clear aims. To make matters worse, according to the BOC, the authorities knew about the insurrection well beforehand.<sup>70</sup> Increasingly, the dissident communists portrayed the FAI as "agents provocateurs", not only harming the revolutionary cause but opening the doors to the counter-revolution. The BOC accused the anarchists of refusing to accept that "democratic illusions" still persisted among many workers. At a time when it was necessary to reinforce union organisation, the anarchists were busily destroying it. "Their sect-like fanaticism", wrote *La Batalla* after the FAI had violently broken up an Federación Sindicalista Libertaria meeting in April 1933, was "splitting the CNT and reducing it to impotence".<sup>71</sup>

The BOC soon alleged that the FAI had not only objectively helped the Right but had quite consciously sided with it against the Republic. The putsch of January 1933 coincided with the beginnings of systematic parliamentary obstruction by Rightist deputies. An abortive forty-eight hour general strike organised by the CNT in May 1933 was also seen as coinciding with the "manoeuvres of the counter-revolution" in preparation for a "decisive attack" against the Left. *La Batalla* spoke, two months later, of a "triple offensive" by the counter-revolution, consisting of the reactionary Right, both inside and outside of parliament, and the objective role of the FAI. It certainly was necessary to get rid of the Republican-Socialist government, but not, stated the BOC, to replace it by one headed by Maura and Lerroux. The handing over, in November 1933, to *Solidaridad Obrera* of the former printing press of the monarchist *El Imparcial*, by its owner, the notorious reactionary plotter Juan March, confirmed the BOC's most bitter accusations about the anarchists' role as "more or less conscious agents of the counter-revolution".

69. Confederación Regional del Trabajo de Cataluña, *Memoria del Pleno Regional de Sindicatos Unicos de Cataluña. Celebrado en Barcelona del 5 al 13 de marzo de 1933* (Barcelona 1933); *Cultura Libertaria* 1.12.32; *La Batalla* 27.7.33; Jones, Op.cit. p.95.

70. *La Batalla* 21.1.33.

71. *Ibid* 20.4.33.



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The BOC now launched even more frenzied attacks on the FAI, whose "anti-marxism" was compared to that of "Lerroux, Maura, Gil Robles and Sanjurjo". "The worst reactionaries put together", declared the Bloc's new daily *Adelante*, had not done "as much damage to the Spanish proletariat in the last two and a half years as had the FAI". Anarchist "provocations" and irresponsibility could, the BOC insisted, open the way to fascism. Moreover, there was even the danger of individual anarchists evolving towards fascist positions, as had happened with the former leader of the Madrid FAI, Alvarez de Sotomayor.<sup>72</sup>

Such violent polemic certainly was not just the prerogative of the BOC and the anarchists did not only confine themselves to verbal assaults. Physical attacks by anarchist groups on BOC meetings and individual militants, as occurred during the Catalan elections in November 1932, became only too common. Not surprisingly in such an atmosphere, the Bloc had little success in winning over anarcho-syndicalists to communism. Attempts to differentiate not only between the FAI and the CNT rank and file, but also the "many decent anarchists"<sup>73</sup> made little impact.

In their scathing denunciations of the anarchists, the BOC leaders had seemingly come a long way from their calls two years earlier for the CNT "to seize power". Nevertheless, at the end of 1934 Maurín was to describe the FAI as having occupied between 1931 and 1932 the same place objectively as the Bolsheviks had in 1917. The problem was that *subjectively* the anarchists were a "blind force", the "antithesis of the Bolsheviks", lacking in doctrine, tactics, strategy and leaders.<sup>74</sup> Because of the whole series of defeats that the Catalan CNT suffered at this time, it is easy to see why the dissident communists began not only to dismiss its revolutionary potential but also underestimate the anarcho-syndicalists' hold over the organised working class. The image of the FAI as an unrepresentative minority that exercised a virtual dictatorship over the CNT was understandable. In October 1933, the FAI had, according to its own figures, surprisingly only 1,400 members in Catalonia. However, they were organised into 206 different "affinity groups", perhaps demonstrating the extent of the FAI's

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72. Comité Ejecutivo. Bloque Obrero y Campesino, Federación Comunista Ibérica, "Ante la Huelga General decretada por la FAI" 9.5.33. (IMHB); *La Batalla* 20.4.33, 15.6.33; *Adelante* 18.11.33, 19.11.33.

73. *La Batalla* 7.9.33.

74. Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. pp.104-105.

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influence, despite its numerical weakness.<sup>75</sup> More importantly, it remains obvious that, historically, anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist ideas and methods greatly appealed to much of the Barcelona proletariat. Furthermore, the BOC's tendency to reduce the "evils" of anarchist influence solely to the machinations of the FAI, was clearly wrong, as such beliefs went far beyond the ranks of this small organisation. This underestimation of the depth of support for libertarianism, however vague, turned out to be a costly mistake for the Catalan dissident communists.

The BOC's increased hostility towards the anarchists during 1932 and 1933 was not just a result of what was considered to be the FAI's disastrous tactics. After the Tarragona Conference of June 1932, the battle between the anarchists and dissident communists for control of a number of unions continued inside the Catalan CNT for another year. Having fought and lost in many of the smaller provincial sections of the CNT, the struggle now began seriously to develop in the anarcho-syndicalist stronghold of Barcelona. It was among the *mercantil* workers, mainly shop assistants and lowly paid white collar workers in the commercial sector, that the dissident communists had their strongest base in Barcelona. Even when first organised by the CNT, in 1918, the *Sindicat Mercantil* had proved indifferent to anarchist doctrine.<sup>76</sup> In fact, this whole sector tended to provide a mass urban base for left nationalism. A certain tendency to feel separated from the industrial proletariat on a social level was reciprocated by the anarcho-syndicalists' lack of interest in these workers on the grounds that they were not "true proletarians".

What limited support marxist organisations had in Catalonia often came from within the ranks of this sector. This had particularly been the case of the PCC, many of whose members had been prominent in reorganising the *Sindicat Mercantil* between 1929 and 1930. Once re-established, the union's dissident communist leadership almost immediately began to clash with the anarcho-syndicalists and there had begun a two year long struggle over control of the union. By invoking the "Madrid Agreements" the CNT tried to disown the *Sindicat Mercantil's* leadership because it included electoral candidates such as the former PCC leader, Jordi Arquer. The BOC, in reply,

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75. J.Gomez Casas., *Historia de la FAI* (Madrid 1977) p.157.

76. Arquer, *El proletariat mercantil i la consciencia de clase* (Barcelona 1935) pp.8-9.

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successfully defended the "freedom of tendency" inside the union and refused to accept the CNT's sanctions. The situation was worsened by the anarcho-syndicalists, habit of trying to pack the Sindicat Mercantil's assemblies with workers from other sectors, such as construction, in order to defeat their rivals.<sup>77</sup>

This internal struggle culminated in a tumultuous, and at times violent, assembly in early September 1932 which once again backed the union's dissident communist leadership. The anarcho-syndicalists now set up a rival junta which described itself as the union's "official" leadership. Because the majority of its activists refused to support this new junta, there now effectively existed two Sindicats Mercantils. The BOC-led union was subsequently expelled from the CNT at the Catalan Regional Plenum in March 1933.<sup>78</sup> The rebel Sindicat Mercantil's influence among office and shop workers went beyond its two thousand or so members. The dissident communist union soon provided the leadership of the important movement which involved tens of thousands of *mercantil* workers in the Barcelona area during the next three years.<sup>79</sup> Many of the BOC's cadres were also leaders of the Sindicat Mercantil, thus reflecting the social composition of an important part of the party's base in the Catalan capital.

Parallel to the struggle inside the office and shop workers' organisation, the dissident communists also fought to maintain their influence inside the Barcelona CNT printworkers' union. Here there was an extra division between skilled and unskilled - the former tending to support the BOC and syndicalist elements, the latter the anarchists. While in the Sindicat Mercantil most of the leading communist militants tended to originate from the PCC, in the print industry there had always been a strong FCC-B nucleus. Several well-known Federation members were among the union's leaders when it was formally reconstituted in May 1930.<sup>80</sup>

This influence among skilled print workers reflected the nature of the BOC's base in Barcelona, as did its implantation in the *mercantil* sector. Printers had always played a leading role in the labour movement internationally; in Spain they had been prominent

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77. Interviews with M. Alberich 6.12.84 and M. Sans Orenga 30.1.85.

78. *La Batalla* 8.9.32; *Confederación Regional... Memoria del Pleno Regional... marzo de 1933 Op.cit.* p.20.

79. See pages 320-323.

80. *Treball* 31.5.30.

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among the founders of the PSOE and UGT. Apart from the dissident communists, the Socialists also controlled several small unions in the city's printing industry. Although the majority of organised printers were in the CNT, the existence of an important marxist minority reflects the tendency for skilled workers to be less susceptible to anarchist ideas.

For the next three years, the anarchists and dissident communists intermittently won and lost control of the CNT's printworkers' organisation. Despite the efforts of the anarchists to use the "Madrid Agreements" against various BOC militants who had appeared in electoral lists during 1931, the real struggle for control of the union depended on who could mobilise the most supporters from one assembly to another. By June 1933, the union had two rival juntas each claiming to be the legitimate leadership. One was dominated by the BOC and the other by the anarchists. The Bloc-led junta had already infuriated the CNT by its harsh criticism of the controversial forty-eight hour general strike in May that year.<sup>81</sup> The anarchists, in turn, had angered the BOC by not allowing any discussion in the assemblies where their supporters had been in the majority. Moreover, as in the case of the *Sindicat Mercantil*, the Bloc accused the anarchists of packing these assemblies with workers from other trades.<sup>82</sup>

This situation could not last and eventually the BOC print workers, supported by a number of Treintistas, took the initiative to form a new union. This, they claimed, would be free from any "party interference", "completely democratic", "administered honestly" and open to all printworkers regardless of ideology "as long as they opposed capitalism". The subsequent foundation, in early September 1933, of the *Sindicat d'Indústries Gràfiques i Similars*, rather than a split in the union's ranks, was claimed to represent a "regroupment" forced upon the opposition by the CNT's sectarianism.<sup>83</sup> The anarcho-syndicalists still enjoyed the loyalty of the great mass of Barcelona printworkers, although internal strife, combined with the general decline of the CNT, had taken its toll. By 1933, according to the CNT's own figures, its print union had lost at least half of the 8,000 members it had claimed in 1931.<sup>84</sup> The anarcho-syndicalist union, despite its losses, still greatly outnumbered the newly-formed *Sindicat*

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81. *La Batalla* 8.6.33, 22.6.33.

82. See note 77.

83. *La Batalla* 17.8.33, 14.9.33; *Sindicalismo* 26.8.33, 22.9.33.

84. *Solidaridad Obrera* 8.12.31; *Confederación Regional...*, *Memoria del Pleno...* Op.cit.

d'Indústries Gràfiques i Similars, which had a little over two hundred members a year after its foundation.<sup>85</sup> The importance of the dissident communist-led union lay in its membership's specific strategic weight in the sector. Because it was made up principally of skilled workers, the new union was to prove relatively influential in the city's printing industry.

The most vicious struggle in Barcelona between the FAI and its enemies took place in the textile industry. The biggest single employer in the city, it also provided along with construction and transport, the CNT's most important mass base. Many prominent FAI members were leaders of the textile union. In fact, they virtually regarded it as their personal fief and were therefore particularly sensitive to any opposition. Inevitably, the general malaise that was affecting the CNT by 1933 had its repercussions in this sector. According to its own figures, the union had lost a third of the 30,000 members it had claimed two years previously.<sup>86</sup> As in the Print Union, discontent came to a head over the forty-eight hour general strike of May 1933 after which CNT members in several factories refused to hand over their dues. They had obeyed the strike call for reasons of discipline rather than of conviction. The BOC, which by now had dropped any hope of trying to reform the CNT, took advantage of these protests to set up, together with various Treintistas, a commission to organise a breakaway union.

The new Sindicat de Treballadors de la Indústria Fabril i Textil de Barcelona was formally established in July and had soon recruited some two thousand members.<sup>87</sup> Not surprisingly, the FAI reacted angrily to this encroachment on their territory and during the next four months organised a campaign to destroy the new union. Various leading BOC and Treintista militants were physically attacked. In a number of factories, the CNT even organised strikes to try and force the employers to sack those who dared to join the renegade organisation. Despite anarchist claims that many textile workers had soon returned to the CNT, the new union continued to expand and managed to establish a foothold in various factories by the end of the year. Although still dwarfed

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85. See Appendix Four.

86. See note 84.

87. *Sindicalismo* 23.6.33; *La Batalla* 14.9.33.

by the CNT, it was obviously a thorn in the FAI's side and its existence was symptomatic of the loosening of the anarcho-syndicalists' grip on the workers movement in Barcelona.

At a regional level, the BOC had soon clashed with the anarchists in the rail and power workers' unions. Support for the dissident communists on the railways was limited to local CNT branches in Tarragona and Lérida, where the Bloc had maintained a base since the days of *La Señal*.<sup>88</sup> As in other unions, it was not long before the FAI leadership turned on the opposition, expelling a number of prominent BOC militants. After failing to reverse these expulsions, the Lérida rail union had finally voted in November 1932 to separate from the CNT to form an autonomous organisation. Meanwhile, the Tarragona section had also been expelled from the Confederation for having supported the BOC-influenced Local Union Federation. Hoping to take advantage of the increasing disarray inside the CNT's Rail Workers' Federation - it had lost some fifty percent of its members in Catalonia since 1931 - these two nuclei set out to create a new autonomous union in the region's Northern Railway Company. Although many workers were sympathetic to the dissident communists' positions, they were reluctant to join a new independent union. Yet despite their limited support, the BOC militants went ahead with their plans and, a year later, established the Sindicato Ferroviario del Norte in Lérida. The new organisation soon had four hundred affiliates, but before it could begin to challenge its powerful Socialist and anarchist rivals, it was suppressed following the events of October 1934.<sup>89</sup>

Dissatisfaction with the CNT leadership also existed in the small "Catalan Railways" company in Barcelona, where the union had begun to lose members after the debacle of the January 1932 uprising. The CNT had soon effectively disintegrated in the company and BOC members helped organise a new union, the Sindicat Profesional de Empleats de los Ferrocarrils de Catalunya, which was founded in June 1933 with the support of nearly half the four hundred-strong workforce.<sup>90</sup>

Apart from their influence in this small local company, the dissident communists made little headway among rail workers in the Catalan capital. Not only the CNT, but

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88. See page 37.

89. *El País* 29.11.32; *La Batalla* 20.4.33, 8.6.33, 2.3.34, 30.6.34; *Frente Norte* 1.10.34.

90. *La Batalla* 19.5.32; *Adelante* 6.1.34; Appendix Four.

also the UGT was relatively strong in this sector in Barcelona. The anarcho-syndicalist railwaymen's union, although having lost many of the 8,000 members it claimed in 1931, was still a powerful adversary, while the equivalent Socialist organisation had a membership of 1,807 by 1934.<sup>91</sup>

In contrast to its modest achievements among rail workers, the BOC's intervention in the CNT's Regional Power Workers' Union was far more important. As in many other CNT unions in the provinces, there was a growing discontent with the Barcelona-based anarchist leadership. Moreover, while the power workers union had been seriously weakened in the capital - by August 1933 only some twenty percent paid their dues - outside its organisation had held together.<sup>92</sup> During 1933, its provincial sections began to operate virtually independently of the CNT. Having organised their own Regional Plenum, the rebel power workers union decided to present the employers with a set of demands relating to working conditions. The CNT leadership refused to support these demands, claiming they were "reformist" and similarly denounced the Plenum's decision to form a united front with other unions in the industry.<sup>93</sup>

The provincial sections, with the support of some of the Barcelona membership, decided to ignore such attacks and proceeded to organise their own regional-based Committee. The CNT responded by expelling seventeen subsections which supported the new committee and whose 2,600 members constituted the near total of the union's strength outside of Barcelona. Despite the CNT denouncing the dissidents as "Treintistas", it was the BOC which provided the political leadership, although some Treintistas were involved. In fact, the rebel Committee refused to join the Treintista Opposition Unions because they had accepted the "Madrid Agreements" and were therefore "no different from the FAI". The expelled sections finally organised themselves in early February 1934 into an autonomous union, the *Sindicat Regional de Llum i Força de Catalunya*.<sup>94</sup> The creation of this union boosted the dissident communists' influence in the region, not only because it had few rivals outside of the

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91. Confederación Regional del Trabajo de Cataluña, *Memorias de los comicios de la regional catalana 2-4.8.31* (Barcelona 1931) p.52; "Cens Electoral Social de Catalunya" *Bulletl Oficial de la Generalitat de Catalunya* 26.7.34.

92. *La Batalla* 3.8.33.

93. *ibid*; *Solidaridad Obrero* 10.8.33; re: United Front see pages 139-140.

94. *Adelante* 24.10.32, 12.1.34, 6.2.34, 6.3.34; *Solidaridad Obrero* 30.9.33.

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Catalan capital, but also because of the obvious economic importance of the gas and electricity industries. It was not long before the new power workers organisation made its presence felt.

Elsewhere in Catalonia the BOC's trade union strength continued to grow during 1933. From all three provincial capitals, Gerona, Lérida and Tarragona, came reports of the steady expansion of the Local Federations since their expulsion from the CNT. Similarly, the Bloc began to consolidate its influence in a number of unions in the province of Barcelona. This was particularly the case in Terrassa where, in some ways, a similar process was developing as in the other main industrial centres near Barcelona. Yet here it was the BOC rather than the Treintistas that led the opposition to the locally powerful FAI. As in Barcelona, the dissident communists' main base in Terrassa since the twenties had been the local CNT Printworkers Union and among white collar and shop workers, who were organised in their own autonomous union. The most important breakthrough for the BOC, however, came when it managed to take advantage of the growing discontent with the anarchists among the, mainly female, hosiery workers. This led to the founding, with Treintista support, in June 1933 of the *Sindicat d'Indústries de Gener de Punt*, which "explicitly recognised the principal of trade union democracy and freedom of tendencies".<sup>95</sup> The creation of this union, which had some one and half thousand members, was an important step towards the BOC winning the leadership of a substantial minority of the local trade union movement.

For a year after the expelled unions' Congress in Tarragona, the BOC had officially defended the idea of working inside the CNT. As late as May 1933, *La Batalla* still talked of there being time "to build a great union on the ruins of the CNT".<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, the reality was that there were by now very few possibilities of winning positions inside the CNT. The OSR groups had long since ceased to function and belated calls by the BOC leadership for them to "intensify their propaganda" inside the Confederation were completely hollow. At the BOC's Third Congress (the FCI's First) in June 1933, the party's Organisation Secretary, Miguel Ferrer, reported that many BOC militants had abandoned work in the unions altogether because of the FAI's "intolerable

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95. *La Batalla* 22.6.33; *Vertical* 14.7.33.

96. *La Batalla* 18.5.33.



sectarianism".<sup>97</sup> The whole experience of the last year, particularly in Barcelona, had led, in practice, to the splitting off of various sections of the CNT to form autonomous unions. Whether this was the BOC's formal policy or not, it was quite obvious that by mid-1933 its members were actively encouraging such splits. This had most clearly been the case among the power workers, the Barcelona textile industry and in Terrassa. Apart from anarchist hostility, the BOC's increasing belief in the CNT's inevitable disintegration played an important part in convincing dissident communist activists that new independent trade unions were a viable alternative.

The BOC's Third Congress formalised this change in the party's strategy and proposed the organising of "a broad congress of trade union unity". Accordingly, those unions under dissident communist control now took the initiative to call, in early October 1933, for a "Regional Congress of Trade Unions", whose principal task would be the formation of a "trade union united front" between the various factions of the Catalan workers movement. A united front appeared particularly relevant because not only were there already effectively four organised tendencies in the local trade union movement - the CNT, Treintistas, UGT and BOC - but there also existed a mass of autonomous unions, described by *Adelante* "as the most powerful trade union force" in the region.<sup>98</sup> The recent success of united fronts among both power workers and the *mercantil* sector,<sup>99</sup> the dissident communists argued, showed the great potential of inter-union collaboration.

The Congress, which took place on 23 October, was attended by fifty-three delegates, representing forty-five different unions with a combined membership of 30,000 workers.<sup>100</sup> Apart from those unions which had been present at the Tarragona Congress in June 1932, these were now joined by the UPA of Lérida and a series of unions from Barcelona province. The most important additions were from the Catalan capital, reflecting an important change in the BOC's fortunes. Only four months previously, an Executive Committee report had commented on the party's weakness in the city's trade union movement.<sup>101</sup> Numerically those represented compared favourably with the

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97. *Ibid* 11.5.33.

98. *Ibid* 12.5.33, 25.5.33, 29.6.33, 5.10.33; *Adelante* 24.10.33.

99. See pages 139-140, 141-145.

100. *Adelante* 24.10.33; *La Batalla* 26.10.33; Appendix Four.

101. *La Batalla* 20.4.33.

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Treintistas and the Catalan UGT, but this did not reflect the totality of the BOC's strength because it had members active in a number of other, mostly autonomous, unions.

Significantly, rather than talk abstractly about the need to have unity in action between all tendencies, most delegates favoured some form of organisational unity with other ex-CNT unions as the first step towards re-building the movement. This idea had also been put forward by some delegates at the BOC's Congress, four months previously, where it was rejected as falling into the same "sectarian error" as the FAI, the Treintistas and the PCE. But the day-to-day experiences of many militants had convinced them that an organised grouping outside the CNT was a practical proposition. Moreover, in a number of unions BOC members were by now working closely with the Treintistas. What was needed, many delegates argued, was some form of organisational structure, even if this meant creating a new regional federation of unions. Whatever the outcome, they had to rid themselves of the title "expelled unions" and take on a more affirmative image. It was therefore decided to approach formally the Mataró-based Treintista Regional Committee to organise an interview with its BOC-led counterpart in Lérida. The delegates left the Congress seemingly optimistic that this new alignment in the Catalan trade union movement would soon be consolidated. In particular, the dissident communists hoped that such a convergence of unions outside the CNT would, as the Barcelona printworkers' representative put it, by presenting the working class with a united alternative, help "finish off the FAI".<sup>102</sup>

Thus, by the end of 1933 all the trade unions led by the BOC were grouped outside the CNT. Two factors had converged to convince the dissident communists that it was both possible and necessary to work independently. Firstly, the CNT's degeneration - both numerically and ideologically - had resulted in it being unable not only to fulfil any sort of constructive revolutionary role but also in it becoming an actual obstacle to proletarian victory. Secondly, the dissident communists' growing influence in the unions had encouraged them to believe there now existed the basis for a new trade union current led by themselves. None the less, the BOC leadership's assessment of the CNT resulted in a serious underestimation of the depth of potential support for

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102. *ibid* 29.6.33.

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**anarcho-syndicalism in the Catalan working class. The consequences of this mistaken analysis would become clearer later.<sup>103</sup>**

## **The United Front**

The lack of trade union unity was paralleled by similar divisions at a political level in the working class movement throughout Spain. This problem was worse in Catalonia where the usual rivalries between anarchists, socialists and communists were further complicated by local circumstances. Obviously, if the working class was to carry out the revolutionary role assigned to it by the BOC and other workers' organisations, then this disunity would have to be overcome. Moreover, the apparently favourable situation in which the labour movement had found itself in the first months of the Republic had clearly changed during 1932.

The Spanish revolution had, according to Maurín and the BOC, now entered into a new decisive "third stage".<sup>104</sup> During the first stage, between 1930 and 1931, the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie and the working class had joined together in order to bring down the monarchy. This had led to the transitional and unstable "second stage", in which the petty bourgeoisie had arbitrated. Inevitably this stage was coming to an end the Bloc leader concluded, because the complete instability of the economic, political and social situation meant that any form of stable bourgeois democracy was impossible. As predicted frequently by Maurín since 1929, the petty-bourgeoisie had proven incapable of carrying through the basic tasks of the democratic revolution. There now arose the third stage, where the choice was clearly polarised between revolution or counter-revolution. This was a dichotomy that Maurín had already posed in 1931, although the immediate threat of a reactionary take over did not exist in those first euphoric months of the Republic because the Right was on the defensive. By early 1933, the political situation had undoubtedly changed.

Both the growth in activity and confidence of the Right and the weakness of the Republican government seemed to confirm the BOC's analysis. A deepening crisis,

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103. See pages 299, 307, 310, 315, 342-343.

104. *La Batalla* 27.4.33, 22.6.33; Maurín, "Las etapas de la Revolución Española", *ibid* 21.12.33.

both at home and abroad, severely aggravated the problems faced by the new regime. However, "petty bourgeois republicanism" itself, despite all its weaknesses, would prove more durable than the BOC expected. While the overall dilemma facing Spain at this time was one of revolution or counter-revolution, the subjective factors were far more complicated. For the working masses to impose their will they needed a coherent and accepted revolutionary leadership and this clearly did not exist yet. With its strident propaganda the BOC obviously hoped to overcome this problem in the shortest possible time.

The BOC's forebodings about the dangers of counter-revolution had been brutally confirmed in August 1932 when the head of the Civil Guard, Sanjurjo, attempted to seize power. In fact, the dissident communists had been practically alone in previous weeks in warning about the possibility of such a coup.<sup>105</sup> The Bloc reacted swiftly to Sanjurjo's rebellion, organising demonstrations in Barcelona and other Catalan towns. The energetic reaction of the dissident communists contrasted with that of the CNT in Barcelona, which justified its indifference by its rejection of both the monarchy and the Republic. Only in Seville, the centre of the coup, was there an unprecedented united general strike involving anarcho-syndicalists, Communists and Socialists. In Catalonia, the BOC rapidly distributed a manifesto calling for the summary execution of those generals responsible, the expulsion of all monarchist officers from the army, the disarming of the Sometent and the arming of the people, the completion of the democratic revolution, a Workers and Peasants Government and a revolutionary united front. According to the Bloc, the coup attempt had been possible because of the government's passivity in the face of the increasing activities of counter-revolutionary groups.<sup>106</sup>

The conspiratorial Right suffered a major setback with the failure of Sanjurjo's plan. Nevertheless, the Republic was confronted with a far more serious challenge from the so-called "legalist" Right - principally grouped around Gil Robles' Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Rightist

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105. *La Batalla* 23.6.32.

106. *Ibid* 13.8.32; *Avant* (Lérida) 19.8.32; *L'Espuma* (Gerona) 1.9.32; "El Bloc Obrer i Camperol davant les tentatives dels monàrquics assassins" n.d. and BOC-FCI, "Treballadors" n.d. (Arxiu Històric de Sabadell).

Groups). Through a strategy which became known as "accidentalism", Gil Robles and his supporters aimed to destroy the Republic from within. By obstructing both inside and outside of parliament the Republican administration's attempts at reform, the legalist Right effectively brought the whole legislative process to a standstill during 1933. This growth of the CEDA and similar organisations was paralleled by a new intransigent mood among the employers. In Catalonia this was, in particular, reflected in the aggressive stance taken by the Sant Isidre Institute in the countryside and attempts to re-organise the Sindicatos Libres in Barcelona.

The government's unwillingness or inability to deal with this threat from the Right contrasted with the continuing use of repressive measures against the most militant sections of the working class movement. Legislation designed to control trade unions, and to increase the powers of the police, and the notorious "Law for the Defence of the Republic", were applied with much more vigour than any of the Republic's limited social reforms. Nineteen thirty-three had begun badly for the government, with the massacre of twenty-one peasants in the Andalusian village of Casas Viejas by Republican Assault Guards during the anarchist revolt in January. Both the Right and the anarchists exploited this tragedy to launch even fiercer attacks on the Republican administration. While the BOC leaders condemned the anarchists' tactics as irresponsible and only helping the Right, they were not prepared to justify the state's retaliatory actions. Accordingly, the events of Casas Viejas were depicted by the dissident communist press as the logical outcome of the government's generally repressive policies towards the more radical sections of the working class movement. It was estimated that between April 1931 and July 1933 such policies had resulted in four hundred workers being killed and another 2,000 wounded by the police and army and 9,000 more, mostly CNT members, being imprisoned for political offences.<sup>107</sup>

This change in the political situation meant a corresponding shift in the BOC's orientation. Its analysis of the fundamental problems of the democratic revolution and the need for the working class to seize power remained the same, but it now posed this in a much more defensive manner. Not only was there a greater threat from the Right but the principal revolutionary workers organisation, the CNT, had, from the BOC's

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107. *La Batalla* 13.7.33.

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point of view, failed to provide the masses with the necessary leadership. Even to the extent that by mid-1933, as previously shown, the Bloc was accusing the anarcho-syndicalists of playing an objectively counter-revolutionary role. These developments led the BOC to two basic tactical conclusions. The first amounted to a re-evaluation of the role of the Socialists and the second was the need for a "workers united front".

During the first year of the Republic, the BOC had essentially shared the anarcho-syndicalists' and PCE's view that the Socialist leaders were little better than counter-revolutionaries. The Right, however, saw the PSOE and UGT as propping up a regime which threatened its interests. Accordingly, pressure was growing to remove the Socialists from government, as a first step towards dismantling the Republic itself. By June 1933, the BOC leadership was forced to take this new situation into account. It now saw the need to defend the Socialists from the Right, although it continued its attacks on their collaboration with the regime's "anti-revolutionary policies". More importantly, the dissident communists believed, the PSOE and UGT rank and file was not going simply to abandon the limited gains that had been made since April 1931. The radicalisation of much of the Socialists' base during 1933 confirmed this desire to resist the advances of the Right. Thus, the dissident communists had to develop a strategy that both defended the Socialists against the Right and at the same time attempted to win their supporters over to revolutionary positions. The BOC now raised the demand for a "working class government" and for the exclusion of all "bourgeois ministers". This position did not mean that the working class no longer needed to seize power, but was a recognition that to call for a government based on soviets or similar bodies was "unrealistic" at this stage.<sup>108</sup> In effect, the BOC was calling for an all-Socialist government with the hope that the PSOE leaders would, either by refusing to form such an administration, demonstrate their lack of serious intentions in defending the workers and peasants, or enter into a confrontation with the bourgeoisie. In fact, the demand for an "all-Socialist" administration was soon taken up by the Socialists' militant new left-wing. Meanwhile, harsh criticism of the PSOE's role in the government was still meted out in the dissident communists' press. Nevertheless, the Bloc's change in line

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108. *Ibid* 15.6.33.

**obviously marked a significant break with its earlier position of dismissing the Socialists as little more than "agents of the bourgeoisie".<sup>109</sup>**

Alongside the call for a "working class government" the BOC advocated the formation of a "united front" of all working class organisations to oppose reaction and to advance towards the seizure of state power. The Catalan dissident communists' role in popularising the united front tactic over the following two years was probably their most important contribution to working class politics in the peninsula. The BOC claimed that its conception of the united front was that defended by the CI during the early twenties.<sup>110</sup> Unity in action was to be based on the equality of those involved, combined with the maintenance of ideological independence. Through this mechanism, it was assured that the communists would prove that they were the best defenders of working class interests and hence break the grip of reformism and other non-revolutionary ideas. Unfortunately, from the BOC's point of view, the "official" Communist Parties had discredited the united front tactic with their sectarianism and the idea of the so-called "united front from below", whereby they called upon the non-communist masses to abandon their "treacherous" leaders. According to the Bloc, it was this policy which had played such an important role in Germany in undermining the strength of the working class movement because it had pitted Communists against Social Democrats instead of against the common foe of fascism. In Spain, the dissident communists believed, there was the danger of the FAI, in its fanatical opposition to the Socialists, playing a similarly sectarian role to that played by the German Communist Party.<sup>111</sup>

During 1931 and early 1932, the BOC had talked of the need for a "revolutionary united front" between itself and the CNT,<sup>112</sup> but this had been little more than a propaganda exercise. The anarcho-syndicalists at this stage dismissed such overtures as merely "political manoeuvres". In fact, by late 1932, the only workers' organisations seriously to defend the united front tactic were the BOC and the Trotskyist ICE. The relative weakness of these two groups made their defence of united action all the more pressing if they hoped to spread their influence. In Catalonia, given the serious

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109. re: radicalisation of the Socialists and BOC's attitude, see pages 148-150.

110. Maurín, "La necesidad de la unificación nacional e Internacional ..." Op.cit.; *La Batalla* 12.1.33; "Tesis Frente Unico" *ibid* 18.5.33; *ibid* 17.8.33.

111. *ibid* 28.9.33.

112. See page 51.

fragmentation of the local working class movement, pro-unity sentiments were much stronger, at least among those sectors outside the CNT. It was within this context that the BOC was to take a number of initiatives during 1933 which helped to make the idea of the united front popular.

The first proposal by the Bloc to form a broad based workers front had been made on the eve of Sanjurjo's abortive coup.<sup>113</sup> This had been ignored by the rest of the labour movement, but a more limited proposal some months later for united action over unemployment got a better response. As elsewhere in the world, unemployment was rising steadily in Spain by the early thirties, complicating further the social and economic problems faced by the Republic. While the level of unemployment in the peninsula was not as high as some other European countries or the USA, the social conditions of the unemployed were arguably worse. Less than a quarter of the unemployed in Catalonia received any form of employment insurance. In Spain in general, there was no programme of public works and few welfare provisions, thereby creating "a desperate situation in many proletarian homes".<sup>114</sup> In Catalonia, the worst hit area was Barcelona, where fifteen percent of the working population, some 60,000 people, were out of work by mid-1933.<sup>115</sup>

Since its foundation the BOC had favoured organising among the unemployed. In contrast, the main working class organisation in Catalonia, the CNT, had paid little attention to the question and dismissed such basic demands as that of a subsidy for the jobless as "reformist", because it meant demanding "state intervention". The German experience, where many of the unemployed, embittered and demoralised had turned to fascism, demonstrated even more clearly to the BOC and others that some form of action was urgently needed. The first practical step was taken in September 1932 when the BOC, in conjunction with the ICE, ECPP, some anarchists and non-aligned militants, set up the Barcelona Unemployed Workers Council.<sup>116</sup> At the same time, the Bloc called on all workers' organisations in Catalonia to take part in a joint conference over the question. This led to a series of meetings during the autumn of 1932 involving

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113. *La Batalla* 28.7.32.

114. *Fam* 10.2.33.

115. *La Batalla* 1.6.33; J. Hortelà, *El desarrollo industrial de Cataluña* (Barcelona 1968) vol.2., p.103.

116. *La Batalla* 9.2.33.



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principally the BOC and the Unió Socialista de Catalunya (USC), the unions under their respective influence and a number of autonomous unions.

After some delay, the conference finally took place on 12 February 1933 with the support of forty-seven different unions, representing around 35,000 workers.<sup>117</sup> The CNT had ignored repeated calls to take part in the Conference and its domination of the industrial proletariat in Barcelona was clearly illustrated by the lack of delegates from the city's manual unions. The twenty or so unions of this type present were all from outside the capital and mostly led by BOC members or sympathisers. Even so, the Conference did show that there was a small section of the workers movement, albeit predominantly white-collar, which was prepared to overcome some of its differences and work together. The interest shown in the Conference's decision to establish a "Workers Front against Unemployment" helped confirm the popularity of joint action. By April 1933, 131 different workers organisations had declared their support for the "Front".<sup>118</sup>

Despite this apparent widespread support for the Workers Front against Unemployment, problems arose due to the BOC's dominance of the Conference and its programme. Several white collar unions under USC influence expressed their disquiet about the "plainly demagogic and unrealisable" nature of the majority of the slogans raised. Moreover, the important Barcelona office and shop workers' association, the Centre Autonomista de Dependents del Comerç i de Indústria (CADCI) actually withdrew its support for the Front, because of what this union's pro-ERC leadership described as its "extremism".<sup>119</sup> This discontent might explain why the Workers Front remained effectively a "paper body". Activity around the unemployed continued to be sustained mainly by the BOC.

The programme adopted by the Conference was essentially that which the Bloc-led Unemployed Workers Council (or "Union" as it became in April 1933) had been defending in previous months. Among other things, it called for a subsidy to be paid

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117. *Ibid* 16.2.33; 23.2.33; It is possible to identify 37 of those unions present with a membership of around 30,000 using *Lluita* (FET) 15.9.33 and the "Cens Electoral Social..." (1934) *Op.cit.*

118. *La Batalla* 13.4.33.

119. *Acció* March 1933; *Lluita* (FET) March 1933; *Justícia Social* 18.2.33; 18.3.33.

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to all unemployed out of a special taxation of the rich; the ending of the eviction of the unemployed who could not pay their rent; a six-hour working day; the municipal authorities to take on the responsibility for clothing the unemployed and feeding their children; and for the expropriation by the Generalitat of "the means of production and distribution that were inactive" and their handing over to the workers' organisations. To organise a campaign around these demands, it was necessary, the Conference had declared, on the one hand, for those with work to support those without and, on the other, for the unemployed themselves to oppose any attempt to use them as "scab" labour.<sup>120</sup> In pursuing these demands, Unemployed Workers Unions in Barcelona, Lérida and other towns organised various actions to put pressure on the Generalitat and the municipal authorities. Some of these protests resulted in clashes with the police, who eventually raided and sacked the Union's offices in the capital.<sup>121</sup>

The Workers Front against Unemployment at least helped to popularise the idea of the united front at a propaganda level, even if its practical activities were limited. Of far more political importance in coming months was a similar united initiative taken against the threat of fascism. The dreadful significance of Hitler's appointment as German chancellor in January 1933 had not been missed by the BOC. Maurín had already warned, in September 1930, that the triumph of fascism in Germany "would have immediate repercussions in the whole of Europe".<sup>122</sup> With the exception of the Trotskyists, the BOC was more or less alone in immediately making comparisons between the conditions that had produced German fascism and the situation in Spain. As in Germany, a worsening economic situation opened up the possibilities for fascist or similar counter-revolutionary movements. A divided labour movement, torn between reformist socialism and anarchist adventurism, the BOC pointed out, hindered a united working class response to this threat. In addition, the failure of social democracy in power and the subsequent demoralisation of the proletariat was compounded in Spain by the anarchists' exploitation of this situation in order to show that "socialism" itself had failed. There also existed a discontented petty-bourgeoisie which was faced with economic ruin. The abysmal failure of the Republican regime, the Bloc observed, to carry through the democratic revolution and the lack of a

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120. *La Batalla* 12.1.33, 16.2.33, 13.4.33.

121. *Ibid* 15.12.32, 5.1.33, 18.5.33.

122. Maurín, *Los hombres...* Op.cit. p.40.

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revolutionary working class alternative meant there was the danger that the middle classes could be drawn towards fascism. Fascism also needed a "thoroughly reactionary bourgeoisie" and the absence, or death, of bourgeois liberalism. The existence historically of these two pre-conditions in Spain seemed evident to the BOC. Finally, the human material necessary to provide fascism with its "hordes" was potentially to be found among the unemployed, through to the Carlist militia, the *requetés*, and other Rightist para-military and youth organisations.

Nevertheless, there were at least three important factors, highlighted by the BOC, which differed from the German experience. Firstly, the working class had not suffered a major defeat, so the possibility of organising resistance to the Right remained. Secondly, the petty bourgeoisie, despite its growing problems, had yet to turn its back on bourgeois democracy. Thirdly, there still did not exist a mass fascist party. The principal focus for the authoritarian Right was the CEDA. Although many of its leaders admired Hitler and its popular support was growing, particularly among Catholic peasants in Castile, its conservatism and clericalism prevented it from developing into a dynamic mass party like the Nazis. Therefore, *La Batalla* declared in March 1933, the counter-revolution in Spain was more likely to be, "a resurrection in different circumstances of classic Carlism, modernised of course, with Mussolini-ite and Hitlerite influences". Given historical circumstances this counter-revolution, the Bloc believed, was most likely to take power in the peninsula through the classic *pronunciamiento* or military coup.<sup>123</sup> The military uprising against the Republic in 1936 would tragically confirm the dissident communists' evaluation of where the real counter-revolutionary threat lay in Spanish society. This analysis of the conditions necessary for fascism to develop in the peninsula was one of the few made by Spanish marxists at the time. Apart from the BOC, only the Trotskyists, leaning heavily on their leader's writings, really treated the question with any seriousness at a theoretical level. However, concern about the spread of fascism internationally, and the general threat posed by the Right was not the prerogative of the dissident communists alone. How to deal with this danger in Catalonia was discussed at an informal meeting between the BOC and USC in early 1933.

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123. *La Batalla* 23.3.33, 27.4.33.

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The USC wanted to go beyond just a tactical agreement to work towards the unification of the two parties.<sup>124</sup> The *Unió Socialista* was the dissident communists' principal rival at a political level in Catalonia, its main base being among white collar workers and certain skilled sections in Barcelona. It claimed to have a membership of over three thousand at this time, although the BOC calculated that this never rose above five hundred during the Republic.<sup>125</sup> The idea of unifying the two parties was of little interest to the BOC, which generally dismissed the USC as a "petty bourgeois" organisation that acted as a "left face" for the ERC. Instead, the BOC proposed the immediate establishment of a "united front against fascism", not only between these two parties but involving all other Catalan workers' organisations. It was decided that the call for such a united front could best be made through the BOC-influenced *Ateneu Enciclopèdic Popular*, rather than any particular party, and thereby have a broader appeal. A subsequent meeting in late March 1933 in the *Ateneu* of representatives of the BOC, USC and syndicalist FSL established a "Workers Alliance against Fascism".<sup>126</sup> The only discordant voice was that of the PCE's Catalan section, which, as at the Unemployment Conference some weeks before, denounced the proceedings as basically a "counter-revolutionary" manoeuvre by the BOC to divert the masses away from the "true" Communist-led united front. Instead, the Communist Party took up the CI's call of 6 March for a "united front from below" to combat fascism.

Without the CNT, of course, any united front in Catalonia would be confined to a minority of the workers movement. None the less, the involvement in joint political activity of Treintista militants, through the FSL, was an important step towards broader unity. Although this "Workers Alliance" did not move beyond being "a propaganda committee sustained in everyway by the BOC",<sup>127</sup> it set another important precedent and helped the strategy of the united front gain further credibility. The Alliance's first activity, of any importance, was an impressive rally of 8,000 people in Barcelona in late July 1933, which was addressed by BOC, USC and Treintista leaders.<sup>128</sup> This was

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124. Alba, *Dos revolucionarios...* Op.cit. p.170.

125. J. L. Martín i Ramos, *Els orígens del PSUC* (Barcelona 1977) pp.121-123; *Front* 29.10.32; *La Batalla* 29.5.36.

126. *Ibid* 24.3.34; "Mont-Fort", *Alianza Obrera* (Barcelona 1935). pp.11-15.

127. *Ibid* p.16.

128. *La Batalla* 3.8.33.

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followed by a series of similar meetings throughout Catalonia during the next three months, as well as the establishment of a number of local united front committees.

During the summer of 1933 the BOC was the mainstay of these committees, as it was in attempts to disrupt "fascist" activity in Catalonia in general. The term "fascist" was liberally applied to all counter-revolutionaries, be they Carlists, the Lliga or the Sant Isidre Institute. "Direct action" became quite common and right-wing meetings in a series of towns fell victim of BOC-led assaults. One of the bloodiest incidents took place in the Bloc's stronghold of Balaguer, in Lérida, where a young party member was killed during a clash with two hundred Carlists. A general strike called in protest on the following day, paralysed the provincial capital, where a demonstration of two thousand fought with police and attacked the Lliga's headquarters.<sup>129</sup> The fact that it was Carlists who were responsible for the Balaguer events, and not the Lliga, made little difference to the demonstrators who obviously identified them as part of the same counter-revolutionary threat. The BOC was also active in initiating a campaign against German enterprises in Barcelona that financed the Nazis. Apart from publishing their names and addresses, young BOC militants organised direct assaults on such businesses' premises.<sup>130</sup> By their generally offensive tactics the BOC hoped not only to hinder the Right's attempt to organise but also to alert Catalan workers in general to the danger they faced. Whether their enemies were "fascists", in the classic sense, was of little importance because it was quite clear to the dissident communists that the counter-revolution in Spain could take on a number of guises. This violent hostility to the Right would soon become generalised throughout the peninsula as events at home and abroad confirmed the magnitude of the threat confronting the workers movement.

Two more practical examples of the "united front" during autumn 1933, one of power workers, the other among shop and office (*mercantil* or commercial sector) workers, further demonstrated the relevance of the tactic to many activists. In both cases, the BOC was the determining factor in their success. Power workers had been in the forefront of the strike wave in Catalonia in the years after the First World War. Yet since the famous 1919 strike in the Anglo-Canadian hydro-electrical company "La Canadiense",<sup>131</sup> these workers had been unable to organise any serious resistance to the

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129. *Ibid* 14.9.33, 21.9.33; *El País* 12.9.33.

130. *La Batalla* 30.3.33; Interview with W. Solano 17.7.85.

131. See page 15.

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employers. Fed up with both endless and seemingly pointless negotiations with the companies and anarchist ineffectiveness, BOC members in the CNT power workers union successfully proposed the formation of a united front in order to overcome the divisions in the workers ranks. The CNT reacted violently to this decision, expelling those who supported it.<sup>132</sup> Undeterred, the rebel union signed a pact with the UGT and the principal white collar unions in mid-September 1933. Only a minority of the CNT in Barcelona remained loyal to the anarchists and outside the Catalan capital the United Front grouped together over 5,000 workers, which amounted to nearly all the remaining unionised sections in the industry.

For the first time, workers from the three gas and electricity companies in Catalonia presented a united set of demands to the employers. Realising that negotiations alone would be unlikely to win concessions, the United Front began to prepare openly, through workplace assemblies, to come out on strike. Objectively, the situation seemed favourable. The Generalitat, which had only recently been handed over responsibility for labour relations by Madrid, was anxious to avoid a strike in such a key sector on the eve of a general election, called for 19 November, and put pressure on the employers to cede to the workers' demands. Other industries, particularly textiles, alarmed by the power workers new-found militancy, also encouraged the gas and electricity companies to adopt a conciliatory attitude. Within ten days the dispute was settled. Without having to go on strike the workforce had won its principal demand for a forty-four hour week along with other improvements, including a general wage rise. That a previously demoralised and badly organised group of workers could win such a victory without even recourse to industrial action was very significant. Furthermore, this was achieved without the support of the supposedly all-powerful CNT, which not only denounced the United Front as "semi-workers" and "a handful of toffs" but even refused to accept the benefits gained by its campaign. According to the BOC's new daily *Adelante*, the United Front, despite being based on the unionised minority, enjoyed the support of ninety percent of the industry's 28,000 workers - something which seemed to prove beyond doubt the efficacy of unity in action.<sup>133</sup>

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132. See page 125.

133. *La Batalla* 5.10.33, 3.11.33, 24.3.34; *Adelante* 15.10.33, 24.10.33, 27.10.33, 28.10.33, 6.3.34; *Solidaridad Obrero* 28.9.33; *Comercio y Navegación* October 1933; "Cens Electoral Social..." (1934) Op.cit.

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Where the united front tactic proved most effective was among Barcelona's *mercantil* workers. Numbering over 80,000 - nearly twenty percent of the city's active population - this great amorphous mass of shop assistants and clerks had, like elsewhere in the world, generally been impervious to militant trade unionism. Many had a petty bourgeois mentality and image that meant they often seemed closer to the middle classes than their fellow workers.<sup>134</sup> Yet their working conditions were usually miserable and frequently inferior to those of industrial workers. Long hours and low pay were the norm. Worse still was the hated system of "living in" on the premises, often in the most degrading conditions. Women, widely employed in this sector, generally had to put up with an even more humiliating situation.<sup>135</sup>

To organise these workers was no easy task, not only because of their mentality, but also because many were employed in tiny and isolated establishments, particularly in retailing. Those organisations that had traditionally existed in the sector had been more like professional associations than unions. The most important of these was the Centre Autonomista de Dependents de Comerç i Indústria (CADCI), a bulwark of Catalan nationalism, which was formed in 1903 and dedicated itself as much to cultural and sporting activities as to defending its members' working conditions. Virtually the only militant trade union had been the dissident communist-led Sindicat Mercantil, which had 1,800 members by early 1933.<sup>136</sup>

The advent of the Republic created the conditions to break the conservatism of the majority of *mercantil* workers. They certainly were not immune to the general whirlwind of social unrest that gripped the country and as with other workers their level of unionisation increased significantly.<sup>137</sup> Agitation had begun immediately, especially among shopworkers, to end "living-in", to secure Sunday as an automatic rest-day and to gain a general rise in salaries, which had been at the same level since 1921. Success was limited due to the fragmented nature of the office and shop workers' struggle and their dependence on the joint arbitration committee, the Jurado Mixto. Much time was wasted in this body in fruitless discussions with the employers, leading to a growing sense

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134. See page 120.

135. E. J. Ferrer, "El problema dels empleats", *Humanitat* 21.10.33.

136. *La Batalla* 20.4.34.

137. A. Durgan, "La Huelga General Mercantil de 1933" *La Història i els Joves Historiadors Catalans* (Barcelona 1986) p.405.

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of frustration among the *mercantil* workers' organisations involved. To many activists it was increasingly obvious that some form of united struggle had to be organised and one that did not rely on the Jurado Mixto.

As early as 1930, the Sindicat Mercantil had suggested the creation of one united union for the sector, but despite some interest, most office and shop workers' organisations feared they would be dominated by the CNT, so the idea did not prosper. Likewise, a proposal in June 1933 by the Federació d'Empleats i Tecnicos (Employees and Technicians), which already grouped together over 20,000 workers in all Catalonia, to form a united front in the *mercantil* sector, failed to be taken up. Heavily influenced by the USC and the CADCI, the Federació d'Empleats i Tecnicos, according to one former leader of the Sindicat Mercantil, was too moderate to inspire the confidence needed for a serious fight.<sup>138</sup> This role now fell to the BOC-led union. The fact that the Sindicat Mercantil had broken with the CNT, on the one hand, and had never been compromised by participating in the Jurado Mixto, on the other, meant it enjoyed a certain prestige among the most militant elements in the sector. In addition, by 1933, BOC militants were also influential in the small, but active, grocery workers' union, the Unió Ultramarina, and the customs and excise workers organisation. Outside of Barcelona, the dissident communists led *mercantil* organisations in Lérida, Sabadell, Terrassa and other important centres.

The Sindicat Mercantil's opportunity came with the collapse in June 1933 of negotiations in the Jurado Mixto for the wholesale sector, after two years of trying to wring concessions out of the employers. At the initiative of the Sindicat Mercantil and after long and sometimes difficult negotiations, often under pressure from their respective rank and files, nine different Barcelona unions came together to form a "United Front" in August 1933. These unions had a combined membership of some 18,000 and represented the majority of unionised workers in the *mercantil* sector in the Catalan capital. The most important organisation involved, at least numerically, was the CADCI, which had around 10,000 members at this time.<sup>139</sup>

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138. M. Sans Orenga, *Els Treballadors Mercantils dins el Moviment Obrer Català* (Barcelona 1975) pp.125-126, 161; *Lluita* (FET) July 1933; *Associació d'Empleats i Tecnicos* September 1933.

139. *Lluita* (FET) 15.9.33; "Cens Electoral Social" 1934 Op.cit.; See Appendix Four



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The Sindicat Mercantil was convinced that only strike action would force the employers' hand. Given the heterogeneity of these office and shop workers and their lack of practical trade union experience, special tactics would be needed if a united movement was to be built. It was decided first to present a new set of demands for the wholesale sector, the most numerous, to be followed by the weaker retailing and food-suppliers' sectors. Confident that the Jurado Mixto would fail to meet their demands, the Sindicat Mercantil hoped the experience would help convince the great mass of employees of the need to come out on strike. Intervention in the Jurado Mixto represented an important shift in the BOC's tactics. Prior to 1933, the dissident communists had always shared the anarcho-syndicalists' disdain for these arbitration committees, denouncing them as a form of "class collaboration" and an attempt to "domesticate the proletariat". Even though it was, as Jordi Arquer declared, against their "primitive beliefs", it proved a useful tactic that the dissident communists would soon repeat. Negotiations were backed-up by mass mobilisations in the street, in which Arquer, as leader of the Sindicat Mercantil, was clearly the main protagonist.

As was expected, these talks failed, mainly because the employers did not take the threat of a strike seriously. This was a costly mistake. On Monday 13 November the strike began in the great majority of shops and commercial establishments. The same day, eager to diffuse the situation as soon as possible given the imminent general elections, the Generalitat invited both the workers and the owners to take part in discussions. Taken aback by the strike's unexpected support, the employers now tried to divide the United Front by offering to accept most of the demands put forward by the wholesale section, while leaving the retail and food-supply workers until later. The United Front's leaders initially agreed to put this compromise solution to the rank and file because the Generalitat Labour Councillor, Martí Barrera, convinced them that the FAI was intending to exploit the situation to launch a revolutionary general strike.

However, the workers after having waited so long were not now prepared to call off their action without an agreement that applied to all sections. A massive and enthusiastic assembly on the same evening convinced their leaders to have no truck with Barrera's pact. Instead, the strike would continue and include administrative and

food-supply workers, who had initially been excluded so as not to alienate the public. The strike now became total and most of the city's commercial life ground to a halt. Banking and insurance workers prepared to join the strike, which now spread to the nearby towns of Cornellá and Badalona. Outside of Barcelona, shop and office workers in Lérida, Sabadell and Terrassa offered to come out in solidarity. Clashes with the police multiplied as groups of pickets, usually organised and supplemented by the BOC's "Action Groups", made sure the more reticent establishments closed their doors.<sup>140</sup> The ERC now tried to undermine the strike, first by denouncing it as an "electoral manoeuvre" by the BOC<sup>141</sup> and then by trying to set up direct negotiations between the Esquerra-led CADCI and the Generalitat, thereby excluding the United Front. However, the growing influence inside the CADCI of a leftist opposition group, led by members of the radical nationalist Estat Català - Partit Proletari, meant the ERC was unable to carry out its plans.

Confronted by such a determined movement, the Generalitat decided to issue a decree in favour of the retail and food-supply workers, despite the employers' opposition. A whole range of improvements had been won, including general wage rises, the eight hour day, the ending of "living-in", an ambitious "family subsidy" scheme and a "no-victimisation" clause.<sup>142</sup> Notwithstanding the employers' refusal to accept the decree because they claimed it was outside the Generalitat's area of responsibility, the United Front decided to call off the strike while it was still strong and take advantage of the Generalitat's action.

From a trade union point of view, the united front tactic had been spectacularly successful. Despite the unions' weakness, by uniting they had managed to mobilise some 80,000, mostly unorganised and often conservative, workers. "It would be necessary", commented *Adelante*, "to return to 1919-1920 to find such a coherent movement as the united front, so well led, so firm at the base and with such surprising results".<sup>143</sup> Not only had they achieved a famous victory, but, like the power workers, without the CNT, which although nominally supporting the strike spent most of its time

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140. Coll and Pané Op.cit. pp.31-33; Alba, *La Alianza Obrera* (Madrid 1978) p.80; Interview with C. Rosa 27.9.85.

141. *Humanitat* 16.11.33.

142. *Butlletí Oficial de la Generalitat* 17.11.33, 18.11.33.

143. *Adelante* 18.11.33.

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heaping abuse on the leaders of the United Front. Where far more powerful groups of workers under anarcho-syndicalist leadership had been defeated, the *mercantil* workers had been successful. The lesson was not lost on many workers tired of what was seen as the CNT's "irresponsible" and wasteful tactics. The effects of the strike cannot be seen in exclusively economic terms, however. They also lay in the political radicalisation of many workers who had traditionally provided an important part of the urban base for moderate Catalan nationalism.

The influence of both marxist and radical nationalist groups, albeit still among only a minority of *mercantil* workers, increased as a result of this strike. Illustrative of this process was the taking over of the CADCI's leadership by the leftist opposition group in August 1934, hence ending thirty years of domination by moderate nationalists of the organisation. Of course, the radicalisation of part of the ERC's base cannot be seen as solely a product of the strike. The Esquerra's role in the Catalan government was inevitably more restricted than it had been when the party was in opposition. Consequently, some of the ERC's more militant supporters had become disillusioned with its performance in the Generalitat. In addition, the general political, social and economic crisis in Spain was producing an increasingly radicalised mood among the masses.

The BOC's role as the prime mover of the various united front initiatives in Catalonia during 1933 undoubtedly boosted its prestige. The Right's victory in the November elections and the growing menace of fascism throughout Europe soon led the majority of workers' organisations to address themselves to the thorny problem of working class unity. Catalonia was an example for the rest of Spain. Unity in action appeared the only solution to many militants to overcome the labour movement's historic divisions. Once such unity became a real possibility, so the BOC stood to gain politically from its tireless work in favour of the united front.

The *mercantil* strike took pace only days before the crucial general elections of 19 November and the tense political situation undoubtedly convinced the authorities of the need to finish the dispute as soon as possible. A variety of factors had finally forced the Republican-Socialist government to resign and call elections. Parliamentary obstruction by the Right, and many deputies' subsequent boredom and frustration, was so great that, for instance, when it was time to vote in August 1933 on the draft law on rural leases a quorum could not even be found. The Right's struggle against the government, in particular, its agrarian reform, progressive labour legislation and attempts to undermine the power of the church, was not just confined to inside the walls of parliament. In southern Spain, for example, local governors and the Civil Guard effectively collaborated with the landowners to prevent the agrarian reform being put into practice. Such obstruction was combined with a massive propaganda campaign by the Right to convince the more conservative sections of the masses of the evils of the "atheistic and marxist" government. A further blow had come in April 1933 when the partial municipal elections resulted in a majority of anti-government councillors being elected.

In addition to external pressures, the Republican-Socialist coalition was racked by growing internal dissent. Apart from splits inside the left Republican parties, many Socialists had become disillusioned with their party's collaboration in the government. Notwithstanding their differences with the anarcho-syndicalists, rank and file UGT members found the authorities' repressive methods increasingly hard to stomach. As a result, the PSOE's deputies had pressed during the first half of 1933 for the repeal of the draconian Law for the Defense of the Republic.

Despite winning a vote of confidence in parliament in early September 1933, a right-wing victory in the elections to the Tribunal of Constitutional Guarantees proved a death blow for the government. The Republic's President, Niceto Alcalá Zamora, had already withdrawn his confidence from the Republican-Socialist administration during the summer because of the growing opposition of more conservative Republicans and his own dislike of aspects of its religious legislation. He now took advantage of this

latest defeat to call on the Radical Party leader, Alejandro Lerro, to form a new government. At the same time the Socialists finally announced the end of their alliance with the left Republicans. Lerro, however, lacked the necessary support to govern and throughout September he kept parliament closed rather than face defeat. When parliament was finally re-opened on 2 October, the new government received an immediate vote of no confidence. A stop-gap all-Republican administration was now set up to preside over the forthcoming elections.

The BOC's leaders had been predicting the demise of the Republican-Socialist government for some time, so its final debacle came as no surprise to them. The petty bourgeois government, which "had come to power as the result of a revolution", which it had then proceeded to hold back, had finally been removed. It had satisfied nobody. Its demagogy, the BOC claimed had only served to disillusion many of its middle class supporters who were moving increasingly towards reactionary positions. Only the counter-revolution would benefit from this situation. The dissolution of Parliament asked for by Sanjurjo just over a year earlier *La Batalla* stated, was now a reality.<sup>144</sup> The BOC's dire warnings about the political weakness of the petty bourgeois Republican parties now seemed to have been confirmed.

From the BOC's point of view, the overall political situation on the eve of the elections was less favourable for the working masses than it had been in 1931. None the less, the workers' and peasants' movements "still showed a great vitality" and could yet, the dissident communists believed, impose their own revolutionary solution on the course of events. Certainly the level of working class combativity was higher than ever, the number of days lost through strike action in 1933 was three times that of 1931.<sup>145</sup> Because of the employers' offensive, both politically against the Socialists and economically against those gains made by workers since the beginning of the Republic, most strikes tended to be tough defensive actions. Catalonia was no exception to this rule, although the rise in strike activity was less dramatic than in some other parts of the peninsula. The CNT, though weakened, still instigated a whole number of stoppages during 1933, particularly in Barcelona. Strike activity also increased outside the

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144. *La Batalla* 31.8.33, 12.10.33.

145. Tuñón de Lara, *El movimiento obrero...* Op.cit. vol.III p.171.

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Catalan capital, with the BOC being heavily involved in a series of disputes throughout the region.

The most significant developments in the workers' movement, however, were taking place outside of Catalonia. Important sections of the Socialist Party, principally inside the UGT and the Socialist Youth organisation, the Federación de Juventudes Socialistas (FJS), had begun to move sharply to the left by the summer of 1933. This radicalisation was partly due to the changing nature of the Socialists' base. A mass of urban, and above all, rural workers had flooded into the UGT during the last two years. This growth in membership was common to all working class organisations at this time, but the UGT had also benefited from state patronage due to the position of its General Secretary, Largo Caballero, as Labour Minister. In particular, the nature of the Socialists' support changed most dramatically with the influx of hundreds of thousands of landless labourers from Southern Spain into the UGT Land Workers Federation, the Federación Nacional de Trabajadores de la Tierra (FNTT). The other principal cause of this radicalisation was the Socialists' gradual disillusionment with their collaboration in government with the Republicans. This lurch to the left was above all typified in the revolutionary phrasemongering of the formerly moderate and life-long trade union bureaucrat Largo Caballero, who was soon the undisputed leader of the Socialist left. His new-found leftism reflected the pressure of an increasingly militant rank and file. Throughout the summer, and on into the election campaign, the more radical Largo Caballero's speeches the better they were received. Rejecting any further collaboration with the Republicans, in or out of government, he made it clear that if legality continued to hinder the Socialists' advance then they would "by-pass bourgeois democracy and proceed to the revolutionary conquest of power..."<sup>146</sup> Not that it was just their failure in government that had led to this left turn by Caballero and other Socialists, but also the impunity with which the Right, particularly the CEDA, was mobilising against the Republic. The "threat of fascism" was matched by the Socialists with the "threat" of launching the revolution.

By mid-1933, the BOC was taking the Socialists a lot more seriously than two years previously. Its criticisms of the PSOE, although still hard, had mellowed considerably.

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146. F. Largo Caballero, *Discursos a los trabajadores* (Barcelona 1979) p.119.

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Following the fall of the Republican-Socialist government, the Bloc pointed to the three major mistakes which the Socialists had committed while in office. Firstly, they had failed to take advantage of the favourable circumstances created by the defeat of Sanjurjo's coup attempt and the temporary setback this represented for the Republic's enemies. According to the BOC, the Socialists should have taken a more radical stance in order to have pushed the political situation decisively to the left. Instead, the opposite had happened and the Republic found itself more and more on the defensive. Secondly, the PSOE had rejected a genuine proportional electoral system which would have guaranteed a substantial working class minority in parliament capable of obstructing any Right-wing government. The system accepted with Socialist blessing allowed a winning list with a minimum of forty percent of the votes cast to take eighty percent of the seats available in any given constituency. This system heavily favoured the formation of electoral blocks and, the dissident communists argued, would probably mean that a new government would have a strong reactionary majority. Thirdly, the PSOE had insisted on defending the Constituent Cortes (parliament) at any cost when it could satisfy no-one. The BOC leadership was optimistic that the Socialists could have used their influence both inside and outside parliament to have converted this body into a "revolutionary convention" instead of subordinating themselves to the Republican parties.<sup>147</sup> The PSOE's indecisiveness could not have surprised the dissident communists, so this critique of its performance in government could only have been aimed at "educating" the Socialists' base.

Despite this condemnation of the PSOE's performance in government, the BOC leaders were well aware of the importance of the left-turn by many of the Socialists' supporters. Largo Caballero's speeches were warmly welcomed by the Bloc's press, although it was recognised that they were part of an attempt by the UGT leader to maintain control over his rank and file. The BOC was also forced to admit that if the Socialists as a whole had not been discredited in the eyes of many workers by this period in power, it was because there was "no communist party capable of taking advantage of their complicity in murdering the revolution". That said, the situation now required all workers' organisations, the dissident communists stated, to stand beside the Socialists "against the blows of the Right", while at the same time "mobilise the masses" to

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147. *La Batalla* 12.10.33.

pressurise any future Socialist government when it did not carry out its promises. This way, the BOC believed, that the masses would learn through practice, rather than "hot air and insults", the inadequacies of reformism.<sup>148</sup> By placing demands on the Socialists, instead of just denouncing them, the BOC leadership showed clearly that it had begun to understand the importance of what was happening inside this sector of the workers movement.

The BOC's relationship with the Socialists, concretely with the UGT, at a practical level was, until 1933, somewhat ambiguous. This was due both to the dissident communists' hostility to the Socialists in general and to the overwhelming influence of the CNT in Catalonia compared to the UGT. Since 1931, the Bloc had formally, at least, defended the idea of working inside the Socialist unions in certain cases but this had had few repercussions in practice. The limited growth of the Catalan UGT, which between 1931 and 1933 doubled its membership to 36,000,<sup>149</sup> was generally seen by the BOC as a negative development and a result of the anarcho-syndicalists' negligence. By the summer of 1932, with their growing difficulties inside the CNT and the beginnings of a thaw in their attitude towards the Socialists, the dissident communists had begun to prepare the ground for a more serious orientation towards the UGT. The BOC now pointed to the fact that although the UGT was a reformist organisation, many of its members "wanted the revolution as much as anyone else" and it was necessary not to "confuse the base with the union's leaders". "Winning the leadership of the UGT masses" became one of the dissident communists' declared aims.<sup>150</sup> Even so, the attitude of many Bloc militants towards the Socialist unions remained ambivalent. Miguel Tuffet, one of the BOC's trade union leaders in Lérida, could write, in May 1933, that it was necessary to "use all measures to stop the growth of reformist unions in Catalonia", although he added that his party had to "...examine every case carefully... the fact that a worker was in the UGT (did not) mean he (was) a traitor".<sup>151</sup>

The BOC's position in relation to the UGT was finally clarified at the dissident communists' Congress in June 1933. Changes inside the Socialist union itself had

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148. Gorkín, "Posición del socialismo español" *ibid.* 31.8.33, 7.9.33, 28.9.33.

149. *Cataluña Obrera* 31.3.33.

150. *La Batalla* 9.6.32, 21.7.32, 28.7.32, 13.10.32.

151. *ibid* 5.5.33.



combined with the abandonment of the hope of making any headway inside the CNT to force the Bloc to re-define its trade union work in general.<sup>152</sup> The Congress decided that BOC members who were inside the UGT should try to form factions favourable to "trade union unity". The possibilities of such work were defended by the Madrid delegate, himself a member of a local Socialist union's leadership, because of the internal democracy that existed inside the UGT. In Catalonia it was becoming clear that a radicalised PSOE was increasingly open to working closely with the BOC. Inside the Catalan UGT itself, both parties' militants proved natural allies against the more moderate USC.

Most Bloc militants were, by 1933, active inside autonomous unions or former sections of the CNT, but in Barcelona this was not always possible. In a number of sectors where there could be no prospect of setting up a new independent union and where the Socialists had some limited strength, the dissident communists had joined the UGT. This was most notably the case among woodworkers, after the BOC and other oppositionists had been driven out of the CNT during 1932. Not only did Bloc members enter the UGT Woodworkers Union, but they actually provided some of its leadership. Likewise, the dissident communists were to gain influence inside the Socialists' railwaymen's, mechanics' and teachers' unions. They also had three members on the UGT's Catalan Regional Committee.<sup>153</sup> In the *comarques*, where the UGT hardly existed, the BOC had little contact with the Socialist unions. One of the few exceptions was Sitges, where there was a long-standing Socialist tradition and the BOC-led autonomous shoemakers' and building workers' unions were part of a Local Federation, the majority of whose components were nominally affiliated to the UGT.<sup>154</sup> Elsewhere in Spain, where the BOC had small nuclei, their members tended to join whichever union was locally strongest and most open to factional work, which invariably meant the UGT. Yet the only place outside of Catalonia where the BOC had any real influence inside the UGT was in the neighbouring province of Castellón.

A chance for closer collaboration with the Socialists came with the elections. Because of the threat posed to the Republic by the Right, now loosely grouped in a

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152. See pages 126-127.; "Tesis Sindical. La Unificación Sindical" *La Batalla* 25.5.33; *ibid* 29.6.33.

153. *ibid* 7.7.34; Letter from J. Soler 22.12.86.

154. *Front* 29.11.36.

so-called "anti-marxist front", the BOC called on the working class to support the Socialist Party, "despite its errors during (its) period of collaboration with the petty bourgeois parties". Outside of Catalonia, the Bloc argued, the Socialists now represented "in general... the stronghold of the working class movement". The dissident communists' attitude contrasted sharply with that of the anarchists who counselled abstention. Workers could not be indifferent to a Socialist or bourgeois victory, the BOC's new daily, *Adelante*, declared, and not to vote would only help right-wing reaction.<sup>155</sup>

In Catalonia itself, the BOC advocated an electoral front of workers' parties, both to oppose the Right and to present an alternative to the petty bourgeois left. With this in mind the BOC leadership wrote, at the end of September, to both the Catalan Federation of the PSOE and the USC. It did not bother to invite the local PCE to participate because the official Communists had already demonstrated, in relation to both the Workers Front against Unemployment and the Workers Alliance against Fascism, that such collaboration was impossible.<sup>156</sup> The USC showed little interest in an exclusively working class electoral pact and opted yet again to support the ERC because of what it described as the "exceptional role" of the petty bourgeoisie in Catalonia. Instead, at a meeting with the BOC to discuss the crisis of the Lerroix government the Unió Socialista repeated an earlier proposal to unify the two parties.<sup>157</sup> The Bloc's leaders had no intention of taking such a step, especially as they could not even reach agreement over something as basic as an electoral pact. The USC's attitude over the elections was denounced in the dissident communists' press as a betrayal of its earlier willingness to collaborate in united fronts. In addition, the two parties' diametrically opposed assessments of the role of the petty bourgeoisie made any meaningful co-operation between them very difficult.<sup>158</sup>

The only alliance which the dissident communists could now hope to forge was with the Catalan Federation of the PSOE, which until now had not participated in the BOC's united front initiatives. The Catalan Socialists were prepared to take up the Bloc's offer of an electoral pact, but not just because of their recent turn to the left. There

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155. *Adelante* 26.10.33, 29.10.33.

156. *Ibid* 31.10.33.

157. See page 138.

158. *Adelante* 25.10.33, 31.10.33; *Justiça Social* 4.11.33.

was also a need for the PSOE to find a way to overcome its weakness and virtual irrelevance in the region. A good part of its already small membership had recently passed over to the USC after an abortive attempt to unify the two Catalan socialist organisations in June 1933. Relations between the USC and PSOE deteriorated further when the Catalan UGT, the majority of whose leadership supported the USC, decided to back the ERC. Nevertheless, various UGT unions, mainly in Barcelona, that were under PSOE control rejected this decision, favouring instead an alliance with the BOC. Nor was opposition to supporting the Republican left just confined to the PSOE's supporters. Even inside the USC, there were a number of local sections which refused to back the ERC and supported the BOC-PSOE "Workers Front" instead.<sup>159</sup>

Despite token PSOE candidates in the provinces of Barcelona, Lérida and Tarragona the coalition only really existed in the Catalan capital, where the Socialists were generously given seven out of fifteen places in the electoral list. The PSOE's weakness in the region had not deterred the dissident communists from making a pact which, they hoped, would have repercussions outside of Catalonia. This was the first time Socialists and communists had formed such an electoral bloc and therefore was, according to the BOC, of "momentous importance". Socialist workers throughout Spain would now read in *El Socialista*, Maurín pointed out, that such an agreement existed and this could only be a further step towards working class unity.<sup>160</sup>

The general elections of November 1933 were also important in that women could vote for the first time. All political parties were therefore forced, in one way or another, to address themselves to this new audience. In general, the BOC paid more attention to the situation of women than did other workers' organisations.<sup>161</sup> Not that it had anything particularly new to say about the question, its analysis of women's oppression was strictly inside the orthodox marxist tradition - women's liberation depended on the broader struggle for socialism because their oppression was firmly tied to the development of class society. Of course, the weakness of the dissident communists'

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159. *Adelante* 25.10.33, 29.10.33, 5.11.33, 18.11.33; *Boletín de la Unión Obrera del Arte de Imprimir* November 1933.

160. *Adelante* 29.10.33, 31.10.33; *La Batalla* 2.11.33.

161. On the BOC and women see, M. Nash, *Mujer y movimiento obrero en España* (Barcelona 1981) pp.207-225.

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position only reflected contemporary circumstances in that, as yet, there was no organised feminist movement as such.

The main emphasis of the propaganda the BOC aimed at women had always been on their economic position as a source of cheap labour. Although the first set of demands related to women which it had published in June 1931 had called for equality before the law, nursery provision, voting rights and access to a free and non-religious education system, stress was placed on the need to improve their working conditions. The plight of women was rarely mentioned in the BOC's more general political programme. The "political and social liberation of women" had been described in September 1931 as one of the five principal aims of the democratic revolution, but such references were the exception rather than the rule.<sup>162</sup>

Not surprisingly, any suggestion that men were the enemy of women was rejected outright, with class alone being seen as the basic division in society. It followed that proletarian women not only had no common interests with bourgeois women but that "bourgeois feminism" had to be combatted. Nor did the BOC's analysis of sexual and family relations differ much from accepted marxist orthodoxy. Like Engels, the dissident communists saw the bourgeois family as a social institution that benefited capitalism. They also shared his view that monogamy was the basis of a proletarian conception of sexual relations, although this "proletarian monogamy" would reject the sexual slavery and sexual inferiority of women. Only socialism could provide the material basis for women's liberation and the experience of the USSR, according to the BOC, showed this was true. Thus, the dissident communists pointed to what appeared to be the great advances made by women in the Soviet Union since the revolution. Achievements such as the "effective abolition" of prostitution or that many Russian couples now supposedly lived on a free and equal basis, were held up as illustrating how the position of women could dramatically improve under a socialist system.<sup>163</sup>

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162. *Ibid* p.222; Grupo Fememino del BOC, "A las mujeres que trabajan", *La Batalla* 4.6.31; *Ibid* 24.9.31; *L'Hora* 13.6.31.

163. A. Estivill i Abello, *Sexo, moral y familia. Contra los conceptos burguesas la concepción proletaria* (Barcelona n.d.); re: the BOC and women in the USSR see the articles by "R. Fuster" in *L'Hora* 12.7.35, 26.7.35, 27.9.35, 18.10.35, and 25.10.35.

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The participation of women in the BOC, as with other working class organisations, was more or less exclusively limited to a rank and file level. There were no women on the Party's Central Committee, let alone the Executive Committee, until the incorporation of Maria Recasens and Maria Gisbert in 1933, although this body regained its all-male composition a year later. Likewise, there were no female BOC candidates in the June 1931 elections, while in November 1932 and November 1933 only two women, Recasens and Carmen Martí, were presented, and even then on both occasions alongside forty different male candidates. In the *comarques*, which were more socially conservative than Barcelona, the presence of women in positions of responsibility was even rarer still.<sup>164</sup>

In an attempt to draw more women towards revolutionary politics the BOC had established the Grupo Feminino in Barcelona in May 1931. This was followed four months later by the organisation of a similar group in Lérida.<sup>165</sup> Reflecting perhaps the general lack of interest in the party in what could be seen as specifically "women's issues", the group's programme made no mention of such things as contraception or abortion. The Bloc's work around women was not formalised until its Second Congress in April 1932, when it was agreed to organise the Sección Feminina (Feminine Section), the main aim of which would be to recruit women to the BOC.<sup>166</sup> Constituted at an assembly of women militants in July 1932, the Sección Feminina sought not to be a separate women's organisation but an attempt to take into account women's specific problems and their disadvantageous position in society which often prevented them from being involved in political activity. Apart from making general propaganda and attempting to draw women towards the Bloc, many of the Section's activities were those traditionally allocated to women in workers' organisations, such as raising funds for political prisoners. Cultural and educational programmes also played an important part in its work.

The Sección Feminina did not succeed in integrating more women into the Bloc as had been hoped. In fact, as was admitted at the FCI's First Congress (the BOC's third)

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164. *La Batalla* 29.6.33, 20.4.34; Molas *El sistema de partidos...* Op.cit. pp.127-156; conversation with J. Reimundí, 28.9.85.

165. *La Batalla* 21.5.31, 24.9.31.

166. *Ibid* 1.9.32.

in June 1933, this was because many party members saw the Section as "petty bourgeois" in conception or at best some form of "lesser evil". Furthermore, the Bloc leadership reported, the majority of women party members were not involved in the Sección Feminina and its activities were often left in the hands of young and politically inexperienced non-members, some of whom were described as having a "petty bourgeois mentality". These defects had, claimed Congress delegates, been there since the Section's creation but had not been eradicated. The real problem was that there was a lack of experienced cadres involved and this meant the "necessary work" in the villages and factories with peasant and working class women had not been carried out. In contrast, the BOC's youth organisation, the Juventudes Comunistas were quite successful in recruiting young women, who worked on fairly equal terms with their male counterparts, even participating in the activities of the party's para-military "Action Groups". These young women members tended to turn their backs on the Sección Feminina, purportedly because the "real" revolutionary struggle was seen as taking place shoulder to shoulder with their male comrades. It was therefore decided to do away with the Section and the BOC established in its place a "Women's Propaganda Commission", made up of both female and male members. Despite lacking even the minimal separate structure which its forerunner had, the new Commission was intended to have a similar role in carrying out cultural and propaganda work aimed at recruiting women directly to the Bloc.<sup>167</sup>

One area where the BOC encouraged the involvement of women was in the unions, particularly in the province of Barcelona where women made up thirty-five percent of the workforce.<sup>168</sup> Apart from being a very direct way of involving them in the class struggle, the recruitment of women into the unions was also essential to avoid them being used as scab labour. In particular, the BOC also denounced the complete lack of women in the trade union leaderships.<sup>169</sup> Yet in neither of the two relatively important Barcelona unions controlled by the dissident communists, the Sindicat Mercantil and the autonomous textile workers union, were there any women among the leadership, despite women forming the majority of the workforce in both cases. In fact, in the office and

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167. *Ibid* 2.2.33; "Resolución a propósito de la Sección Femenina" *Ibid* 29.6.33; Interview with V. Ballester 16.4.84; W. Solano cited in Bonamusa *Op.cit.* p.132; also see page 200.

168. A. Balcells, *Crisis económica y agitación social en Cataluña (1930-1936)* (Barcelona 1971) p.32.

169. *La Batalla* 17.9.31.

shop workers' organisation only a minority of the membership were women.<sup>170</sup> Outside of Barcelona, a number of important unions under Bloc control had a largely female membership, such as the hosiery unions in Terrassa and Calella and in the shoe making industry of Sitges. However, just as was the case within the Bloc itself, very few women actually held positions of leadership in the trade unions.

With the granting of female suffrage, it was feared by some on the Left, particularly the Republicans, that women, who tended to be more influenced by the church, would vote for the Right. While the BOC recognised the pernicious role of religion in perpetuating women's oppression, its statements asserted this could be best countered by the political participation of women at all levels. This was paralleled on a more practical level by the Sección Feminina and its forerunners trying to make sure all the BOC's female contacts and sympathisers were registered to vote. When it came to the elections of November 1933, the Bloc, however, paid little attention to propaganda among women as such, appealing to them instead on a class basis to support the Workers Front. The party later admitted that this lack of specific propaganda aimed at women had been a mistake.<sup>171</sup>

The election campaign itself was dominated at a national level by Gil Robles' authoritarianism on the one hand and Largo Caballero's revolutionary rhetoric on the other. In Catalonia, the campaign was particularly marked by the anarchists' vigorous campaign for abstention - "Gil Robles' fascism" and "Maurín's communism" being denounced as one and the same thing.<sup>172</sup> The BOC, in turn, bitterly attacked the CNT leadership for playing into the hands of the Right, even accusing Martínez Barrio's caretaker government of complicity in a plot by the FAI to launch an armed uprising before the elections could even take place. Not that the dissident communists believed the revolution would come through the ballot box but neither did they believe that voting would prevent it. Today the struggle was at the polling booths, declared *Adelante*, but whatever the results the immediate prospect still remained one of either total victory for reaction or the workers revolution. Accordingly, the Workers' Front's programme centred on the conviction that the country was polarised between the working masses

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170. *L'Hora* 15.9.34.

171. *Adelante* 19.11.33, 22.11.33.

172. *Ibid* 21.10.33.

and the bourgeois Right.<sup>173</sup> This view was given credence by the increasing number of often long and violent strikes and other disturbances at this time.

As in previous elections, the BOC, despite its lack of resources, ran an enthusiastic campaign, organising over three hundred meetings. It was particularly active in rural Gerona and Lérida, where it often attracted larger crowds than the ERC.<sup>174</sup> The BOC also presented candidates in Castellón, after failing to reach an agreement with the local PSOE, which had aligned itself with the Republicans.

As had been widely predicted, the elections resulted in a substantial victory for the Right, principally the Radicals and the CEDA, which now became the biggest single party in parliament. The Left's defeat was due to numerous factors, most importantly the shift of the Centre parties towards the Right and working class abstention, particularly in the south. The division of the Left had less of an impact than has been assumed, although it did show the pitiful weakness of the left Republican parties when not aligned with the Socialists. Outside of Catalonia and Galicia, only eight left Republicans were elected, and five of those in local alliances with the PSOE. Petty bourgeois republicanism, in the shape of the ERC, only really retained independent mass support in Catalonia, although not enough to overcome the Lliga without an electoral alliance with the moderate nationalist Acció Catalana Republicana. It was this division of the Catalan nationalist Left, rather than anarchist-inspired abstention that was the most important factor in the Esquerra's defeat.<sup>175</sup> Two weeks later, a second round of voting had to take place in sixteen constituencies, but apart from the Socialist victory in the province of Madrid, the outcome varied little from the initial results.

The BOC won around 24,000 votes. This was slightly more than in 1932, but given that the franchise had expanded to include women, this result was undoubtedly a disappointment. The dissident communists' share of the vote dropped slightly in the provinces of Barcelona, Tarragona and Gerona, while remaining more or less the same in Lérida and the city of Barcelona. Yet again, Miravittles' personal prestige proved important in Gerona, his 8,130 votes being twice that of any other BOC candidate in the

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173. *Ibid* 10.11.33, 19.11.33.

174. *Ibid* 21.11.33, 22.11.33, 25.11.33.

175. A. Durgan, *The 1933 Elections in Spain* (M.A. Dissertation, University of London 1980) pp.22-25.



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province. The Bloc's prominence during 1933 in the peasant struggles in Lérida did not seem to have helped them much at an electoral level. Despite a slight drop in the ERC's support in some villages, the dissident communists' vote increased substantially only in a handful of places in the province. Likewise, in Barcelona the recent victory of the *mercantil* workers did little to alter traditional voting patterns, although Arquer's personal vote increased from 3,146 a year earlier to 5,745. In Castellón, the BOC received some seven hundred votes, only half a percent of the total votes cast in the province.<sup>176</sup>

There were a number of reasons put forward by the BOC to explain why it had been unable to capitalise on its support in Catalonia, estimated by Maurín to amount to some 50,000 people by the end of 1933.<sup>177</sup> Fear of a Lliga victory, the dissident communists claimed, had encouraged many of their sympathisers to vote for the ERC instead. Moreover, it was clear that the Bloc had not won over as many female voters as hoped. Insufficient resources were also blamed for the bad result because this had prevented the party's campaign from reaching many areas. The youthful nature of many of the BOC's sympathisers was cited as another reason for its lack of electoral support because only the over twenty-threes could vote.

All these explanations are valid enough, but the real problem for the BOC obviously continued to be that of breaking the electoral hold of the ERC over the Catalan masses. Despite some minor reverses, the Esquerra and its allies had again won around forty percent of the poll, over 400,000 votes. During 1933, the BOC had made some inroads into the ERC's base - among peasants in Gerona and Lérida and office and shop workers in Barcelona - but the left nationalists' electoral hegemony appeared unassailable. Furthermore, the bulk of the CNT's membership had again ignored its leaders' campaign for abstention and had voted for the ERC. Compared with the 1931 general elections, participation had fallen by barely two percent in the Confederation's stronghold, Barcelona. The dissident communists had only begun to encroach on the anarcho-syndicalists' domain in a number of areas - among textile workers and printers in Barcelona, power workers at a regional level and in a number of local unions. The

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176. Molas, *El sistema de partidos...* Op.cit. pp.157-168; *El Mercantil Valenciano* 22.11.33.  
177. *La Batalla* 4.1.34.

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**CNT's domination of the organised working class, although shaken, was far from broken. Thus, squeezed between left nationalist republicanism and anarcho-syndicalism, Maurín's party had to struggle hard to find a mass base.**

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## 4. 1934. THE WORKERS ALLIANCE.

### The search for workers' unity.

The immediate response of the workers' organisations to the Rights' electoral victory was a further radicalisation of their positions. For the BOC, petty bourgeois republicanism had paid dearly for having failed seriously to undermine the old feudal-monarchical structures. In contrast, the dissident communists praised the PSOE's decision to stand alone and defend "independent class" politics. Hence the BOC enthusiastically welcomed the Socialists' victory in Madrid in the second round on 3 December. The dissident communists had urged workers in Madrid not to abstain, as the PCE advocated, but to support the PSOE's candidates. Nevertheless, a word of caution was necessary because the Socialists' adoption of radical, or even revolutionary, positions, as Maurín pointed out, was a very recent development. While in government they had shown little understanding of the threat posed from the counter-revolutionary Right, if allowed to re-organise. Only in the last few months had some sections of the PSOE begun to comprehend the nature of this threat.<sup>1</sup> Following the elections the "counter-revolution" was a lot closer, the question was how the workers movement would fight back.

The anarchists meanwhile, interpreted the important strike wave in the weeks preceding the elections, in particular the bitter transport workers strike in Barcelona, as evidence of the masses' preparedness for the revolution. Accordingly, they launched on 8 December yet another putsch. Organised principally by the so called "anarcho-bolshevik" faction of the FAI, the uprising centred on Aragon and Logroño and was their most bloody adventure yet, leaving eighty-seven dead and over seven hundred in prison. Contained after five days of intermittent fighting, the uprising's only consequence was to provoke even more repressive measures against an already weakened CNT. The BOC, which some weeks before had predicted that the anarchists would organise some "outrage" once the elections finished, was quick to denounce this latest insurrection as only helping the counter-revolution. The FAI, it seemed, was

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1. See the following articles by Maurín, "Después de las elecciones ¿Qué hacer ahora?" *La Batalla* 7.12.33, "La clase trabajadora y la pequeña burguesía" *Adelante* 5.12.33, and "Por qué han triunfado las derechas ¿A dónde vamos?" *Ibid.* 14.12.33.

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incapable of breaking out of the vicious circle in which its "putchism" had caught it. It appeared to the dissident communists to be completely oblivious to the existence of masses of workers who supported the Socialists and, to a lesser extent, the Communists and left Republicans. By wanting "its" revolution, rather than a revolution of all workers, the FAI was not only doomed to failure, Maurín explained, but could only do untold harm to the proletariat's cause.<sup>2</sup>

After the elections, the need for unity against the Right was clearer than ever to nearly all those working class organisations in Catalonia outside the CNT. As soon as the results had been announced, *Adelante* had declared that the need for a workers united front was now a "life or death question".<sup>3</sup> The BOC immediately wrote to all other workers groups in the region proposing the setting up of such a front and a few days later the FSL took a similar initiative. After a series of lengthy discussions, an agreement was finally signed on 10 December by the BOC and the unions under its control, the PSOE, UGT, USC, Opposition Unions (Treintistas), FSL, Unió de Rabassaires and ICE to establish the "Workers Alliance". Only the CNT and PCE were not involved. The Alliance's manifesto pointed to the growth of "capitalist reaction" and fascism throughout Europe and how this danger was manifesting itself in Spain. In a clear reference to the CEDA, it spoke of how the authoritarian Right would use its strength in parliament to force the government to declare a state of emergency under the Public Order Act and thereby launch an offensive against the labour movement. According to the Alliance, there then could arise the danger of the anarchists provoking yet more futile clashes with the state, which in turn could be used to justify a reactionary and fascist coup to re-establish order. The Workers' Alliance aimed to impede the Right's supposed plans by uniting the working class through action in defence of its hard-won rights and providing an alternative to anarchist "adventurism". This pact did not mean that the different factions in the Alliance would forget their doctrinal differences, rather that unity had to be forged around specific issues.<sup>4</sup>

This "transcendental" manifesto, as *Adelante* referred to it, represented not only the consolidation of the earlier propagandistic "Workers Alliance against Fascism", but also

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2. *ibid.* 29.10.33; Maurín, "¿Que harán ahora los anarquistas?" *ibid.* 16.12.33.

3. *ibid.* 21.11.33.

4. *ibid.* 25.11.33, 10.12.33; *Sindicalismo* 2.5.34.

what ICE leader Andreu Nin described as a development of "immense historical importance" - unity with the peasantry in the form of the *Unió de Rabassaires*.<sup>5</sup> On an historical level, the formation of the Workers Alliance meant, in Maurín's opinion, that the Catalan workers movement had managed to put into practice something which the Comintern had advocated for ten years but had been unable to carry through. Not even in Germany, where the threat of a fascist takeover had been brutally obvious, had the Communist Party seriously defended the united front. The official communist movement had become, in practice, "the enemies of unity". In contrast, as Maurín explained a few months later to the Asturian Socialist paper, *Avance*, the existence in Spain of an independent communist party, the BOC, meant that for the first time internationally since 1914, it was possible to create a really broad united front, the ramifications of which would be seen "beyond the country's frontiers".<sup>6</sup> While the Alliance never had the international repercussions that Maurín hoped for, it did represent, as would soon be seen, an important strategic development inside the Spanish workers movement. Moreover, at an ideological level, the BOC clearly dominated the Alliance. The political analysis presented in the Workers Alliance's public statements was generally no different to that propagated by the dissident communists.

Within the Workers Alliance there were, however, difficulties over its relationship to the petty-bourgeoisie. From the outset the Alliance recognised the need to win this class over to "proletarian leadership" and hence prevent its "slide towards fascism". Yet non-working class organisations were only to be allowed to "support morally" this "exclusively workers front".<sup>7</sup> This reflected the rejection of any further pacts with the Republicans by most groups that signed the Alliance's manifesto. A problem soon arose when in early January the USC leader, Joan Comorera, entered the Catalan government, alongside his party's ERC allies. This provoked immediate protests from the other workers organisations, but the USC refused publicly to choose between either the Workers Alliance or continued participation inside the Generalitat. Unable to persuade the *Unió Socialista* to back down, the Alliance formally expelled this party from its ranks in March 1934.<sup>8</sup> Despite this, some local USC organisations outside of

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5. *Adelante* 16.1.34.

6. Maurín, "La Alianza Obrera. Frente Unico en marcha", *Avance* 1.5.34.

7. *Adelante* 10.12.33.

8. *Ibid.* 9.3.34.

Barcelona continued to work with the Alliances, thus reflecting a certain pragmatism in the Left's approach in some *comarques*, despite the violent polemic that often could be found in its press. It is interesting to note that when the PSOE supported the ERC in the Catalan municipal elections in mid-January 1934 the BOC, although protesting, did not call for its expulsion from the Alliance. In part, this was due to the fact that this electoral alliance was not as damaging for the cause of the Workers Alliance as was the USC's entrance into the Catalan government. However, it cannot be overlooked that the BOC itself was quite prepared to present joint lists in the local elections with the ERC where this was the only way to defeat the Right.<sup>9</sup> The dissident communists obviously had a far greater interest in maintaining good relations with the PSOE, both because of its importance at a state-wide level and because of the radicalisation of much of its base, than with the more moderate USC.

The loss of the USC did not prevent the Workers Alliance spreading quickly throughout Catalonia, with the formation of local committees in many towns and villages during the first months of 1934. Outside of Barcelona, except in those centres where the Treintistas were strong, the initiative to form local Alliances was taken by the BOC, as the only workers organisation with any real influence in the *comarques*.

Obviously the Alliance could not just be restricted to Catalonia and it was deemed necessary to establish similar fronts throughout the peninsula as soon as possible. Maurín was optimistic about the possibilities of such a development. He justified this belief by returning again to his observation that all major innovations in the Spanish working class movement tended to begin in Catalonia.<sup>10</sup> The Workers Alliance, the Bloc leader believed, would prove no exception to this general rule. The radicalisation of much of the UGT and the obvious threat posed by the Right's victory in November 1933 had certainly created an increasingly favourable situation for such an initiative. Maurín's optimism was partially confirmed when, encouraged by the Catalan example, various Workers Alliances were soon established elsewhere in the peninsula. The most important of these, without doubt, was formed in the northern mining region of Asturias. Having always co-operated to a certain extent with its powerful UGT rivals, the Asturian

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9. See pages 182-183.

10. See page 65.

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CNT proposed in March 1934 the establishment of a pact between the two unions. The resulting agreement, after outlining the threat posed by the authoritarian Right, concluded that no peaceful solution to the political situation was possible. The aim of a united working class, the Asturian CNT and UGT declared, was to carry through the social revolution.<sup>11</sup> After some discussion, the CNT finally agreed to let non-trade union organisations join the pact, and first the Asturian Federation of the PSOE and then the Federación Comunista Ibérica (BOC) and the Trotskyists added their names to the agreement.

The BOC was later to claim that it had been responsible for inspiring the creation of the Asturian Workers Alliance. In fact, in early January 1934 the FCI in the mining centre of Mieres had proposed the formation of a united front of all local working class organisations based on the Catalan model. The local Socialists, in particular, had appeared very interested in this idea. Following this appeal, the dissident communists in Mieres had been instrumental in organising a "joint committee against unemployment", involving most of the workers groups in the town. Then, on the initiative of this committee, a provincial assembly had taken place in Oviedo on 25 February, attended by 180 delegates who decided to establish a "Workers Alliance against unemployment".<sup>12</sup> This body never seems to have had much more than a paper existence and was soon overshadowed by the UGT-CNT pact of which it was, in a certain sense, a forerunner. The importance of the "Workers Alliance against unemployment" lay in the fact that it was supported by all working class factions in the region. Whether or not the BOC can take all the credit for inspiring the Asturian Alliance is another matter. The truth was that following the November elections there was a general atmosphere in favour of unity in Asturias, as elsewhere. The BOC, unlike any other organisation, except the Trotskyist ICE, was certainly the most consistent defender of the united front tactic and, of course, widely accepted as having inspired the Catalan Alliance. Furthermore, given that the BOC's only group with any strength in Asturias was in the strategically important mining town of Mieres, this allowed it to play a disproportionately influential role in the future development of the Asturian Workers Alliance. Certainly the creation of the Catalan Alliance had boosted the dissident

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11. *Avance* 1.4.34., 11.4.34.

12. *ibid.* 11.1.34, 27.2.34, 9.3.34; *La Batalla* 18.1.34, 17.3.34, 7.4.34; *Adelante* 3.3.34.

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communists' credibility and this was reflected when Maurín spoke at several very well-attended meetings in Asturias during the first week of May 1934.<sup>13</sup>

Where the BOC could play a central role in the setting up of the Workers Alliance was in the Levante region. In Castellón, an important step toward organising the Alliance was the three-day general strike in the provincial capital following a "fascist demonstration" at the end of January 1934. Nevertheless, despite the survival of a united front between the Socialists and the BOC once the strike was over, the Workers Alliance, as such, was not formally established in the city until six months later.<sup>14</sup> The BOC also took part, at the end of April, in the constitution of the Alliance in Alicante, in conjunction with the Socialists and some autonomous unions.<sup>15</sup> Of more importance was the founding of the Alliance in Valencia at the beginning of February. This followed a letter the previous December to all workers groups from the small, but expanding, Valencian section of the Bloc.<sup>16</sup> Apart from the BOC and the Socialists, the Valencian Alliance was also supported by the majority of the locally powerful CNT, which had sided with the Treintistas. The Valencia Alliance was soon given a chance to show its considerable strength when it decided to organise a one day stoppage on 23 April in solidarity with striking power workers. Despite the arrest of many of the Alliance's leaders a few days previously and the opposition of the anarchists, the general strike completely paralysed the city.<sup>17</sup> Until then the Valencian Alliance had only been involved in propaganda activities, so its ability to organise practical solidarity action of this kind was an important qualitative move forward.

As expected, the Radical government, with CEDA support, soon began to undermine those few reforms instigated during the previous two years, as well as granting an amnesty for political prisoners which allowed the release of those involved in the Sanjurjo coup. These moves were accompanied by a more or less permanent state of emergency which had been imposed during the anarchists' December uprising and now gave the authorities more power in dealing with social unrest. Inevitably this offensive took its

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13. *Avance* 2.5.34, 7.5.34; Maurín, "La Alianza..." Op.cit.; *La Batalla* 12.5.34.

14. *Adelante* 31.1.34, 1.2.34, 3.2.34; *La Batalla* 26.7.34.

15. *Ibid.* 1.5.34.

16. *Adelante* 7.12.33, 3.2.34.

17. *La Batalla* 20.4.34, 5.5.34.



**toll on working class resistance and there was a drop in both the overall number of strikes and, in particular, in those which the workers won.**

The BOC press during the first weeks of 1934 was full of dire warnings of the danger of a fascist-style coup, most probably through the introduction in parliament of sweeping legislation aimed at repressing the workers movement and the Left in general. Events in Germany and Austria showed only too clearly the dangers of such an "institutionalised coup". The "decisive moment" was approaching for the proletariat, *Adelante* declared dramatically. According to the dissident communists, the Radicals would soon be pushed aside by the authoritarian Right, hence making way for another decisive step towards counter-revolution. This scenario seemed confirmed in February when Lerroix's government staggered through its first crisis. The Catalan Workers Alliance responded by declaring that any attempted counter-revolutionary coup had to be met by an immediate "revolutionary general strike".<sup>18</sup> Offensive slogans such as this were combined with more defensive ones. In strict contrast to its position two years previously, the Bloc now defended the benefits gained for the workers through the Jurados Mixtos under Largo Caballero. This same system in the hands of the new government would, it predicted, now be turned against the working classes. A proletarian offensive, leading to the seizure of state power was the only way to avoid the terrible fate that had befallen the masses in Germany and more recently in Austria.<sup>19</sup> For this offensive to happen the traditional divisions inside the Spanish working class movement had to be overcome. The creation of the Workers Alliance was therefore presented by the dissident communists as an important step in this direction. Moreover, the BOC claimed, the masses' "illusions in parliament" appeared "burnt up" after the first two years of the Republic.<sup>20</sup> It remained to be seen whether the Bloc's leaders' "profound optimism", as they described it, was justified.

The Catalan Workers Alliance needed to show, especially to the CNT, that it was capable of more than fine words. An opportunity soon arose because of the increasingly desperate situation of the workers movement in Madrid, which was now bearing the full brunt of the government's attacks. With both the capital's building and metal workers

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18. *Adelante* 28.2.34, 2.3.34.

19. See page 170.

20. For example see *Adelante* 6.2.34, 3.3.34; and *La Batalla* 31.3.34, 1.5.34.

on strike and the possibility of the UGT calling a general strike, the Catalan Alliance decided to call a one-day stoppage on 13 March in solidarity and against the "danger of fascism". Apart from the historic significance of Catalan workers offering such direct support for their Madrid counterparts, this was a considerable gamble given the absence from the Workers Alliance of the CNT. In fact, the Confederation itself had organised a strike the day before to protest about continued harassment by the Catalan authorities. On the thirteenth, the Alliance's strike was the most extensive outside of Barcelona since 1930, affecting some forty towns, including all the major provincial industrial centres. However, in Barcelona itself, apart from some white collar sections, printers and catering workers, the stoppage was a failure due, according to *La Batalla*, to the "systematic" sabotage of the USC and ERC. The CNT confined itself to publishing a note doubting the efficiency of a twenty-four hour strike against fascism and instructed its members to wait and see how the situation developed. Given that the anarcho-syndicalists had organised their own stoppage the day beforehand, both factions must have seen the other's decision to strike as a deliberately competitive show of strength.<sup>21</sup>

For the BOC, the strike was unique in Catalan working class history in that it had taken place against the wishes of both of the region's two principal mass organisations, the CNT and ERC. Its effect was later described by Maurín as a "cannon-shot in the middle of the night", which had woken up all the Spanish proletariat. The dissident communists claimed that this stoppage represented not only the overcoming of the historic division between the Madrid and Catalan working class but also the recuperation of the idea of the general strike, previously discredited by anarchist adventurism and socialist reformism.<sup>22</sup> However, it was not so well received by some factions in the workers movement.

Somewhat predictably, the strike was severely criticised by the USC, which described it as "infantile" and a failure that would weaken the left-wing and "loyal" Catalan government and therefore against the interests of the workers and the revolution in general.<sup>23</sup> The BOC's general euphoria over the strike's outcome was also undermined

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21. *Ibid.* 17.3.34; *Las Noticias* 14.3.34; *Combate* 16.3.34; *Comercio y Navegación* March 1934; *La Antorcha* 1.5.34.

22. *La Batalla* 17.3.34, 24.3.34; Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución..* Op.cit. p.121.

23. *Justicia Social* 17.3.34.

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by the withdrawal from the Alliance of the Unió de Rabassaires, who claimed the peasants would not support such an action. This abandonment, although not wholly surprising given the Rabassaires' links with the ERC, could only be a blow to the Alliance's prestige after the importance it had attached to the UdeR's original support.

The 13 March strike brought to the surface a debate which had been simmering inside the Workers Alliance since its foundation. It concerned the exact role of this body in the revolutionary process. For the BOC, following the traditional Bolshevik conception, the united front could not "just remain a simple formula" but had to be used. The revolution, the dissident communists explained, was not just a straightforward act but the culmination of a long process which concluded with the armed insurrection. This meant that the Alliances had to be engaged in day to day struggles if they were to play their designated role in mobilising the masses for a revolutionary offensive.<sup>24</sup> This view was not shared by the Treintistas. Despite having participated in the 13 March stoppage, they had complained bitterly that only the unions should issue an order of this type. Moreover, they warned that in future they would oppose the Catalan Alliance's Committee being able to make such calls. Instead, the Alliances, the Treintistas argued, should have a strictly revolutionary role in bringing about the overthrow of capitalism, after which their function would be to "defend the revolution" while the constructive tasks would lie in the hands of the unions.<sup>25</sup>

More problematic for the success of the Workers Alliances was the attitude of the Socialists. As Gorkín had put it in December 1933, "today the Socialist Party constitutes the strongest..most disciplined and best prepared workers party in Spain....we cannot fight fascism without taking the PSOE and UGT into account".<sup>26</sup> The radicalisation, within the Socialist ranks, which had begun in the summer of 1933, deepened after the electoral defeat in November. Consequently, Largo Caballero and his supporters strengthened their position both inside the PSOE and, especially, the UGT. Like the BOC, most Socialists believed the new Radical government would act as a bridge for the CEDA to carry through some form of institutionalised fascist coup.

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24. "La fase actual de la revolución española y los deberes de la clase trabajadora [Tesis política adoptada por el Segundo Congreso de La FCI] *La Batalla* 1.5.34.

25. *Vertical* 16.3.34; *Combate* 17.3.34, 18.3.34; *Sindicalismo* 20.6.34.

26. Gorkín, "Los socialistas y nosotros" *Adelante* 19.12.33.

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Awareness about the dangers of a "fascist" take-over was reinforced by events abroad. The bloody suppression of the Austrian Socialists in February 1934 by Dolfuss' government left a deep impression inside Spain, not least because of the obvious similarities between the CEDA and Dolfuss' party. Both were fundamentally peasant-based reactionary Catholic movements and both followed a "legalist" strategy aimed at introducing an authoritarian regime through parliament. The Austrians' last ditch attempt to foil Government plans through an armed uprising, was, despite its defeat, of great significance for the Spanish Socialist left who compared this with the dismal failure of its German counterparts to put up any serious resistance to Hitler's seizure of power a year earlier.

By early 1934, the threat of fascism increasingly dominated the Socialist press as did the need to organise the revolution. Undoubtedly many Socialist leaders, and especially the rank and file, were quite sincere in believing that violent revolution was the only path open to them, the problem was how they conceived this developing. In reality this "revolution" was seen as something forced on them by an intransigent bourgeoisie rather than an historic necessity in itself. Even the leader of the PSOE's moderate "centre" faction, Indalecio Prieto, threatened revolution if the authoritarian Right tried to take over. Despite this radical turn to the left by many Socialist leaders, decades of reformist politics and practice could not be ditched overnight. The party's traditionally deterministic brand of marxism was still apparent in the politics of its new left wing. For instance, in the writings of the Socialist left's principal theoretician, Luis Araquistain, the triumph of socialism is presented as somehow inevitable and a fascist coup as automatically provoking the revolution. Moreover, the left also continued to believe, as the PSOE had done in effect since its foundation, that the Socialist movement's mission was to absorb all other working class organisations. Not surprisingly then, the left Socialists' attitude to the Workers Alliances was to be, to say the least, ambiguous.<sup>27</sup>

Initially the PSOE's daily newspaper, *El Socialista*, had welcomed the establishment of the Catalan Workers Alliance. The Socialist left, especially the FJS, was even more

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27. On the radicalisation of the Socialists see S. Juliá, *La Izquierda...* Op.cit.

enthusiastic about this development.<sup>28</sup> Largo Caballero himself seemed to confirm this favourable attitude, when he spoke in January and February to delegations from the Catalan Alliance, which included Maurín, first in Madrid and then in Barcelona. As it had during the elections, the BOC again pointed out the importance of the UGT leader's apparent "break with social democracy". In an interview published in *Adelante*, Largo Caballero defended the need for a united front and for the working class to prepare to seize power. Maurín responded to these declarations by stating that it was obvious that "all true communists" had to "welcome with open arms" this "general rectification" imposed on the Socialists by the working class and try to win "the left Socialists to completely revolutionary positions". He contrasted the BOC's attitude with that of the official Communists, who tried to eradicate social democracy's hold on large numbers of workers by simply waging an "all out war" against it. Amidst such positive assessments of the political development of Largo Caballero and his supporters, Maurín had, however, added a note of caution following the elections of November 1933. The left Socialists, he argued, had now to go beyond just propaganda and break decisively with social democracy. However, this was something which would prove very difficult for them to do, the BOC leader warned.<sup>29</sup>

It did not take long for the leaders of the Socialist left, let alone the rest of the PSOE, to show that their participation in the Alliances was limited to where it was beneficial to their party's interests. This participation was combined with an abstract leftism, typical of the new left, which defined the Alliances as being purely insurrectional bodies. The left Socialists' apparently revolutionary position meant that the Alliance could not encroach on what was the terrain of the unions - the day to day struggles. Strikes over "economic issues" were increasingly seen as wasting the workers' energies, which needed to be saved for the revolution. Thus, both the general strike of 13 March in Catalonia and that of Valencia a month later were criticised by the left Socialist leaders as being a waste of time and not the type of action the Workers Alliances should have been organising.<sup>30</sup>

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28. *El Socialista* 29.12.33; *Renovación* 9.12.33, 6.1.34, 27.1.34.

29. Maurín, "Después de las elecciones.." Op.cit. and "El fracaso del socialismo reformista" *Adelante* 1.3.34.

30. *El Socialista* 17.3.34; *Actas de la Comisión Ejecutiva de la UGT* 19.4.34, 17.5.34.

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This ambiguous attitude towards the Alliances was most clearly reflected in the left Socialists involvement in the Madrid Workers Alliance. Instead of using the Alliance, which they totally dominated, to create an image of genuine workers unity that could possibly attract the anarcho-syndicalists, the Socialists generally treated it as of secondary importance. For instance, when the CEDA decided to hold a mass rally in El Escorial on 22 April 1934 the resulting general strike in protest was presented as an initiative of the FJS rather than the Alliance. Opposition to so-called "wasteful" economic strikes also led the Socialist leaders to reject calling for solidarity action with the massive peasant strike organised in June 1934 by the Socialist landworkers federation, the FNLT.

The BOC, although increasingly interested in building a closer relationship with the left Socialists, did not share their view on the role of the Workers Alliances. In fact the Catalan Alliance, very much under the dissident communists' influence, demonstrated right from the beginning that the BOC intended to intervene where-ever possible in economic struggles. In late January, for instance, the Alliance had called an assembly, interestingly enough in the Barcelona Socialists' headquarters, to protest at the recent sacking of some 5000 workers in the city. Delegates representing sixty-two different trade unions denounced the sackings as part of "a plan by the bourgeoisie" to destabilise the political situation further and thereby justify even more repressive measures.<sup>31</sup> The small Catalan section of the PSOE, under pressure from the dissident communists, may have been prepared to accept the Workers Alliance's involvement in such "economic" struggles in Catalonia but this was not the position of the party's leaders in Madrid. Not surprisingly, the BOC was very critical of the Socialists' rejection of the Alliances' involvement in partial and economic battles and the supposed "saving" of the workers' energies. Events in Austria had confirmed the dissident communists' analysis. According to the Bloc, the Austrian Socialists, having held back the working class for so long, had in the end been forced to break in both theory and practice with reformism, the tragedy was that they left it too late. The simple recruitment to the unions and workers parties and passively "waiting for the great hour", the BOC warned, was, as had

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31. *Adelante* 24.1.34, 25.1.34, 27.1.34.

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been shown in both Austria and Germany, "suicidal". In the struggle against fascism the workers could not afford to wait but had to go on to the offensive at all levels.<sup>32</sup>

For Maurín, the Socialists' position, despite the revolutionary rhetoric, remained in essence reformist - previously the workers had to "wait" for parliament, now they "waited" for the revolution. Social democracy had always opposed the general strike and despite appearing to accept the tactic in recent months the attacks in *El Socialista* on the 13 March stoppage showed nothing had changed. If the Socialists spoke of organising a general strike it was only to frighten the bourgeoisie because, in Maurín's opinion, they were obviously not serious about taking such a path. The working class movement was, he argued, just that, a *movement*; it had to be permanently in action. Political and economic strikes were like the manoeuvres of an army in peacetime preparing for war. Through the experience of organising strikes, Maurín explained, workers would become more aware of organisational problems, morale would be raised and they could "demoralise the enemy" by disrupting the bourgeoisie's plans and making coherent government policies difficult. Not that the tactic of the general strike as such should be abused, but there were moments, in his opinion, such as the anti-fascist strike in Paris on 12 February, when such actions were indispensable. What if, Maurín asked rhetorically, there had been a general strike in Germany on 20 July 1932 or in Austria at an earlier date than February 1934? In Spain, such a strike should have been organised on 3 December 1933, he claimed, but instead it was the anarchists who went on the offensive, but in the wrong way and hence damaged the workers' cause. A successful armed insurrection needed a period of revolutionary agitation and in the present situation even purely "economic strikes" had a revolutionary meaning because they led to a more general mobilisation of the working class, with potentially far-reaching consequences. The Workers Alliances might, the BOC agreed, become insurrectional bodies as some left Socialists advocated, but first they had to unite the proletariat and launch a series of more limited battles.

For the Workers Alliances to be a success both in Catalonia and the rest of Spain, they needed the collaboration of the CNT. Despite the anarcho-syndicalists' hostility

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32. On the BOC and Austria see *ibid.* 18.2.34, 20.2.34, 24.2.34 and 1.3.34; on the role of strikes see articles by Maurín in *La Batalla* 24.3.34 and 31.3.34.

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towards the united front, as a "communist manoeuvre", there were some grounds for hoping that at least a section of them could be won over to the idea. This was at the centre of Maurín's reflections on the possibilities open to the anarchists after the debacle of the uprising of December 1933. The course they now chose to follow was of central importance given that, as the BOC leader put it, a "great part of the Spanish revolution's future depended on the development of anarchism". Maurín believed there was no option for the anarchists if they wanted to continue on a revolutionary course but to unite with other workers organisations. At a practical level, it would be difficult for them to organise another putsch. Furthermore, the anarchists sincere desire to "make the revolution" would prevent them either from lapsing into passivity and limiting themselves to cultural activities or from falling under the influence of bourgeois parties or fascism.<sup>33</sup> Maurín's optimism was only partly justified because subsequently the CNT would be prepared to participate in the Workers Alliances in very few places.

If the anarchists in Catalonia did seem reticent this was hardly surprising, given the direct attacks on them in the Alliance's original manifesto. Comments which asserted that this document had been signed by "the most responsible organisations of the Catalan working class",<sup>34</sup> must have reinforced the anarchists' belief that this was an alliance directed against themselves as much as the Right. Any meaningful collaboration was made even more difficult when the CNT later called on the UGT to "clarify its revolutionary intentions" and added that the Confederation would be prepared to support any revolutionary movement as long as it aimed at the "total suppression of capitalism and the state". This clearly was not a serious basis for an agreement with marxist organisations which, of course, favoured the establishment of a new, socialist, state. Nevertheless, the CNT rank and file were not immune to a desire for unity, which was becoming increasingly common among the organised working class. The failure of the FAI's latest uprising could only help strengthen such feelings inside the CNT itself. This was reflected most clearly outside of Catalonia, especially where the anarcho-syndicalists tended to be overshadowed by the UGT. Accordingly, at the Confederation's National Plenum in February 1934 the Asturian, Central and Galician organisations proposed some form of united front with the Socialist union. Likewise,

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33. Maurín, "¿ Que harán ahora los anarquistas?" Op.cit.

34. *Adelante* 12.12.33.



in an influential article published at this time, veteran CNT leader Valeriano Orbón Fernández argued from a similar position.<sup>35</sup> Even the phenomenal thirty-six day general strike in the Confederation's stronghold of Saragossa, in the spring of 1934, was nominally based on a united front with the UGT. The BOC was very impressed by this apparent anarchist-Socialist unity in the Argonese capital and described the strike as "one of the most intelligent manifestations of class struggle" in the history of the Spanish workers movement.<sup>36</sup> Both the Catalan and Valencian Workers Alliances organised support for this struggle by helping to locate the hundreds of children who were sent from the strike-bound city. The Alliance also participated in the solidarity strike with Saragossa which was organised in Barcelona on 7 May by the CNT; although this support was not organised in conjunction with the anarcho-syndicalists but rather in spite of them. Nevertheless, in the end, the only unity agreement of any lasting importance during 1934 that the CNT made was in Asturias.

In Catalonia, the continued influence of the FAI was seen by the dissident communists as the main obstacle to the CNT joining the Alliance. A series of costly defeats for the Confederation in recent months, however, in particular the aborted insurrection in December 1933, had convinced the BOC that the anarchists' strength was on the decline. Thus, the dissident communists not only believed that the CNT would eventually be forced to participate in the Workers Alliance but that its domination of the organised working class in the region had been seriously weakened. The apparent popularity of the Alliance since its foundation at the end of 1933, reinforced this view. So much so, that in the aftermath of the 13 March general strike *La Batalla* declared, incredible as it may seem, that the FAI had "disappeared forever as leaders of Catalan proletariat" and now had "only" (sic) Barcelona left under its control.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, the Bloc's leaders were confident that the anarchists could be outflanked at a trade union level by bringing together those unions outside the CNT.

In particular, the BOC leadership increasingly hoped that it could reach some form of agreement with the Treintistas. There appeared some reason to be optimistic when, following the proposal of the Bloc's Trade Union Conference in October 1933 for unity

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35. See Alba, *La Alianza Obrera* Op.cit. pp.191-200.

36. *La Batalla* 12.5.34.

37. *Ibid.* 17.3.34., 24.3.34.

talks, a delegation met with the Treintistas' representatives on 5 November. An agreement was made to call a "Conference of Trade Union Re-groupment", but nothing ever came of this. Instead, the Treintistas established their own "Regional Committee of Opposition Unions in the CNT" and called on all those outside the Confederation to join the new body. This proved, at least to the BOC, that the Treintistas had no real interest in trade union unity but rather that they aimed to establish their own exclusively revolutionary syndicalist federation. The Treintistas, in turn, accused the BOC of wanting, like the FAI, to dominate the opposition unions, whose "only loyalty was to their class".<sup>38</sup>

Despite this hostility at a leadership level, by the end of 1933 both dissident communists and Treintistas continued collaborating at a local level, even to the extent of organising new unions together.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, in the Treintista stronghold of Sabadell, the relatively important BOC faction remained active inside the city's unions, as they did in some other places in the province of Barcelona where the local CNT had joined the Opposition. Since the Treintistas had supported the Workers Alliance, it is not difficult to see why the dissident communists were hopeful of an even closer relationship between the two tendencies. Apart from syndicalist elements working with BOC militants in Barcelona to establish new autonomous printworkers' and textile workers' unions, there was similar joint work among other sectors of disaffected CNT members in the capital. Attempts were made in late 1933 to form new unions among woodworkers, photographers, metal, building and leather workers. These and other small unions also tried to set up a "Local Federation" in Barcelona. The anarchists accused those involved of being connected to the *Sindicatos Libres* and the new Federation felt obliged to issue a statement insisting on its "revolutionary and class essence".<sup>40</sup>

This endeavour to co-ordinate some of the city's autonomous, Treintista and BOC unions came to little however, probably because of the diverse origins of the various groups that had broken with the CNT at this time. Some of these new unions hardly seem to have existed, while inside others it was not clear yet which faction had control.

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38. *Adelante* 27.12.33, 30.12.33, 31.12.33; *Sindicalismo* 3.1.34, 10.1.34.

39. See pages 122, 123, 126.

40. *Adelante* 19.1.34.

Of the twelve unions which were affiliated to the new Barcelona Local Federation in March 1934, at least three, the printers', textile and metal workers, were BOC-led. Nevertheless, two months earlier, the FSL had angrily protested that it had organised all those unions concerned.<sup>41</sup> Yet, although the new united Local Federation had its offices at the Treintistas' Barcelona headquarters, it was never dominated by just one tendency. Even this limited co-operation was short lived and fell victim of the Treintista leaders' hostility towards the BOC, the rupture inside the former's ranks between the purer syndicalists and the followers of Angel Pestaña<sup>42</sup> and the actual weakness of many of the unions involved. A few months later there emerged another "Local Federation" made up exclusively of BOC-led unions.<sup>43</sup>

While the BOC's direct collaboration with the Treintistas was uneven, unity at a trade union level was, as at a political level, more forthcoming through the medium of the united front. The atmosphere had become even more favourable to this tactic among certain sectors of organised workers, not only because of the growing threat of the authoritarian Right, but also as a result of the successes enjoyed by the *mercantil* and power workers' united fronts before the elections. The constitution of the Workers Alliance gave even more credence to the idea of some form of unity in action among those sections outside the CNT. This was especially true in the traditionally less organised and weaker sectors, and there were moves in early 1934 to establish united fronts in Barcelona among teachers, employees of the Generalitat, the Catalan Railways Company, post office, catering and bank workers.<sup>44</sup> At a regional level agreements were reached in the petroleum company CAMPSA and among print, metal and rail workers. Most of these united fronts only brought together a minority of trade unionists in any particular sector and some were of little importance. Nevertheless, this tendency towards unity was symptomatic of the mood of many workers and in certain cases the united front continued to prove an effective tactic.

For instance, the power workers soon had the opportunity to demonstrate further the advantages of trade union unity. Their employers, hoping to benefit from the new

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41. *Sindicalismo* 3.1.34.; *Combate* 18.3.34.

42. See page 180.

43. *Sindicalismo* 3.1.34.; *Combate* 18.3.34.; *Treball* (Sindicat Mercantil) 1.9.34.; see Appendix Four.

44. *Adelante* 2.12.33, 2.2.34, 2.3.34.

political situation created by the Right's victory in the elections, now refused to carry through the agreement signed the previous October.<sup>45</sup> This led to an all-out strike in the sector on 15 March 1934. Once more, the power workers United Front surprised everyone, this time by bringing out nearly all the industry's 28,000 manual and clerical workers in the region. Only those who remained loyal to the CNT, in particular a minority of employees in Barcelona and Badalona, refused to join the strike. After five days, the employers backed down and a new agreement was signed following the intervention of the Generalitat. The importance of the strike's outcome was emphasised by all factions involved, the BOC describing it as a "great victory", the Treintistas as the "most important movement" in the industry since 1919, and the USC as a "great example of firmness and discipline". In Madrid, the UGT leadership also welcomed this "great victory", and asserted, quite unjustifiably, that it was in particular a triumph for the Socialist union, which had "controlled the movement".<sup>46</sup> Despite these claims, it was the BOC that benefited most from such a movement because it was the dissident communists' united front policy that had again been vindicated in practice. Neither the Socialists nor the Treintistas had championed so consistently the need for unity in action at all levels, tending instead to favour the absorption of the other factions into their own unions.

Parallel to the power workers' dispute, a similar struggle was developing in the Catalan Railway Company. Here also, it was the employers' refusal to put into practice an agreement, signed a year beforehand in the Jurado Mixto, that provoked industrial action. Again it was the establishment of a United Front of the company's unions in late January 1934 that proved crucial to mobilising the workforce. Apart from the BOC-led Sindicat Professional d'Empresa, which had proposed the organisation of such a front some weeks beforehand, this initiative also included the UGT and, surprisingly, the Radical Party's railwaymen's association. The resulting strike, which took place between 17 and 21 March, affected some 1,200 workers and resulted in an impressive victory for the United Front. Among other things the workers won a staggering eighty percent wage rise, a new pension scheme and fifteen days holidays a year.<sup>47</sup>

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45. See page 140.

46. *Las Noticias* 16.3.34, 21.3.34; *La Batalla* 17.3.34, 24.3.34.; *Combate* 18.3.34., 20.3.34., 21.3.34., 23.3.34; *Justicia Social* 24.3.34.; *Comercio y Navegación* March 1934; *Actas de la Comisión Ejecutiva de la UGT* 29.3.34.

47. *Adelante* 11.12.33, 6.1.34, 24.1.34, 18.2.34; *La Batalla* 17.3.34, 24.3.34; *Comercio y Navegación* March 1934.

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Once more the Generalitat's intervention had been decisive in quickly resolving a labour dispute. Since the Catalan government had taken over responsibility for labour relations from the central authorities, it had generally discriminated in favour of non-CNT unions, both in order to isolate the anarchists and to demonstrate to workers the advantages of participating in the arbitration committees.<sup>48</sup>

Another sector where the fragmentation of workers organisation was particularly marked was in the printing industry. The BOC had always been relatively influential among printers and this no doubt played an important part in the formation of a United Front at a Regional Conference of print unions on 1 and 2 April 1934. A total of eleven BOC-led, UGT and independent unions supported this initiative, whose joint membership amounted to around 1,500 workers. About a thousand of these were members of the four Barcelona unions present which, despite being outnumbered four to one by the CNT in the capital, were quite important because they grouped together mainly skilled print workers. By joint action the various unions involved aimed to get the industry's National Statute of Minimum Wages applied throughout Catalonia and not just in Barcelona, an end to the practice of making up public holidays through extra work and the elimination of shift work where working hours had been reduced. To tackle unemployment they proposed the abolition of overtime, the covering of existing vacancies and a forty-hour week.<sup>49</sup>

United fronts were also organised on a regional level, with differing results, among metal and rail workers. The metal workers front was established in February 1934 and claimed to represent some 10,000 workers. Unlike other trade union united fronts in Catalonia, this one was clearly dominated by the Treintistas, who led nine of the sixteen unions involved. The others being either independent, led by the BOC or from the UGT. The United Front's principal aim was for a forty-hour week, a long-standing grievance in the sector. This, in fact, was granted in June 1934, only to be withdrawn some months later, hence provoking a bitter fight by all the metal workers' unions, including the United Front, to regain this improvement.<sup>50</sup> Initiatives to form a united

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48. Jones, *Op.cit.* p.100.

49. *La Batalla* 24.3.34, 7.4.34, 1.5.34; *Boletín del Unión Obrera del Arte de Imprimir* March, April, May-June, July-August 1934.

50. *Adelante* 2.2.34; 13.2.34; *Sindicalismo* 24.1.34; *La Batalla* 20.7.34; See page 215.

front of rail unions were less fruitful, not only because of the hostility of the CNT but also because of the reluctance of the Socialists to commit themselves on a regional level. However, the BOC remained hopeful of some broader form of unity following co-operation between Socialist and anarcho-syndicalist railworkers in Madrid and Saragossa. None the less, agreements were only reached where the BOC had some influence. This was the case in Tarragona, where a pact was established with the UGT. Then, following the sacking of several workers in Lèrida in September 1934, a united front based on the local Socialist, anarcho-syndicalist and BOC rail unions was also established.<sup>51</sup>

One important exception to this general trend towards unity by many non-anarchist sectors of the Catalan workers movement was in the Barcelona textile industry. Initially, a united front had been formed in February 1934 between the UGT and the BOC and Syndicalist-led *Sindicat de Treballadors de la Indústria Fabril i Textil*. These two unions represented around 3,500 workers and in April managed, again through the now Generalitat-run *Jurado Mixto*, to obtain "considerable improvements in wages", something of which the FAI had been incapable, despite all its militancy. However, any prestige the United Front gained from this victory was probably short lived, because some months later the majority of the Socialist textile union's members deserted the UGT for the USC-led split, the *Unió General de Sindicats Obrers de Catalunya* (UGSOC).<sup>52</sup> Equally damaging to the Textile Workers United Front were the serious internal differences that were emerging inside the BOC-influenced union. What had been an uneasy alliance with certain syndicalist elements came to an end in June 1934 when the BOC tried to remove the union's president, whom it accused of "not being capable of standing up to the FAI" and later of being a "a police informer" and "bosses' agent". Relations had deteriorated between the two factions since some of leading *Treintistas* in the union had joined the new Syndicalist Party, which had been founded in April 1934 by followers of the former CNT leader Angel Pestaña in an attempt to give a "political" voice to syndicalism. The dissident communists were highly suspicious of this new formation and accused it at various times of being "in league with the ERC" and

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51. *Ibid.* 16.8.34; *El País* 14.8.34; *Frente Norte* 1.10.34.

52. The UGSOC was formed in July 1934 after the withdrawal of USC-led unions from the Catalan UGT in April that year following an unsuccessful attempt to break the PSOE's domination of the region's Socialist unions.

even in danger of moving towards some form of fascism. Given the violent nature of such recriminations there was little room for compromise. The syndicalists responded by forming their own alternative junta inside the union in direct competition to the "official" leadership which supported the BOC. The union was now divided in two and the dissident communists renamed the faction under their control the *Sindicat Regional de la Indústria Fabril i Textil de Catalunya*,<sup>53</sup> clearly with the aim of linking up the various textile unions influenced by them into a regional-based organisation. The later fusion of the Syndicalist faction with the USC's textile union<sup>54</sup> seemed to confirm the BOC's suspicions about the involvement of the ERC. The USC was closely aligned to the left nationalists and those unions under its control benefited from the Generalitat's patronage.

Despite this setback in the textile industry, the various trade union united fronts, particularly those among print, metal, power and *mercantil* workers, encouraged the BOC to believe that the struggle for workers unity was definitely making headway during the first half of 1934. More importantly, the Workers Alliances were increasingly popular throughout the peninsula.

### **Catalonia and Madrid - defiance or submission ?**

The formation of the Workers Alliance was the response of a sector of Catalan workers to the threat posed by the Right. The municipal elections celebrated in the region on 14 January 1934 offered the Left in general an opportunity to recuperate some of the ground lost electorally months earlier. Consequently, the ERC hurriedly patched up its alliance with the *Acció Catalana Republicana* (ACR) in an attempt to avoid a repetition of its defeat by the *Lliga* the previous November. The BOC, for its part, saw the local elections as a chance both to strengthen working class unity and, yet again, attempt to break the political influence of the ERC. As usual, the BOC tried to present the electoral battle as one between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. In this schema, the petty bourgeoisie had to side with one or the other classes, represented by the Bloc and the *Lliga*. Unfortunately for the dissident communists, the Catalan masses did not see it that way and were far more likely to back yet again the ERC and its allies.

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53. *La Batalla* 2.6.34; 9.6.34; 16.6.34; 7.7.34;

54. In March 1935, as the *Sindicat Unió Obrera de la Indústria Fabril i Textil*.

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Understandably then, the BOC's propaganda aimed at undermining this support - although it admitted that the Esquerra could retain working class votes because of fear of a right-wing victory. Municipal government alone, the Bloc explained, could not hold back fascism and, moreover, the workers' votes would be wasted if they went to the left nationalists. In government, according to *Adelante*, the ERC, like its Republican counter-parts in Madrid, had acted as a "break on the revolution" and had become "no more than the Lliga's doormen".<sup>55</sup>

The BOC also saw the municipal elections as a chance to further the cause of the workers' united front. Not only did it seek to repeat the electoral alliance that it had made the previous November with the PSOE, but it hoped to extend this to other working class organisations. Such hopes were in vain because the Treintistas refused to get involved in elections and, as has been shown, the USC, despite signing the Workers Alliance manifesto, soon went back to its ERC allies. More surprisingly, the Catalan PSOE refused to align itself this time with the BOC, deciding instead to back the Republicans. Given the revolutionary demagoguery of the Socialist left, with whom the party's Catalan Federation more or less identified, this decision appeared, to say the least, incongruous.

However, even the BOC was not opposed to some local alliances with the ERC where the latter was "the organisation of the workers and poor peasants". This position reflected a certain tradition of collaboration between the dissident communists and the republican nationalist left in some localities, as well as the contradictory nature of the ERC itself. The BOC intended to oppose the Esquerra where it "represented the bourgeoisie". Accordingly, it rejected an offer of four places in the ERC's list in Gerona, for example, because the local Republican organisation was considered to be middle class. Nevertheless, the dissident communists unsuccessfully proposed a joint list with the ERC in the city of Lérida where the Catalan left nationalists could hardly have been considered to have been representative of the "workers and poor peasants". In fact, the ERC's provincial leaders in Lérida were opposed to any form of contact with the Bloc and described themselves as the only "guarantee against revolution". Their

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55. *Adelante* 7.1.34, 13.1.34, 14.1.34.



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stance led the Esquerra to make pacts with the Right in various places where the BOC had a chance of winning. In contrast, in other villages in Lérida and elsewhere, the local ERC formed joint candidacies with the Bloc in order to keep out the Right.<sup>56</sup> The Esquerra may have been a heterogeneous organisation, especially in rural areas, but the dissident communists' decision to make alliances with it at a local level contrasted starkly with the virulent attacks on it in their press.

In most parts of Catalonia, the BOC stood alone or in conjunction with local trade unions or peasant organisations under its control. The party's electoral programme centred on the idea of a special tax of the rich to finance social welfare projects, municipal control of all urban services and a number of initiatives designed to alleviate the plight of the unemployed such as the free provision of housing, water, electricity and transport. Particular attention was also paid to the long standing corruption and great waste of public money associated with Barcelona's municipal administration. Notwithstanding the practical elements of the BOC's programme, the main thrust of its electoral intervention was clearly propagandistic and aimed at "strengthening revolutionary positions".<sup>57</sup>

As expected, the ERC regained many votes lost in the general elections and won control of local government in the majority of towns and villages in the region. According to the BOC, most workers and peasants understood the dangerous situation which faced the Republic and therefore voted yet again for the ERC. Optimistically, the dissident communists denied that the results reflected a new mood of sympathy for the ERC but rather was a vote against the Lliga. The Esquerra remained a "serious obstacle to revolution" but, the Bloc insisted, it should be defeated by the working class and not by the Right. Voting in these local elections had polarised even further between Left and Right, between the ERC and Lliga, and not the latter, representing the bourgeoisie, and the BOC, representing the proletariat, as the dissident communists had hoped. This further polarisation between the two principal nationalist parties was reflected in the fact that all other parties, including the BOC, lost around fifty percent of their previous electoral support.

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56. *Ibid.* 7.1.34, 11.1.34, 12.1.34, 24.1.34, 31.1.34; Barrull, *Op.cit.* p.366.

57. *Adelante* 11.1.34; See note 55.

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Despite the BOC's attempt to explain its poor results as the consequences of the "great mass" of its sympathisers voting for the ERC, party spokesmen could not hide their dissatisfaction. In Barcelona, for instance, its maximum vote dropped by more than half to a mere 1,970 and talk of this representing "the vanguard of the vanguard" was not very convincing, especially as the diminutive Catalan section of the PCE managed to win 1,454 votes in the city. In the provinces, the BOC's results were equally disappointing, although it managed to win seats in at least twenty-seven towns and villages. The only outright victories known to be won by the BOC were in Vilanova d'Alpicat and Tudela de Segre in Lérida and in the small mining village of Agullana, in Gerona, near the French border.

In some places the Bloc's town councillors were elected in coalition with the ERC, although elsewhere, for instance Sitges and Vendrell, the lack of such a pact had, according to the dissident communists, given victory to the Right. In addition, in various towns and villages the ERC had actually blocked with the Right to prevent the BOC's candidate from winning. The left nationalists' political incoherence seems to have provoked an equally contradictory response from the dissident communists. While they were not only prepared to enter into local alliances with the ERC but also denounce it for refusing to do so in certain places, at the same time they described the left nationalists as "being bound hand and foot to the Lliga". Moreover, they continued to underestimate the depth of mass support for the Esquerra and consequently they frequently predicted its imminent demise or conversion into a purely "bourgeois" party.<sup>58</sup>

Attacks on the ERC had steadily increased in the Bloc's press since 1933. Not only was the Esquerra the "prisoner of the Lliga", but Macià was now compared to Cambó, whom, the BOC declared, he should replace as the true leader of bourgeois nationalism given his "conservative and reactionary" policies. If the ERC had maintained mass support until 1934 this was, according to Maurín, because until then it had possessed very little real power and had been able to maintain illusions in its intentions. Now that

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58. *Adelante* 16-21.1.34, 24.1.34, 3.2.34, 7.2.34; *L'Hora* 17.1.24; *La Vanguardia* 16.1.34, 18.1.34; *Humanitat* 19.1.34; C. Mir Curcó, *Lleida (1890-1936). Caciquismo político i lluita electoral* (Barcelona 1985), Appendix 1; R. Viros, "Las elecciones municipales del 14.1.34 en la provincia de Gerona", *Perspectiva Social* no.5, 1975.

more legislative powers had been handed over from the Madrid government, the BOC leader predicted that the Esquerra's weaknesses would become clearer. The death of Macià in December 1933 would also accelerate the ERC's decline, the dissident communists believed, and like other petty bourgeois parties in Spain, the Catalan Republicans were gradually condemned to disappear. In government, Maurín wrote, they would end up like Robespierre, Castelar, Stanbulisky, Herriot and Chatemps and be by-passed by other more powerful class interests. Therefore as a party with a "bourgeois leadership" and a strong working class and peasant base, the ERC would, he argued, fall between the Lliga and the BOC and it would either end up increasingly marginalised, like the British Liberal Party or actually replace the Lliga as the principal counter-revolutionary force in Catalonia. The belief that the ERC's heterogeneous composition and diverse social base made it unviable in the long term was shared by some Spanish Republicans.<sup>59</sup> However, the BOC's predictions of its impending collapse or transformation into a party of the Right was never fulfilled, if only because the Civil War radically altered the fate of the whole of the Left in the peninsula.

The fact that the dissident communists, notwithstanding their ferocious criticism of the Esquerra, had been prepared to collaborate with it during the municipal elections had been a result, principally, of the left nationalists' often militant base at a local level. Yet there was another reason for the BOC's apparently contradictory attitude. Since the Right's electoral victory in November 1933, the Generalitat had become a bastion of republicanism in the peninsula and hence an obvious target for the counter-revolutionary Right. Accordingly, the BOC and the Workers Alliance saw the need to defend the Catalan government from the attacks of right-wing centralism. However, they contrasted the Generalitat's role in relation to Madrid to its repressive attitude towards the more militant sectors of the workers movement, in particular the CNT. Hostility towards the anarchists was especially strong among the increasingly influential separatist elements of the ERC. During 1933, para-military squads, *escamots*, organised by the party's radical youth section and led by Estat Català members, were involved in clashes with anarcho-syndicalist militants and were often used to break strikes. Such activities were repeatedly denounced in the working class press, even to

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59. Miravittles, "Macià-Cambó" *Adelante* 10.11.33; Maurín, "¿Quién vencerá, Cambó o Companys?" *Ibid* 4.2.34 and "On va l'Esquerra?" *L'Hora* 25.8.34 and 1.9.34; Jones, *Op.cit.* p.90.

the extent that *La Batalla* had described the Catalan flag as "synonymous with scabbing" after the *escamots* had tried to smash the Barcelona transport workers' strike in November 1933.<sup>60</sup> Once responsibility for public order had been fully transferred to the Catalan government in March 1934, what was described by the BOC, as the left nationalists' "intolerable persecution" of the anarchists intensified. The CNT's persistent militancy was seen by the ERC as a continued obstacle to the establishment of stable government in the region. Accordingly, unable to persuade the anarchist leaders to moderate their tactics, the Catalan authorities now set out to smash them, both through naked force and by favouring certain non-CNT unions. The BOC denounced the Generalitat's "double policy of demagogy and ferocious repression" as proving that this "colonial parliament" was no more than "a simple executive at the orders of Madrid and a docile tool of the Catalan bourgeoisie".<sup>61</sup>

The activities of Estat Català and similar groups seemed to confirm the BOC's worst fears about the potentially counter-revolutionary role of petty bourgeois governments and the danger of elements of the middle classes moving towards fascism. More specifically, the separatists' actions further convinced the dissident communists of the possibility of the ERC turning to the right. Certainly some radical nationalists, especially the uniformed *escamots* and the Estat Català leader, Dr Josep Dencàs, were increasingly behaving in a quasi-fascist manner, so much so that the BOC described them as "more dangerous than the (local) groups of Nazis". Moreover, the Bloc accused these Catalan "philofascists" of trying to infiltrate the working class movement through Pestaña's Syndicalist Party. Events inside Barcelona's autonomous Textile Workers Union reinforced this belief.<sup>62</sup> The BOC's growing obsession with Dencàs and his supporters may have been exaggerated but it was an attitude shared by most sectors of the workers movement at the time.

The apparent evolution of Estat Català, or at least some sectors of it, towards fascism was also another reflection of the heterogeneous composition of the ERC, of which it was a part. As a consequence, the BOC's belief in the inherently unstable nature of the

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60. *La Batalla* 7.12.33.

61. *ibid* 7.4.34, 13.4.34; "La fase actual de la revolució..." *Op.cit.*

62. *La Batalla* 12.5.34, 1.6.34; Maurín, *Revolució y contrarrevolució* *Op.cit.* pp.134-135. See pages 180-181.

Esquerra, was strengthened. Yet the ERC also attracted many on the Left, as had been demonstrated again during the municipal elections. Its populist nationalism made it a difficult rival for the dissident communists whose repeated denunciations of the ERC as "tools of the reactionary bourgeoisie" made little impact on its mass base. At a rank and file level, the BOC may well have won over a steady trickle of ERC supporters but this process also went the other way. In June 1934, Jaume Miravittles, one of the Bloc's most popular leaders, went over to the ERC, denouncing his former comrades' "sectarianism" and praising the "anti-capitalist" nature of the Catalan middle classes.<sup>63</sup>

Meanwhile the Generalitat had been moving towards what appeared to be an inevitable clash with Madrid over its planned reform of cultivation contracts. If the dissident communists' analysis was correct such a clash would expose the vacillating nature of the "petty bourgeois" ERC and put pressure on its complex relationship with the Catalan masses. Already in an attempt to avoid an intensification of agitation in the countryside during the summer and autumn of 1933, the Catalan government had passed the so-called "Llei Petita" ("Small Law"). This allowed all those sharecroppers in conflict over their contract to keep fifty percent of what they had previously handed over to the landowner and eviction would now only be possible on the grounds of non-payment. The fact that this law applied effectively only to the *rabassaires* was, according to the BOC's Agrarian Commission, because they had known how to organise themselves and fight and thereby could not be ignored by the ERC. Nevertheless, it was a "monstrous injustice" that some seventy percent of peasants, mainly outside of the province of Barcelona, remained excluded from the law and continued in the same conditions as under the monarchy.<sup>64</sup>

This law was only a stop-gap measure before the presentation of more definitive legislation. Its forerunner had first been put forward on 20 April 1933, six days after a massive peasant demonstration in Barcelona demanding an end to promises and provisional solutions. None the less, internal dissent inside the ERC and opposition from the Lliga prevented this project becoming law until 21 March 1934 and only then after being considerably modified. Among other things, the legislation allowed

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63. *L'Opinió* 21.6.34.

64. *La Batalla* 8.6.33, 29.6.33; Comisión Central Agraria del BOC "La ley debe ser para todos los explotados del campo catalan" *ibid* 13.7.33.

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peasants to buy land they had cultivated for 18 years, guaranteed the rights to those who had held it for six years to automatic renewal of contracts and prevented evictions, except in cases of non-payment or non-cultivation by the peasants concerned. Within days of the law's official proclamation by Lluís Companys, who had replaced Macià as president of the Generalitat, the central government had taken the new legislation to the right-wing dominated Tribunal of Constitutional Guarantees, claiming it to be "unconstitutional".

Maurín criticised the new Cultivation Contracts Law as "petty bourgeois and basically conservative" because it aimed at creating a "great mass of small owners" who, depending on the political situation, could break with the peasant movement and go over to the side of the counter-revolutionary land owners. In no way, the BOC leaders argued, could this law solve the agrarian problem in Catalonia, only the socialist revolution could do that. However, the combination of mass support for national rights and the obvious antagonism between reactionary Madrid and republican Catalonia made this law's implications potentially explosive. At stake was the whole question of Catalan autonomy and the implementation of relatively progressive agrarian reform at a time when the central government was busy dismantling similar legislation passed by its Republican predecessors. Consequently, despite the dissident communists' initial criticisms of the law, they recognised that in the current situation it was "objectively revolutionary" and they emphasised its positive aspects, above all that in the name of the cultivator it attacked the rights of "established property". The law's importance, according to the Workers Alliance, also lay in that it was the product of the peasants' struggles during the previous two years. Moreover, as the petty bourgeoisie was "likely to capitulate" to Madrid's pressure to modify the new legislation it would be more necessary than ever for the workers movement to take up the defence of Catalonia against "Spanish imperialism".<sup>65</sup>

The BOC itself tried to mobilise its supporters in the countryside not only against the owners and the Right but also to take advantage of the ERC's apparent prevarications. Parallel to the creation of the Workers Alliance, the dissident communists had already

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65. Maurín, "El problema agraria..." *Leviatán* Op.cit.; *La Batalla* 1.5.34, 19.5.34, 2.6.34; Comité de la Alianza Obrera. "La Alianza Obrera ante los problemas campesinos" *Ibid* 19.5.34.

called in December 1933, through the Lérida peasants' union, the Unió Provincial Agrària, for a "Peasants United Front" to ensure the projected reform of the contracts system became law. This call resulted in a mass meeting and demonstration of three thousand peasants in Gerona two months later, organised jointly by the local Federació Provincial de Treballadors de la Terra, UPA and UdeR. The militancy of this gathering and its hostility towards the pro-Esquerra UdeR leaders encouraged the BOC to believe that Catalan peasants were ready to "break with the petty bourgeoisie" and the "allies of the landowners." Yet, despite the antagonism shown by the Bloc towards the UdeR leadership and the latter's decision in March to leave the Workers Alliance, collaboration between the *rabasaires'* organisation and the two dissident communist-led unions continued. Once the new legislation was drawn up the peasants' organisations intensified their campaign to revise existing contracts. They were encouraged by the fact that the new law would allow all those who had presented revision of contract claims before the next harvest to keep half of what they would normally owe to the landowners.<sup>66</sup>

As feared, the Tribune of Constitutional Guarantees declared on 3 June that the Cultivation Contracts Law was "unconstitutional". The ERC, commented the BOC press, had now paid the price of its demagogy, the "comedy had ended". Since 1932 the left nationalists had calmed down the peasantry with promises of such a law but they had left its introduction until 1934, when, with a reactionary central government, the objective circumstances were far less favourable. By annulling this law, the Right had taken a decisive step towards doing away with Catalonia's limited autonomy; the ERC, declared the BOC, had to rebel against Madrid if it wanted to avoid "committing suicide".<sup>67</sup>

Initially, it appeared that the Catalan Republicans would indeed take a firm stand against the central government. Companys reacted to the Tribune's decision by strengthening the position of the hard-line Estat Català in his government. Then on 12 June the Catalan parliament re-affirmed its decision to carry through the new law, while

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66. *Adelante* 21.12.33, 13.2.34, 14.2.34; *El Socialista* 13.2.34; *La Batalla* 26.5.34; *L'Hora* 29.6.34.

67. *Ibid* 9.6.34, *La Batalla* 9.6.34.

**simultaneously the ERC's deputies withdrew from the Cortes. Everything now seemed set for a major showdown with Madrid.**

**The BOC welcomed the ERC's ostensible refusal to bow down to Madrid and called on the Catalan masses to defend, by any means at their disposal, the law voted for by the Catalan parliament, despite all its inadequacies. None the less, as Maurín warned in a special meeting organised in the Ateneu Enciclopèdic Popular the same night as the Catalan parliament's historic decision, the Esquerra's defiance had to be treated with caution. All the Republicans, both Spanish and Catalan, had, by their vacillations, let the Right get into such a powerful position in the first place. He reminded his audience that had Macià declared the Catalan Republic in April 1931, "no force could have stopped" the nationalists; instead the ERC leadership had done a deal with Madrid and had missed a great opportunity to strike a real blow for Catalan freedom. Then, as now, the ERC was motivated more by fear of the masses falling under revolutionary leadership, Maurín claimed, than by really wanting to mobilise them against the counter-revolution. By defending the Cultivation Contracts Law, he explained, the BOC was not supporting the Generalitat, but rather defending Catalonia from the Spanish imperialist state. The latter, and not the Catalan government, remained, as Maurín had stated at the FCI's Second Congress two months previously, the main danger for workers and peasants in the region.**

**Given that the workers movement and the Left in general were forced onto the defensive after November 1933, the BOC leadership was convinced that the Catalan crisis presented an excellent opportunity to strike a major blow against the new government. For this reason it was important, the dissident communists argued, to get across to workers in the rest of Spain that in this struggle there were no "geographical enemies" only class ones. Here were confronted "two Catalonias", Maurín declared in his speech in the Ateneu Enciclopèdic Popular. One was represented by the Sant Isidre Institute, the Lliga and its reactionary allies elsewhere in the peninsula. The other was the "Catalonia of the workers and peasants", of Layret, Segui, 1909 and 14 April. Thus, this was not just a struggle for Catalan freedom but a struggle for workers' freedom throughout Spain. Consequently, the BOC appealed to all Spanish workers to act in**



**solidarity with their Catalan comrades and, if it became necessary, block the sending of troops to the region.**

A combination of factors, the dissident communists believed, had converted Catalonia, since the general elections, into the "bulwark of the revolution". The struggle over the Contracts Law had produced a situation in which it would be possible to establish a "triple front" of workers, peasants and the national liberation movement in the region. Now was the time, the Bloc's leaders insisted, to establish a "Catalan Republic" and finally to carry through the tasks of the democratic revolution. By calling for such immediate measures as expropriating all "Catalan traitors", dissolving all religious orders and confiscating their wealth, instituting a forty hour week and handing over "the land to those who worked it", they hoped the popular masses could be mobilised into a "great invincible army" and inspire workers, peasants and national liberation movements elsewhere in the peninsula. The declaration of a Catalan Republic, the dissident communists concluded, would therefore be a decisive step towards the socialist revolution and the establishment of the Union of Iberian Socialist Republics. The fact that the Generalitat's stand seemed to be well received by some workers organisations outside of Catalonia, further strengthened the BOC's view that there had arisen an unprecedented opportunity to unite the three "driving forces" of the revolution.<sup>68</sup>

Whatever happened in Catalonia would undoubtedly affect the fortunes of the Spanish left in general. Objectively it appeared that the "triple front" the dissident communists advocated could be formed. None the less, the ERC's reticence, despite its bravado, to lead a revolutionary movement against Madrid on the one hand and the CNT's hostility to national liberation on the other, made the establishment of such a "front" unlikely unless the BOC could dramatically increase its sphere of influence. So, by clearly posing the alternatives open to the Catalan masses, the dissident communists hoped to gain more support in the region.

The rest of the Catalan workers movement did not, however, share the BOC's enthusiasm for a "Catalan Republic", as became clear at the first Regional Conference

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68. On the BOC and the crisis over the Cultivation Contracts Law see *La Batalla* 20.4.34, 16.6.34, 21.6.34, 30.6.34, and 26.7.34; *L'Hora* 9.6.34, 13.6.34 (Full Extraordinari), 16.6.34, 23.6.34. and 30.6.34.

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of the Workers Alliance, held in Barcelona on 17 June. The BOC and those trade unions under its influence, produced a resolution which reflected the dissident communists' general analysis of the current situation and the revolutionary potential of the national liberation movement.<sup>69</sup> It stressed the strategic importance of Catalonia and how the Workers Alliance had to win the leadership of the "triple front", failure to do so would "lead irredeemably to catastrophe". This leadership could not be won through "sympathetic noises" but through fighting for a Catalan Republic. The creation of such a Republic, the BOC concluded optimistically, would not only "convert Catalonia into the first trench of the revolution" but within "a few hours or days" would be the "spark for a general insurrection" throughout Spain, hence leading to the establishment of the Alliance's final objective: the "Federal Socialist Republic".

The majority of the Catalan Alliance's Committee, however, favoured supporting a Catalan Republic if this was proclaimed but not actually calling for one to be set up. Maurín warned delegates that such a "defensive" position would effectively mean following the ERC and a repeat of 14 April 1931. Instead, the Alliance had to champion the very demands that had made the ERC so popular. Demands which under working class leadership would become revolutionary and not merely nationalist in content. He drew a parallel with the position taken by the Bolsheviks in 1917 when, by defending the democratic regime from Kornilov, they managed definitively to break the remaining influence of the petty bourgeoisie and its allies over the masses. It was necessary to realise that the Federal Socialist Republic would not be "formed by a meeting of the Workers Alliance in Madrid" but, as in 1931, the revolutionary movement had to start somewhere. By fighting for the Catalan Republic, the Alliance would become the vanguard of the revolution in the peninsula, the BOC leader concluded.

These arguments were, however, rejected by the other components of the Alliance. The Treintistas described the BOC's position as "nationalist" and "incomprehensible". If the Alliance was capable of declaring the Catalan Republic, the syndicalists argued, then it was capable of declaring the socialist republic hence making the former slogan redundant. The PSOE delegation claimed that workers outside Catalonia would inevitably reject the establishment of a Catalan Republic as "separatist" and therefore

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69. *La Batalla* 21.6.34.

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the Workers Alliance, while it should support such a regime if it was set up, could not advocate it themselves.

Despite the BOC having the majority of the delegates from the twenty-six places represented at the Conference, a compromise solution had to be found between the different political factions to avoid the disintegration of the Alliance. It was finally decided that if "the counter-revolutionary Madrid government attacks Catalonia and because of this a Catalan Republic is proclaimed", the Workers Alliance would "support it, trying to take over the leadership with the object of leading [the struggle] towards the victory of the Federal Socialist Republic". The Alliance had seemingly fallen into the very passivity against which the BOC had warned.<sup>70</sup>

The clash between Madrid and the Generalitat, however, was postponed because the ERC leadership was soon seeking a negotiated settlement. The truth was that the Catalan government's radical posturing was basically designed to force the central government into making concessions. Apart from pressure from the Right, the influential and moderate association of rural co-operative societies, the *Unió de Sindicats Agrícoles*, also came out against the Cultivation Contracts Law as it stood, hence pushing the Generalitat further towards a compromise. The agreement struck with Madrid amounted to a set of complicated regulations for the application of the Law, which were subsequently approved by the Catalan parliament on 13 September. These regulations, which were more extensive than the original law itself, were heralded as a "victory" in the ERC press but denounced as a "capitulation" by the BOC. In particular, the dissident communists criticised the intention to appoint lawyers to preside over the proposed system of contract arbitration committees. The committees, they believed, would invariably side with the owners if under the control of lawyers rather than mayors as the Catalan government had originally proposed. The "rapid and efficient application" of the Cultivation Contracts Law would now be very difficult and the peasants would, according to the Bloc, become bogged-down in a "dense web" of expensive legal procedures which would "reduce their conquests to nothing".

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70. *Ibid.*; J. Vila, "Para transformar la Alianza Obrera en órgano de poder" *ibid.* 16.8.34; *Sindicalismo* 3.6.34, 20.6.34, 27.6.34.

What was seen by the dissident communists as the Catalan government's "cowardly betrayal" after having "maintained the popular masses in a state of tension for months" was only what they had predicted from the start as the logical outcome of the ERC's petty bourgeois politics. In fact, as the Workers Alliance Committee commented, if the left nationalist party had, "adopted an offensive attitude at the right moment, it would no longer have been the ERC". Yet again it was clear, the Alliance concluded, that the land and national questions could not be separated from the general problems of the revolution. Thus, support for the Workers Alliance remained the Catalan peasantry's only alternative.<sup>71</sup> The problem was that there was still no easy way for the BOC to break the ERC's hold over large sections of the masses. In the short term, at least, everything depended on the Esquerra making the very stand that its dissident communist critics both demanded and believed it incapable of. It was therefore hoped, in Maurín's words, that the petty bourgeoisie could be forced into a position from whence "it could not retreat" and it would have no alternative but to declare the Catalan Republic. The Workers Alliance believed it would then be able to step in to take over the peasant and national movements' leadership when the ERC inevitably began to falter.<sup>72</sup>

Within weeks of their retreat over the Cultivation Contracts Law, the Catalan left nationalists would be driven into the very position which Maurín and his comrades hoped for. The question of whether a triple front would be formed under the Alliance's leadership - thereby conclusively ending the influence of the Esquerra - had still to be resolved.

## Red October

By early September, both the reactionary Right and the workers movement were frantically mobilising their forces for what seemed to be, as the Catalan Workers Alliance put it in early August 1934, one of the "most decisive phases" of the Spanish revolution.<sup>73</sup> For much of the Catalan Left the counter-revolution's preparations were most clearly represented by the Sant Isidre Institute's intention to hold a rally in Madrid on 8 September to call for the complete repeal of the Generalitat's Cultivation Contracts Law,

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71. *La Batalla* 2.8.34, 9.8.34, 30.8.34; *L'Hora* 21.7.34, 25.8.34, 15.9.34.

72. *La Batalla* 21.6.34.

73. Comité Regional de la Alianza Obrera de Cataluña. "Ante la actual situación política" *Ibid.*, 9.8.34.

despite its modifications. The Catalan Workers Alliance responded by calling on both the Catalan government and the masses physically to prevent the Institute's delegations from leaving Catalonia. On 5 September the BOC's Action Groups responded to this planned rally by assaulting the Institute's Barcelona headquarters, causing a considerable amount of damage. On the day of the rally itself five thousand Catalan landowners travelled to the Spanish capital. In an unprecedented act of solidarity with Catalonia, the Madrid Workers Alliance called an impressive general strike in protest. The locally-powerful UGT had initially opposed the strike, but seeing it could well take place without them was forced to go along with it.<sup>74</sup>

Events in Madrid illustrated just how extensive rank and file pressure for joint action was at this time and, in part, help explain the dissident communists' confidence in the revolutionary potential of the Workers Alliances. Meanwhile in Barcelona, a proposal for a one day general strike by the BOC and the Catalan section of the PCE at a meeting of all workers organisations, except the CNT, was rejected in favour of a protest demonstration on 10 September. In what appears to have been an attempt to take the initiative away from the workers' groups, the ERC also called a demonstration for the same day. In the end both protests merged, an estimated 15,000 of the 25,000 present being mobilised by the workers organisations.<sup>75</sup> It was not just in Barcelona and Madrid that the Workers Alliances were flexing their muscles. The same weekend, Asturias was also paralysed by the "most unanimous strike that the province had known",<sup>76</sup> when the CEDA attempted to organise a mass rally at Covadonga.

Despite the threats of the landowners, agitation continued in the Catalan countryside. As the harvest approached many peasants, without waiting for the implementation of the Generalitat's legislation, yet again refused to hand over more than half of what was due to the owners. This growing rural militancy was further reflected at a demonstration of over 8,000 people in Gerona on 16 September, which was addressed by both local peasant and BOC leaders.<sup>77</sup>

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74. *L'Hora* 8.9.34; Rosa-Roc *Op.cit.* p.93; *Actas de la Comisión Ejecutiva de la UGT* 6.9.34; G. Munis, *Jalones de derrota, promesa de victoria* (Madrid 1977) p.156.

75. *La Batalla* 13.9.34, 20.9.34, *L'Hora* 15.9.34; Letter from PCdeC to PCE 13.9.34 (ACCPCE).

76. Bizcarrondo, *Op.cit.* p.41.

77. *La Batalla* 20.9.34; *Comercio y Navegación* August and September 1934.

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In mid-September, the Workers Alliances were further strengthened by the integration of the PCE. Until then the official Communists had been uniformly hostile to the Alliances, which they denounced as a "counter-revolutionary manoeuvre". Instead, they had advocated the so-called "united front from below" which, in line with current CI thinking, meant attempting to win over the rank and file of other workers organisations while fiercely denouncing their leaders as little better than fascists. The real fascist threat was continually underestimated, even to the extent that many Communist parties, the Spanish among them,<sup>78</sup> had actually seen Hitler's victory as a prelude to revolution because it reflected the depth of the crisis of capitalism. A new orientation was needed if the Communist parties were to end the isolation caused by such sectarianism. The rise of fascism forced the CI to begin to moderate its attitude, the first practical signs of this being the collaboration between French Socialists and Communists, leading in July 1934 to the signing of an anti-fascist pact. Internationally, there was also a need for the USSR to find new allies against Nazi Germany and in May 1934 the Soviet Union had joined the League of Nations. The first moves by the PCE to co-operate seriously with other workers organisations had come in the summer, when it had attempted to develop closer relations with the Socialists. None the less, a meeting between the two parties' youth wings in July failed to produce any positive results. The Communists refused to accept the Socialist invitation to join the Workers Alliances.

The PCE's objections did not last much longer, however. A few weeks later, the CI, in line with the general re-orientation internationally, instructed the Spanish party to enter the Workers Alliances forthwith.<sup>79</sup> After having quietly entered a few Alliances at a local level during August, the PCE announced its formal change of line on 12 September. The party declared its intention to fight for the Alliances' extension into "Workers and Peasants Alliances", the formation of workplace-based committees and their eventual conversion into soviets. Privately, the "official" Communists stressed that by joining the Workers Alliances they would be able to enter into "permanent contact with the UGT, PSOE and FJS", of whose radicalisation they obviously hoped to take advantage.<sup>80</sup> The likelihood of a change in the PCE's line had already been predicted

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78. For example see *Catalunya Roja* 9.2.33.

79. E. H. Carr *Op.cit.* p.312.

80. *Mundo Obrero* 12.9.34, 17.9.34; "PCE a todos los Comités Provinciales del Partido" 19.9.34, "PCE a todos los Comités" 26.9.34. and "Alerta camaradas" 3.10.34. (ACCPCE)

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in the BOC press some weeks beforehand; both because of developments at an international level and because of the party's isolation in Spain itself. The party's subsequent entrance into the Alliance did not convince the BOC's leaders that any genuine rectification had taken place and they waited sceptically to see what the PCE's first actions would be.<sup>81</sup>

With the political situation in the peninsula becoming ever more unstable, the BOC was facing its stiffest test since its foundation. But was the Bloc in a position to take advantage of these developments? Certainly in Catalonia, the party's local organisations had reported a steady increase in their strength since 1933. By June 1934, 2,711 of that year's party cards had been distributed, mostly in Catalonia, and total BOC membership was later given as having been 4,423 at this time. The number of Bloc groups had increased from 127 in 1932 to a total of 74 sections and 145 nuclei two years later. Public meetings continued to be well attended and Maurín's estimate, in January 1934, that the BOC had 50,000 supporters was probably not too much of an exaggeration. The dissident communists' vote in November 1933 had been little more than half this figure but given the youth of many members and sympathisers, the trade unions under the Bloc's control and the often complex relation in rural areas with the ERC, it is possible that Maurín's claim was fairly accurate. Yet there were two major organisational problems facing the dissident communists - their relative weakness in Barcelona in comparison with the anarcho-syndicalists and their failure seriously to extend their organisation beyond Catalonia. Only in the neighbouring provinces of Huesca, Valencia and, above all, Castellón, had the BOC really managed to build itself a limited base. Nevertheless, there seemed some grounds for optimism, after a series of "very successful" meetings in Asturias and the Levante during August 1934 and the "extraordinary rise in the sales of *La Batalla* outside of Catalonia".<sup>82</sup>

Despite the growth in membership, the BOC was still beset with economic problems. Many members did not pay their dues, or at least they were not regularly sent into party headquarters.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, as there were no other sources of finance this meant the Bloc had frequently to turn to special fund raising drives to support its publications. The

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81. *La Batalla* 2.8.34, 20.9.34; *L'Hora* 4.8.34.

82. *La Batalla* 7.4.32, 4.1.34, 2.8.34; see Appendices Two and Three.

83. Appendix Two.

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party's inability to resuscitate *Adelante*, after its suspension following the general strike of 13 March, was the most obvious example of its financial limitations. There also remained an organisational problem over the exact relationship between the Federación Comunista Ibérica (FCI) and the BOC. In some rural areas, the BOC had maintained its looser character because of the difficulties of organising often isolated groups of peasants. Yet where the party was better organised, or in urban centres, the differences between the Bloc and the Federation had been steadily broken down. The problems involved in sustaining the dual structure, as it was originally conceived, were clearest in Barcelona, where in 1933 the FCI had two hundred militants compared with one thousand and seven BOC members, "the great part of which" had gone "to one meeting and were never seen again". One solution to this continuing ambiguity was to fuse the two organisations definitively, as had been proposed by Gorkín and Portela at the FCI's Congress in June 1933. With the exception of the Gerona and Castille delegations, this proposal found little support. Instead, it was decided to maintain the formal distinction between the Bloc and the Federation, except in those areas where there was no peasant movement, such as in Asturias, Madrid and Vizcaya, where only the FCI would exist. Nevertheless, in practice the differences continued to be blurred, if often non-existent, and during 1934 this process reached its logical conclusion with the "organic assimilation of the BOC by the FCI". While this reflected the reality of the party in most areas, in Barcelona, where the division had been most rigidly applied, the integration of the Federation and Bloc led to a strengthening of the party. The five hundred members claimed by the Barcelona organisation as a whole in 1934, was considered an important qualitative improvement on the higher 1933 figure, when the distinction between the BOC and FCI had still existed in the city.<sup>84</sup>

As the political crisis deepened and the threat of a take-over by the authoritarian Right seemed closer everyday much of the workers movement began to organise paramilitary defence groups. The Socialists, above all the FJS, were most prominent in these preparations, even to the extent of attempting to smuggle small quantities of arms into the country. Likewise, inside the BOC similar, though less spectacular work was

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84. "Tesis de Organización", *La Batalla* 11.5.33; *ibid* 26.6.33; *Boletín del Bloque Obrero y Campesino (FCI)* no. 1., June 1934; Partit Obrer d'Unificació Marxista, Comité Executiu, *A propòsit d'un manifest fraccional* (Barcelona 10.12.35) p.11.



being carried out by the party's youth organisation, the Juventud Comunista Ibérica (Iberian Communist Youth).

Youth organisation played a very important role in the country's political life at the time and in this sense the BOC was no exception. In fact by August 1933 it claimed to have a higher proportion of young members than any other party in the peninsula.<sup>85</sup> The Bloc's first youth cells were organised during 1931, but it was not until June 1932 that the Juventudes Comunistas, as they were first known, celebrated their First Congress. This Congress formulated the youth organisation's programme which, amongst other things, called for the reduction of military service, the democratisation of the army and expressed its general opposition to militarism and war. The Juventudes Comunistas also defended the creation of a state-run and a- confessional education system, in which student's rights would be recognised, and the placing of technical education under control of the workers organisations. At work they demanded "equal pay for equal work" and subsidies to be provided for apprenticeships.<sup>86</sup>

Over the next year the Juventudes Comunistas grew steadily, and by its Second Congress in October 1933 the BOC youth organisation had a thousand members, six hundred according to the PCE, organised into forty different sections, mostly in the provinces of Barcelona and Lérida. Despite its potential, the JCI, as it was now called, suffered in its own words, from a "lack of external organisation and propaganda". For instance, in mid-1933 it was reported that ninety percent of its cells' work was "connected to internal questions" and "not very productive." Moreover, unlike their Socialist, anarchist and "official" Communist rivals the BOC youth never managed to produce their own newspaper.<sup>87</sup>

The vast majority of the JCI's militants were of working class origin but the BOC did manage to organise an active nucleus of students in Barcelona University, principally in the Medicine Faculty. After having tried to organise students during 1932 into an "Intellectual Workers Union", the BOC was more successful in instigating the "Student Antifascist Committee" in early 1933. This committee brought together sympathisers

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85. *La Batalla* 31.8.33., 4.1.34.

86. *Ibid.*, 21.5.31., 4.5.32., 30.6.32.

87. *Ibid.*, 21.9.33.; *Adelante* 31.10.33.; "Organizaciones Juveniles" n.d. (ACCPCE).

of most workers' organisations, including the FAI and PCE, and was converted into the "Revolutionary Students Association" in January 1934. Despite efforts to find a common programme, the anarchist students, after initially participating, withdrew from this initiative. Elsewhere in Europe, universities, given their domination by the upper classes, had provided an important base for fascism and reaction in general. The Association hoped to pre-empt such a development in Catalonia, as well as campaigning generally against war and religion. This show of unity, though much more limited in its scope, proved as popular in the University as the Workers Alliance and some of the Trade Union United Fronts had elsewhere. By May 1934 the Association claimed two hundred members, as well as the support of "great numbers of pro-ERC students".<sup>88</sup>

Like many youth organisations, the JCI was noted for its activism and militancy, along with a certain tendency towards being morally opposed to vices such as tobacco and alcohol. Sport played a very important part in the BOC youths' activities, as it did in other working class organisations at the time. "Proletarian Sports Clubs", which were popular with leftist youth, were organised in various towns, often in conjunction with local *ateneus*. The JCI stressed the need to "combat bourgeois and Catholic sports organisations" and advocated the creation of "communist factions" inside existing sports associations if it could not set up its own organisation. Even the PCE was forced to recognise that the BOC had managed to attract a lot of youth through its sporting activities.<sup>89</sup>

It was its involvement in direct action, however, for which the JCI became best known. An attempt between 1931 and 1932 to provide para-military training through a so-called "military cell" came to an unfortunate end after its activities were exposed in the right-wing press. A more serious initiative was the organising of the BOC's "Action Groups" to defend party meetings, intervene in strikes, protect fly-posting, and carry out other defensive actions. These groups consisted of four or five militants, usually from the JCI, and occasionally included women in their ranks. Pistols were quite commonly carried by the Action Groups' members when in action, although rarely used, these being

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88. *La Batalla* 30.3.33.; *Adelante* 21.10.33., 24.1.34., 6.2.34.; *A.E.R.* 19.4.34.; *Front* (Manresa) 1.5.34.; Interview with W. Solano 4.7.86.

89. *La Batalla* 12.10.33.; Interview with V. Ballester 16.4.84.; "Sobre el trabajo en la organización de Cataluña" Op.cit.

bought individually by those involved. Street clashes were quite frequent, not only with the police, but also with members of the FAI, the Catalan section of the PCE and the *escamots*. The Action Groups' most spectacular intervention to date had been during the *mercantil* strike in November 1933, when they effectively "persuaded" many blackleg establishments to close down. In 1934, the Groups became better organised when placed under the command of the very capable former ECPP leader, Josep Rovira. Nevertheless, converting these Action Groups into a more fully-fledged para-military defence corps was a lot more difficult.<sup>90</sup>

Apart from general propaganda by the BOC in favour of the formation of "anti-fascist militias",<sup>91</sup> more specific moves towards para-military style organisation began to be taken up by the JCI, as by its Socialist and Communist counterparts, in the months leading up to October 1934. This was most clearly reflected in the military-style parade of five hundred blue-shirted JCI militants near Terrassa in late September. Similar day-long rallies organised in recent months by the BOC had been very big, boasted *La Batalla*, but "spontaneous and primitive". In contrast this parade was a thoroughly disciplined display of the "men and women" who would make up the "future revolutionary battalions". Likewise, the JCI proudly published a set of military instructions about how its members should organise themselves for such parades. The instructions stipulated the wearing of "dark blue workshirts", saluting with the right fist, strict marching orders, the formation of sections, each with its own chief and flag bearers and their subsequent grouping into "centuries". Discipline was even to be applied to singing.<sup>92</sup> None the less, these were only the beginnings of the militias which the JCI and BOC sought to construct. As yet, they had few resources to take this much further.

By the end of September, it seemed clear that the institutionalised "coup" which the Workers Alliance and BOC had forecast for so long was about to be carried through. "Everything is prepared", warned *La Batalla*; the counter-revolution felt "seriously threatened by the working class" and would now make its move. The recently declared "state of alarm" was not, according to the BOC, really due to the handful of arms found

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90. POUM, *A propòsit...* Op.cit. p.4.; Interviews with V. Ballester 3.4.84., R. Fernandez Jurado 18.4.84. and C. Rosa-Roc 27.9.85.

91. *La Batalla* 7.4.34.

92. *Ibid.* 27.9.34., 4.10.34.

in workers centres throughout the country but because of the fear that the FAI might join the Workers Alliance and therefore "complete the united front".<sup>93</sup> Fear of the anarchists may well have been one reason for the government's action but the general need by the authorities to prepare the ground for what many right-wing leaders saw as an inevitable clash with the workers movement, was probably the more likely explanation. When Parliament opened on 1 October 1934 everyone knew that Samper's government would fall. The question was who would replace him. "A government with the participation of Gil Robles' fascists", the BOC predicted, "will mean a declaration of war on the proletariat, the peasants, Catalonia and the Basque Country".<sup>94</sup>

On Sunday 30 September, a special extended meeting of the BOC's Central Committee gathered in Barcelona to examine the situation. Maurín introduced the debate by explaining that if the reactionary forces were not strong enough to succeed with their planned coup, nor was the revolutionary movement strong enough to take power. Despite the situation having modified in favour of the working class in recent months because of the activities of the Workers Alliance, he cautioned that to "launch the proletariat towards the seizure of state power tomorrow would be criminal". Instead, the workers should be mobilised in order to avoid, at all costs, the establishment of a majority right-wing government. Parallel to this, the BOC Central Committee urged the other workers organisations to help establish the Workers Alliance on a state-wide basis, with its corresponding National Committee.<sup>95</sup> Yet with the majority of the CNT still outside the Alliance and the Socialists unwilling to clarify their position, such a call was only useful for propaganda purposes.

As expected, Samper's government fell as soon as parliament opened the following day and consultations began immediately for the formation of a new administration. By 3 October it was clear that Lerroux would form a government with the participation of the CEDA. Gil Robles was aware that his party's participation would probably provoke a revolutionary situation, but he calculated that it would be better to provoke this from a position of power while the working class movement was still not properly prepared.

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93. *Ibid.* 27.9.34.

94. *L'Hora* 29.9.34.

95. *La Batalla* 4.10.34.

**Manifestoes published by the BOC and Workers Alliance the day before again sounded the alarm that a Lerroux government with CEDA participation would be the "antechamber" of one presided over by Gil Robles and the "beginning of fascism". None the less, they warned that although the "hour of insurrection" was approaching, a civil war provoked by the government would be prejudicial for the revolutionary movement. It was necessary to respond to such a provocation but to do so intelligently.<sup>96</sup>**

On the night of 4 October, it was finally confirmed that three CEDA deputies had entered Lerroux's new government. The Socialists had repeatedly threatened to meet any such move with the unleashing of the revolution. Their bluff had now been called, so reluctantly they gave the order for a nation-wide general strike. This swiftly developed into a full-scale insurrection in Asturias where thousands of poorly-armed miners held out for three weeks until they were overwhelmed by superior government forces. The Asturian "commune", as it became known, apart from representing the most serious attempt to foil the Right's plans, was also an experiment in social revolution. As well as taking over the region militarily, the miners and their allies also set up a whole network of revolutionary committees, based on the local Workers Alliances, which proceeded to organise their own systems of communications, supplies, sanitation, internal security and basic economic production. The Asturian FCI's role in these events was necessarily limited as, despite having recently expanded its influence outside of Mieres, it had only some fifty members, most of these being miners.<sup>97</sup> Its most conspicuous intervention was through the young miner and Federation member Manuel Grossi, who was vice-president of the Mieres-based "Regional Committee of the Workers Alliance".

The Asturian uprising remained isolated, however, because elsewhere, except Catalonia, the initiative remained in the hands of the Socialists. In Madrid, the general strike ended after eight days, lacking any real leadership or purpose, notwithstanding the support of the local CNT. The Socialists quite deliberately by-passed the Madrid Workers Alliance which did not even meet during the strike. This was confirmed by a delegate sent by the Catalan alliance who was unable to find a way of contacting the

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96. *ibid.*

97. *ibid.* 20.7.34., 16.8.34.; M. Grossi, *La Insurrección de Asturias* (Madrid 1979) p.14.

Madrid committee.<sup>98</sup> In the Basque country, the strike briefly took on insurrectional proportions, but the Socialists balked at extending this action. The CNT participated on a local basis in some areas, principally in Andalusia and the Levante, but not on a scale that would push the movement in a revolutionary direction as had happened in Asturias. Despite all their bluster, the Socialists appeared woefully ill-prepared, both politically and materially, for any serious assault on power, they were, in the words of one ICE militant, "going to use arms like they used phrases".<sup>99</sup>

In Catalonia, the Workers Alliance Committee had gone into permanent session on 3 October as soon as it became obvious that a deal with the CEDA was about to be concluded. The following day delegates began to arrive from outside of Barcelona for an extraordinary assembly that night in the PSOE's headquarters. Maurín addressed the packed meeting, which also included delegates from the CADCI and other organisations not affiliated to the Alliance, outlining the general situation. Faced with the new government, he stated, the Generalitat had to defend itself and declare the Catalan Republic if it wanted to continue to exist. The proletariat, Maurín continued, repeating the line of argument he had put forward since June, could not win alone in Catalonia, but only as part of a "triple offensive" of workers, peasants and the national liberation movement, it was therefore necessary to push the ERC into action before it had time to retreat. The technical side of any insurrection could be guaranteed, he declared optimistically, if the left nationalists took a stand because the Generalitat had at its disposal 3,000 police and 7,000 *escamots*, the rest depended on the workers' forces elsewhere in the peninsula. To this end the Catalan Alliance Committee had already sent delegates to Madrid to try and get an agreement to launch a nationally co-ordinated movement.

The assembly finally broke up in the early hours of the morning on 5 October, having decided to call a general strike throughout Catalonia. It was agreed that where the ERC dominated local government then the Alliance should collaborate with it, at least for the time being. Where the Right was in power, its representatives were to be immediately replaced by representatives of the Alliance. The assembly was confident that power

98. "Acta de la reunió del B.P. de C." 29.10.34. (ACCPCE); Bloc Obrer i Camperol (Federació Comunista Ibèrica), *La Insurrecció d'Octubre a Catalunya* (Barcelona 1935) p.14.

99. *Munis Op.cit.* p.160.

could be seized throughout the region, the problem would be Barcelona, where much depended on the attitude of the CNT. A few days earlier Maurín had reiterated to the BOC's Central Committee his belief that there was a good chance that the anarchists would soon join the Alliance and thereby transform it into an "unstoppable sea which would overwhelm everything" in its path. Hope of such a development had been strengthened by the Asturian CNT's recent confirmation of its support for the Alliance and a meeting in Barcelona where several leading anarchists had supposedly expressed support for taking a similar position in Catalonia. Nevertheless, an invitation to the anarcho-syndicalists to attend the Alliance's assembly was turned down. Time would tell whether CNT workers would now "pass individually over to the united front", as Maurín had predicted, if their leaders refused to support the Alliance. Meanwhile, a delegation had gone to see Companys to explain the Alliance's plans and call on him to declare the Catalan Republic.

The CEDA had made it quite clear that once in government, apart from dismantling the last vestiges of progressive legislation introduced since April 1931, it specifically intended to put an end to even the limited autonomy enjoyed by Catalonia. Consequently, the ERC had repeatedly pledged itself in recent months to defend the Republic against the encroachments of "fascism". However, as in June, such a stance implied mobilising its mass base and aligning itself with the revolutionary left - something which the Esquerra's leaders were loathe to contemplate seriously. Thus, the Catalan President appeared far from enthusiastic about the Workers Alliance's idea of establishing a Catalan Republic and his vacillations were a warning that the Alliance could expect little from his government. Moreover, a demonstration called by the Alliance the previous evening in the centre of the city was violently dissolved by Assault Guards, on the orders of Estat Català chief Dencàs, who had been appointed the Generalitat's "Councillor for Public Order" in June. This was an indication of what the workers organisations could expect from some of their erstwhile allies.<sup>100</sup>

In the early hours of Friday 5 October, the BOC's Action Groups, armed with a few pistols, took up positions outside the tram and bus depots to prevent public transport

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100. *La Batalla* 4.10.34.; Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. pp. 129-131; BOC, *La Insurrección...* Op.cit. pp. 14-16.; A Estivill, *Sis d'Octubre l'ensulsiada dels Jacobins* (Barcelona 1935) pp.111-129.

from functioning. This action was co-ordinated by a "Military Committee" headed by Rovira and set up by the BOC independently of the other organisations. Despite the dissident communists' insistence on the importance of the Workers Alliance, the creation of this independent military committee showed that they did not fully trust all the other organisations involved. The BOC's protagonism within the Catalan Alliance became even clearer during the next few days. The activities of its Action Groups on 5 October were decisive in gradually bringing the city to a standstill.

By nine in the morning, the whole of the Gracia district was paralysed, soon to be followed by other areas and commercial establishments, as pickets systematically visited factories. Before mid-day not a tram, bus or metro was running, although it had been necessary to burn four trams and break a few windows before they could all be stopped. In the telephone exchange, a "revolutionary committee" was established which put the control of "all communications in Catalonia" at "the disposition of the revolutionary forces". Not that everything was so easy, because some sectors, for instance in the port and others under USC influence, were slow to join the stoppage.<sup>101</sup>

For the first time, Barcelona had been paralysed without the support of the CNT, in stark contrast to 13 March, when not one of the city's major factories had come out. The anarchists later claimed that the strike had been imposed by the police under orders of the Generalitat.<sup>102</sup> In reality, however, the attitude of the Catalan authorities hardly favoured the strikers. The ERC leadership was ambiguous about the strike, but the Estat Català leader Dencàs had no doubt as to his opposition. He was determined that there should be only one power in the city, his own, so he ordered the police to move against the Alliance. Consequently there were numerous clashes between the police and pickets during the morning, with scores of arrests and wounded and at least one fatality. When the Alliance later began to requisition cars, the police tried to detain those responsible. However, by the afternoon it was clear that the strike was general and those Alliance supporters who had been arrested were soon released, although the police remained hostile. Meanwhile, Dencàs had mobilised the *escamots*, who now

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101. Alba, *El marxismo en España* Op.cit. p.165; Rosa-Roc, Op.cit. p.97; *Butlletí de l'Aliança Obrera* 6.10.34.

102. Bizcarrondo, Op.cit. p.296; J. Peirats, *La CNT en la revolución española* (Paris 1971) vol.1., p.100; J. Ballus, *Octubre Catalan* (Barcelona 1935) p.18.



patrolled the streets, supposedly to "deal" with the anarchists but also in an attempt to take the initiative away from the Alliance.<sup>103</sup>

News soon began to arrive of how the Workers Alliance had taken over in most major towns and villages throughout Catalonia. Nevertheless, although the capital was at a standstill, the Alliance recognised that more decisive action would be necessary to bring down the central government. Above all the Alliance needed to arm its supporters, both to counter-balance Dencàs's forces and to prepare for what was seen as an inevitable clash with the army. Pressure also had to be directly applied on the Generalitat, so at eight o'clock in the evening a demonstration was organised of between fifteen and twenty thousand people calling for the establishment of a "Catalan Republic". The BOC's influence on events could not have been clearer because the Alliance's stance was exactly that which the Regional Conference had rejected four months earlier. This "revolutionary slogan", the BOC claimed, had been accepted by the Alliance under the "pressure of the moment".<sup>104</sup> Another interview with the Generalitat, this time by a delegation from the demonstration, was equally inconclusive, because the Catalan government still hoped it could reach an agreement with Madrid. The Alliance, in turn, warned that the next day would be "decisive" - a decision had to be taken.<sup>105</sup> Despite the threats of the Workers Alliance that it would "declare the Catalan Republic if Companys would not",<sup>106</sup> it was clear that the workers groups, without the active support of the CNT, were still dependent on the Generalitat mobilising the forces under its control.

In part, the CNT's hostility was not surprising. Dencàs had immediately turned his attentions to persecuting the anarchists, to make sure they could not take advantage of the situation, and a number of bloody clashes ensued. The following day, the CNT issued a manifesto calling for the re-opening of its unions, protesting about the police action and, in an obvious attack on its marxist rivals, re-affirming its general revolutionary and liberation principles as opposed to "authoritarian ones". Basically,

103. *Bulletí de l'Aliança...* Op.cit.; BOC *La insurrecció...* Op.cit. pp.16-18; Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. pp.137-139; Estivill, *Sis d'octubre...* Op.cit. pp.134-135, 145-146; L. Aymaní i Baudina, *El 6 d'Octubre tal com jo l'he vist* (Barcelona 1935) pp.96-97.

104. *L'Hora* 4.10.35; POUM, *A propòsit...* Op.cit. p.3.

105. Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. p.138; BOC, *La insurrecció...* Op.cit. p.18; Aliança Obrera, "Endavant la Vaga General" n.d. (ACCPCE).

106. *Bulletí de l'Aliança...* Op.cit.

the anarchists refused to commit themselves to support a movement which they felt had nothing to do with them, hence three separate interviews between them and the Workers Alliance during the uprising failed to secure their collaboration. Nevertheless, it was apparent that large sections of the CNT rank and file in Catalonia had followed the strike call and in a number of places its members actively participated in the movement.<sup>107</sup>

The next day, 6 October, began with the Alliance plastering the city with a bulletin which spoke optimistically of the revolution's progress, not only in Catalonia, but throughout the peninsula. "Circumstances are extraordinarily favourable for a victorious struggle" it claimed but "decisive and energetic action" was necessary. The declaration of a "Catalan Republic", the bulletin concluded, could not be left another day. It was believed that such a step would encourage the masses throughout Spain and stiffen their resistance to the government.<sup>108</sup> Throughout the morning the Alliance's headquarters, now in the occupied offices of the employers organisation, the Fomento de Trabajo, were the centre of feverish activity. The crucial question remained that of arms, but the Alliance's own searches had only produced around fifty shot-guns and no ammunition.<sup>109</sup> Everything depended on the Generalitat.

After much pressure Dencàs finally promised to hand over some arms that afternoon, yet meantime both the police and *escamots* continued to act against not only the anarchists but also the Alliance itself. The Estat Català chief's intentions were put even further in doubt by a sinister incident. It appears that the police were given orders to fire, without warning, on two cars carrying the Alliance's leaders. These cars had been handed over by Dencàs' department and were now reported to contain "fascists".<sup>110</sup>

At four o'clock in the afternoon the Alliance began to concentrate its supporters outside its new headquarters with the intention of distributing the promised arms. Two hours later, these still had not arrived and the several thousand workers present lined up para-military style and proceeded to march towards the Generalitat to demand, yet again, the immediate declaration of the Catalan Republic and the handing over of arms.

107. Peirats, Op.cit. pp.101-102; "Acta de la reunion del B.P. de C." 29.10.34 and "Datos sobre la actividad del P. en diversas localidades de Cataluña" n.d. (ACCPCE).

108. *Butlletí de l'Aliança...* Op.cit.

109. BOC, *La Insurrecció...* Op.cit. p.26.

110. Aymamí, Op.cit. p.120

According to the PCE, there were considerably fewer present than the previous evening because, since the Estat Català's forces had taken control of the streets militarily, the Alliance was left with only those "who were prepared to fight".<sup>111</sup> The demonstration subsequently dissolved after a delegation from the Alliance was assured that Companys would make a public statement at eight o'clock that evening regarding his government's position.

Accordingly, the Catalan President made his famous address from a balcony of the Generalitat announcing the creation of the "Catalan State within the Spanish Federal Republic". The enthusiasm of the crowds was hardly shared by the ERC leaders who Maurín described as behaving as if they were "attending a funeral".<sup>112</sup> Later the left nationalists admitted they had been forced into such a situation under pressure from both the masses in general and from the more separatist sections of their own party. More specifically, many nationalists, "unsure of their own capabilities", feared they would be "displaced by the BOC and the Alliance".<sup>113</sup> The Catalan government could neither afford to suppress the movement nor could it abandon power, so it opted for trying to bring the situation under its control. Subsequent events would soon show the nationalists' complete lack of any serious intentions of fighting. Azaña, who was present in Barcelona at the time and later put on trial, claimed that the Catalan Republican leaders believed the rebellion would be a repeat of 14 April and that the Madrid government would compromise and negotiate with them.<sup>114</sup>

Companys and his government now withdrew inside a fortified Generalitat Palace to wait and see what would happen. Apart from those police forces under the Catalan government's control and the *escamots*, some six hundred workers were concentrated at the Workers Alliance's headquarters waiting for arms and a few hundred more at the CADCI's offices. The revolutionary forces also had complete control of the rest of Catalonia and communications. Moreover, according to Maurín, the loyalty to the central government of the city's 5,000 troops was not guaranteed. However, when a mere 500 troops left their barracks at nine o'clock that night no resistance was offered,

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111. Estvill, *Sis d'Octubre...* Op.cit. p.164.; BOC, *La insurreció...* Op.cit. p.23; "Acta de la reunion del B.P. de C." Op.cit.

112. Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. p.141

113. Ucelay Da Cal, Op.cit. p.215.

114. cited in Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. pp.139-140.

despite such apparently favourable circumstances. A suggestion by the head of the Generalitat's forces, Pérez Farrás, that the Catalan government left Barcelona for the provinces, was rejected by Companys, because, according to Maurín, it was obvious that if it had resisted "even one day more... leadership would have passed to the Workers Alliance - as had already happened in so many important towns...". Instead, the petty bourgeois politicians opted to make, as the BOC leader had predicted they would at the Alliance's Regional Congress four months earlier, a "heroic gesture" which was doomed to defeat.<sup>115</sup>

Barely ten hours later, the Catalan government surrendered after a brief artillery bombardment of its headquarters. Demoralised by this apparently pitiful surrender, the *escamots*, who had waited all night in various centres for orders from Dencàs, fled leaving their arms behind them. Likewise, the Workers Alliance's forces had no option but to dissolve, but not before picking up some of those arms left behind by the separatists, to hide them for a later date. The only serious resistance took place at the headquarters of the CADCI, where some forty armed militants held out until forced to surrender by artillery fire.<sup>116</sup> Here, as elsewhere, they had waited for help to be sent by Dencàs. Instead, the Estat Català chief, while broadcasting hysterical appeals to the Catalan people to march on Barcelona to save their government, did nothing to mobilise his own relatively well-armed supporters, let alone give arms to the Workers Alliance, which he had ordered to be definitively suppressed only a short time before the artillery opened fire on the Generalitat. His subsequent escape to fascist Italy only confirmed the view that this aspiring Catalan "Führer", as Maurín described him, was little more than a "provocateur" and "adventurer".<sup>117</sup> Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to place all the blame for the debacle on Dencàs' shoulders, as in fact many ERC leaders would later do, because the Catalan government as a whole had little intention of seriously resisting the Spanish state's forces.

By Wednesday 9 October, "normality" had returned to nearly all of the region, leaving scores of dead and wounded. Following the Generalitat's capitulation, the CNT used

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115. *Ibid.* p.142-143, 174.; *La Batalla* 21.6.34.

116. *Estivill, S/s d'Octubre...* Op.cit. pp. 176-179.; *Aymamí, Op.cit.* pp. 133-145.; *P.Fobx, Barcelona 6 d'octubre* (Barcelona 1935) pp.97-98.

117. *Avant* 29.10.34.; *Maurín, Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. p. 141.

the radio of the army's Fourth Division to call for a return to work.<sup>118</sup> The anarchists later justified their attitude during the Catalan uprising by arguing that the Workers Alliance had been shown to be little more than a tool of the Generalitat designed to destroy the CNT. The "60,000 marxists and separatists armed with rifles and machine guns" (sic), declared the Confederation's National Committee, "had not ceased in their persecution of the anarchists up till the last moment" before surrendering like "terrified whores".<sup>119</sup>

Outside of Barcelona, where the balance of forces was much more favourable, the movement had quickly triumphed, although according to Dencàs this was because he had given the order to the police and Civil Guard not to intervene.<sup>120</sup> Much to Dencàs' disgust, however, by three o'clock in the afternoon of 6 October, the "Catalan Republic" had already been declared throughout the region, on the orders of the Barcelona-based Regional Committee of the Workers Alliance. This put Companys under even more pressure to do likewise. In most places, the Workers Alliance had taken the initiative in taking over, usually supported by local ERC members and in some cases the CNT.<sup>121</sup> None the less, such local rebellions were incapable of seizing the initiative from Barcelona with which their fate was unavoidably tied.

The immediate aftermath of the October rebellion was widespread repression directed against the labour movement. This had its most bloody consequences in Asturias. Yet rather than a straightforward defeat for the revolutionary movement the uprising effectively put an end to the Right's attempt to destroy the Republic "from within". More importantly, the working class movement emerged morally strengthened from this baptism of fire - the heroic stand of the Asturian miners became a symbol of revolutionary resistance to the threat of fascism. The first edition of the BOC's clandestine newspaper, *Avant*, declared that it was the counter-revolution which had "suffered a great defeat".<sup>122</sup> In reality, the political situation which emerged after October 1934 was somewhat more complicated. While it was certainly true that the

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118. *Ibid.* p.145.; N. Molins i Fàbrega, *UHP La insurrección proletaria de Asturias* (Madrid 1977) p.221.

119. cited in Bizcarrondo *Op.cit.* p.296.

120. J. Dencàs, *El 6 d'octubre des del Palau de Governació* (Barcelona 1935) pp.62-63.

121. Estivill, *Sis d'octubre...* *Op.cit.* p.143.; Aymamí, *Op.cit.* p.184.; Alba, *El marxismo...* *Op.cit.* pp.170-171.; BOC, *La insurrecció...* *Op.cit.* p.22.

122. *Avant* 29.10.34.

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most radical sectors of the workers movement appeared even more confident of their eventual victory, the subsequent persecution of Republican leaders such as Azaña and Companys to a certain extent revived their mass support. Following the experience of the Workers Alliances, the demand to extend this unity not only to all levels of the labour movement but also to a broader "anti-fascist unity", including the Republican left, would soon be increasingly popular.

## 5. 1935 MARXIST UNITY

### Towards the Second Revolution

The October movement may have curtailed the Right's more authoritarian plans but it could not avoid a further dismantling of those reforms instigated by the previous government. This was accompanied by widespread repression against the workers' movement and the number of political prisoners in the peninsula's jails soon increased from an estimated 9000, mainly anarcho-syndicalists and peasants, prior to October, to around 30,000 by the end of 1934. While the level of repression in Catalonia was never as ferocious as in Asturias, it was still extensive.

By December, the BOC calculated that there were between seven and eight thousand prisoners in the region.<sup>1</sup> Martial Law was temporarily lifted in April 1935 but re-imposed two months later. A year after the revolt, it was reported that 280 different workers' centres in Catalonia were still closed. The employers took advantage of the situation to carry through widespread sackings, particularly in the textile industry, as well as victimising those who had taken part in the October events. Both the *Jurados Mixtos* and "unfair dismissal" laws were repealed, leaving workers more vulnerable than ever. Many agreements, such as that of the *mercantil* sector of November 1933, were soon annulled, leading to a general decline in working conditions and cuts in wages.<sup>2</sup>

The situation in the Catalan countryside was worse than in the cities. Thousands of peasants were forced into misery as the landowners took their revenge against those who had dared to defy them during the previous four years and there were wide-spread evictions. The situation worsened with the new "Rural Leases Law" of March 1935 which forced many sharecroppers and tenant farmers to sign new unfavourable contracts to avoid being thrown off the meagre patch of land they rented. In those villages where the Catalan Republic had been declared, peasant leaders were often arrested "en masse", many being deported to prisons elsewhere in Spain.

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1. *Avant* 3.12.34, 10.12.34.

2. "Informe sobre la situación de Cataluña" n.d. (ACCPCE); Balcells, *Crisis económica...* Op.cit. pp.223-6; Vinyes, *La Catalunya Internacional* Op.cit. pp.166-7.

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According to its own internal reports, the BOC was "heavily punished by the repression" and apart from having its press suspended and its offices closed, an undetermined number of its members were imprisoned. Nor was it the case that this repression was just confined to those accused of taking part in the October revolt and throughout 1935 Bloc activists continued to be harassed or detained.<sup>3</sup>

The dissident communists organised material support for their imprisoned members through Socorro Rojo (Red Aid). Prisoner aid organisations under this name had originally been established during the twenties by the Communist parties internationally and the BOC's was clearly modelled on these. It aimed to help non-party elements as well as party members. For instance, Socorro Rojo collected money for all those jailed following the Alt Llobregat uprising of January 1932 and subsequent general strike in Terrassa, regardless of their affiliation.<sup>4</sup>

Despite its many financial difficulties the BOC managed regularly to send money and other help to its prisoners. Later the dissident communists claimed that their imprisoned members had received more than any other organisation's detainees. Special emphasis, "for reasons of proselytism", was placed on aiding those BOC militants imprisoned in Asturias, thereby creating a very favourable impression on prisoners of other workers' organisations. Inside the prisons themselves the BOC was active in protests against the inhuman conditions the inmates had to put up with, particularly in the notorious San Cristobal jail in Pamplona, where militants from all over Spain were taken.<sup>5</sup>

The Bloc also received support from foreign revolutionaries, especially from sympathisers in the USA. Nevertheless, most solidarity work was carried out in France, where numerous Bloc militants had fled to avoid persecution. This activity centred on the Saint Denis district of Paris, under the protection of its popular mayor, Jacques Doriot, who had been expelled from the PCF because of his opposition to the party's sectarian line over the united front. A group of BOC exiles, supported by Doriot's

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3. For example see, *Boletín del Bloque Obrero y Campesino (FCI)* January to June 1935; *Boletín del Socorro Rojo del BOC* June 1935; *Boletín del Socorro Rojo del POUM* October 1935.

4. "Tesis Socorro Rojo", *La Batalla* 8.6.33.

5. *Boletín del Socorro Rojo del BOC* June 1935; *Acta del Comité Central del POUM* Barcelona, 5 and 6.1.36 p.9; *Avant* 17.12.34.



organisation, began to publish in the summer of 1935 its own paper, *Adelante*, which was aimed at Spanish workers in the French capital. It was soon reported to be "extraordinarily successful".<sup>6</sup>

Working class resistance to the government and employers following October 1934 was inevitably limited because of repression. The number of strikes dropped drastically compared with previous years, although the official figure of only eleven recorded stoppages in Catalonia during 1935 (there were supposedly none at all in the province of Gerona) was clearly "ridiculous".<sup>7</sup> There is evidence of a large number of small-scale struggles, usually over sackings or the breaking of previous agreements. In the metal industry, the government's decision in December 1934 to re-introduce the forty-eight hour week led to a one day general strike in the sector, called by the Catalan Workers Alliance, on 10 December. It was followed by further illegal strikes in factories in Barcelona, Manresa, Sabadell and Terrassa. Eventually, the Assault Guards and Civil Guard intervened to try and enforce the new hours.<sup>8</sup> Even in the Catalan countryside, where repression was severer than urban areas, there were reports of disturbances and protests.<sup>9</sup>

To this background the BOC tried to re-organise itself on a clandestine basis. Despite the widespread arrests of its members, much of the party's structure remained intact. Of the BOC's leadership only Arquer and Portela were permanently in prison, others, such as Maurín, soon rejoined political life after brief stays in France. To lessen the effectiveness of any police action directed against the party, all its committees were reduced to only three members. Notwithstanding the "inevitable decline of internal democracy" in such conditions, the Central Committee managed to meet three times between October 1934 and September 1935, which, the dissident communists claimed, compared very favourably with any other workers' organisation at this time. Even though party membership fell by some twenty percent and the number of sections by half because of the problems created by illegality, the BOC was quite confident that its political influence had actually grown.<sup>10</sup>

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6. *Acción* 7.9.35; *Adelante* (Sant Denis) 27.12.35.

7. Vinyes, *Op.ct.* pp.165-166; *Camara Oficial de Gerona* 1936, p.137.

8. *Acción* 29.12.34; *Lluita* (PCdeC) 28.12.34; *Comercio y Navegación* January 1935.

9. Vinyes, *Op.ct.* p.119.

10. POUM, *A propòsit...* *Op.ct.* p.2.

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The party's activities were extremely limited during the early months of the year. Accordingly, to compensate, the BOC organised trips to the country or collective visits to the graves of those killed during the October events, thus providing a convenient cover for political meetings. The dissident communists also edited two clandestine fortnightly newspapers, *Avant* and *Acción*, which were printed in Paris. At a legal level, they managed to re-publish, from the beginning of 1935, *L'Hora*, albeit heavily censored. Given the restrictions on press freedom and the militant mood that still prevailed after the October events, these and other leftist publications were eagerly snapped up. *Avant* had a circulation of some ten to twelve thousand copies and the re-appearance of *L'Hora* caused, according to the PCE's Catalan section, "a great sensation", selling in "fantastic quantities".<sup>11</sup>

The immediate reaction of the Bloc to the new situation after October 1934 was to demand the return of democratic freedoms such as those of the press and association, the freeing of all political prisoners, the raising of the state of alarm, the dissolution of the "reactionary Cortes" and the re-establishment of the Catalan Statute of Autonomy, which was definitively suspended on 14 December 1934. These demands became the basis of the Bloc's agitation during the coming months.<sup>12</sup> More importantly, the Catalan dissident communists, like most other Spanish working class organisations, were forced by the October events not only to analyse the new situation but also to re-examine the strategy and tactics of the revolutionary movement. The first public manifestation of the BOC's position was in mid-December in an article in *Avant*, followed by an extensive resolution by the Central Committee, some week later. Both these documents were probably written by Maurín. But the BOC's position most fully developed was in *Hacia la Segunda Revolución*, written by its leader during the winter of 1934-1935 and first published April 1935.<sup>13</sup> This book amounted to the most developed exposition of the party's political viewpoint during the Republic. Built on the analysis outlined in *La revolución española*, Maurín's latest work stressed yet again the historic failure of the bourgeoisie to carry through "its revolution". Likewise, Maurín once more examined the corresponding failure of the proletariat, as yet, to impose its

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11. *Acta del Comité Central...* Op.cit. p.8; "BP de C al BP de E" 27.1.35 (ACCPCE).

12. *Avant* 3.12.34, 10.12.34.

13. *Ibid* 17.12.34; Resolució del Comité Central del Bloc Obrer i Camperol - Federació Comunista Ibèrica, *Les lliçons de la insurrecció d'octubre* (Barcelona 1935); *Hacia la Segunda Revolución* was re-edited in 1966 as *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit.

will on the country, because of the inadequacies of anarcho-syndicalism and reformist socialism. The BOC leader again insisted that if the working class, aligned with the peasants and the national liberation movements, did not take the reins of power the forces of reaction would. Although the uprising was a defeat for the working masses, Maurín argued that it was only a temporary one, neither side was strong enough to impose itself on the other, but this balancing act could not last long.

Since the beginning of the Republic, Maurín and his comrades had argued that the only real choice open in the Spanish situation was between revolution and counter-revolution.<sup>14</sup> The events of October 1934 brought this dilemma even closer. The overall situation faced by the workers movement in October had been in the BOC leader's opinion, quite favourable. Unlike in Austria the previous February, there was a revolutionary upturn, the general strike had taken hold in most strategic centres, the Right was deprived of its press and the most important radio station in the country, that of Barcelona, was in rebel hands. Moreover, there was the possibility of an insurrection in several key places apart from Asturias. The petty bourgeoisie had still not turned to fascism and the bourgeoisie was, in Maurín's words, "truly terrified".<sup>15</sup> However this movement had obviously failed, so the first question to answer was why.

For the BOC there were two fundamental reasons why the uprising was defeated: the role of the Socialists in Madrid and that of the ERC in Catalonia. Madrid was the strategic centre of Spain and the dissident communists recognised that any successful insurrection needed to take power there. Nevertheless, they explained, because it was not a real industrial city and due to the high number of military posts, such an insurrection needed to start at the periphery of the peninsula. Had this happened simultaneously in other key centres, Madrid, Maurín argued, would have fallen like a "house of cards".<sup>16</sup> Not that the capital's working class had shown anything but a high level of militancy since the elections of November 1933. The problem, Maurín stated, was its political dependence on the PSOE which was incapable, as had been shown in October, of leading the proletariat to victory.

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14. See pages 129, 157.

15. Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución* Op.cit. pp.169-170.

16. *Ibid* p.177.

From the dissident communists' standpoint, the situation in Catalonia in October 1934 had, objectively at least, been very encouraging. The "triple front" to which the BOC had often referred seemed on the verge of becoming reality. Three different struggles had been posed simultaneously: the working class against reaction, in this case the Lerroux government; the counter offensive of the peasantry; and the defence of Catalan freedom, threatened by the "centralist counter-revolution". The problem was, however, that the initiative had been in the hands of the ERC. Militarily, Maurín claimed in *Hacia la Segunda Revolución*, the Catalan government had been in a strong position. Not only because of the forces under its control - police and *escamots* - but also because the reliability of the local garrison, navy and airforce was questionable. Both before and during the revolt, Maurín and the BOC, and hence the Workers Alliance, had defended the belief that had the Generalitat fully taken over power in the region then this would have inspired the working masses elsewhere in the peninsula. As a consequence, the Bloc leader now wrote, the insurrection would have spread like a "train of gunpowder". Instead, the petty bourgeois nationalists had rapidly capitulated. This had happened, Maurín explained, because the "Catalan October" was what Trotsky had called a "paradoxical revolution". The petty bourgeoisie had been forced to begin a struggle for freedom which entailed linking with the workers movement. However, this meant, in Maurín's opinion, that the ERC would lose control of the movement, hence its vacillations and subsequent surrender.<sup>17</sup>

The ERC leadership's actions during October 1934 certainly seemed to confirm Maurín's view that it was just as scared of the implications of its rebellion as it was of a Rightist administration in Madrid. The Catalan Republican leaders made the stand that they did only because of mass pressure.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, what October also showed was the Workers Alliance's weakness without the CNT and hence the former's dependence on the Generalitat. As the BOC itself had stated after the abortive anarchist uprising of January 1932, any serious "revolutionary movement had to start in Barcelona and not in the villages".<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately for the Alliance, the most important section of the masses in Barcelona was not under its control, but the CNT's. Apart from the

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17. *Ibid* pp.172-177, 184; *Acta del Comité Central...* Op.cit. p.5; El Comité, "Aliança Obrera" n.d. (ACCPCE).

18. See page 209.

19. See page 55.

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"treacherous" role of the Socialists and the ERC, Maurín spoke of two other important objective conditions which, according to Lenin, were necessary for any revolution to triumph: that the working classes were no longer prepared to accept the situation in which they found themselves and the ruling classes no longer were in control. Neither was yet the case in Spain, the BOC leader insisted. The masses, with the exception of the peasantry, were not much worse off on the eve of October than during the previous three years. Those few gains made since 1931, despite the counter-revolution, had not been totally wiped out. The majority of the population, he wrote, undoubtedly desired social and political change, but as yet, these desires had not led to a general belief that the only solution was a proletarian revolution. Nor had the bourgeoisie exhausted all its possibilities. Having now turned to a Lerroux-Gil Robles government, it still was left with the alternative of dissolving parliament or a military coup.<sup>20</sup>

There was also a series of subjective factors needed for the working masses to be victorious. Again citing Lenin, Maurín explained that the revolution had to be not the outcome of a plot or the work of one party, but the high point of the working class's revolutionary activity and confidence. Instead, the October movement was not started voluntarily but it was seen rather as a defensive necessity, provoked by the ruling class which had held the initiative. Moreover, he continued, the Spanish working class still had some way to go in overcoming its deficiencies. The Socialists continued to vacillate and the PSOE's right-wing was still intact, and the anarcho-syndicalists were only just beginning to be aware of some of, what Maurín termed, their "false positions". Above all, and this was the crux of the BOC's position, the Workers Alliance, although progressing, had only really been formed in Asturias and a mass revolutionary party had still to be created.

At a more general level, Maurín drew parallels between the situation in Spain and that of revolutionary Russia in 1917, thereby seeking to confirm the marxist-leninist orthodoxy of his analysis. There too, the petty bourgeoisie had been unable to carry through the democratic revolution and this role had fallen to the proletariat and its allies. Faced with such a situation, Lenin had dropped his previous insistence on a "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry", a conception since resuscitated by the CI

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20. Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. pp.165-166.

and hence the PCE. Unlike his successors, Lenin had effectively taken up, although not explicitly, the position of the "permanent revolution".<sup>21</sup> The working class thereby passed directly from the "democratic" to the "socialist" stage of the revolution. Maurín believed that the Spanish working class was in a better situation than its Russian counterparts had been eighteen years previously. Not only could it learn from the Russians' errors but there was a strong democratic tradition inside the peninsula's workers movement which could aid the democratisation of post-revolutionary society. In addition, the Spanish peasants had a generally higher level of political consciousness than their Russian counterparts.

So the need for the working class to impose the "democratic revolution" remained at the centre of Maurín's and the BOC's politics, as it had for the previous five years. However, in the aftermath of October 1934, the direct link with the "socialist stage" was now given more prominence. This was not the same, *Avant* had insisted in December, as saying that if the petty bourgeoisie would not make the democratic revolution then the working class would make the socialist one. Only an "anarchist would say this, not a marxist". The democratic revolution was indispensable and because, according to the dissident communists, it fell historically to the proletariat to bring this about in Spain then this was "intimately linked", to the triumph of socialism. Once more the Russian experience was cited as proving that such a link between the democratic and socialist revolutions existed. *Avant* went on to quote approvingly both Lenin and Trotsky to show how by being the best defenders of democracy the proletariat would proceed to impose its own power and hence would avoid the influence of the petty bourgeoisie over the workers.<sup>22</sup> Maurín now coined the term "socialist-democratic" to describe the revolution the workers would lead, thereby making it clear how both the "democratic" and "socialist" stages were intrinsically connected. As the BOC leader had argued during 1933, the revolution had now reached a stage where only the working class could resolve the situation through seizing power and beginning the "march towards socialism".<sup>23</sup> The problem was therefore posed as to how this crucial stage in the revolution's development could become a reality.

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21. *Ibid* p.116.

22. *Ibid* p.224; *Avant* 17.12.34.

23. Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. pp.96-97

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The essence of the socialist-democratic revolution lay in the working class transforming itself through its organisations, the Workers Alliance and the revolutionary party, into, in Maurín's words, "the great liberator" of the Spanish people. The liberator "of the great working masses tortured by social injustice and hunger...", of the national minorities, "...of the middle classes and petty bourgeoisie tormented by uncertainty and the voraciousness of a decadent and parasitic capitalism..." of women "the real pariah of bourgeois society", of youth. "In a word, the proletariat has to be the exponent, the guide, of a profound national transformation". This "second revolution" could not be the work of one party or even one class, but it had to be considered by the "immense majority of the population" as "the dawn of a new fairer, more humane, more ordered, more habitable world". Therefore, "when the organised proletariat", concluded Maurín, "represented the great mass, when the meridian of the national interest is fused with the meridian of the workers movement, the proletariat will then take power".<sup>24</sup> It was as such a liberating force that the BOC presented the "second revolution" led by the proletariat and based on its convergence with the struggle of the peasantry and the national liberation movements. Despite the terminology Maurín used and the violent criticism to which his theories would be subjected by Trotsky, it is difficult to see much difference between his conception of the socialist-democratic revolution and that of Lenin and the Bolsheviks in 1917. This is even clearer in an article by Maurín published in May 1936 where he stated "our revolution is at the same time democratic and socialist, given that the victorious proletariat will have to carry out a good part of the revolution that corresponds to the bourgeoisie and simultaneously begin the socialist revolution".<sup>25</sup>

The minimum programme, proposed by Maurín, to be implemented by the workers' and peasants' government at the beginning of the socialist-democratic revolution contained many points commonly defended by the BOC since 1930: the Iberian Union of Socialist Republics, based on the freedom to secede of its component parts; the nationalisation of the land and its redistribution to the peasants; nationalisation of the major industries, banks, mines and means of transport; the six hour working day; and the arming of the workers. The BOC leader added various intermediate economic

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24. *Ibid* pp.224-225.

25. Maurín "¿Revolución democrático-burguesa o revolución democrático-socialista?", *La Nueva Era*, May 1936; re: Trotsky's criticisms of Maurín's theory see Trotsky, *Op.cit.* pp.227-278.

measures such as the abolition of state, regional and municipal debts, at present financed by the working population; a state monopoly of foreign trade; the doubling of the purchasing power of the internal market through a "rapid rise of output of labour and production in general"; and the "doubling, trebling, quadrupling of production under state control". The economy would no longer be chaotic but planned with one final aim - "to increase the well being of the workers".<sup>26</sup>

Compared with the BOC's programme for the democratic revolution in 1931, the one encapsulated in *Hacia la Segunda Revolución* appeared more specific in its economic demands but more ambiguous when it came to the question of revolutionary power. Local and national government and all other "organs of power" would "be elected democratically by the workers". "Power would belong to and be of everyone." Its organisation would be structured in such a way as to allow "the workers to intervene in the functions of government". The workers would have the basic rights "to life, freedom, work, the truth, thought, to Power". In strict contrast to under fascism the socialist state would have "no rights only duties".<sup>27</sup>

To talk of the "national" nature of the Spanish revolution, according to Maurín, did not contradict socialist internationalism. On the contrary, like the Bolsheviks before them, he claimed, it would be "a formidable step towards world revolution". The international repercussions of such a revolution in Spain could well lead, the BOC leader believed, to the fall of fascism in Portugal, Italy and Germany. Even if the revolution did not spread, the new regime would have two great allies - the USSR and the international proletariat. Like Russia, Spain would probably pass through a period of civil war following the proletariat's seizure of state power. This military conflict would be briefer than that faced by the Bolsheviks, Maurín forecast, because the capitalist countries would have difficulty in sustaining such a war both because of the opposition of their own proletariat and, because of the intensification of inter-imperialist rivalry, the threat of world war.<sup>28</sup> The possibility that those capitalist states under the control of fascism might not be restrained by these conditions, as indeed they were not when the Civil War broke out in 1936, was not discussed by Maurín.

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26. Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. p.226-228.

27. *Ibid* pp.228-229.

28. *Ibid* pp.223-224, 230-231.



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According to *Hacia la Segunda Revolución*, another of the principal lessons demonstrated once more by the October events was the political incapacity of the petty bourgeoisie. This had already been clear, Maurín argued, after the debacle of the left Republican parties in the 1933 elections. Rather than a victory for reaction, the result, the BOC stated, represented the "absolute defeat of the petty bourgeoisie", which had led "like the oscillation of a pendulum to the ascent of the Right". While the ERC had, unlike other similar political options in Spain, received mass support at the polls, its real political weaknesses, Maurín pointed out, had been fully exposed during the summer and autumn of 1934. Until recently the complex social make-up of the ERC - old-style republicans, separatists, social democrats and radicalised peasants - had been both its strength and weakness. However, experience in government and the subsequent debacle of the "Catalan State" in October 1934, Maurín believed, had led the Esquerra into conflict with the mass base which had always sustained it. If it had in some way been progressive in 1930 and 1931, he continued, this was no longer true and the ERC was now a reactionary force.<sup>29</sup>

Because of these contradictions, Maurín and the BOC repeated earlier predictions that the Esquerra would eventually disintegrate, its supporters turning either to the counter-revolution or the side of the proletariat. Already the BOC had reported a number of new worker recruits from the left nationalists since October as well as an increase in sympathy inside the UdeR towards the Workers Alliance. In general, the BOC emphasised that "the majority of workers in the ERC were good revolutionaries". In particular, the dissident communists noted the radicalisation of the Estat Català's base, describing many of them as "young patriots, [and] sincere revolutionaries", the majority of whom were workers unlike the "adventurers of all types" who, above all, made up the party's leadership. This view clearly contrasted with the completely negative evaluation by the BOC leadership of the Estat Català during 1934 as "quasi-fascists". The united front, would be the mechanism whereby, the Bloc hoped, both the masses and the petty bourgeoisie could be won away from the ERC. Such a shift was now possible, Maurín felt, because it had been the Workers Alliances, firstly in Madrid in September, then in Catalonia and above all in Asturias, which had, by their resolute action, done more to defend Catalan freedom than the petty bourgeoisie ever had. The whole

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29. *Ibid* pp.133-134; *Avant* 26.11.34, 9.1.35; *La Batalla* 2.8.35.

experience of October convinced Maurín that the "national movement had begun to move away from the petty bourgeois camp to that of the working class". The proletariat was now in an even better position, he believed, to take over the leadership of the national liberation movement.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, as on other occasions the BOC's optimism about the imminent demise of petty bourgeois nationalism proved unfounded.

After October 1934, the BOC's warnings of the danger of some form of fascist-style take-over became all the more urgent. Gil Robles, according to Maurín, had already completed the second stage of his strategy for conquering the Republic from within; after having initially supported the Radicals, his party was now in government with them, the next and final step would be its complete taking over and the introduction of fascism. The entrance in May 1935 of five CEDA ministers into the government was therefore seen by Maurín and his followers as extremely alarming. The new government was, warned the Catalan Workers Alliance, a "great step towards the victory of fascism". Gil Robles would now, from his newly acquired position as Minister of War, "prepare a definite coup d'état".<sup>31</sup>

The BOC had yet to dedicate much space to examining the actual nature of fascism and this was now rectified to some extent in Maurín's latest book. Here he argued that fascism was the last response of a decaying capitalism faced with the threat of socialism. Maurín outlined a series of circumstances that had generally favoured the development of fascism in other European countries. Firstly, there needed to be a profound economic crises and the massive growth in unemployment, which could provide recruits for the new movement. Secondly, capitalism had to find itself in a *cul de sac* thereby bringing the country to the verge of complete ruin resulting in the bourgeoisie then trying to make the working class pay for this catastrophe by enslaving it politically and economically. Other conditions favourable to a growth in fascism included, Maurín explained, an increasingly authoritarian state, an international climate of war, the defeated petty bourgeois-led democratic revolution and the division of the working class movement.<sup>32</sup>

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30. Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. p.184; *Avant* 16.4.35; *L'Hora* 8.3.35; 4.10.35; *Les Illçons...* Op.cit. p.29-30.

31. Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. p.225; *Acción* 14.5.35.

32. Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. pp.204-208.

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In one way or another, these conditions existed in Spain. Maurín argued, however, that there were still a number of important obstacles to fascism, which had not been present in Italy, Germany or Austria. Spain had recently experienced one dictatorship with all its consequences. Thus, in contrast to Italy and Germany, it was difficult, he believed, for fascism to have any mass appeal in Spain on the basis of some mythical future. The petty bourgeoisie, which had provided the mass base for fascism elsewhere, still had many illusions in democracy, although, as the BOC had repeatedly warned, this situation could easily change. Maurín also pointed out, that not only had fascism not been able to gain support in the working class, as it had done in Germany and Italy among the unemployed, but neither had the industrial bourgeoisie declared itself for fascism. Finally the local fascist movement was, Maurín reminded his readers, divided and lacked an accepted chief.

The strongest reactionary party, the CEDA, was incapable, the BOC leader thought, of converting itself into a classic fascist party. Torn between trying to represent both the interests of the church and the landowners, the CEDA was unable to serve fascism's only real god - the state. Despite being repressive and authoritarian, Gil Robles could never be a real fascist leader, Maurín claimed. He was "neither intelligent like Mussolini nor passionate like Hitler" and although in many ways he wanted to be a fascist, he was in fact "afraid of fascism". With the recent fall of Dolfuss fresh on his mind and the obvious lack, as yet, of mass support for fascism in Spain, Gil Robles had been forced to distance himself from such an option. Instead, Maurín repeated the view he had held since 1930-1931 that the counter-revolution in Spain would take on a military character. Such a regime would probably be like that of Primo de Rivera, although more fascist, or like those of Poland, Portugal, Bulgaria, Greece, Yugoslavia and some countries in Asia and Latin America. The popularity of certain military leaders, such as Franco, after their repressive role in October 1934, made the possibility of military intervention all the more likely if the CEDA's "institutional road" failed. In fact, Gil Robles' activity in the War Ministry from May 1935 was to strengthen the hand of these potential plotters even further.<sup>33</sup>

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33. *Ibid* pp.208-217; *Les lliçons...* Op.cit. p.25; *Acción* 1.2.35, 18.6.35.

Finally there was, according to Maurín, one more and crucial condition for the triumph of fascism - a defeated revolution. The democratic revolution led by the petty bourgeoisie had failed in Spain, thereby creating favourable conditions for a fascist-type coup. On the ruins of this failed revolution, however, there could begin the second, socialist-democratic, one. The working class, having learnt from the tragic experiences of Germany and Austria, had already shown in October that it was prepared to fight to the end to prevent a fascist take over. If, as the petty bourgeoisie had preferred, the proletariat had not fought, the defeat, the BOC leader wrote, would have been terrible. Ruling class opinion was still divided over which road to take and the potential forces of fascism were faced with a number of important obstacles. Nevertheless, the situation could change and, Maurín concluded, "if the working class was unable to overcome" this threat, "if it was not capable of understanding its corresponding mission (thereby) adopting correct strategy and tactics, focused on a final objective.. of taking power, the present generation would be smashed to smithereens by the counter-revolution...". Fascism was therefore, Maurín insisted, also a dreadful punishment wrought on the working class and its allies for failing to carry through the historic tasks that befell it - the conquering of state power and the installation of socialism.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Workers Alliances in 1935**

"Unity in action" was for Maurín and the BOC one of the precursors to the working class seizing state power. This unity had partially been attained through the creation of the Workers Alliances. In the aftermath of October 1934, the dissident communists continually stressed that the Alliances now had to be extended at least to include the majority of the workers movement and be co-ordinated at a national level. The Bloc also began to talk about the need to turn the Alliances into a Spanish equivalent of the Russian soviets by extending them to become, firstly, united fronts which could involve far more workers in joint activity than at present, secondly, insurrectionary bodies and thirdly, organs of power. For the first stage to become a reality it was necessary, the Bloc now argued, to "democratise" the Alliances. This position had also been defended by the Trotskyists since early 1934 and, once it had joined the Alliances, by the PCE.

34. Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. pp.167, 206, 218, 221; *Les lliçons...* Op.cit. pp.20, 27; *Avant* 17.12.34; *Accion* 9.4.35.

**The Spanish "soviets" envisaged by the BOC would not be completely new bodies created independently of existing parties and unions, as they had been in Russia due to the weakness of established working class organisations, but an extension of the united front. Prior to October, there had been some criticism inside the BOC that the Alliances were limited by the fact that they were only based on existing organisations, a type of "super organisation formed from above". The problem inherent in this kind of structure had been most apparent at the Catalan Alliance's Regional Conference in June 1934.<sup>35</sup> Delegates, rather than represent their local Alliances, merely voted for their respective party lines. Instead, the BOC now argued, the Alliances should be open to all workers, whether they were party or trade union members or not, thereby turning them into soviet or workers' council-type organisations. By uniting workers at a rank and file level in this way, the dissident communists hoped the Alliances could become potential centres of "dual power". The BOC proposed that not only had the Alliances to unite the masses in day to day economic and political battles but also they had to organise all aspects of working class life such as co-operatives, schools and mutual aid societies.<sup>36</sup>**

Unfortunately for the BOC, its hopes of converting the Alliances into "soviets" had little chance of becoming reality unless the Socialists and anarcho-syndicalists developed a more positive position in regard to workers' unity. Following October, the Socialists' attitude towards the Alliances had become even more ambiguous, if not downright hostile. If the PSOE and UGT leaderships favoured them at all it was in a role strictly subordinated to the party. Only the FJS still openly defended the Workers Alliances, also as a form of "soviet". Nevertheless, the Socialist Youth's conception of the Alliances remained one of a purely "insurrectionary" character. Strikes and other daily struggles were still presented as being a "waste of the workers' energies". In contrast, the BOC argued that the Alliances' involvement in such struggles would play a crucial part in building up workers' confidence.

The CNT remained, officially at least, opposed to the Alliances, especially in Catalonia. Yet there was disquiet among some anarcho-syndicalists about the

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35. See pages 192-193.

36. *La Batalla* 16.8.34, 6.9.34, 13.9.35., 11.10.35; *L'Hora* 4.10.35; POUM *Què és i què vol el Partit Obrer d'Unificació Marxista* (Barcelona 1936) p.14; Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. pp.119 and 222. and "La Alianza Obrera. Orígenes, características y porvenir" *La Nueva Era* January 1936.

Confederation's activities in October and its leaders found it necessary to justify their role in what had happened. They pointed to the success of the general strike where the CNT had participated, hence emphasising their own importance, and blamed the movement's overall failure on the inadequacies of social democracy. Apart from the Asturian CNT, a number of other local sections, including those in Madrid, now collaborated with the Alliances. A pro-Alliance current was also reported to exist inside the anarchist youth organisation, the Juventudes Libertarias. Particularly encouraging for the BOC was a series of articles by veteran anarchist Frederico Urales in the *Revista Blanca* advocating the CNT's participation in the united front. During the summer of 1935 the dissident communists opened up the pages of *L'Hora* to the polemic taking place among anarchists as a result of the Urales articles. Publicly, at least, the Bloc appeared confident that the CNT would soon change its position over the united front.<sup>37</sup> In practice, however, there was less reason for optimism. Not only did the bulk of the CNT remain outside the Workers Alliances but the latter now led an increasingly precarious existence.

Formally at least, the number of Workers Alliances organised throughout the peninsula increased during the early months of 1935. In April of that year, an internal report of the PCE put the total of Provincial Alliances at sixteen, along with 207 local and 53 workplace-based bodies. In fact, the Communist Party had exploited its role, real or otherwise, in the October events. The PCE was aided by the bourgeois press which was eager to encourage the idea of a Moscow-backed "plot". While some Socialist leaders, including Largo Caballero, effectively denied organising the uprising, the PCE proudly accepted responsibility for what had happened. Unlike the BOC, the Communist Party had a nationally-based, albeit relatively small, presence and the resources to popularise its idea of "Workers and Peasants Alliances". The vast majority of the Alliances claimed by the PCE to exist in mid-1935 were based in zones of party influence, such as Vizcaya, and consisted of little more than the official Communists, the trade unions under their control and a few local Socialist organisations. The true

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37. *Actas de la Comisión Nacional de la UGT* 6.6.35. lists the CNT and FAI among participants at the Madrid Workers Alliance meeting of 23.5.35; "Alianzas Obreras existentes en Mayo-Junio 1935" n.d., "Informe sobre la situación de Cataluña" Op.cit., and "Partido Comunista de España Comité Central al C.C. del P.C. de Cataluña" 30.1.35 (ACCPCE); *Avant* 10.12.34; *La Batalla* 27.9.35, 18.10.35; for debate with anarchists about the united front see, *L'Hora* 22.3.35, 27.4.35, 28.6.35, 5.7.35, 13.6.35, 21.6.35 and 19.7.35.

situation was more likely to be that later described by the BOC, that the Alliances had virtually "collapsed after October 1934", due to both repression and the indifference, if not hostility, of the major workers' organisations.<sup>38</sup>

In Catalonia, the Workers Alliance nominally continued to exist at a regional level throughout 1935, as well as at a local level in important centres such as Barcelona, Badalona, Gerona, Lérida, Mataró, Tarragona and Terrassa.<sup>39</sup> Apart from the local section of the PCE, the Partit Comunista de Catalunya, which had entered literally on the eve of the October revolt, the Regional Committee now included the Syndicalist Party and, later in the year, the Partit Català Proletari (Catalan Proletarian Party), as the ECPP had become in 1934. Repeated appeals to those organisations remaining outside the Catalan Alliance to join, in particular to the CNT, came to little. However, both the BOC and Partit Comunista de Catalunya (PCdeC) remained optimistic that this situation would soon change. Likewise, the Bloc paid special attention to trying to persuade the UdeR to re-join the Alliance and by March 1935 this seemed a real possibility because of the growing influence of the more militant elements in the peasant organisation's leadership. A pamphlet published by the UdeR some months later, which dismissed the Alliance as consisting of a "series of leaders after their own ends", must have dented these hopes.<sup>40</sup>

Apart from supporting the metal workers' struggle,<sup>41</sup> the Catalan Alliance also attempted to organise a "general strike" on 1 May 1935. As this was a Sunday, the strike would be confined essentially to transport and service workers. The government threatened to sack anyone in these sectors who refused to work as well as putting considerable numbers of troops and extra police on the streets of Barcelona to ensure public order. The city resembled a "military encampment" and right-wing sources described the situation as one of "near normality". The BOC's clandestine press, however, claimed the strike as a "great victory". According to the Communist Party, few turned out to work in the city's hotels, bars and restaurants. Even in those

38. "Resumen de las Alianzas Obreras y Campesinas" April 1935 (ACCPCE); "Alianzas Obreras existentes..." Op.cit.; *Acta del Comité Central...* Op.cit. p.6.

39. "Alianzas Obreras existentes..." Op.cit.; "Alianzas Obreras y Campesinas" December 1935 (ACCPCE).

40. *Boletín del Bloque Obrero y Campesino (FCI)* January 1935; "BP de C al BP de España" 21.3.35 (ACCPCE); *Octubre* 7.6.35; *L'Hora* 27.9.35.

41. See page 215.

establishments that functioned normally there were numerous reports of refusals to serve military personnel during the day. Public transport seems to have been less affected - except for some trams that were stopped by militants armed with pistols. The most significant aspect of the stoppage was the participation of the CNT alongside the Workers Alliance. Such collaboration was unprecedented in Barcelona and must have greatly encouraged the belief that it would finally be possible to draw the anarcho-syndicalists into the united front. Unfortunately for the Catalan Alliance, a more lasting co-operation with the CNT proved as elusive as ever.<sup>42</sup>

Apart from the 1 May strike, the Catalan Alliance's activities were fairly limited, not only because of the attentions of the authorities but also because of internal tension that would eventually lead to its more or less complete paralysis. Since the integration of the PCdeC there had begun an often bitter struggle between this party and the BOC. The dissident communists, usually with the support of most of the other organisations present, denounced what they saw as a series of manoeuvres by the PCdeC which could undermine the Alliance's prestige. The most serious accusation being made by Maurín in January 1935, was that according to the official Communists' own internal documents, they were trying to establish "Liaison Committees" with the Socialists behind the Alliances' backs. This proposal was duly condemned by the Catalan Alliance's Regional Committee, with only the UGT and PCdeC voting against. It was then agreed to send a delegation to Madrid to try and persuade both the PSOE and PCE that such a move was against the interests not only of the Workers Alliances but also of the revolution. The production by the BOC at Alliance meetings of other PCE internal material further inflamed the situation. The PCdeC complained that the BOC aimed to expel it from the Alliance and that hardly a meeting of the Regional Committee passed without the dissident communists making an attack on its representatives.<sup>43</sup>

Events came to a head in April 1935, following disagreements over the use of funds collected for political prisoners. The Catalan Alliance's Regional Committee had

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42. El Comité Local de la Alianza Obrera de Barcelona, "Primero de Mayo. ¡Viva la Huelga General!" and "Informe sobre la Jornada del 1 de Mayo en Cataluña" n.d. (ACCPCE); *Accion* 14.5.35; *Comercio y Navegación* May 1935; *La Vanguardia* 1.5.35, 3.5.35.

43. "Partit Comunista de Catalunya, Comité Central al Buro Político del Partido Comunista de España" 24.1.35, "Partit Comunista de Catalunya Comité Central. A todos los comités de Radio y comarcas" 22.2.35 and 6.3.35, and "B.P. de C. al B.P. de España" 21.3.35 (ACCPCE).



decided after October to act as a "Prisoner's Aid Committee" and raise money for all working class prisoners, regardless of their political affiliation. Considerable bad feeling was caused when the PCdeC tried to increase its influence in the Catalan Alliance after 10,000 pesetas were donated by "Russian workers" through the official Communists' aid organisation, International Red Aid. The Catalan Communists now unsuccessfully demanded that the latter should have representation on the Alliance's Regional Committee. The situation worsened when accusations were made by the BOC two months later that the Catalan UGT representative had misappropriated funds destined for prisoners. When the other organisations, except the ICE, refused to back the BOC, the dissident communists resigned from the Alliance's Secretariat in protest.<sup>44</sup> As a result of this dispute, the BOC was to claim that the Catalan Alliance effectively "collapsed" at a regional level. This crisis had more to do, however, with the changing alignments of the various workers' organisations involved<sup>45</sup> than just squabbles over money.

While the Catalan Alliance was increasingly immersed in internal disagreements, its Valencian counterpart appeared to be in a much stronger position. This was in part due to the fact that the state of emergency that covered much of the peninsula after October 1934 did not apply to the Levante region. It was also a consequence of the continued support for the Alliances of the Valencian Treintistas; the most important organised force in the province's workers movement. Along with the BOC, PCE and ICE, the Treintistas had advocated, since at least July 1934, the formation of a "National Alliance" - the absence of which was seen by the syndicalists as the main reason for the movement's defeat in October.

In the weeks following the revolt, the Valencian Alliance became the centre of a campaign to establish such a nationally co-ordinated united front. The main stumbling-block to such an initiative were the Socialists. In November 1934, the Valencian Alliance wrote to both its Madrid counterparts and the PSOE and UGT, proposing the immediate establishment of a National Workers Alliance.<sup>46</sup> Five months

44. "Reunión del Comité Regional de Alianza Obrera de Cataluña" 8.4.35 (ACCPCE); POUM, *A propòsit...* Op.cit. p.8; *Acta del Comité Central...* Op.cit. p.7.

45. See pages 236-237.

46. "Comité de la Alianza Obrera Antifascista Valencia al Comité de la Alianza Obrera Madrid" November 1934 (ACCPCE).

later this call was repeated, this time with the support of the Catalan Regional Committee, when the Valencians tried to take the initiative in organising a meeting of all Alliances in Madrid for early April. These initiatives were quickly sabotaged by the Socialists. The UGT replied that it no longer had relations with the Alliances because "these had served their purpose". The PCE feared that if the Socialists did not declare in favour of such a national body then it would be established in Barcelona and hence under BOC control. Consequently, the official Communists also called for a National Alliance through the Vizcayan Alliance, but their initiative was equally unsuccessful. A further letter from the Catalan Regional Committee, this time to the leadership of all working class organisations, including the CNT, arguing for a special conference to set up a National Alliance, was not even answered by the Socialists. Nor was any headway made by a delegation consisting of Maurín and Catalan Socialist leader, Rafael Vidiella, sent to Madrid to discuss the question with the PSOE.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, the Socialists' national leaders had difficulty convincing some of their membership that the Workers Alliances no longer had a role to play. Apart from the Catalan and Valencian Federations, local PSOE branches in Seville, Saragossa and elsewhere all favoured the establishment of a National Alliance and the leadership felt it necessary to issue yet another circular in June explaining its opposition.<sup>48</sup>

To try and give a new impetus to the idea of a National Alliance and to take advantage of its continued legality, the Valencian Alliance organised a mass rally on 18 August 1935. An estimated 40,000 people attended this meeting, which was addressed by representatives of the PSOE, UGT, FSL, Opposition Unions, BOC and PCE. Many of the audience came from outside the region and thousands more were turned back, some of these being arrested. Around 120 different bodies formally supported what was later described as a "national" rather than a local or provincial act. They included sixteen Workers Alliances, twenty-five trade unions, ten peasant unions and thirty-one different Socialist organisations, as well as Treintista, PCE and BOC sections. The majority of

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47. *Actas de la Comisión Ejecutiva de la UGT* 21.3.35, 4.4.35; "B.P. de C. al B.P. de España" 21.3.35, PyJS, UGT, PyJC, "A la reunión extraordinaria de Alianza Obrera Madrid" Zaragoza 5.4.35, Letter from "Comité de la Alianza Obrera de Cataluña" to all workers organisations, 15.4.35, and unsigned letter, probably from the PCdeC, to "Secretariat del PCE" 8.5.35 regarding Maurín and Vidiella's visit to Madrid (ACCPCE).

48. *La Batalla* 4.7.35; *Acta del Comité Central...* Op.cit. p.6; *Actas de la Comisión Ejecutiva de la UGT* 6.6.35.

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those organisations which declared their support for the rally were from the Levante region and the Basque Country; the latter probably due to the PCE's influence.<sup>49</sup>

For those who supported the Alliances the Valencia meeting seemed to confirm the mass support which they enjoyed. Gorkín, in his speech to the assembled multitude, repeated the belief that "under pressure from its base" the CNT would soon join the Alliance and then no one would be able to resist such a united force. It also seemed that the Socialists were finally being forced to change their position, especially as the UGT representative, the Santander parliamentary deputy, Bruno Alonso, spoke of the need to achieve "total working class unity" through the Alliances. However, these hopes were short lived. The UGT's national leadership had already tried to prevent its Valencian organisation from participating in the meeting and Alonso contradicted his stance a few weeks later when he described the Alliances as "organs of confusion, disorientation and division". In an attempt to use the rally's success to put more direct pressure on the Socialist leaders, Gorkín, representing the Valencian Alliance, met Largo Caballero on 17 September. The UGT leader left little doubt as to his position, stating that the Socialists "had neither organised these Workers Alliances, nor created them, nor (did they).. have to maintain any sort of relationship with them".<sup>50</sup> Largo Caballero would later contradict this view, but basically it must have been obvious that the Socialist leaders, including those on the left, continued to be very reticent to take the Alliances seriously. Nearly a year after the October revolt, the BOC's passionate defence of the need for a National Alliance had made little headway beyond the level of mere propaganda.

### **Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista.**

The need to extend and strengthen the Workers Alliances was not the only major conclusion that the BOC drew from the experience of October. Without a great revolutionary marxist party, the dissident communists believed, the working class could never seize power. Obviously this had always been a central part of the BOC's or any other marxist grouping's politics, but the revolutionary movement's defeat in October 1934 made the absence of such a party more obvious than ever. In all previous

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49. *Alianza Obrera* n.d. (1935)

50. *Ibid*; *La Batalla* 23.8.35, 13.9.35, 11.10.35; *Actas de la Comisión Ejecutiva de la UGT* 1.8.35, 8.8.35, 15.8.35; *POUM A propòsit...* Op.cit. p.7.

revolutions, Maurín pointed out in *Hacia la Segunda Revolución*, in England, France and Russia, there had been a "party" of some form or other that had played a "vital and decisive role" in the revolution's eventual victory. In Spain, the party had to become the axis of the Workers Alliance and thereby of all the forces of the socialist-democratic revolution. It would, concluded the BOC's Central Committee in early 1935, "provide the working class of our country with the instrument of leadership and struggle that had been found so wanting in the October insurrection". Thus it was necessary, Maurín stated, to establish a centralised leadership, such as had existed in Russia, which could co-ordinate both the military, insurrectional and political aspects of the revolution. Moreover, the existence of a mass revolutionary party was important to avoid serious defeats when the working masses were faced with ruling class "provocations", such as had happened in October 1934. The Russian experience demonstrated, according to Maurín, that under the guidance of a "party of steel" any premature revolutionary action would not necessarily lead to an "irreparable catastrophe".<sup>51</sup>

"The doctrine of the proletariat's future great revolutionary socialist party (communist)," the BOC leader proclaimed, "naturally has to be marxism and leninism". "But not the marxism and leninism as interpreted by the epigones, but ..(as).. interpreted by our revolutionary proletariat. The mechanical transplanting of experience from some countries to others has had ill-fated results". "A party", Maurín wrote, "cannot be a copy, an imitation (or) an adaptation. It had to have its own life, (and) to have that its roots had to be sunk in the country where it exists.. united with the past, present and future of the people it wanted to transform".<sup>52</sup> In this way, Maurín explained, the revolutionary party would become, like the Bolsheviks and Jacobins had, the "nation's soul". It was under the leadership of their party that the working masses had to become, as mentioned before, what the BOC leader termed "a genuinely national revolutionary force" or the "great liberator" of the Spanish people. Here lay "the secret of all revolutionary movements of an historic magnitude". This emphasis on "national" characteristics was not a rejection of either the lessons of other revolutions nor internationalism. Rather it was born of the necessity of basing the revolutionary party's strategy and tactics within national reality as opposed to the blind acceptance of the

51. Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. pp.168,185,222; *Les lliçons...* Op.cit. pp.28-29.

52. *Ibid*; Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. p.114.

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dictates of an infallible international leadership, which had become the case with the Stalinized Communist Parties.

Previously Maurín and the BOC had espoused the view that the revolutionary party could be built in Spain by starting in Catalonia. Historical experience had apparently demonstrated the tendency for major innovations in the peninsula's working class movement - the creation of the UGT and CNT - to have their starting point in Catalonia; the latter playing, according to Maurín, a role similar to that of Prussia in the history of modern Germany. Nevertheless, calls for a renewed effort to build the FCI throughout the peninsula, such as the "intense propaganda campaign" launched on the eve of October, had proved relatively fruitless. The Federation, despite the optimism of its leaders, had failed to establish itself seriously outside of Catalonia, except in parts of the Levante and the Catalan speaking area of Huesca. October had highlighted the absolute necessity to construct, in the short term, a state-wide party capable of leading the working masses to victory, the alternative, the dissident communists were convinced would be the triumph of the counter-revolution.

There were, Maurín commented in December 1934, two ways in which a revolutionary party could be established in Spain - through the unity of the PSOE, PCE, BOC and all other existing marxist nuclei or through the absorption by one party of the rest. Events in 1934 and the subsequent clamour for unity throughout the working class movement had popularised the idea of uniting the country's marxist groups into one party. Unity along these lines may have been attractive to many militants but it was obviously fraught with problems given the deep-rooted divisions between these groups. Hence the Bloc leadership's support for the unification of Spain's workers' parties had more of a propaganda value than anything else. At best it would be possible to win sections of these parties over to one united revolutionary party and this meant, the dissident communists realised, that it was necessary that any unity initiatives did not appear like a "manoeuvre".<sup>53</sup>

Calls for the unification of existing workers parties had most effect in Catalonia, where the level of division was highest and the BOC strongest. On 1 January 1935 the

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53. *L'Hora* 26.1.35; *Avant* 3.12.34, 9.1.35; *Boletín del Bloque Obrero y Campesino (FCI)* January 1935.

**Bloc issued a manifesto calling for the formation of a "great marxist party". This was well received by some of the other Catalan workers parties, which were soon engaged in a series of informal talks about such a possibility. Subsequently, the radical left nationalist Partit Català Proletari (the former Estat Català - Partit Proletari), with the BOC's enthusiastic support, called for a meeting of all the region's marxist groups to discuss unity.<sup>54</sup> This led to a meeting on 3 February between the BOC, USC, Catalan Federation of the PSOE, PCdeC, PCP and ICE. It was immediately apparent that any form of agreement would prove difficult. The two socialist organisations, on the basis of a prior agreement, advocated as a first step the separate unification of their own and the communist factions. Moreover, the PSOE representatives pointed out that they were subject to the discipline of their party's national leadership and therefore unable to make any decision at a regional level. The PCdeC insisted that any form of political unity had to take place on the basis of the programme of the CI. So there seemed little ground to hope that any meaningful unity could be achieved in the short term. Nevertheless, the meeting decided on three basic proposals that would now be discussed by each party separately. These were:**

- that all those present recognised the need for the unification of existing marxist parties.**
- that this unity would take place on the basis of revolutionary marxism, which meant breaking all relations with the petty bourgeois parties, the violent seizure of power and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.**
- all parties to be in the Workers Alliance.**

**The USC delegation made it clear that they only agreed on the first point and along with the PSOE and PCP wanted the question of the Alliance to be left open.<sup>55</sup>**

**Another meeting was held on 6 April. The BOC, the Trotskyists (ICE) and the Partit Català Proletari (PCP) all expressed both their agreement with the points decided on at the first meeting and their desire to continue negotiations. The USC, in turn, repeated its original objections and stated its intention to wait and see how things would develop. The PCdeC, although agreeing in general with the original proposals, wanted**

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**54. ibid; *La Batalla* 12.7.35; "P.C.de C. Comité Central (al) B.P. del P.C. de E." 5.2.35 (ACCPCE).**

**55. *Accion* 1.5.35; *Justicia Social* 25.5.35.**

to substitute the term "marxism-leninism" for "revolutionary marxism" and exclude the ICE as it was not a "party but an opposition group". Both these suggestions were rejected by the rest of those present; the first because as they aimed to unite all marxists the term "marxism-leninism" would exclude the socialists and the second because any form of exclusion was against the whole spirit of unity that was being propounded. It was decided to adjourn the meeting for another week so that the PCdeC and USC delegates could consult their respective parties and allow the PSOE, which had not attended, to put its view.<sup>56</sup>

All six parties therefore met again on 13 April. The Socialist Party delegation now explained that it agreed with the basis for unity outlined in the first meeting but that any unification had to take place inside the PSOE. This position was supported by the USC, but rejected by the other participants. The PCdeC maintained the amendments it had previously put forward, adding that it did not believe political unity was possible and advocated instead the creation of a Liaison Committee between all the parties present. Yet again, the other delegates opposed the official Communists' proposals and the BOC accused the Communist Party of being sectarian and lacking any serious desire for unity. Similarly the PCP declared that the attitude of the PCdeC, PSOE and USC made unity impossible. Consequently the negotiations were called off, leaving the BOC, ICE and PCP. These three parties published a joint statement immediately after the meeting pledging themselves to continue working on the basis for marxist unification.<sup>57</sup>

The importance of these talks was not in their immediate results, but rather in that they were the product of an increasingly strong desire for unity among many workers. Apart from representing the first formal steps towards the eventual unification of the BOC and ICE, they also reflected a general shift in the position of the other parties involved. The catalyst that, albeit for different reasons, would finally push the PCdeC, PCP, USC and the Catalan Federation of the PSOE to form one united party, would be the CI's response to the growing menace of fascism, its adoption of the Popular Front policy and its advocacy of Communist-Socialist unity.<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile, the Catalan

56. *Ibid*; *Octubre* 19.4.35; *Catalunya Insurgent*, first fortnight May 1935.

57. *Justica Social* 25.5.35; *Accion* 1.5.35; "Acta de la reuni6n del d'ia 13.4.35" (ACCPCE).

58. See pages 283-284.

workers parties had yet to adopt clearly defined positions and there were contacts at different levels, both during and after the talks, between individual organisations to try and find the basis for closer collaboration.

Parallel to these formal talks, the PCdeC had launched a new campaign to try and win over the BOC's base. Following October, the official Communists had proposed the formation of a "liaison committee" between the two parties, claiming that events had brought both organisations closer together "despite their great differences". The BOC brusquely rejected these overtures, pointing out that "unity in action" already existed inside the Workers Alliance. The subsequent talks between the various Catalan marxist organisations encouraged the PCdeC in early April 1935 to renew its direct calls for unity with the Bloc. A letter was distributed to the BOC's rank and file and Local Committees, which pointed to the "great sympathy for unity" and "for the creation of a marxist-leninist revolutionary party" that existed among many workers who "did not understand why the Bloc called itself communist" and "was outside the CI". Despite the breakdown of the talks between the Catalan workers parties, the PCdeC still hoped to win over some of its dissident communist rivals' supporters. Another open letter sent to the BOC leadership in June, proposed an interview to discuss the practicalities of unification, the organisation of a joint congress to decide on which International to join and the sending of a delegation to Moscow to speak directly to the CI.<sup>59</sup>

The BOC leadership was extremely cool towards these approaches, in particular because it had, in January, violently attacked the PCE for having proposed the creation of Liaison Committees with the Socialists and had successfully moved a resolution inside the Catalan Alliance which forbade those affiliated to make definitive pacts with other organisations without the permission of the Alliance's Regional Committee.<sup>60</sup> The dissident communists dismissed the PCdeC's proposals as no more than the "old manoeuvre of unification at the base", to which "not one of the Bloc's members had responded." However, a few BOC militants, unhappy with, among other things, their party's increasingly close relations with the ICE, entered into contact with the official

59. "El Comité Central del Partit Comunista de Catalunya al Comité Executiu del Bloc Obrer i Camperol" 3.4.35. and "Partit Comunista de Catalunya al Comité Executiu de la Federació Comunista Ibérica i del Bloc Obrer i Camperol" 15.6.35. (ACCPCE).

60. See page 230.



Communists at this time.<sup>61</sup> The dissident communist leaders' apparent contempt for the PCdeC's appeals for unity was also hardly surprising given that vitriolic attacks against them still appeared in the official Communists press. Nor was this abuse purely verbal. In late May, PCE militants tried violently to disrupt a meeting addressed by Maurín and Gorkín in Palma de Mallorca.<sup>62</sup> The Bloc was only prepared to consider unifying with the Catalan Communist Party within the context of a more general unity process involving the region's other workers parties. Furthermore, the dissident communists considered that for this process to include the PCdeC, the latter would have to break with the CI. As such a development was highly unlikely, this meant that the BOC effectively excluded the possibility of unity with its official Communist rivals.

Privately, the PCdeC was also quite aware that there was no real basis for unification with the BOC. In fact, the official Communists had been instructed by the Madrid leadership initially to attend the Catalan unity talks with the sole purpose of "denouncing the Trotskyists' and Maurínists' call for a united party as a "manoeuvre aimed at deviating the masses away from the Communist Party". Maurín was still regarded by the PCdeC as a "covert Trotskyist" and "principal enemy of a united party" and the official Communists intended to demand that he condemned all previous "campaigns in his press against the USSR". The PCdeC hoped to "expose" the Bloc's leadership's supposed lack of seriousness regarding unity and thereby attract some of its rival's rank and file. The official Communist position also has to be seen in the light of similar offers to form "Liaison Committees" with the PSOE, USC and PCP. In fact, knowing that the BOC would turn down its proposals, the PCdeC hoped to undermine the dissident communists' attempt to portray themselves as the main champions of working class unity.<sup>63</sup>

Discussions now centred on the BOC, PCP and ICE. Initially those involved seemed confident that an agreement could be reached and *Acción*, returning to a theme once popular with the Bloc's leaders, spoke optimistically on May Day 1935 of how "marxist unity.. like the Workers Alliance.. will start in Catalonia and then extend to the rest of

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61. See page 253.

62. *Avant* 16.4.35; *Acción* 1.5.35; *La Batalla* 4.7.35.

63. See letters from PCdeC to PCE 5.2.35, 4.4.35, 2.5.35, 12.6.35 and 15.6.35. and "... a todos los Comités de Radio y Comarcas" 6.3.35 (ACCPCE).

the peninsula". However, talks between these three parties soon came up against the problem of whether the united party should be state-wide or only based in Catalonia. The BOC had stressed since the beginning of negotiations with the other Catalan groups that it would only accept unity in the region if it was the starting point for a new peninsula-wide revolutionary marxist organisation.<sup>64</sup> In contrast, the PCP favoured the creation of a united marxist organisation in Catalonia, separate from any similar process in the rest of Spain, where the working class was already politically organised in the PSOE and PCE. To propose, as the BOC did, building a new party outside of Catalonia, could only mean wanting to destroy the Socialist and Communist Parties. Instead, the PCP argued, a united Catalan organisation would join a unified party when this was formed in the rest of Spain, although maintaining its "own name and characteristics". These two conceptions were obviously incompatible and negotiations had broken down by late June 1935. The BOC saw the establishment of a state-wide revolutionary party as being completely indispensable and was unable to accept, what Maurín described as, the "narrow localist vision" of the PCP.<sup>65</sup>

Given the divergent origins of the six parties involved in the Catalan unity talks, their failure could not have been completely unexpected, despite the optimism shown at a propaganda level. As the BOC leaders themselves put it, a united party could not be created on the basis of a "federation of disperse tendencies" but on a firmer theoretical basis. Despite being only able to reach an agreement with the ICE, the Bloc continued to insist that the revolutionary party should "logically" extend to all those who accepted marxism, and the dissident communists were convinced that the other marxist organisations in Catalonia, with whom relations were described as "excellent", would soon see the need for unification.<sup>66</sup> However, such statements were for propaganda purposes. Since late 1934, when the BOC leadership had first proposed the unification of all workers parties, it could have only seriously thought this was possible with small groups like the ICE and PCP and above all the Socialist left - the real target of both "official" and "dissident" communists alike. In the end, it was the Trotskyists and the BOC

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64. *Boletín del Bloque Obrero y Campesino (FCI)* January 1935; *Accion* 1.5.35.

65. *Catalunya Insurgent* 1.6.35, 7.7.35; "Interviú con Joaquín Maurín a propósito de la unificación marxista", *La Batalla* 4.7.35.

66. *Ibid*; *Accion* 18.6.35.

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which decided to merge, in what was described as the first step in a more general unification of marxist forces.

The ICE, despite its considerable intellectual output, had been unable to expand beyond certain local nuclei. At the most it had some eight hundred members, based principally in Estremadura, Madrid and Northern Spain. In Catalonia, the Esquerra Comunista, as it was called, had between fifty and a hundred members, mainly in and around Barcelona; although *La Batalla* put this figure at only "eleven" in September 1934.<sup>67</sup>

There were a number of reasons why the ICE and BOC moved closer during 1934. Since 1932, the ICE's relations with the international Trotskyist movement had become increasingly distant. This was due, in particular, to the Spanish section's constitution as a separate party, rather than an opposition faction of the PCE, nearly a year before this became international policy and to its lack of involvement in the internal life of the International Left Opposition. Attempts by the international leadership to intervene directly inside the Spanish Trotskyist organisation against Nin's supporters only made matters worse. However, it was the so-called "French-turn" of 1934, when Trotsky advocated that his followers should enter the Socialist Parties to try and influence their new radicalised left wings, that really brought matters to a head. At a special National Plenum in September 1934, the ICE totally condemned the new position and favoured the constitution of a tendency of all those who shared its position inside the International Communist League (ICL), as the International Left Opposition had become in August 1933. From their own experience alone, in the ranks of the UGT, many Spanish Trotskyists knew what trying to work inside the PSOE would be like. The ICE's factional work inside the Socialist unions had often come up against bureaucratic obstruction, if not outright repression. Instead, the Trotskyists insisted that the "guarantee for the future" was in the united front and the "organisational independence of the proletarian vanguard". These were the principles that Trotsky had taught them and his Spanish supporters were prepared to maintain them "even if this meant breaking" with the former-Bolshevik leader.<sup>68</sup>

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67. Pagès, *El movimiento trotskista...* Op.cit. pp.70-94; *La Batalla* 6.9.34.

68. Pagès, *El movimiento trotskista...* Op.cit. pp.129-149, 237- 277; *Comunismo* September 1934.

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Like the BOC, the ICE saw the lack of a mass revolutionary party as the main cause for the workers' defeat in October. This agreement combined with the BOC's desire to expand its influence outside Catalonia and the Trotskyists' own isolation, laid the basis for bringing the two parties closer. Already, in the Catalan Workers Alliance's Regional Committee, Maurín and Nin had renewed their close collaboration of former years and in practice found themselves usually in general agreement. According to Maurín, it was during one of their conversations after an Alliance meeting in the winter of 1934 that Nin proposed that the two parties should work more closely together. The violent polemic that had often taken place in the past between their respective organisations had not seriously damaged personal relations between the two communist leaders.<sup>69</sup>

The call for discussions between the various workers parties in Catalonia had been taken up enthusiastically by the ICE. Given the balance of forces inside the Spanish workers movement at this time, the Trotskyists recognised that, at present, the foundation of a united party was only really possible in Catalonia. In common with the BOC, they believed that the creation of such a party could have an important effect on the revolutionary left in the rest of Spain, as the Workers Alliance had done when it was founded in the region. Nevertheless, Nin warned from the pages of *L'Hora*, it would not be desirable to form a party on the basis of a "monstrous cohabitation of irreconcilable tendencies". This would only paralyse the proletariat's struggle. Consequently, he argued that, the urgently needed revolutionary party would have to be established on the basic principles of revolutionary marxism. The ICE leaders were sceptical about the possibilities of reaching an agreement with either the PCdeC or the Catalan Federation of the PSOE, but this was not necessarily a problem, they believed, because neither of these organisations had much support. Instead, the Trotskyists' intervention in the Catalan unity talks was not only seen as a way of drawing closer to the BOC but also as giving them an opportunity to defend their position to a wider audience than usual.<sup>70</sup>

Outside of Catalonia, the ICE hoped to intensify its relations with the left Socialists, particularly the FJS. Although they had rejected "entrism" as an overall strategy, the

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69. See letter from Maurín to V. Alba 27.2.72, Alba, *Dos revolucionarios...* Op.cit. p.204; and see letter from Maurín to P. Broué 18.5.72 (FPI).

70. *L'Hora* 26.1.35; "A los miembros del CC. Carta remitida por el CE" 22.1.35. *Boletín Interior de la ICE* 15.5.35.

**Spanish Trotskyists were not averse to some form of agreement that would allow them to enter the Socialist Youth, while maintaining their right to make independent propaganda in favour of a new revolutionary party. Meanwhile, a few ICE militants had begun to advocate wholesale entry into the PSOE without conditions. It was now argued that the ICE was too small to expect the FJS to negotiate directly with it. Moreover, given the overtures being made internationally by the Communists towards the Socialists, there was a danger that the PSOE left, in particular the youth, would come under the influence of Stalinism. By entering the Socialist organisations, these ICE members hoped that they could combat this influence.<sup>71</sup>**

**Finally, in April 1935, the ICE Executive Committee decided on a compromise solution, proposed by Nin, whereby its members would form part of the new united party in Catalonia while entering the PSOE in the rest of Spain as a distinct group with its own publications which would defend the need to unite with the Catalan party. The leadership's position, however, was overwhelmingly rejected by the ICE's rank and file, because it was generally felt that it was utopian to believe that they could have any influence inside the PSOE. Instead, they claimed that converting their groups elsewhere in Spain into sections of the new party would not only strengthen the Trotskyists' position inside Catalonia but help the unified organisation's growth throughout the peninsula. By maintaining its independence, most ICE members reasoned, the unified party could play an important role in the process towards a wider marxist unity without having to be subject to the dictates of the Socialist leadership.<sup>72</sup>**

**The overturning of the Executive Committee's proposals was energetically condemned by the ICL who saw the Spanish section's decision as representing a capitulation to the BOC's "centrism". The Trotskyists' international leadership repeated its warning that if the ICE failed to work inside the PSOE this could lead to the danger of the "pro-Bolshevik current" going over to the Stalinists. The ICE replied in late July rejecting the ICL's position and roundly condemning its "sectarian" methods and complete failure to understand Spanish conditions. The expulsion a few weeks later of the Trotskyists from the French Socialist Youth helped confirm the views of those**

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**71. Ibid; Fersen, "Comentario a la resolución del CE de la ICE sobre cual debe ser nuestra orientación" 5.2.35. Ibid.**

**72. Pagès, *El movimiento trotskista...* pp.277-281; *Boletín Interior de la ICE* 25.4.35.**

who had been opposed to entry into the PSOE and FJS. In the end, the ICL leadership reluctantly accepted the ICE's decision to fuse with the BOC, with the proviso that the Trotskyists would try and win the new party over to the idea of a "Fourth International".<sup>73</sup> Only a handful of ICE members finally entered the PSOE and even this was without informing the ICL. In part, the pro-entry faction was proved correct because many left Socialists soon began to gravitate towards the PCE.<sup>74</sup> However, it remains highly debatable if the Trotskyists' very limited numbers could have made any real impact inside the PSOE given the restrictions that would have been placed on them openly defending their points of view.

Apart from the pressure in the early months of 1935 for some form of unity in the short term, the political evolution of both the BOC and ICE made such a development an increasing possibility. The abandonment by the Bloc of certain attitudes inherited from official communism, for instance its total and often sectarian hostility towards the Socialists, combined with the success of the united front policy, brought the Catalan dissidents closer to the Trotskyists. The ICE's own development, especially its distancing from some of the positions of the Trotskyist movement internationally, further encouraged the Bloc to believe that an agreement could be reached. Likewise, both parties had modified their position on the national question, which had previously been an area of serious disagreement between them. The BOC had abandoned its earlier insistence on the need to create national liberation movements throughout the peninsula regardless of local circumstances and its supposed defence of "separatism". The dissident communists had realised after 1932 that such "national" movements were unlikely to develop, at least in the short term, outside of the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia, despite the Bloc's initial optimism. Maurín's brief defence of "separatism" in 1931 had not led to any serious revision of his party's orthodox Leninist position. Hence the BOC demanded "self-determination" rather than "separation" or "independence" for the oppressed nationalities. The departure from this earlier radicalism had caused some friction inside the Bloc, with accusations by the more "Catalanist" sector that the party had "abandoned the national question".<sup>75</sup> The ICE,

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73. *Ibid* 1.8.35; J. Rous, *Rapport sur la fusion de la Gauche Communiste d'Espagne (Section de la LCI) et le BOC (Bloc ouvrier et paysan-Maurin)* n.p. September 1935.

74. See pages 280-283.

75. See pages 76, 251.

in turn, had changed its earlier view of dismissing Basque demands for national rights as "reactionary", and now defended, as the Bloc always had, the need for the proletariat to win the leadership of this movement.<sup>76</sup>

Criticism of the Trotskyists had become less frequent in the BOC's press after 1932, although in October 1933 Maurín could still claim that "Trotskyism was the antithesis of organisation", that caused "civil war" wherever it appeared in the workers movement. Once the Workers Alliance was established such attacks by either organisation became far less frequent. There were exceptions. The fact that one of the BOC's most important leaders, Miravittles, could desert in June 1934 to the ERC had been held up by the ICE as illustrating the nature of Maurín's party. Not only was the Bloc basically "opportunist" and lacking in any clear programme but, the Trotskyists believed, destined to eventually collapse altogether. Likewise, the BOC could be equally brutal in its criticisms - the "French turn" being described in *La Batalla* in September 1934 as representing the "final liquidation" of Trotskyism. The same article accused the Left Opposition of being "perhaps even more sectarian than Stalinism itself". Nevertheless, such polemical excesses did not reflect the relatively healthy relations that existed by 1934 between the two groups.<sup>77</sup>

Another important factor which allowed the two parties eventually to unite was the BOC's gradual clarification of its position in relation to the international communist movement. This process had begun in 1932<sup>78</sup> and soon the Bloc quite clearly had begun to identify the crisis of the CI with the degeneration of the Russian party itself. At the FCI's First Congress in June 1933, the dissident communists had stated that the Comintern "had failed as the International of revolution from Bulgaria in 1923 to Germany in 1933". The CI was no longer the "centre of world revolution", Maurín wrote in *Hacia la Segunda Revolucion*, but "an instrument at the service of the Soviet state". The inability of the revolution to spread in the early twenties he claimed, had led to the "myth" of "socialism in one county" and "yesterday's internationalists had become fervent nationalists". Parallel to this, Maurín explained, had been the transformation of

76. See page 76.; J.Land J.M. Arenillas, *Sobre la Cuestión Nacional en Euskadi* (Barcelona 1981) pp.47-59.

77. Maurín, "La quiebra del troskismo" *La Batalla* 26.10.33; *ibid* 27.9.34; *La Antorcha* 30.6.34.

78. See pages 71-72.

Leninism at the hands of the "epigones" into a type of "religious sect". "The triumph of Stalin over Trotsky", the BOC leader concluded, "is the victory of Russian socialism over internationalist socialism". Such criticism of Stalinism differed little from that of Trotsky's. Moreover, despite the occasional attacks on his followers, the BOC had continued to publish articles of a general nature by the former Bolshevik leader.<sup>79</sup> A return to "orthodoxy" was also evident in Maurín's comparisons between Spain and Russia in *Hacia la Segunda Revolución*, comparisons he had dismissed as "grotesque" in 1931.<sup>80</sup>

Where the BOC differed fundamentally with the Trotskyists was in the conclusions its leaders drew from its recognition of the degeneration of the CI. While stating, as early as April 1932, that there was the need for a "truly great International" the Bloc did not believe that the basis existed for building such a body in the short term and hence rejected the International Left Opposition's call for a new "Fourth International". Instead, the Catalan dissident communists favoured co-operation in the short term with the "strong minorities" which existed in many countries that "wanted to return to the traditions of Marx and Lenin".<sup>81</sup> The impact of the economic crisis, the rise of fascism and the apparent incapacity of either the social democratic or Communist parties to deal with these problems had led internationally, on the one hand, to the radicalisation of many Socialists and on the other to the disenchantment of many militants with official communism. The result was the proliferation during the thirties of new left-socialist or dissident communist groups, principally in Europe.

In an attempt to bring these disparate groups together, the British Independent Labour Party (ILP) had organised an International Conference in Paris in August 1933 of Left Socialist Parties and independent communist organisations. Fourteen different European organisations attended, including the FCI and representatives from the International Left Opposition. The rapid deterioration of the world situation convinced the delegates that an international response from the proletariat was more urgent than ever. Above all, Hitler's victory in Germany had exposed the terrible

79. *La Batalla* 18.5.33.; Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución*. Op.cit. p.108.; see articles by Trotsky in *Adelante* 7.11.33., 11.11.33., 19.12.33., 20.12.33., 1.2.34., 2.2.34., and 16.2.34.

80. See page 53.

81. *La Batalla* 14.4.32.



political weaknesses of the existing Internationals. The Second had shown itself, the dissident groups claimed, to be "completely burnt up" and the Third had "extinguished all internal democracy" and under the slogan of "socialism in one country" had "liquidated the world revolution". The result of the latter's "disastrous policies" had been defeats not only in Germany but also in Bulgaria, Estonia and China. As Maurín, who represented the FCI, commented, even though both the Socialist and Communist Internationals were bankrupt, historical conditions were not ripe for the creation of a new body because there was no powerful revolutionary party, like the Bolsheviks, which could be the "soul" of such an organisation. The Conference agreed with him that a new International at this stage would have either fallen under the sectarian influence of the Trotskyists or, given the predominance of ex-socialist groups, have been another "Two and a Half International" similar to that created by the left Socialists after the First World War. A further proposal by some delegates in favour of the unification of the Second and Third Internationals was also rejected by the majority of delegates. Instead, the FCI's position in favour of an "international united front" was adopted. In the meantime, the Conference declared, it was necessary to re-construct revolutionary parties in every country before the question of founding a new International could be seriously posed. An International Committee, often referred to as the "London Bureau", was established to, "develop common international action between its own sections and with other revolutionary sections of the working class movement with the objective of preparing for the formation of a reconstructed International on a revolutionary socialist basis".<sup>82</sup>

During 1934, the BOC reinforced its position regarding "international unity in action" and, as Maurín put it, "the need progressively to build the base of a new International". Certainly the process of disintegration of the communist movement appeared to continue apace. In many countries, it was reported to the FCI's Second Congress in 1934, "the Communist parties hardly exist" or were divided. In France, for example, Maurín, in early 1935, pointed to the existence of at least eleven different factions that had split away from the PCF. These developments strengthened the Bloc's belief that a revolutionary regrouping outside the discredited Second and Third Internationals was

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82. *ibid* 7.9.33, 14.9.33, 21.9.33; *Boletín Interior de la ICE* 5.9.33; *Revolutionary Socialist Bulletin* January 1936.

increasingly possible.<sup>83</sup> A second Conference, organised in Paris in February 1935, reaffirmed the previous position in favour of international unity and the International Committee was converted into the "International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity" (IBRSU). Of the twelve different parties represented, only the Dutch delegation counterposed affiliation to the Trotskyists' proposed Fourth International.<sup>84</sup>

Disagreement over how the International should be rebuilt was the only major disagreement that seemed to separate the BOC and ICE by early 1935. Nevertheless, the ICE believed that because the Bloc favoured the creation of a new "revolutionary marxist International" this amounted to the same thing as the Trotskyists wanted. Even the ICL was under the illusion that the unified party would defend inside the IBRSU the need for the Fourth International. This was not to be the case. Not only was the question of the Fourth International not raised in discussions between the two parties but the unified organisation adopted the BOC's position that the immediate construction of a new International was not a viable prospect and the ICL's scheme therefore doomed to failure.<sup>85</sup>

As well as this general ideological convergence between the two parties, there was a more practical basis for unity. Despite the fact that, during the first half of 1935, the BOC leadership had returned to the idea of building from "Catalonia outwards", in practice this conception had made little headway. Talks between the various Catalan marxist organisations had come to nothing and the BOC itself had, as yet, failed to establish a base outside the region. Unity with the ICE could help overcome this weakness by providing Maurín's party with a number of useful nuclei throughout the peninsula. The BOC was also interested in unity with the ICE, Maurín claimed many years later, because the incorporation of Nin would help strengthen the party leadership, which until then had revolved too much around himself. Moreover, the Bloc would

83. *La Batalla* 12.4.34; Maurín, "La capitulación de la Internacional Comunista" *ibid* 2.8.34 and "La unidad internacional del proletariado" *Leviatán* no.10, February 1935.

84. *Avant* 11.2.35, 28.2.35.

85. J. Andrade, "Carta a un camarada americano" 29.6.35 reproduced in L. Trotsky, *La Revolución Española* (Barcelona 1977) vol. II. pp.348-352; "Actas de la sesión del 22.5.35 del S.I. de la L.C.I.(B.-L.)" *ibid* p.347; *Boletín Interior de la ICE* 1.8.35; Rous, *Op.cit.*; Maurín to Broué, *Op.cit.*

gain the collaboration of a whole number of other capable and long-standing communist militants who could be found in the ICE ranks.<sup>86</sup>

By early July 1935, the BOC and ICE had reached a final agreement to unite the two parties. This, Maurín explained, had not been difficult because there was already a general level of political understanding between their respective organisations. The new party, the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Workers Party of Marxist Unification), would not be considered as a "definitive party, but the first practical step in a general process of unification". A "great revolutionary socialist party (communist)", declared the BOC's Central committee, would be formed by "grouping all the marxist organisations in one organisation" as well as drawing in those "demoralised by sectarianism and division" now attracted by the "revolutionary impulse" created by marxist unity. Not that the extension of the unified party could take place just in a "straight line" with the simple incorporation of other factions but rather, in what Maurín described as a "spiral" process through true "unity in thought and action" and not "ideological chaos". Both parties appeared confident that their unification would have immediate repercussions throughout the Left; for instance, Maurín repeated his "firm belief that the other marxist organisations in Catalonia would unite with them". Similarly, Nin predicted "rapid and brilliant victories" for the new party, whose importance would not be "measured by the numerical addition of its component parts but by the immense poll of attraction that (this) will represent".<sup>87</sup>

The POUM's political programme was elaborated during the summer of 1935 by Maurín and Nin and progressively approved by the two parties' Central and Executive Committee. The new party's politics were centred on the BOC's and Maurín's analysis of the current phase of the Spanish revolution as being "socialist- democratic". Yet it would be an over- simplification to say that the POUM was a mere continuation of the BOC, despite the Bloc's overwhelming numerical superiority and Maurín's personal influence. Moreover, the ICE privately believed that the fusion of the two parties was on the basis of a programme that contained the Trotskyists' "fundamental principles", regarding the "international nature of the revolution", opposition to the theory of

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86. See note 69; Interview with W. Solano 17.7.85.

87. *Boletín del Bloque Obrero y Campesino (FCI)* July 1935; "Interviú con Joaquín Maurín..." Op.cit.; *La Batalla* 12.7.35; Nin, "Un pacto de unificación firme y sincero" *ibid* 19.7.35.

socialism in one country, defence of the USSR while reserving the right to criticise, the recognition of the failure of the Second and Third Internationals and the subsequent need to "re-establish the international workers movement on a new basis". Juan Andrade, a founder member both of the PCE and ICE, even claimed that Maurín "had totally corrected his points of view" after October 1934 and now coincided with the Trotskyists. Nevertheless, the reality was closer to Nin's publicly expressed view that unification had been so easily achieved because there were no "fundamental differences" between the two organisations and that "neither side had made important concessions".<sup>88</sup> Rather than one of the two parties imposing its line on the other, historical circumstances had led to a general convergence on the most important questions. Differences still existed, but the overriding need to take the first step towards the construction of a mass united revolutionary party pushed these into the background.

Once the unification agreement and various political resolutions had been approved by the BOC and ICE leaderships, these documents were discussed by the two parties' respective memberships. Parallel to these discussions, both groups began to collaborate closely at all levels. When *La Batalla* re-appeared in late June 1935 it carried articles by leading ICE members and was now sold by the latter's militants throughout Spain.<sup>89</sup>

By early September, the BOC press described unification with the ICE as a "reality" if not yet officially consummated. In Bilbao for instance, the former ICE group had already begun to use the title "POUM". None the less, given the situation of clandestinity in which both parties still had to work, a normal congress was impossible, so the final touches to the unification process took place at a meeting of leaders of both groups in Barcelona on 29 September. The new party was to be based on "democratic centralism", allowing for the most extensive internal democracy without permitting the existence of organised factions. Supreme authority would be vested in the party's annual congress which would elect a Central Committee of forty-one and the General Secretary. In order to overcome the impossibility of organising a proper congress in the short term, the meeting took on this function appointing a Central Committee made

88. *Ibid*; "Entreviu con... Maurín..." *Op.cit.*; *Boletín Interior de la ICE* 21.7.35; Andrade "Carta..." *Op.cit.*

89. *La Batalla* 4.7.35, 9.8.35.

up of twenty-eight BOC members and thirteen from the ICE and an Executive Committee consisting of Nin and Narcís Molins i Fàbrega from the ICE, Maurín, who was also to be General Secretary and editor of *La Batalla*, Arquer, Bonet and Rovira from the Bloc.<sup>90</sup>

Unification with the ICE was greeted with mixed feelings by the BOC's members. Many were enthusiastic, especially the youth in Barcelona. Others were either indifferent or objected to the change of name because the BOC was already well known as a distinct political option. Nevertheless, Maurín's prestige inside the party made sure that the vast majority of its militants accepted unification with the Trotskyists.<sup>91</sup> More serious opposition came from a group led by the majority of the *L'Hora* editorial board and based on the Ateneu Enciclopèdic Popular.

The antecedents of this opposition group lay in accusations made at the FCI's Second Congress in April 1934 that the party had "abandoned the national question". At the forefront of such criticism, which was combined with a general reticence about building the party on a state-wide basis, were Rovira and ex-PCC leaders Arquer, Colomer, Miguel Ferrer and Miravittles, who soon left to join the ERC.<sup>92</sup> The majority of delegates at the Second Congress had rejected the arguments of the "Catalanist" faction in the party's leadership, but this did not resolve the problem. The opposition now gathered around the new editorial board of *L'Hora*, which the congress had decided to resurrect. Fears that the Catalan weekly would be converted into a focus for dissent, despite being nominally under the control of the Executive Committee, were later proved justified.<sup>93</sup>

Unification with the ICE brought this opposition to a head and a factional manifesto was distributed throughout the new party in November 1935, signed by forty militants, headed by Colomer, Ferrer and two other members of the *L'Hora* editorial board, Angel

90. *ibid*; *Acción* 7.9.35; *Boletín del Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista* October 1935; "Funcionamiento orgánico del POUM. Instrucciones a los militantes" *La Batalla* 1.5.36, 8.5.36.

91. Opposition to the change of name was widespread according to E. Adroher-Gironella and R. Fernandez Jurado, Interviews 26.11.84. and 18.4.84., Alba, *El marxismo...* Op.cit. pp.233, 240, and J. Soler, Op.cit. p.33.; In contrast, V.Ballester and W.Solano, in Interviews on 3.4.84. and 17.7.85. respectively, expressed the opposite view.

92. See page 187.

93. *La Batalla* 20.4.34.

**Estivill and Libert Estartus.** The opposition claimed that: the BOC had progressively declined since 1931; that there was no internal democracy; there was a lack of technical preparation, which had been reflected in October 1934; its position over the national question "lacked revolutionary content"; it had been "bureaucratised"; and that it made too many attacks on the USSR. The opposition also called for an end to the "campaign of insults and slander against other workers' organisations" and to "work sincerely" for unity between all the Catalan workers parties. In particular, it virtually accused the BOC of having sabotaged the Workers Alliance, hence bringing about its "failure".

Despite this long list of complaints, the two issues over which the "*L'Hora* Faction", as it became known, and the BOC really parted company were the establishment of a new state-wide party, more specifically unification with Nin's group, and their respective evaluations of the "Popular Front" tactic. Supporters of this faction, along with Rovira, had maintained contacts with the PCP, after negotiations had been broken off with the BOC, with the hope of still creating an exclusively Catalan-based, as opposed to a peninsula-wide party. Rejection of unity with the ICE was not just because of an aversion to building the party outside of the region, however, but also quite simply due to anti-Trotskyism.<sup>94</sup>

The turn by the CI and its sections towards the policy of the "Popular Front" was looked upon favourably by some members of the *L'Hora* faction. Prior to this, Colomer had already begun to move towards a similar position when, following the elections of November 1933, he had advocated a bloc with the ERC to avoid the "immediate triumph of fascism". More significant still was the lead-article written by Colomer in *L'Hora* in July 1935, where he enthusiastically supported the setting up of the French Popular Front. Its victory, he claimed, would have repercussions in every country and signal the "downfall of the capitalist world". It would, he wrote, be "blind sectarianism" to criticise the Popular Front because only one question faced the workers movement - to "confront the enemy and impede the victory of an implacable dictatorship". This sympathy towards the policy of the Popular Front and the level of collaboration with the petty bourgeois parties it implied, contrasted sharply with the official position of the BOC

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94. POUMA *propòsit...* Op.cit. p.2; *Acta del Comité Central...* Op.cit. pp.19-20; Coll and Pané, Op.cit. p.52.

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which was reflected most clearly in an article by Maurín published a week later in *La Batalla*, leaving no doubt as to the party's rejection of the CI's latest strategical turn.<sup>95</sup>

Despite the faction's limited size and claims by the POUM leadership that its positions would win no support among the membership there was a concerted effort by the Executive Committee to smash the opposition quickly. Faced with the *L'Hora* editorial board's virtual refusal to submit to party discipline, the POUM began to publish a new Catalan weekly in December 1935, *Front*. A special extended Central Committee meeting was held in early January 1936 to deal with the problem. Apart from Rovira, the editor of *L'Hora*, most leading members condemned the faction's activities, especially after it was disclosed that its manifesto had got into the hands of rival organisations. Consequently, a proposal by Maurín to expel the rebels was backed by the majority of the Central Committee.<sup>96</sup>

In a note published in the PCdeC and PCP press in late January 1936, a total of twenty-two members, headed by Colomer, Ferrer, Estivill and Estartus, now declared themselves outside the POUM. There had in fact, been contacts between the faction and the Communist Party for some time and the BOC had already accused the PCdeC in June 1935 of trying to "create a revolt" among its rank and file at a time when unity discussions with the ICE were in their final stages. None the less, apart from Ferrer and perhaps a few others, the majority of the faction now joined the Catalan Federation of the PSOE rather than the PCdeC. Their decision seems to be due to the relative openness of the Socialist Party, but it certainly belied the characterisation of the opposition as "Catalanist" given the poor record of the PSOE in relation to the national question. The departure of this group had little effect on the POUM numerically but it was used at a propaganda level by its rivals. Moreover, the loss of Colomer, a founder member of the FCC-B, PCC and BOC, President of the Ateneu Enciclopèdic Popular and a constant member of these parties' leaderships, must have been a personal blow to Maurín of whom he had been a long-time collaborator and friend. The real significance of this split would become clearer in months to come, as the former oppositionists played an

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95. POUM, *A propòsit...* Op.cit. p.5; *L'Hora* 12.7.35; Maurín, "Las relaciones del proletariado con los partidos pequeños burguesas" *La Batalla* 19.7.35; on the POUM and the Popular Front see pages 263-265.

96. *Acta del Comité Central...* Op.cit. pp.19, 21-26; POUM, *A propòsit...* Op.cit. pp.1, 3.

important role in undermining the POUM's attempts to influence the Catalan Socialists.<sup>97</sup>

### **The POUM, the left Socialists and revolutionary unity**

Central to the POUM's ambition to become a state-wide party was the need to win over at least part of the Socialist left. A few leading BOC members actually favoured a direct fusion with the PSOE. This position had been defended by Colomer in April 1935 in opposition to the idea of creating a new party outside of Catalonia. Even Gorkín, one of Maurín's most loyal supporters, claimed some ten years later that he too had favoured unity with the Socialist Party at this time. Nevertheless, the majority of the Bloc's leaders ruled out unity with the PSOE without either a split in its ranks or a purge of the reformist and right-wing factions. In fact, when, in late 1933, Largo Caballero had spoken of there being nothing that separated socialists and communists other than the question of the party this had been brusquely dismissed by Gorkín. Historical examples, he had written, - Kerensky, Noske and Scheidemann among others - showed how false the UGT leader's view was. If the Socialists knew "how to break with the past, correct errors, clean out traitors and become loyal to the working class", Gorkín had insisted, then the BOC would "talk of unity...". Hopes that such a development was possible were high in early 1935, given the increasing radicalism of the Socialist left, in particular the FJS. The "splitting of the Socialist Party", the BOC had commented in late 1934, would not weaken the workers movement but was "indispensable for its purification". Moreover, the BOC had been confident that it could benefit from the radicalisation in the Socialist ranks. In fact, the dissident communists believed, as Luis Portela put it on the eve of the October uprising, that, despite its small size, the Bloc had "certainly influenced the PSOE's change of line".

During the first half of 1935 there was clearly an increase in collaboration between the BOC and some local PSOE organisations. In Vinarós (Castellón) for instance, the two parties began to publish a newspaper together, *Frente*. More importantly, relations

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97. *Octubre* 24.1.36; "Informe sobre la actividad del p. desde Julio hasta Diciembre 1935. Cataluña" n.d. (ACCPCE); "Carta del Comité Ejecutivo del BOC al Partit Comunista de Catalunya" *La Batalla* 30.6.35; see page 284.



with the Catalan Federation of the PSOE were still fairly healthy, despite the breakdown of unification talks. Agreement between the BOC and the local Socialists had been such that the PCdeC had complained bitterly in March 1935 about these two parties continually uniting against its representatives inside the Catalan Workers Alliance's Regional Committee. After the formation of the POUM, the Catalan Socialists raised at the PSOE's National Plenum, much to Prieto's disgust, the need to maintain relations with the new party.<sup>98</sup> Yet it was in, what they described as, the "increasingly marxist-leninist" FJS that the dissident communists were most hopeful of making converts. The Socialist Youth's militancy was symbolised in its controversial pamphlet, *October: Segunda Etapa*, published in the aftermath of October 1934. It now advocated an even more strident campaign to "bolshevise" the Socialist movement, with the aim of centralising the party's structure, expelling Besteiro's faction and removing Prieto's supporters from any positions of authority. "Bolshevization" would, the FJS hoped, be accompanied by a general unification of the proletariat at a political and trade union level, opposition to any further alliances with the Republicans and withdrawal from the Second International in favour of "international reconstruction on the basis of the traditions of the Russian revolution". The Socialist Youth had reiterated its belief that the Workers Alliances should be concerned only with organising the armed insurrection. Like other left Socialists, the FJS also believed that a "bolshevized" PSOE would exercise any future proletarian dictatorship rather than the Alliance or any form of "soviet".<sup>99</sup>

Notwithstanding their disagreements with much of the FJS's politics, both the BOC and ICE<sup>100</sup> had placed a growing emphasis on the need to take advantage of the Socialist Youth's radicalisation to win it to what the dissident communists considered "fully-fledged marxist" positions. There seemed good reason to believe that the FJS could be influenced in such a way because contacts between it and both the JCI and ICE Youth had been built up throughout 1934 and early 1935.

In Barcelona, the JCI and FJS had formed, in April 1934, the "Young Workers Alliance", which later included the Communist youth organisation, the *Unión de*

98. POUM *A propòsit...* Op.cit. p.2; Gorkín, *El POUM ante el reagrupamiento socialista* (Mexico 1946) and "Posición del socialismo..." Op.cit.; *La Batalla* 4.10.34, 13.9.35; *Acta del Comité Central...* Op.cit. p.2; "Partit Comunista de Catalunya Comité Central. A todos los Comités de Radio y Comrcas" 6.3.35 (ACCPCE).

99. The FJS pamphlet is reproduced in Bizcarrondo, Op.cit. pp.83- 156.

100. See pages 150, 240, 242.

Juventudes Comunistas (UJC) and the Revolutionary Students Association. Similar bodies were also set up in Reus, Sabadell and Tarragona. The Socialist Youth's preparedness to collaborate with the BOC was, in part, as it was in the case of the local PSOE, a recognition of its weakness in Catalonia. This became clear when FJS leaders Carlos Hernández Zancajo and Santiago Carrillo visited Barcelona in September 1934 and offered the BOC's Juventud Comunista Ibérica the leadership of a united youth organisation in the region. This offer was turned down by the BOC youth on the basis that the establishment of a new united youth group could not be divorced from the question of forming a unified party. Nevertheless, the Bloc's Executive Committee saw this proposal as a hopeful sign and resolved to intensify relations with the FJS. Collaboration continued in Catalonia after October 1934, and the JCI joined with both the local Communist and Socialist Youth organisations in campaigning against the death penalties imposed on certain leaders of the Asturian miners' revolt. In contrast, attempts by the JCI to form a Young Workers Alliance in Valencia, where the FJS was much stronger, were opposed by the Socialist and Communist Youth.<sup>101</sup>

Dissident communist influence inside the FJS had seemed to be growing during 1934 because many local Socialist Youth organisations throughout Spain had started regularly to order *La Batalla* and other BOC literature. This influence probably increased when the Bloc began to give space in its press to the FJS's leaders to defend themselves against the attacks of Prieto's faction inside the PSOE. First *L'Hora*, in February 1935, then *La Batalla* during the summer, published a series of articles by leading Socialist Youth members attacking not only the Socialist centre and right, but also, in some cases, the PCE's idea of a "Popular Anti-Fascist Bloc". At the same time *L'Hora* published FJS leader Serrano Poncela's book *El Partido Socialista y la conquista del poder* in which he eulogised the role of the Bloc in the Catalan Workers Alliance, contrasting this with the sectarian attitude of the PCE elsewhere in Spain. In Serrano Poncela's opinion, the BOC had moved closer to the PSOE after the November 1933 elections hence making some form of political agreement more likely.<sup>102</sup> In particular, the left Socialists' rejection

101. *Accion* 18.6.35; *La Batalla* 6.9.34; W. Solano, "Comentarios críticos al "unificación" de las Juventudes Socialistas y Comunistas" *Ibid* 1.5.36; JCI, JSC, UJCC and FJS, "A tota la Joventut Treballador" n.d. and Comité Executiu Aliança Obrera Jovenil, "Joves Obrers!" 1.4.35 (IMHB)

102. Interview with W. Solano 4.7.86; for articles by FJS leaders, see *L'Hora* 15.2.35., 11.5.35. and *La Batalla* 28.6.35, 4.7.35, 12.7.35, 19.7.35, 13.9.35; S. Serrano Poncela, *El Partido Socialista y la conquista del poder* (Barcelona 1935) pp.113-114.

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of a renewal of the Republican-Socialist alliance had, objectively at least, brought them closer to the dissident communists.

Meanwhile, the BOC had continued to publish friendly criticism of the FJS, in particular what it saw as the Socialist Youth's "ultra-leftism". The differences of opinion between the BOC and FJS were most graphically summarised in a series of written exchanges involving Maurín and Carrillo, published in *La Batalla* and the left Socialist paper *Claridad*, during July and September 1935. This debate also marked something of a watershed in the two organisations' relationship. Carrillo repeated the view that the future great Spanish Bolshevik party would be built inside the PSOE and called on the BOC to join the party, thereby strengthening the left in its fight against the reformists. Maurín, in turn, replied by stating the BOC's belief that such a schema was impossible while there existed two irreconcilable tendencies inside the Socialist Party. It was not just a question of numbers, he argued, numbers had not bothered Lenin in 1917, but ideological clarity. If the dissident communists were inside the PSOE they would be subject to its discipline, and independent initiatives, such as the creation of the Workers Alliance, would be impossible to propose. Furthermore, the expulsion of the French Trotskyists from the French Socialist Party in the summer of 1935 heightened the BOC leadership's fears that there was no guarantee that a similar situation could not occur in Spain if any dissident marxist faction entered the PSOE. Unity was an absolute necessity but on a revolutionary basis and outside any existing party. Maurín also attacked the FJS's "Blanquist" conception of armed insurrection, which relegated the masses to the role of onlookers while the revolutionary elite, in this case a "Bolshevized" PSOE, took power on their behalf. This was a form of "substitutionism" - the political organisation substituting itself for the mass action of the working class. A criticism which the BOC had already made of the left Socialists over their conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat as being exercised by the party rather than by soviets, or in the Spanish case, the Workers Alliances.<sup>103</sup> The FJS and other Socialists may have turned sharply to the left but they had not abandoned the traditional social-democratic marxism which saw the party acting on behalf of the working class rather than leading it in the struggle for power as Lenin had advocated. Maurín concluded his critique of

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103. *La polémica Maurín-Carrillo* (Barcelona 1937); *Acción* 7.9.35; Solano, "Las JS y el problema de la insurrección" *La Batalla* 23.8.34.

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**Carillo's and the FJS leadership's politics by outlining the basis for any agreement with the Socialist left:**

- acceptance of the Workers Alliances as organs of struggle, insurrection and power;
- one unified trade union movement;
- the recognition of the socialist-democratic nature of the revolution;
- the adoption of a "Bolshevik position" regarding the national and agrarian questions;
- for a homogeneous party with no factions.

The BOC leader finished by warning that not only would the FJS never achieve the unity it desired inside the PSOE but that ultimately these youthful leftists would be defeated if they did not change their position.<sup>104</sup>

If anything, the publication by the BOC of this polemic and other FJS articles has given a false impression of the closeness of relations between the two groups at this time. Although, by mid- 1935, the Bloc and the ICE had built a limited influence among some sections of the FJS, this was not decisive enough to win over more than a handful of these young militants. The demands that Maurín had raised, before unity could be achieved, in his polemic with Carrillo were unlikely to be met because of the very weaknesses in the left Socialists' positions which the BOC leader had identified. Instead, the dissident communists must have hoped that, by exposing the fragility of the FJS's new-found revolutionary politics, they could begin to draw the Socialist Youth's base into the orbit of the new unified marxist party. This was difficult, however, because the POUM had little strength outside of Catalonia and, as yet, hardly seemed a viable alternative to FJS radicals and other left Socialists who were members of mass, and apparently, revolutionary organisations. The Socialist membership, particularly the Youth, was still steadily expanding and the POUM was probably considered as an unnecessary competitor by many Socialist militants. Nevertheless, the POUM leadership remained optimistic that, in Maurín's words, if the FJS "did not abandon the revolutionary road which it had taken" it would inevitably end up moving towards the dissident communists' party.<sup>105</sup> These hopes were not borne out by experience; the attractions of a revitalised and internationally powerful official communism would prove far more seductive to the FJS than the revolutionary marxist orthodoxy of the POUM.

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104. *La polemica...* Op.cit.

105. *Acta del Comité Central...* Op.cit. pp.3-5.

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## 6. 1936: REVOLUTION OR COUNTER-REVOLUTION ?

### The Popular Front.

The collapse of the Radical-CEDA government following the financial scandals during autumn 1935 opened up a decisive phase in the Republic's history. Unable to gain sufficient parliamentary support, the "stop-gap" government, based on various small "centre" parties, soon had to prepare the ground for new elections. For the POUM, the real choice was more than ever between socialist revolution and fascism. Any elections, the party declared in December 1935, could only be at best a temporary solution. The next Cortes, the dissident communists claimed, would demonstrate even more clearly than during any previous government since 1931, "its emptiness and impotence". The political incapacity of the petty bourgeois parties and the unstable socio-political situation undermined any possibility of a lasting solution based on bourgeois democracy, the party concluded. Comparisons in the foreign press between the political situation in Spain and the days prior to the fascist take-over in Germany, Austria and Italy were dismissed by the POUM as inaccurate. According to the party's theoretical journal, *La Nueva Era*, the "balance of forces" in the country at the beginning of 1936 was "infinitely more unfavourable" for the authoritarian Right than two years previously. This was due, it argued, to the creation of the Workers Alliances, the determination of the masses, as seen in October, to prevent the Right from taking power, government scandals and the divisions in the ranks of the bourgeois parties. Hence any election at the present time, the POUM predicted, would have "a marked revolutionary character".<sup>1</sup> Whether the working class could take advantage of this situation was another matter. The workers movement was neither organisationally nor ideologically in condition to make a serious bid for power.

Faced with the prospect of elections, most of the Left favoured some form of pact which, in effect, would be a repeat of the Socialist-Republican alliance of five years earlier and would, given the electoral system, prevent a repetition of the 1933 defeat.

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1. *La Batalla* 13.12.35., 20.12.35.; *La Nueva Era* January 1936.

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Moves towards such an agreement were greatly aided by the return to popularity of the left Republicans. Moreover, Prieto's faction of the PSOE enthusiastically welcomed any chance to rebuild its alliance with the Republicans. Plus there was also a new dimension in that the PCE now advocated the forming of a "Popular Front" of the workers organisations with all anti-fascist sections of the middle classes. The stumbling block to the consummation of this pact were the left Socialists who, theoretically at least, were opposed to any repeat of the PSOE's alliance with the Republicans.

In the POUM's view, the petty bourgeoisie would be unable to play a decisive role in the country's political development. The weakness of the left Republicans' social base and their impotence when previously in government confirmed the orthodox marxist view that only two classes - the proletariat and the bourgeoisie - could really determine the country's political future. Accordingly, the petty bourgeoisie itself was incapable of taking a political stance that was ultimately independent of either of these two great classes. None the less, this analysis did not mean that the POUM dismissed the importance of the petty bourgeoisie as a class. Especially given that, as one of the former leaders of the Basque ICE, José Luis Arenillas, pointed out, the working class actually constituted a minority of Spain's population. If the peasantry was included under the general heading "petty bourgeoisie", then the numerical significance of this class was obvious. Experience elsewhere in Europe had shown, moreover, that the petty bourgeoisie could provide the cannon-fodder for fascism. Maurín and others had therefore repeatedly warned in recent years that it would be "a monstrous mistake for the working class to break completely with the petty bourgeoisie and consider it an adversary". There "never had been" and "never would be a pure revolution", Maurín wrote in July 1935, and in moments of "historical convulsion", such as 1917 in Russia or conversely the rise of fascism, this class had proved "extraordinarily important".<sup>2</sup>

With increasing talk of the need for an alliance with the Republicans to defeat the Right, the POUM clarified its own position in this respect. "Unity in action against reaction" the party insisted, meant neither handing over the workers movement to the petty bourgeois parties as the PCE and "reformist Socialists" effectively advised, nor

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2. Maurín, "Las relaciones del proletariado con los partidos pequeños burguesas" Op.cit.; J.L. Arenillas, "Las clases medias en relación con el proletariado" *La Nueva Era* July 1936.

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stipulating that the petty bourgeoisie should be denied its separate political identity and be expected to fall in behind the workers' organisations as the anarchists and the "intransigent wing of socialism" expected. Instead, the two classes should collaborate "when their interests coincided in the realisation of the democratic revolution" and the middle classes "recognised that they could not impose the slogans of 14 April on their own". Central to the POUM's position was the need for the workers organisations to maintain their independence and to show in practice that the petty bourgeoisie's aspirations could only be satisfied by the proletariat. The latter, Arenillas wrote later, would not be achieved by simply denouncing capitalism or by calling on the petty bourgeoisie to participate in the socialist revolution. The revolutionary party had to attract this class on the "basis of a programme of concrete demands" and by showing that the solution to the petty bourgeoisie's problems was only possible through the control of the means of production and exchange by the working masses.<sup>3</sup> Practical collaboration with the Republican parties had never been ruled out by the BOC, as had been seen in 1931 and, to a lesser extent, during the municipal elections in Catalonia in January 1934. More recently, the Catalan Workers Alliance had taken the initiative to found the "United Pro-Amnesty Committee" with the ERC and other Republican and nationalist groups. Not only had the Bloc fully supported this Committee but Maurín had acted as its "General Secretary".<sup>4</sup>

An important differentiation was made by the POUM between the petty bourgeois masses and their parties. In their press, the dissident communists never tired of denouncing the Republicans as "instruments of the bourgeoisie" that had "held back the revolution". Even this role was only transitional the POUM believed, because once a mass fascist organisation existed this, rather than the Republicans, would be used by the ruling classes to crush the revolution. The petty bourgeois parties would disappear, the dissident communists forecast. Notwithstanding these and previous assurances that the left Republican parties, including the ERC, were about to collapse, events during 1935 seemed to suggest otherwise. Azaña, in particular, attracted gigantic crowds to a series of open-air rallies, and now seemed to symbolise more than anyone else a new spirit of left unity. The POUM now needed to explain how the man who had presided

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3. *Ibid.*

4. El Comité de Front Pro-Amnistia, "Front pro-Amnistia" n.d.(IMHB); *La Batalla* 4.7.35.

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over the first Republican government and had "done his utmost to make the October insurrection in Catalonia fail", could be in such a situation. According to Gorkín, Azaña and other left Republican leaders, who had been imprisoned after October 1934, had regained popularity partly because they were seen as victims of right-wing persecution. However, above all it was because of the lack of any clear alternative from the Socialists that the left Republicans enjoyed this new lease of life. If the PSOE, wrote Gorkín in November 1935, had known how to "act in and out of parliament... denouncing the reactionary Right" and had openly built the Workers Alliance, then Azaña would not have been in his present position. The gigantic public turn-out for Azaña's meetings was not necessarily a reflection of mass support specifically for republicanism but a general popular reaction against the Right. The "immense majority" of those attending the meetings were, according to POUM sources, "revolutionary workers", drawn there because of the lack of any other means of public protest. Azaña, Gorkín reported, had seen stretched out before him "thousands of clenched fists and red flags".<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, it was the Comintern's conception of the "Popular Front" against which the POUM directed most of its fire. The origins of the CI's new line were twofold: the urgent need to develop some kind of response to the growth of fascism throughout Europe and for the USSR to find allies against Germany. According to the CI's leaders, the struggle facing the working classes was one between "democracy and fascism", hence the need for an alliance of all anti-fascist forces. In order to attract the middle classes, the Popular Front had to be based on a political programme which kept within the parameters of a bourgeois democracy. As far as the POUM was concerned, the CI's analysis was seriously mistaken and could lead only to the political subordination of the proletariat to the petty bourgeoisie. Talk of a struggle between "fascism and democracy" was denounced by the dissident communists as a dangerous abstraction because both were forms of capitalist rule and neither could be treated as separate entities. Fascism, as Maurín and others had previously explained,<sup>6</sup> was the product of capitalism in crisis and therefore could not be effectively opposed by defending bourgeois democracy. The CI's position, Maurín wrote, just showed its "total incomprehension" of the nature of fascism and would only result in holding back the

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5. *Ibid* 19.7.35., 11.10.35., 25.10.35.; Gorkín, "El drama de Azaña" *ibid* 8.11.35. and "Retrato político de Azaña" *La Nueva Era* June 1936.

6. See pages 136-137.



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working class by keeping the struggle within a bourgeois framework, thereby giving the counter-revolution time to prepare itself. "In a word", he concluded, the official Communist's new line was the "repetition of what the Mensheviks had wanted in Russia in 1917" and the position of reformist socialism which had led to disaster in Italy, Germany and Austria. Instead, the POUM counter-posed Lenin's position, symbolised by the Bolshevik's defence of the democratic republic from Kornilov while submitting its head, Kerensky, to "implacable criticism" and maintaining the proletariat's complete independence.<sup>7</sup>

It was in France that the Popular Front policy had its most immediate impact. At a diplomatic level the USSR had successfully managed to establish a pact with the French government in May 1935 for mutual defence against Germany. Then, in July, the PCF signed an agreement with the Socialists and Radicals to form a "Popular Front". Writing at this time, Maurín stated that by limiting the workers' political horizons to that of the Popular Front, the PCF was negating the "historical concept of the class struggle" and reducing the proletariat's action to class collaboration. The end result would be that the working class would lose confidence in itself as a class and be unable to fight fascism seriously. Worse still, perhaps, was the "patriotic" stance the PCF would now take because of the alliance between France and the Soviet Union. This meant, the POUM pointed out, that the French Communists would back their own government against Germany in any armed conflict instead of turning the "imperialist war into a civil war" as had been the traditional Leninist position. The PCF's stance epitomised for the POUM the dangerous implications of the Popular Front tactic - nationalism and class collaboration replacing internationalism and the revolutionary class struggle.<sup>8</sup>

In Spain, the precursor of the CI's new policy was the decision by the PCE at the end of October 1934 to call for the formation of "anti-fascist blocs" based on all those "forces and organisations that were prepared to fight fascism". At first the Spanish Communist Party's view of the potential role of the Republican parties in any such "bloc" does not seem to have been very clear. In a letter to the BOC leadership in April 1935, the

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7. Maurín, "Revolución democrático-burguesa o..." Op.cit.

8. Maurín, "L'enfonsament definitiu de la Tercer Internacional" *L'Hora* 25.5.35. and "Las relaciones..." Op.cit.; Gorkín "Servidumbre del comunismo oficial" *La Batalla* 4.7.35.; Arquer, "¿Frente Popular antifascista o Frente Unico Obrero?" *La Nueva Era* January 1936.

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PCdeC had claimed that "much of the petty bourgeoisie had lost its illusions in the petty bourgeois parties" and was looking "more and more to communism and the USSR... to the Russian road". However, once the Popular Front tactic had been established in the summer of 1935, the Catalan section of the PCE quickly forgot about the petty bourgeoisie's supposed interest in "communism". This new turn by the PCE towards collaboration with the Republicans appeared particularly ironic to the dissident communists. During the first two years of the Republic, the official Communists had been the petty bourgeoisie's most determined enemies, but now that the Republicans were considerably weaker, the Communist Party seemed determined to help resuscitate them.<sup>9</sup>

Since the creation of the Workers Alliances, the BOC had defended the idea that in the case of elections the Alliances themselves should present candidates. Thus in early February 1935, the Catalan Alliance had agreed to present itself in any forthcoming poll, provided it could reach an agreement with the Treintistas. Failing this, the BOC advocated the forming of a "Workers Front", consisting of all the workers' parties.<sup>10</sup> Yet neither position had little chance of becoming reality given the syndicalists' "apoliticism" and the PSOE's reticence to be too closely involved with the Alliances. By the summer of 1935, in perhaps tacit acceptance of the mass popularity of certain Republican politicians, Maurín and other BOC leaders were openly recognising the need for some form of agreement with the petty bourgeois left, albeit purely circumstantial and without the workers organisations making any concessions over their political independence.<sup>11</sup>

Any such agreement, the POUM insisted, had to be on the basis of a prior pact between the workers parties. Accordingly, having recognised the impossibility of getting a Workers Alliance candidacy, the POUM Executive Committee wrote to both the PSOE and the PCE, at the beginning of November 1935, proposing the formation of a "broad workers coalition". The dissident communists were confident that their stance

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9. Secretariado del C.C. "A todos los Comités Regionales y Provinciales del Partido" 27.10.34 (ACCPCE); *Lluita* (PCdeC) 28.12.34.; "El Comité Central del (PCdeC)...al Comité Executiu...(BOC)..". Op.cit.

10. *Avant* 18.3.35.; B.P. de C. al B.P. de España" 21.3.35. (ACCPCE).

11. Maurín, "Cómo se plantea entre nosotros la cuestión de las relaciones del movimiento obrero con los partidos pequeños burguesas" *La Batalla* 26.7.35.

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reflected the feelings of the masses and asserted that if the workers' forces united they could impose conditions on the petty bourgeois parties thereby forcing them to follow the Workers Front. Not to take this position would only lead to a repetition, with even worse results for the working class, of the experience of the first Republican administration of 1931 to 1933. Nevertheless, these and further calls for unity went unanswered. It was becoming increasingly clear that not only the PCE but also the PSOE was moving towards some form of electoral pact with the left Republicans.

With the fall of the government in mid-December and the subsequent calling of elections, the POUM was forced to reflect on the failure of its attempts to form an alliance with the other workers parties. The dissident communists lamented that a Workers Alliance candidacy, with certain pacts with the Republicans, "would have attracted all the working class movement... including the anarchists". A coalition between left Republicans, Socialists and Communists was inevitable, so the POUM offered to support such an alliance, but only if it was transitional; aimed to "defeat the counter-revolution" at the polls; secured an amnesty for all political prisoners; and re-established the Catalan Statute of Autonomy. If the electoral pact did not meet these requirements then the dissident communists warned they would stand alone.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, the Socialists and the PCE had entered into discussions regarding the posture they would adopt in the electoral pact with the Republicans. The POUM had, of course, advocated for some months an agreement between the workers organisations prior to dealing with the Republican groups. Thus, on 1 January 1936, the dissident communists Executive Committee wrote to its Socialist counterparts complaining about its exclusion from these discussions. Publicly the POUM leadership re-affirmed the basis on which it thought any electoral coalition should be formed and claimed that the "Workers Front", which it had continually advocated, now existed. Yet a belated invitation from the PSOE for the POUM to take part in the next meeting of those workers organisations that supported an electoral agreement with the Republicans arrived too late for the dissident communists to be able to attend. By 10 January, the basis of the Left Electoral Pact had been decided, and the POUM was faced with a "fait accompli"

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12. *Ibid.* 15.11.35., 27.12.35.

which it could choose to support or not.<sup>13</sup> The marginalisation of the POUM from this process was due principally to the hostility of the PCE and the right-wing Socialists, although the Socialist left also showed little interest in the dissident 'communists' participation.

The Pact's electoral programme was signed on 15 January by all the principal left Republican and workers organisations, except the CNT. Juan Andrade reluctantly signed the coalition's manifesto on behalf of the POUM, after last minute telephone calls to Barcelona. Despite trying to make out that the "Republican-Workers Front", as the POUM referred to it, was just a simple electoral compromise, a necessary evil to stop fascism and secure an amnesty, the reality of the situation was that the dissident communists had been forced to accept the pact without the slightest possibility of influencing the basis on which it had been drawn up.<sup>14</sup>

If the POUM had found itself completely excluded from the formation of the electoral coalition in the rest of Spain, it was hopeful that in Catalonia, where the party was far stronger, it could have some influence over the elaboration of any similar pact. To this end a series of meetings took place between the POUM and the Catalan Federation of the PSOE, although not with the other Catalan workers parties. These meetings proved inconsequential because the Socialists had to wait for instructions from Madrid before making any decision. The situation was further complicated, Nin informed the POUM's Central Committee in early January, on the one hand by the reluctance of a faction of the ERC to form an alliance with the workers parties and on the other by Comorera's fear that the POUM's presence in any coalition would undermine the position of the USC. Nevertheless, because the dissident communists' potential vote could prove decisive in some parts of the region, the POUM leadership was confident that the rest of the Catalan left would be forced to take its proposals seriously.<sup>15</sup>

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13. *Ibid.* 17.1.36.; S. Juliá, *Orígenes del Frente Popular en España (1934-1936)* (Madrid 1979) pp.118-119,207-210.

14. *La Batalla* 21.2.36.; *Front* 24.1.36.; Andrade cited in R.Fraser, *Blood of Spain* (London 1979) p.566.

15. *Acta del Comité Central...* Op.cit. p.13.; *La Batalla* 17.1.36.

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The POUM still toyed with the idea of trying to present a separate Workers Alliance candidacy in Catalonia, but, as Maurín admitted to the party's Central Committee, this plan was not viable because the anarcho-syndicalists were only prepared to support an electoral agreement which included the Republicans. Moreover, the other workers parties also strongly favoured a pact of this nature. The POUM Executive Committee had to recognise that an agreement with the petty bourgeois parties in Catalonia was both "inevitable and necessary" if the Left's vote was not going to be split. Accordingly, once the electoral agreement in Madrid had been signed, the POUM issued a manifesto, which was reprinted in most Barcelona newspapers, denouncing the lack of a similar pact in Catalonia and reminding people of the fact that in October 1934 "workers and Republicans" had "fought together... and filled the prisons together". If the ERC did not agree to form an alliance with the workers parties, then the POUM "could not be blamed" and would present a "minority list", including "those left Republicans who, for their past activity or present, can be placed beside workers' candidates".<sup>16</sup> Notwithstanding the reticence of certain sections of the ERC, a "Left Front" was finally put together some days later with the support of all the Catalan workers parties, the ERC, ACR and other Republican and nationalist groups, although unlike the Madrid pact the Catalan version did not have a programme as such.

The POUM Executive Committee had already expressed itself "extraordinarily interested in obtaining parliamentary representation" which would allow the dissident communists to defend a "class position" in the Cortes. This would also give them, they hoped, more leverage over the PSOE thereby helping to draw closer sections of the Socialist left. Even though the POUM's leaders recognised that the question of candidates was not one of principle, they were disposed to defend their party's right to be included in the lists of Asturias, Badajoz, Castellón, Huesca, Valencia and, above all, Catalonia, zones where the dissident communists considered themselves to be strong. However, given the POUM's lack of real influence inside the electoral coalition, its representatives found all their proposals blocked and in the end forced to accept places, despite protests to the PSOE, only in the lists of Barcelona, Cadiz and Teruel. Positions in the latter two provinces clearly could not be taken seriously because the POUM had

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16. *ibid.* 24.1.36.; *Acta del Comité Central...* Op.cit. p.7.

hardly any members in either area. When Nin and Gorkín arrived in Teruel and Cadiz respectively to participate in the election campaign, they found the local Socialist, Communist and Republican organisations completely unwilling to collaborate with them. Faced with this situation, the two POUM candidates decided to withdraw on the grounds that, as they declared publicly, their presence could only create divisions and help the Right. This left the POUM with Maurín in Barcelona as its sole representative. The dissident communists' isolation inside the Left electoral pact could not have been clearer, not only at a state-wide level but also in Catalonia. Despite the POUM's optimism that its influence in the region would force the rest of the Catalan left to make concessions, this had not happened. Instead, because both the ERC and the other workers parties saw the POUM as rivals, they had sought to minimise its influence in the electoral list. Hence the left nationalists were able to impose an agreement that left the POUM and the far weaker PCdeC, PCP and Catalan Federation of the PSOE with one representative each. Worse still, from the POUM's point of view, the USC had four candidates in the pact's lists in Catalonia, including Comorera in Lérida as the only workers' representative despite his party being more or less non-existent in the province.<sup>17</sup>

Justifying his party's signing of the Left Electoral Pact, Andrade stated that the dissident communists and the left Socialists had been forced to recognise the "material existence of an electoral law" that had obliged them to make "provisional agreements" with the left Republicans "to avoid the victory of the bourgeoisie". However, at the same time, he had to admit that the coalition's programme, which was basically that of the left Republicans, was very disappointing. Andrade blamed its weakness on the left Socialists. Despite initially being opposed to a pact with the Republicans, Largo Caballero's faction had ended up not only accepting the coalition but unable, or unwilling, to even make its influence felt in its programme. The UGT leader later claimed that although he and his supporters had felt no enthusiasm for the pact, they had accepted it as the only way to achieve an amnesty for those imprisoned after October 1934.<sup>18</sup>

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17. *Ibid* pp.13-16.; *La Batalla* 31.1.36., 7.2.36., 14.2.36., 21.2.36.; *Front* 7.2.36.

18. Andrade "El Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista y el alcance y significación del bloque de izquierdas" *La Batalla* 24.1.36.; L. Caballero, *Escritos de la República* (Madrid 1985) p.286.

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The left Socialists' political weaknesses had left the POUM without a potential ally in trying to impose any conditions in the formulation of the electoral agreement. The end result, both in terms of the dissident communists' level of representation in the coalition's lists and the nature of its programme, was far from satisfactory for them. Despite these setbacks, the POUM still tried to set some conditions on its involvement in the electoral pact. While insisting on their intention to "serve the coalition loyally", the dissident communists rejected either limits on their own independent activity in the election campaign or collaboration in any future left government. Once the elections were over, the best safeguard for the future, they believed, was the unity of all factions of the workers movement and specially for the continuance of a "Workers Front" based on the PCE, PSOE and POUM. The workers could expect no more than "vague promises" from the Republicans, the dissident communists warned, and the pact should "end the day the election finished".<sup>19</sup>

The POUM threw itself into the election with typical revolutionary enthusiasm. A few days before the electoral pact was announced, the party managed, after repeated prohibitions, to hold its first public rally in Barcelona since October 1934. In front of an estimated 12,000 people, Arquer summed up the party's position when he declared that the POUM did not "counterpose bourgeois democracy to fascism, but communism... the dictatorship of the proletariat". Once the Left Pact was finalised, and the electoral campaign began in earnest, the party organised a whole series of such acts throughout Catalonia, which it later described as having been "extraordinarily successful". According to *La Batalla*, the crowds who flocked to the election meetings of the Left "listened with indifference, if not coldness, to the petty-bourgeoisie" but, in contrast, reacted enthusiastically to the "revolutionary class language of October 1934". Outside of Catalonia the party's most spectacular meeting took place in Madrid, a week before the election, where Maurín addressed a "wildly enthusiastic" audience of five thousand. This was part of a series of meetings on the same day by leaders of the Left coalition throughout the capital which were broadcast live over the radio. The POUM leader presented his audience with a singularly radical interpretation of the electoral campaign. "On the one side", he declared, "was the socialist-democratic front, the republican-workers programme, on the other only thieves and murderers". "We are

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19. Andrade "El Partido Obrero..." Op.cit.

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going into the elections", Maurín continued, "thinking not only of our dead and prisoners but also in the victory of our revolution" of "tracing a diagonal line through Europe between Madrid and Moscow that will contribute to the sinking of fascism throughout the world".

Publicly, at least, the POUM appeared very confident not only of victory but of its own future importance in the Spanish parliament. As part of its campaign the party's press published a twenty-five point minimum programme of measures "to unchain the social revolution" that the POUM would present in the Cortes. This consisted of a series of wide-sweeping social, economic and political reforms, many of which had formed the basis of the BOC's programme for the democratic revolution since 1931.<sup>20</sup> It is unlikely that the POUM seriously believed that its sole representative in the Cortes would be able to push through such a programme. Instead, by raising such demands the dissident communists must have hoped to differentiate themselves in the eyes of the masses from all the other parties in the electoral pact.

The POUM was also confident that after the elections the "working class-petty bourgeois coalition" would be "naturally overtaken" hence opening up a new revolutionary period. This optimism seemed well justified given the popular reaction to the Left's victory on 16 February. Massive demonstrations and assaults on prisons took place throughout the country. It was during one such demonstration in Barcelona, on 19 February, that a POUM member, Josep Palau, was killed in a clash with the Republican Assault Guards. His funeral was attended by over two hundred different organisations, including the CNT, ERC Youth and the PSOE and turned into another show of mass strength in favour of the immediate release of all political prisoners.

The POUM's immediate reaction to the election results was to issue a manifesto describing them as a great victory for the workers and peasants and an important defeat for the counter-revolution. A new stage in the Spanish revolution had opened up. The sixteenth of February 1936, the POUM proclaimed, would prove more important than even 14 April 1931 as a starting point for new conquests. Before the masses,

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20. *La Batalla* 10.1.36., 7.2.36., 14.2.36., 21.2.36., 3.4.36.; *Front* 24.1.36.



declared the party, stood two roads, that of Germany and Austria, and that of Asturias. In particular, the POUM stressed that the Left's victory was not a victory for bourgeois democracy nor did it represent mass support for the petty bourgeois parties but was a by-product of revolutionary struggle. If the October insurrection had not taken place, Nin wrote in *La Nueva Era*, then "the situation today would be very different... the conquest of democratic freedoms is always an accessory product of the proletariat's struggle for the conquest of power". October had undermined the plans of the authoritarian Right, he argued, and had inspired the working masses to resist. It was within this context that the electoral victory had to be placed.<sup>21</sup> However, the political situation that emerged after 16 February was not as straightforward as the dissident communists had hoped. While it was true that the left Republican parties as such had a very limited base, the electoral pact had given rise to widespread illusions that the new left government would differ substantially from that of 1931 to 1933. Accordingly, any revolutionary strategy had to take such "illusions" into account. Moreover, far from the electoral pact being taken over by events, as the dissident communists had predicted, it now continued, soon becoming known as the "Popular Front".

Although the left Socialists had accepted an electoral pact with the left Republicans, they opposed the PSOE actually entering into government with them. Largo Caballero and his supporters not only hoped to avoid a repetition of the alliance of 1931-1933 but also that the Republicans would carry out the Left electoral programme and then make way for an all-Socialist government. Thus, an all-Republican administration was formed, under Azaña's premiership and based on his party, Izquierda Republicana, together with the Unión Republicana and the ERC, with the loyal support of the PSOE and PCE.

The POUM's propaganda did not cease to point out that not only would this Republican government be no better than that of 1931, but it would probably be worse. Objective circumstances were far less favourable for a reform-minded petty bourgeois government than they had been five years previously. Despite the Right losing the elections, its ruling class backers were in no mood to make concessions to the workers and peasants. Moreover, the economic crisis had worsened since 1931 and the level of

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21. Maurín, "La nova situació política" *ibid.* 21.2.36.; Comité Ejecutivo del POUM (and) Comité Central de la JCI 10.3.36., "Ante la nueva situación política. A todos los trabajadores" *La Batalla* 13.3.36.; Nin, "Después de las elecciones del 16 de Febrero" *La Nueva Era* February 1936.

**unemployment was steadily increasing. Therefore, even if the new administration did want to carry out its relatively timid programme this would be impossible without directly confronting the ruling oligarchy. Maurín, for instance, argued that, even if the peasants were given land under the Agrarian Reform, this on its own would not be enough since they would also need credit to buy seeds, grain and other items. Therefore, apart from the fierce resistance that any such measures would encounter from the major landowners, the only possibility of financing this reform, the POUM leader claimed, was through the nationalisation of the banks - something which the Republicans were not prepared to contemplate. Instead, the dissident communists predicted that, as was the case during the time of the 1931-1933 government, the Republicans would try to hold back any revolutionary activity by the masses. The new government would be profoundly moderate and bourgeois, Andreu Nin warned a few days after the elections, and not one which the masses "instinctively" desired. The real nature of this government, the POUM had stressed during the election campaign, would soon become clear.<sup>22</sup>**

**During the following weeks, the actions of the all-Republican administration seemed to confirm the POUM's line of argument. Despite immediately declaring a general amnesty, re-opening the Catalan Parliament and imposing the re-admission of those sacked after October 1934, the new government maintained the suspension of Constitutional Guarantees because of growing agitation throughout the country. Moreover, those popular measures they had carried out were, in the POUM's view, the least they could do to contain the mass unrest which exploded after 16th February. Obviously the workers and peasants expected far more from their electoral victory. When the government, a week after taking office, re-started the process of cautious agrarian reform it was again quickly overtaken by events. Thousands of peasants forced the issue by taking over the land. Two years of aggressive right wing government far from destroying working class and peasant militancy, had encouraged it. Neither the masses nor the ruling oligarchy were prepared to compromise. Thus, as tension in the country mounted, the Republican government found itself squeezed between two apparently unstoppable and antagonistic forces. By April, there were a growing number of violent clashes in the streets, usually involving militants of the far Right and**

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**22. see note 21; Maurín, "Revolución democrático-burguesa o..." "Op.cit.**

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leftist youth. In addition, there were rumours of military plots. The gathering momentum of a strike wave was increasingly escaping from the control of the workers organisations, particularly the UGT.

Parallel to these events, Azaña was proposed by his party, Izquierda Republicana, to take over from Alcalá Zamora as President of the Republic. The PCE and PSOE decided to back Azaña, hence providing the POUM with another opportunity to differentiate itself from its Socialist and Communist rivals. The dissident communists admitted that the left Republican leader was "just as popular now as in 1931", but they believed that as President, he "would be even more dangerous for the working class than as Prime Minister (and) although he appears otherwise, Azaña is anti-liberal and anti-democratic (and) will openly carry out bourgeois policies". Instead, the two POUM *compromisarios* (elected delegates to the Presidential electoral college) voted for the Asturian miners' leader and PSOE deputy, González Peña. These two votes, as opposed to the 754 for Azaña, represented, the party claimed, the true "revolutionary marxist position... history would show that both the PCE and PSOE had committed an error". Apart from this ineffectual protest, Maurín, although probably receiving the sympathy of some left Socialists, was usually alone on the left in criticising the government from inside parliament. In his first speech in the chamber on 15 April, despite supporting a vote of confidence in Azaña's government, he attacked the then Prime Minister's aim of restoring calm to the country. Maurín asked how people could remain calm while those responsible for the repression after 1934 were not brought to justice. It was only the workers' sacrifices and heroism in October, he went on, that had enabled this government to exist. As with moderately reformist governments such as Herriot's in France in 1924 or the British Labour government of 1929 to 1931, the POUM leader foresaw, the bourgeoisie would have no difficulty in sabotaging this administration once they got tired of it.<sup>23</sup>

In these circumstances it was, Nin had written after the elections, "a crime and a betrayal" to demand that the working class should renounce its maximum aspirations - the destruction of the bourgeois state and the conquest of power - in the name of

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23. *La Batalla* 3.4.36., 1.5.36., 15.5.36.; Maurín, *Intervenciones Parlamentarias* (Barcelona 1937) pp.7-11.

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consolidating the Republic. In plain language, to do so meant giving the bourgeoisie the possibility of consolidating its "class domination under a Republican form". This did not mean, however, that the working class should launch itself on some "putschist" adventure, but nor did the fact that the conquest of power was not put immediately on the agenda mean that it was a remote possibility and that the masses should therefore limit themselves to a struggle for reforms. Instead, Nin concluded, it was necessary to create the conditions in the short term for the conquest of power and this meant "forging the necessary arms for such a victory" - the Workers Alliance and the revolutionary party - and the workers movement maintaining its complete ideological and organisational independence. Such a strategy, he believed, was also the only way to provide the petty bourgeoisie with a real alternative to a government whose "inevitable failure" could drive this class towards fascism as had happened elsewhere in Europe.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, there remained the problem of the faith that many workers held in the "Popular Front". Crucial to this situation was the support, albeit for different reasons, that the PSOE and PCE had given to the electoral pact, continuing after 16 February. In practice, this meant demobilising the masses in order not to destabilise the government. The PCE in particular opposed many strikes as being potentially damaging to the Popular Front government and as helping reaction. As has been seen, the POUM repeatedly denounced this position as having "extraordinarily serious consequences" because it meant placing the proletariat in a secondary and subordinate position behind the bourgeoisie at a time when bourgeois democracy was a spent force. The PCE's support for the Azaña government, exclaimed *La Batalla*, in April 1936, meant, in effect, as far as the official Communists were concerned, the "liquidation of any perspective of socialism in our country". The mission of the proletariat was thus reduced by the PCE to no more than sustaining the Republican administration and exerting "intelligent pressure" on it.<sup>25</sup>

There was an urgent need, the dissident communists now believed, to eliminate the false hopes that many workers had in the whole Popular Front strategy. To this end, in April, the POUM Central Committee challenged the Socialist and Communist parties,

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24. Nin, "Despues de las elecciones..." Op.cit.

25. *La Batalla* 10.4.36.

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**"which believed in the efficacy of the Popular Front", to form a government with the Republicans. The experience of such a government, the dissident communists claimed, would show the workers that the Popular Front was quite incapable of dealing with the counter-revolution. Prieto's faction, in fact, also favoured a "genuine" Popular Front government, although not because of any need to undermine the masses' "illusions" but rather as the only answer to Rightist provocation and social chaos.**

In contrast, the left Socialists called for the Republican government to "hand power over" to the PSOE. According to the POUM, this position meant, on one hand, passively waiting for the current petty bourgeois administration to "wear itself out" and, on the other, not taking into account the faith that large sections of the masses still had in the Popular Front. The idea of an all-Socialist government would be correct, the POUM argued, if the PSOE was "united, revolutionary and the centre of attraction for the majority of the working class". This was not the case, so a Popular Front government with Socialist participation was still a necessary "transitional phase" that the masses needed to live through, the POUM concluded, after which the moment for the establishment of a true "workers' government" would arrive. Only such a government, Maurín told an unsympathetic parliament, could resolve the dilemma of either "socialism or fascism" which faced the country.<sup>26</sup>

The POUM may have been able to point to what were the main dangers facing the masses, but it still lacked the necessary strength actually to influence the outcome of events. Building their party, particularly outside of Catalonia, had become an even more urgent task for the dissident communists.

### **The revolutionary party**

The need for a "great revolutionary socialist party" remained central to the POUM's politics in the months leading up to the Civil War. Following its formation in September 1935 and having failed during the previous months to convince any other parties of the correctness of its line, the POUM ceased, for the time being, to make any

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26. *Ibid* 17.4.36.; Maurín *Intervenciones...* Op.cit. pp.7-11.

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concrete proposals in favour of extending the unification process. This led to some limited criticism at the Central Committee meeting in January 1936 that the POUM was in danger of losing its prestige because the initiative towards unity now seemed to be passing to the Socialists and the PCE. Maurín, supported by most of those present, stated that given that the other organisations did not understand the POUM's position, any specific approaches over the question would be just "playing to the gallery". Instead, during the coming months, the party reiterated its stance that unity without a prior ideological agreement would only lead to division and factional struggles. The problem, the POUM Central Committee explained in May 1936, was not to confuse unity in action, that is the united front, with political unity. Ideological clarity was therefore of utmost importance, so before unification the dissident communists believed, as had Lenin, that it was necessary to "differentiate themselves". The alternative was an "elephantine" organisation in which there was room for everybody, rather than a "Bolshevik-type" party.

The POUM was aware of the dichotomy between its own increasingly entrenched position and the desires of the masses, who, in Maurín's words, would be "extremely satisfied" if all the existing workers parties united. So, in late May, the dissident communists made a new appeal to the PSOE and PCE to form a Liaison Committee with them, which could begin discussions over unity. Not surprisingly, given the indifference, if not downright hostility, felt by the PCE and PSOE leaderships towards the POUM, this initiative came to nothing. Such proposals could only have been designed to impress those militants who supported the Socialist left, whom the dissident communists believed to be most open to revolutionary marxism. The POUM's lack of other specific unity initiatives reflected, in part, an exaggerated self-confidence in its ability to grow. This faith was based on the fact of its being the only party in Spain that "unequivocally defended the socialist revolution". Hence the dissident communists boasted in mid-April 1936, that they were now the "bourgeoisie's great worry", as the Bolsheviks had been in 1917. Like the latter, they would eventually be proved right and their "detractors", *La Batalla* declared, would not "take long to appear at (the POUM's) door begging for forgiveness".<sup>27</sup> In reality the POUM had little reason to be

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27. *La Batalla* 17.4.36., 29.5.36.; *Acta del Comité Central...* Op.cit. pp.2-6.

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so confident because there were few signs that its relative isolation, both inside and outside Catalonia, was diminishing. On the contrary, its relations with the rest of the workers movement were generally deteriorating.

During the first weeks of 1936, the POUM were still hopeful that they could win over at least part of the Socialist left. Other than themselves, this was the only section of the workers movement that the dissident communists seriously considered as close to revolutionary marxism. Maurín reported to his Central Committee in January that sympathy for the POUM was "very intense" inside the PSOE and "growing every day". Apart from isolated cases on a local level, however, practical examples of co-operation at this time seem to have been fairly limited. None the less, the POUM was probably encouraged by Largo Caballero's apparently open attitude towards unity. In April 1936, the UGT leader, speaking at a meeting in Madrid, stated that any process of marxist unity should include the POUM. Moreover, at about this time, Maurín was to claim many years later, the UGT leader proposed to him the fusion of their two parties. Yet there was little possibility of this taking place, given both the political orientation of the left Socialists, let alone the rest of the PSOE, and the grounds on which the POUM itself posed the question of unity. In fact, when Maurín reported Largo Caballero's proposal to the POUM's Executive Committee, the idea was opposed out of hand by Nin and the other ex-ICE leader, Molins i Fàbrega, and consequently went no further. Instead, the dissident communists continued to insist that the only basis for unity was for the left Socialists to break with the reformists, not only politically but also organisationally. Quite obviously this meant a split inside the Socialist Party. Any subsequent claims, including those of Maurín, that the POUM's "long term aspiration was to fuse with the PSOE" bear little relation to his party's position on the eve of the Civil War.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the optimism of Maurín and others at the January Central Committee meeting, the reality was that the POUM was becoming less and less hopeful that Largo Caballero and his leading supporters would develop in a truly revolutionary direction. As Maurín himself had put it at the end of 1935, despite Largo Caballero reflecting the "revolutionary will of the working masses", it was impossible that "a man who had been

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28. *Ibid* pp.3-5.; *La Batalla* 27.3.36.; Letter from Maurín to Broué *Op.cit.*; Letter from Maurín to J. Rocabert, October 1971 (CEHI); Maurín, "Introducción" (1965), *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* *Op.cit.* p. 3.; Letter from J. Soler 22.12.86.

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at the head of Spanish reformism for so long could suddenly become a revolutionary leader". The dissident communists had warned in 1933 about the fragility of much of the Socialists' new-found radicalism, in particular in the case of the new left wing's most prominent leader.<sup>29</sup> Largo's ambiguities had been illustrated by his resignation from the Presidency of the PSOE in December 1935. Prieto, in an attempt to call the UGT leader's bluff, had proposed at the PSOE National Committee's first meeting since October 1934 that the Socialists' parliamentary minority be subject to control by the party leadership. Although this appeared to be a position which the left Socialists had always defended, Largo voted against it. He had done so before on the eve of the October events when Prieto had made the same proposal, on the grounds that under party statutes a Congress could make such a change. Outvoted, Largo's subsequent resignation as PSOE President only caused consternation among his supporters. According to the POUM's theoretical journal, *La Nueva Era*, this whole episode exposed the weaknesses in Largo's politics. By choosing to fight Prieto over something as formalistic as the party statutes, he had fallen into the "purest reformism". In addition, the ambiguous stance taken by the left Socialists over the electoral pact with the Republicans had further dented hopes for what Maurín described as a "rectification of the Socialist Party's politics". Rather than Prieto and his supporters conquering the PSOE leadership, the Left, because of its vacillations, had gradually handed it over to them.<sup>30</sup>

Over the next few months, the left Socialist leaders' behaviour only confirmed the POUM's pessimistic view of them. In particular, their attitude to the Republican government again highlighted the abstract nature of much of the Largo Caballero faction's leftism. While criticising the government, the left Socialists' attitude remained fundamentally passive. Rather than argue for the proletariat to seize power as such, they demanded that power be "handed over" to the working class if the Republicans were unable to govern.<sup>31</sup> Within this schema, the "working class" generally meant the PSOE. Thus, in practical terms, Largo Caballero's supporters had no real strategy for taking power, and nowhere was this clearer than in their attitude to the CNT. By the spring of 1936, the anarcho-syndicalists appeared to be increasingly open to the

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29. See pages 161, 171.

30. Maurín, "¿ A donde va el Partido Socialista?" *La Batalla* 13.12.35. and "La derrota de Largo Caballero" *ibid* 27.12.35.; *La Nueva Era* January 1936.; P.Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War* (London 1978) pp. 144-5.

31. see page 276.



idea of joint action with the UGT. At the Confederation's Congress in May, they proposed to the Socialists the formation of a "revolutionary alliance". Even allowing for the demagogy involved in this appeal, it was an offer that genuine revolutionaries should have taken up. Whether the CNT leadership seriously wanted joint action would have soon been tested in practice. Instead, the left Socialists showed little enthusiasm for what could have been a real opportunity to develop an alternative extra-parliamentary strategy based on working class unity.<sup>32</sup> Essentially, Largo Caballero's radicalism was a cover for the long term aim of the Spanish Socialists to absorb all other factions of the labour movement.

By late May 1936, the POUM had come to the conclusion that there was little to choose between the Prieto and Largo Caballero factions, even though they increasingly operated like two separate parties and there was even widespread talk of an imminent split. As *La Batalla* pointed out, both factions favoured remaining in the Second International, supported the League of Nations, voted for Azaña for President, supported the policy of the Popular Front and accepted the government's permanent suspension of Constitutional Guarantees. Finally, neither was clear about their attitude to the Workers Alliance. The POUM's frustration with the left Socialists' twists and turns was reflected in Arenillas's dismay that the working class had ever been able to accept the "myth of Largo Caballero", the creation of which he wrote in *La Batalla*, had been a real anti-marxist blunder".<sup>33</sup>

It was not just the incoherence of the Socialist left's principal spokesmen which the POUM faced, but also a growing sympathy, especially among the FJS, towards the positions of the Comintern. There were a number of reasons for such a development. The political confusion of the left Socialists contrasted not only with the relative clarity of the POUM but also with that of the PCE. Unlike the POUM, however, the PCE had a far more extensive organisation on a state-wide level. Involvement in the Workers Alliances during 1935 had brought the Communists into direct contact with many local Socialist organisations, disoriented by clandestinity and the lack of clear leadership. At an ideological level, the left Socialists, with their talk of a "Bolshevised" Socialist Party,

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32. S. Juliá, *La Izquierda...* Op.cit. pp. 202-264.

33. *La Batalla* 22.5.36.

which in turn would exercise the dictatorship of the proletariat, were open to Stalinist influence. Sympathy towards the USSR, present in most sections of the workers movement, was also a powerful auxiliary in any serious attempt by the PCE to influence the Socialist left.

Above all, it had been the CI's turn away from its previously sectarian line, consummated at its Seventh Congress in August 1935, that really opened up the possibilities of closer relations between the Socialists and Communists. Talk by the latter of the need to unite both tendencies seemed particularly attractive to some leaders of the FJS and other left Socialists. In the FJS pamphlet *Octubre: Segunda Etapa*, the Socialist Youth's leaders had already said they would join the CI if it modified its statutes regarding the dominance of the ECCI. *Claridad*, the left's principal mouthpiece, also commented favourably on the Communists' new orientation. Nin subsequently reflected that either he had misunderstood the CI's change of line or the left Socialists' arguments were meaningless, because the Comintern's positions were the very ones which they were supposedly fighting inside the PSOE. Many FJS leaders, in particular, seemed oblivious to the fact that the Popular Front meant the very collaboration with the petty bourgeois parties which they had so vehemently opposed. Some of these young militants had only recently attacked, from the pages of *La Batalla*, the PCE's concept of a "Popular Anti-Fascist Bloc". Yet, as one of the JCI's leaders, Wilebaldo Solano, had warned in September 1935, changes in the CI statutes would probably be enough to push sections of the Socialist Youth towards the Stalinists.<sup>34</sup>

The possibility of closer collaboration between Socialists and Communists seemed confirmed with the absorption by the UGT of the Communist trade union federation, the Confederación General de Trabajo Unitario (CGTU), at the end of 1935. In the trade union field, the Socialists had little reason to fear the PCE. Membership of the Communist unions only amounted to around 46,000 compared with over a million in the Socialist UGT.<sup>35</sup> In addition, given the Communists' new-found enthusiasm for unity, the incorporation of the CGTU's unions had taken place very smoothly. The

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34. Nin, "El Congreso de la Internacional Comunista y los socialistas de izquierda. Una incongruencia" *ibid* 30.6.35.; Solano, "Después del VII Congreso de la ICE ¿ Adonde van los jóvenes socialistas?" *ibid* 13.9.35.; Bizcarrondo *Op.cit.* p.131; S. Juliá, *La izquierda...* *Op.cit.* pp.159, 170.

35. Cruz, *Op.cit.* p.241.

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hegemony exercised by the Socialists in this process lulled many of them into a false sense of security about the possibility of dominating any further unification at a political level. Moreover, as the POUM pointed out, despite claims by the Socialists and Communists to the contrary, the "unification" of the UGT and CGTU had been fixed at a bureaucratic level without any proper debate, let alone local or national congresses.<sup>36</sup> For the PCE, the undemocratic nature of this fusion mattered little. Given the weakness of the CGTU, the importance of this development lay in its political repercussions, as reflected in the creation in many localities at this time of Socialist- Communist "Liaison Committees". More significantly, the official Communists were, by early 1936, making considerable headway in their relations with the FJS. So much so, that when a delegation of Socialist and Communist youth visited Moscow in March, a preliminary agreement to unite the two organisations was signed under the auspices of the Communist Youth International (CYI). Upon their return to Spain, the unity process began in earnest at a local level and the important Madrid FJS merged with its Communist counterparts to form on 1 April the Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas (Unified Socialist Youth). Although the unification process was not completed at a national level until the end of August 1936, the Socialist and Communist youth organisations now worked closely together in most areas.

The POUM leaders were extremely critical, if not a little disillusioned, by this "Stalinisation" of sections of the Socialist left. They could not resist commenting wryly on the fact that these erstwhile revolutionaries should choose to move towards the CI at the very moment that this body was moving to the right. The dissident communists denounced the "fusion", rather than "unification", of the two youth organisations as "opportunist" and undemocratic. "Opportunist" because of the political basis on which the fusion had taken place and "undemocratic" because of the lack of debate inside the two organisations over the process. Organisationally, the FJS had absorbed the far smaller Unión de Juventudes Comunistas, but politically the new united organisation had adopted a "Stalinist programme". This was most clearly reflected in the JSU's status as "sympathisers" of the CYI. The creation of a revolutionary youth organisation could not take place, the JCI Central Committee stated in April 1936, separately from the creation of a united revolutionary party, let alone through a "confused bloc of reformists,

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36. *La Nueva Era* January 1936; Maurín, "Unificación sí, pero no absorción", *La Batalla* 3.4.36.

**Stalinists and left Socialists".** Worse still, from the POUM's point of view, was the CYT's idea of the formation of youth organisations of a "new type" which would extend to all sectors of anti-fascist youth. In Spain, this led to the formation by the JSU and various Republican youth organisations of the Spanish Youth Front. The dissident communists denounced the formation of this front as yet another move in the process of what they described as the "republicanising" of the Spanish Workers movement. The unified youth organisation proposed attending the World Youth Congress in Geneva, to which even fascist youth groups were reported to be sending delegates. This further confirmed the former Socialist Youth leadership's "degeneration" in the POUM's eyes.<sup>37</sup> However, there was some opposition in the FJS to this slide towards Stalinism. Within both the Asturian and Madrid Socialist Youth, for instance, there were proposals that any unification process had to include the JCI. Consequently, while the POUM may have been fast losing hope of influencing the left Socialists as a whole, it did retain the illusion, right up until the outbreak of the Civil War, of being able to win over those young socialists who were still "sincerely and categorically revolutionary marxists".<sup>38</sup>

In Catalonia, once the BOC's determination to create a state-wide, as opposed to a Catalan, party became apparent then its chances of influencing those sections closest to it, the Partit Català Proletari (PCP) and the local PSOE, had diminished rapidly, albeit for different reasons. Relations with the PCP cooled because it favoured a Catalan-based party, with the local Federation of the PSOE because a state-wide party meant challenging its own party elsewhere in Spain. Following the failure of its talks with the Bloc, the PCP had formed a "Liaison Committee" in July 1935 with the Unió Socialista de Catalunya with the declared intention of establishing a "Catalan Socialist Party". This development was made possible by the radicalisation of the USC in the aftermath of October 1934. The USC was also attracted to the CI's position regarding the Popular Front and Communist-Socialist unity and had applied in July 1935 to become a "sympathising section" of the Comintern. Consequently, the Unió Socialista moved closer to the Communist Party, which had already expressed its interest in a fusion of the two parties and had maintained contacts with the USC's principal "left" leader,

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37. *Ibid* 3.4.36.; Solano, "Comentarios criticos..." Op.cit. and "Critica de la unificación de las Juventudes Socialistas y Comunistas" *La Nueva Era* June 1936.

38. *La Batalla* 17.4.36., 5.6.36., 17.7.36.; Juventud Comunista Ibérica, *La Juventud obrera asturiana en las luchas revolucionarios* (Barcelona 1937) p.24.; J.L. Martín Ramos, Op.cit. pp. 208-209.

Comorera, since at least the beginning of 1935. In January 1936, the official Communists also joined the USC-PCP Liason Committee, with the proposal of broadening this body further to include the PSOE and Estat Català.

The Catalan Federation of the Socialist Party was likewise undergoing a number of important changes in orientation which eventually led it to participate in this unity process. Victory for the Popular Front in the February elections, along with the drift of certain sections of the Socialist left elsewhere in Spain towards the positions of the CI, had strengthened the Federation's left wing, which favoured Socialist-Communist unity. The integration of most of the "L'Hora faction" into the Catalan PSOE in January 1936 reinforced an increasingly pro-communist left and led to a more sensitive attitude regarding the national question. In addition, according to the POUM, by joining the PSOE, these ex-BOC members not only helped to resuscitate the Socialists' Catalan Federation but had also helped to end the "excellent relations" which had previously existed between the two parties. The acceptance by the exclusively Catalan parties, the USC and PCP, of the PSOE and PCE as the sole political representatives of the working class in the rest of Spain further contributed to bringing the Socialists closer to the other groups. This process culminated in the Barcelona organisation of the PSOE voting in May 1936 in favour of participating in the unity discussions, for adherence to the CI and "self-determination for Catalonia".<sup>39</sup>

In late June 1936, the four parties that now constituted the Liaison Committee published their final agreement for the foundation of the "Partit del Proletariat Català". This brief declaration was similar to that issued by the USC and PCP a year previously. It included most of the points laid down by the CI's Seventh Congress regarding the basis of Communist-Socialist unity. Its radical tone reflected the agitated socio-political situation in the country at this time and it therefore defended the need for an armed insurrection leading to the establishment of a "Catalan Socialist Republic" based on the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>40</sup> The outbreak of the Civil War three weeks later

39. *Ibid* pp 201-231; Vinyes, *Op.cit.* pp. 253-276; M. Caminal, *Joan Comorera. Catalanisme i socialisme (1913-1936)* (Barcelona 1984) pp.203-213; "Partido Comunista de España Comité Central. Al C.C. del P.C. de Cataluña" 30.1.35. (ACCPCE); *Front* 17.4.36.

40. *Catalunya Insurgent* 26.7.35.; *Justicia Social*- Octubre 3.7.36.

precipitated the definitive fusion of the four parties as the **Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya (Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia)**.

The actual strength of the new party is difficult to ascertain, although the figure of 6,000 members is often accepted without any further investigation. Fewer than half this number would probably be a more accurate assessment of the PSUC's initial size compared with over 6,000 POUM militants in the region by the summer of 1936.<sup>41</sup> Despite its small size the PSUC had two relative advantages; it was concentrated largely in Barcelona and it had a certain level of potential popular support. Interest in the formation of the new organisation was reflected in a number of well-attended public rallies during the spring of 1936, the biggest being that called under the auspices of the PCE's "International Red Aid", which even *Front* admitted was attended by 20,000 people.<sup>42</sup> In part, such gatherings reflected the general upsurge in political activity following the February elections. However, compared with any previous mobilisations by these four parties, the difference was enormous. More important was the trade union base which the unified party could expect to influence. Despite the division of the Catalan UGT in 1934 and the subsequent creation by the USC of the *Unió General de Sindicats Obrers de Catalunya*, unions under the control of both Socialist factions had grown considerably. The UGSOC claimed 22,000 members at the end of 1935 and by the following July the combined membership of the region's two Socialist trade union federations amounted to over 80,000 workers. The bulk of the Socialist unions' strength in Catalonia was concentrated in Barcelona, where in the transport and metal sectors they matched in size, if not influence, their generally more powerful CNT rivals.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the PCP now led the important office and shop workers association, the CADCI and, along with the PCdeC, the newly formed united front of hostelry unions, the *Federació Obrer de Sindicats de la Indústria Gastronómica*. In addition, leaders of the important Sabadell Treintista unions had, according to the PCdeC, maintained links with the USC since early 1935.<sup>44</sup> At the beginning of the Civil War, these unions,

41. re: PSUC membership, L.V. Ponamariova, *La formación del Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya* (Barcelona 1977) p.100.; *La Batalla* 15.11.35., 15.5.36., 29.5.36., 10.7.36.; B. Bolloten, *The Spanish Revolution* (North Carolina 1979) pp.376-377, gives a figure of 2,500.

42. *Front* 13.3.36.

43. re: Trade Union Membership: *Unión General de Trabajadores de España, Secretariado General de Cataluña, Primera Asamblea General*, Barcelona, April 1934, pp.15-19.; "Cens Electoral Social .." Op.cit. 26.7.34, 22.11.35., 8.7.36.; "Informe sobre la situación de Cataluña" n.d. (ACCPCE). Also see pages 307-310.

44. "Partit Comunista de Catalunya Comité Central (al) B.P. del P.C. de E." 5.2.35. (ACCPCE).

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along with their Manresa counterparts, passed over to the UGT. Finally, the Unió de Rabassaires was "progressively distancing itself from the ERC" and supposedly welcomed the setting up of the new party.<sup>45</sup>

The POUM was unimpressed by these moves towards a new Catalan marxist party. In particular, despite its apparent radicalisation, the USC continued to be dismissed by the dissident communists as "more nationalist than marxist... petty bourgeois... ultra-reformists" and "pseudo-socialists at the service of the republican bourgeoisie". The BOC leadership was equally scathing about the PCdeC's involvement in the formation of the new party. The official Communists' new-found interest in Catalonia, according to Arquer, only reflected one of the "typical turns ordered by Moscow". As he pointed out, the PCdeC remained a party subordinated to the PCE, the majority of its members were not Catalan and its publications continued to be overwhelmingly in Castilian. Initially, the POUM saw the projected "Catalan Socialist Party" as an extension of the USC and hence "an instrument at the service of the ERC".<sup>46</sup> This characterisation would later be proved inadequate, if only because of the PSUC's status as the Catalan section of the CI. Rather than act as an "appendage" of the ERC, the new party, in the dramatically changed context of the Civil War, would effectively displace the Catalan Republicans as the main opponent of the revolutionary left in the region.

The fundamental difference between the POUM and the other Catalan marxist groups was over the Popular Front policy. However, despite this and other differences, not to mention the mutual insults that filled their press, the distance between some of the elements that would constitute the PSUC and the POUM in the months leading up to July 1936 was not always that great. Above all, the positions defended by the PCP and by the Catalan Federation of the PSOE had not always been incompatible with the political stance of Maurín's party. Collaboration between the BOC and the Catalan Socialists had been particularly common since 1933. As late as January 1936, the two parties had jointly discussed their intervention in the elections in the region. The

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45. Martín I Ramos, *Op.cit.* p.230.

46. *La Batalla* 15.11.35., 29.11.35., 10.7.36.; *Acta del Comité Central...* *Op.cit.* p.13.; Arquer, "Carta obreta al meu entranyable amic Joan Comorera" *Front* 7.12.35.; Nin, "El sentit d'una fusió" *ibid* 7.12.35.

radical left nationalists of the PCP had also worked closely with the dissident communists on a number of issues since abandoning the Estat Català in 1932. Only a year previously, the Partit Català Proletari had been on the verge of uniting with the BOC and ICE.<sup>47</sup> Thus, the incorporation of the Catalan Federation of the PSOE and the PCP into the PSUC was not a foregone conclusion.

The growth of the CI's influence in Spain, particularly after the Seventh Congress, forced the POUM to place even more emphasis on its differences with the "Stalinists". The process begun by the BOC of effectively seeing the "degeneration" of the international communist movement in terms similar to those used by Trotsky, had been strengthened by the incorporation of the ex-ICE militants into the party. Many former BOC leaders however, were equally explicit in their denunciations of the CI. Arquer, for instance, writing in *La Nueva Era* in January 1936, claimed that the subordination of the Communist parties to the Comintern had led to the former's inability to base themselves on the "interests and realities of each working class" hence distancing themselves from the "great masses who had followed the Russian revolution with such sincere and fervent enthusiasm". The result was both the weakening of the CI's national sections and their increased dependence on the International. Subsequently, the Communists were further isolated from the workers movement, leaving the USSR "practically defenceless", hence obliging them to make pacts with "one group of imperialists against another". The latter was the outcome of "socialism in one country" and the abandonment of internationalism, Arquer concluded, and had led directly to the policy of the Popular Front. By adopting this total subordination to Russian national interests, the Communist parties had, in Maurín's words, "ceased objectively to be revolutionary" and now stood to the "right of social democracy".<sup>48</sup>

These criticisms did not mean that the POUM leaders neglected what they saw as their duty to "defend the USSR". The fall of this "stronghold of the world proletarian revolution", as an Executive Committee statement put it in May 1936, would be a "catastrophe with terrible consequences for all the workers of the world". The Russian working class "had made an incalculable effort to begin the difficult but heroic road

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47. See page 267.

48. see page 263, 265..; POUM *Què és..* Op.cit. pp.28-29.; Arquer, "¿Frente Popular..." Op.cit.; Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op.cit. p.109.



towards the definitive freedom of humanity", however this did not mean accepting the "theological anti-marxist conception" that everything that happened in the USSR was perfect. Such an attitude was as damaging to the USSR, the POUM leadership claimed, as that of its systematic detractors. Instead, the workers movement had to combine an "enthusiastic defence of the revolution" with the "right to criticise and examine", which, as Lenin had said, would be a far greater service to the cause of world revolution.<sup>49</sup>

The defence of the USSR could be best guaranteed, the dissident communists believed, by spreading the revolution not by holding it back. In contrast to the CI, the dissident communists declared that the world revolution was still a real possibility but only if the workers movement did not "capitulate to the bourgeoisie" as it had in 1914.<sup>50</sup> The unstable economic, political and social climate internationally gave credence to the POUM's position, yet equally the absence in most countries of a mass revolutionary movement independent of Stalinism detracted from it. However, from the standpoint of orthodox Leninism, the dissident communists saw no alternative to their line and they presented "international proletarian revolution" as the way not only to support the USSR but also to avoid the victory of fascism and war. The threat of a new world conflagration had been brought a lot closer by Italy's invasion of Abyssinia in 1935 and the beginnings of German re-armament. The POUM's response to the danger of war had been to advocate the Bolsheviks' position of "revolutionary defeatism", which meant "turning the imperialist war into a civil war". "The position of the workers movement regarding the threat of war", the party stated, was, as it had been in 1914, the "touchstone to measure the real consistency of (revolutionary) principles". Not surprisingly then, the dissident communists violently rejected the decision adopted by both the Second and Third Internationals to back the League of Nations' attempts through the application of sanctions to force the Italians to withdraw from Abyssinia. The Socialists and Communists' support for the League of Nations, the POUM argued, was an extension at an international level of the Popular Front policy and was due to a false division in their analysis between fascism and war on the one hand and capitalism on the other. For the dissident communists the former were a product of the latter. The Socialist and Communist positions would lead to the chauvinistic policies defended by social

49. "El partido unificado y la situación Internacional (resolución)", *Boletín del Bloque Obrero y Campesino (FCI)* July 1935.

50. *Ibid.*, Maurín, "El VII Congreso de la IC" *La Batalla* 23.8.35.

democracy during the First World War. The most striking example of this, according to the POUM, was the PCF's defence of a national "sacred union" against German fascism, which meant the French Communists backing "their" government against a foreign power. Equally alarming, from the dissident communists' point of view, was that even the Spanish left Socialist leaders supported the League of Nations' sanctions against fascist Italy. Although the POUM was in favour of sanctions, these had to be directly imposed by the proletariat. A similar position was defended by the FAI and the Treintistas, hence earning the praise of *La Batalla* as having certainly a "more marxist" attitude over the question than either the PCE or PSOE.<sup>51</sup>

Faced with the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, the POUM advocated the unconditional defence by the international workers movement of this country's independence, although adding that it would be necessary at the same time for the Abyssinian masses to carry through the "democratic revolution" and thus free themselves from feudal "backwardness". More specifically, the dissident communists had called on the rest of the Spanish workers groups in October 1935 to help organise a "National Conference against War". The basis of such a Conference would be : opposition to Italian aggression in Abyssinia, the "transformation of imperialist war into civil war" (revolutionary defeatism) and the rejection of any "national union" (as in France). Yet, with the exception of the independent Tobacco Workers Federation, no other organisation showed any interest in the proposed conference. However, given the "defeatist" basis on which it had been called, the indifference of the Socialists and the Communists was to be expected. Undeterred, right up until the outbreak of the Civil War, the POUM continued to make propaganda against the dangers of pacifism, the "sacred union" and capitulation to the League of Nations. Similar initiatives were taken on an international level by the International Bureau of Revolutionary Socialist Unity, which in September 1935 had called on the Second and Third Internationals to join it in a "Common Front" against war. This call having failed, the International Bureau decided, eight months later, to organise instead a "World Conference" on the question. None the less, the dissident communists and their allies made little impact either in Spain

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51. *La Batalla* 25.10.35., 22.11.35.; *L'Hora* 18.10.35.; POUM, *Què és...* Op.cit. pp 23-24.; "El partido unificado y la situación internacional..." Op.cit.

or internationally in their attempts to organise a revolutionary response to the threat of war.<sup>52</sup>

Maurín's party's increasingly strident anti-Stalinism came at a time of growing hysteria in the official Communist press about the menace of "Trotskyism". In Spain, the chosen target for these attacks, which were usually of a slanderous rather than a political nature, was the newly-formed POUM. Despite having occasionally referred to Maurín and his followers as "Trotskyists" ever since their split in 1930, the PCE did not take up this line of argument seriously until 1936. In accordance with the international campaign orchestrated in the USSR, the official Communists blamed "Trotskyists", real or otherwise, for a whole range of crimes against the socialist fatherland and the cause of world communism in general. Typical of such attacks were accusations made at a PCE meeting in Madrid in April 1936, that the POUM was "paid by fascist gold". In the same vein, claims were made by PCdeC leader Arlandis that the task of the "Trotskyist POUM" was to "split the Communist and Socialist parties and sow confusion among the masses". A headline in *Mundo Obrero* in late June accused Maurín of being a "renegade... at the service of the counter-revolution". Likewise, on the eve of the Civil War, the parties that would soon constitute the PSUC declared in their press that the POUM was not only "the enemy of the USSR and the Popular Front" but of "all other working class organisations".<sup>53</sup>

It was from the newly formed united Communist-Socialist youth organisation, the Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas that attacks on Trotskyism came most frequently. The united youth organisation obviously feared that the dissident communists might influence sectors of its rank and file. There was a real danger that the POUM could win recruits from the new organisation given, on one hand, that both the BOC and ICE had already gained a limited audience in the FJS, and on the other, the disquiet of some of the latter's former militants over the united organisation's Stalinist politics. Moreover, Socialist Youth leaders who had sympathised with the dissident communists during the last two years were probably keen to prove their new-found loyalty to Moscow. *La Batalla* remarked ironically that the JSU's General Secretary, Santiago Carrillo,

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52. *Accion* 7.9.35.; *La Batalla* 20.9.35., 11.10.35., 13.12.35., 15.5.36., 15.6.36.

53. *Ibid* 17.4.36., 3.7.36.; *Octubre* 13.3.36.; *Justicia Social-Octubre* 17.7.36.

having flirted only a few months previously "with the Fourth International", was now trying to "emulate the great Stalin" in his anti-Trotskyist zeal. The United Socialist Youth was anxious from the start to eliminate the threat posed by the dissident communists. Its first manifesto, published at the beginning of April 1936, set the tone by denouncing the "Trotskyists" for their criticisms of the USSR and the Republican government. Attacks on the POUM as "counter-revolutionary Trotskyists" and "the enemies of unity" by JSU leaders soon became common-place. Other left Socialist leaders, who had become "fellow-travellers" of the PCE, such as Julio Alvarez del Vayo and Margarita Nelken, joined in this abuse.<sup>54</sup>

During the first half of 1936, the POUM press dedicated considerable space to denouncing the CI and the PCE. In part, this was a response to the campaign being directed against the dissidents by the Stalinists, but it also implicitly reflected concern about the PCE's growth in the peninsula in the months prior to the Civil War. Even if Communist Party membership was only half of the 20,000 it claimed in February 1936 and the 83,967 five months later, it was still now a force to be reckoned with.<sup>55</sup> The POUM claimed by April 1936 that the Stalinists "wanted to create an atmosphere of pogrom" against it, which would provoke "physical attacks" on its militants. This became a problem outside of Catalonia where the dissident communists were weaker. The POUM soon accused the PCE of assaulting its members and of trying to disrupt its meetings. In addition, the official Communists applied direct pressure on the Socialists to exclude the POUM from united initiatives, such as the Left's electoral pact - although in this case Largo Caballero refused to countenance the dissident communists' exclusion.<sup>56</sup> These attacks did, however, provoke protests from sections of the Socialist Youth, for instance in Asturias, Salamanca and Madrid, which were already uncomfortable about their leader's headlong rush towards the Communist Party.<sup>57</sup> However, the sinister outcome of the Stalinist campaign could not as yet be perceived and *La Batalla* confidently asserted that "experienced militants had nothing to fear" from this abuse.<sup>58</sup>

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54. *La Batalla* 10.4.36, 17.4.36.

55. Cruz Op.cit. p.60.

56. There are regular reports of such attacks in the POUM press from April 1936 onwards.

57. See page 283.

58. *La Batalla* 10.4.36.

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The Trotskyist movement itself had continued to hope that it might be possible to win the new party to the idea of a Fourth International.<sup>59</sup> None the less, the POUM's support for the Left electoral pact in January 1936 marked the end of any relation, however tenuous, between the Trotskyists' International Communist League and the ex-ICE members. Trotsky, who had written little on Spain since 1931, now launched a series of vitriolic attacks on his former followers. Andrade, who had signed the agreement for the POUM, was described by the Bolshevik leader as having "betrayed the proletariat for the sake of an alliance with the bourgeoisie". Attempts by the POUM to try and justify its action by citing the specific conditions existing in Spain were dismissed as the "customary argument put (forward) by all opportunists... electoral *technique* (could not) justify the *politics* of betrayal, which a joint programme with the bourgeoisie amounted to...". The former Left Communists, he wrote, "had turned into a mere tail of the 'left' bourgeoisie". It was hard to "conceive of a more ignominious downfall".<sup>60</sup>

Trotsky accused the ex-ICE militants of "vegetating in the confused organisation of Maurín... without a programme... perspectives (or) any political significance". "Marxist action in Spain" he continued "can begin only by means of an irreconcilable condemnation of the whole policy of Nin and Andrade which was, and remains, not only false but also criminal...". His disillusionment was particularly great as regards Nin, who "during the whole period of the revolution (had) proved to be a completely passive dilettante..." of whom the Bolshevik leader cherished "no hope of seeing... become a revolutionary", although he added that he "could be wrong". By not entering the PSOE, as Trotsky had advised, the majority of his former sympathisers in Spain should be "stigmatised for ever as criminals against the revolution" for having permitted the "splendid Young Socialists... to pass over to Stalinism". The task of Spanish Fourth International supporters was, on the one hand, to enter the PSOE and JSU and, on the other, "grasp in full the wretchedness of the leadership of the POUM... especially of the former Left Communists...".

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59. See page 248.

60. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution* Op.cit. p.209

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Trotsky also reiterated many of the criticisms he had made of Maurín five years previously, describing him as the "very incarnation of a petty bourgeois revolutionist... superficial, agile and versatile... he studies nothing... understands little and spreads confusion all round him". His "entire policy" was "nationalistic... provincial and petty bourgeois... reactionary in its entire essence". In particular, Trotsky now turned his attention to attacking Maurín's theory of the socialist- democratic revolution, which he described as an "eclectic hodge-podge". The "democratic and socialist revolutions are" as the October 1917 revolution had shown, he argued, "on opposite sides of the barricades", not only had the democratic revolution been carried out in Spain but the Popular Front was "renewing it". According to Trotsky, the socialist revolution could only be made by an uncompromising struggle against the "democratic" revolution and its Popular Front. This "synthetic socialist-democratic revolution" meant nothing, he concluded.<sup>61</sup> What seems quite apparent from these criticisms is that Trotsky had little knowledge of the true content of Maurín's position, nor for that matter of the POUM's unswerving denunciations of the Popular Front. As in 1931, his appreciation of the problems facing the Spanish dissident communists or the true nature of their organisations is fairly superficial, although this does not necessarily detract from his many perceptive insights on the development of the political situation in Spain in general.

These insights were still appreciated by the POUM's leaders, despite his attacks on them. This was especially the case with regard to his analysis of the international situation, which they largely shared. Thus, occasional articles by Trotsky continued to appear in the party's press. Gorkín, in referring to the "historic causes of Spanish backwardness", praised the "magnificent" analysis to be found in three different sources: Maurín's two books on the subject and Trotsky's pamphlet, *La Revolución Española*, published in 1931. Sympathy for Trotsky was particularly noticeable in those sections of the POUM which were made up more or less exclusively of former ICE members. When Maurín spoke for the party in Madrid during the February elections, for instance, giant portraits of both Lenin and Trotsky adorned the walls of the cinema where the meeting was held. The POUM's Salamanca branch, based entirely on ex-ICE militants, issued a leaflet on 1 May 1936 describing Trotsky as the only former Bolshevik leader who still "held high the banner of international revolution". In fact, Trotsky himself

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61. *Ibid* pp.211-214, 217-219.

misinterpreted such manifestations as representing agreement with his line of argument.<sup>62</sup>

In even starker contrast to Trotsky's denunciations of the POUM and its leaders, is the article by Maurín entitled "I am not a Trotskyist but..." published on 1 May 1936. Replying to the Stalinist campaign against himself and his party, Maurín explained that while they were not Trotskyists they certainly were not insulted by being described as such. Despite disagreeing with Trotsky on a number of questions, this could "not cloud the truth" that he had been and still was, in Maurín's words, "one of the best organised brains that the socialist movement has produced". Not only was he not a counter-revolutionary but the "man of October" and the "major Bolshevik leader after Lenin...". In contrast, the POUM leader listed the many non-revolutionary aspects of Stalin's policy, from the "division of the German working class" through to his new-found patriotism and support for the League of Nations. Maurín concluded that although not a Trotskyist himself, "Trotsky was head and shoulders above this rabble of Johnny-come-lately so-called revolutionaries" who now led the Comintern.<sup>63</sup>

Building the POUM was not just a question of ideological battles with its various rivals but also an organisational one. Like all working class organisations in the months leading up to the Civil War, the POUM's ranks expanded, although not as dramatically as those of the PCE and the JSU. The actual membership of the POUM by July 1936 is usually cited at being between seven and ten thousand. Andreu Nin, addressing the party Central Committee in December 1936, gave a figure of six thousand for the beginning of the war, although this does not seem to take into account the JCI, only some of whose members held dual membership with the party. Therefore, a figure of some seven thousand members is probably the most reliable, around six thousand of whom were in Catalonia.<sup>64</sup> Certainly at the end of 1935 the leadership remained confident that the party would continue to grow and printed five thousand membership cards for the coming year, two thousand more than for 1935. Moreover, although the POUM

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62. Articles by Trotsky, *La Batalla* 13.9.35., 4.10.35., 8.11.35., and *La Nueva Era* February, May and July 1936; Gorkín, "Los problemas de la revolución española" *Ibid*, March-April 1936; *La Batalla* 27.3.36.; El Comité de Salamanca del POUM, "A todos los trabajadores" (1.5.36), (CEHI).

63. *La Batalla* 1.5.36.

64. Maurín, "Apendice. Sobre el comunismo..." *Op.cit.* p.288.; Alba, *El marxismo en España* *Op.cit.* p.240.; *Boletín Interior del POUM* 15.1.37.

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had spent over a year in clandestinity, the number of organised party groups, despite an initial drop because of the repression, had grown from one hundred and forty-five in 1934 to three hundred by the end of 1935. Circulation of *La Batalla* in the same period had risen from six to nine thousand and it was "now read in the whole of the peninsula".<sup>65</sup>

Outside Catalonia, the POUM had inherited a number of important nuclei from the ICE, most of which grew during the first half of 1936. Yet, in reality, this growth was far too slow to match the party's pretensions of converting itself into the centre of revolutionary marxist unity throughout Spain. Following the unification of the BOC and ICE considerable energy was devoted to expanding the party's influence outside of Catalonia, and frequent speaking tours were organised involving POUM leaders, particularly Maurín. *La Batalla* now had a far more state-wide orientation, reflecting the need both to polemicise with the left Socialists outside of Catalonia and to counter the destructive activities of the PCE. In fact, the POUM appeared to be making progress throughout the peninsula. In October 1935, the new party already claimed to have sections in Castile, Valencia, Estremadura, Asturias, Galicia, Andalusia, Aragon, the Basque Country, the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands - effectively, that is, in most parts of the country.<sup>66</sup>

Assessing the POUM's real strength outside Catalonia is not easy given the lack of relevant documentation. However, some general idea can be ascertained from information on the ICE's local organisations and from the united party's press, where the most frequent reports related to successes in Galicia, Madrid and the Levante.<sup>67</sup> In Galicia, on the basis of a number of existing ICE nuclei, the party managed to grow quite steadily in an area with generally little tradition of working class organisation. By January 1936, there was already talk of producing a weekly paper in the region. The celebration in July 1936 of the plebiscite regarding autonomy gave the party the chance to defend its position on the national question. It was in fact to be the only workers party to take an open stand in favour of a "yes" vote. By the beginning of the Civil War, the POUM had at least sixteen or seventeen groups in the region, mostly based in the

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65. POUM, *A propòsit...* Op.cit. pp.9-10.; *Acta del Comité Central...* Op.cit. p.8.

66. *La Batalla* 11.10.35.

67. Information about the party's development can be found in *La Batalla* from July 1935 through to July 1936; POUM, *A propòsit...* Op.cit.; *Acta del Comité Central...* Op.cit.; on the ICE see Pagès, *El movimiento trotskista...* Op.cit. pp.70-94. also see Appendix Six.



province of La Coruña. The Madrid party branch had been strengthened by the entry of a group of thirty or so former Communist youth in early 1935 and Maurín reported to the Central Committee in January 1936 that it already had seventy members. In the following months, the POUM continued to grow in the capital and even claimed some membership in the surrounding province. In the Levante region, the BOC had been making progress since 1934 and this continued into 1936, once the POUM was founded. In particular, the party claimed new recruits in Valencia itself, with some seventy militants by January 1936, and an important influence among the city's three thousand-strong Administrative Workers Union. By July 1936, it is possible to identify at least twenty-six POUM sections in the Levante region, twenty of these in the province of Castellón.

In addition, there were also reports of new recruits in Castile, where the POUM's strongest organisation was in and around Salamanca. Scattered groups also existed in Palencia and the capitals of Valladolid, Leon and Soria. In the Basque Country, the POUM was based on former ICE sections in Bilbao, Pamplona and Sestao and new nuclei in Vitoria and Santurce. The relatively important POUM organisation of Astillero in Santander, which was influential among petroleum workers, was probably also organisationally linked with the Basque groups, as it had been during the time of the ICE. In Extremadura, the party boasted as having in the town of Llerena "the strongest proletarian nucleus" in the region, with a total of one hundred and twenty-two members by early June 1936, as well as sections in several surrounding villages. Llerena had always been one of the ICE's most important centres after the leading role the Trotskyists had played in peasant strikes in the area during 1932 and 1933. The party's main group in Andalusia was based in Seville, although there were also nuclei in Huelva and a handful of other places.

Results of the fusion of the BOC and ICE in Asturias were described as "magnificent" and apart from the BOC's groups in and around Mieres, both parties already had members in Oviedo, the ICE in Gijón and Sama and there was a new party branch organised in La Felguera. From Mallorca, where the BOC had previously established a tiny nucleus, came reports of growth, "despite the disruptive activities of the PCE".

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Finally, in Aragon, principally in the Catalan-speaking region bordering Lérida, the POUM also won new ground, with thirteen different sections known to exist by the beginning of the Civil War.

Despite its optimistic claims, the POUM remained, with few exceptions, an extremely small organisation at a national level, and was generally dwarfed by its Socialist and Communist rivals. Catalonia continued to be the dissident communists' main area of influence, so much so that the party leadership triumphantly declared in December 1935 that it had "already conquered a large part of the Catalan masses for revolutionary marxism". Even though in reality the situation certainly was not so encouraging, the POUM undoubtedly consolidated its influence in the region in the period leading up to the Civil War. The "rhythm of party activity" was described by the Executive Committee at the end of June 1936, as having been "truly extraordinary" in recent months. Attendance at the POUM's meetings, especially outside of Barcelona, continued to be high. *La Batalla* reported in April 1936 that the party had recently managed to "fill the biggest venues" in Sabadell, Terrassa, Figueres, Sitges and Banyoles. On May Day, the party celebrated a total of fifty meetings throughout Catalonia. The organisation's press also increased its circulation; the first copy of *La Nueva Era* in January 1936 sold out in two or three days. In the *comarques*, the POUM now published newspapers in Manresa, Terrassa and San Joan de Abadesses. Trade union papers under party control also appeared in Lérida, Figueres and in Barcelona respectively among office and shop workers, power workers and garment makers.<sup>68</sup>

Actual party membership in Catalonia, as has been mentioned, was probably about six thousand, including the JCI, by July 1936. This figure was considerably greater than that of any other Catalan workers party, although only a tenth of the ERC's membership. What was most noticeable about the dissident communists' strength was the level of organisation outside of Barcelona. It is possible to identify on the eve of the war two hundred and eighty-two different POUM sections or nuclei in Catalonia, seventy-six more than two years previously. Because of the lack of complete data, this figure obviously does not include all those groups in existence. For instance, the party claimed to be organised in "nearly every village" in the *comarca* of Bagés in January 1936. But

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68. *La Batalla* 31.1.36., 3.4.36., 8.5.36., 26.6.36.; POUM, *A propòsit...* Op.cit. p.10.

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out of thirty-five municipalities, it is possible to find references to POUM groups in only fourteen. Therefore, to talk in terms of the party having a presence, however limited, in more than three hundred towns and villages in Catalonia is not unreasonable.<sup>69</sup>

The Catalan capital was still the party's relative weak spot, although its local organisation was reported to be "stronger than ever" at the end of 1935 when it claimed over 500 members. Unlike in the provinces, however, the party in Barcelona had to compete with the various other marxist factions which would later form the PSUC, and whose combined membership in the city was possibly double that of the POUM's. In contrast, the dissident communists seemed to be growing fast in the province of Barcelona where there were at least fifty-eight groups; the most important sections were those of Sabadell, with two hundred members by March 1936, Sitges and Terrassa.

In the province of Tarragona, the party had thirty-eight known sections and nuclei by 1936, although again it is quite possible that there were more. For instance, in late September 1935 it was claimed that there soon "would not be a village in the *comarca* of Camp Alt" without a group of party members. This *comarca* and that of Tarragonés had the highest concentration of party militants; the strongest local sections were those based in the provincial capital, Reus and Vendrell. There was some limited competition in the provinces of Barcelona and Tarragona from other marxist parties. By April 1935, the PCdeC claimed to have members in thirty-nine places in Barcelona province and twenty-nine in Tarragona, but only in the *comarca* of Alt Penedès did its groups outnumber those of the POUM. Similarly, the USC had some scattered groups, mainly in Barcelona province and especially in the *comarca* of Maresme. The PSOE also had a handful of small branches in the province of Barcelona.

Where the POUM was virtually unchallenged by any other workers party was in the provinces of Gerona and Lérida. In Gerona, it had organised groups in at least eighty-eight towns and villages by 1936. Nearly half of these groups were to be found

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69. see Appendix Three; Information on the POUM in Catalonia is based on the list of groups published in *La Batalla* 20.4.34 and *Boletín del Bloque Obrero y Campesino (FCI)* 15.5.35., the party press 1935 to 1936, comparisons with election results at a local level from 1931 to 1934, and a letter from J. Soler 21.4.87. re: Gerona province; on the USC, Martín I Ramos *Op.cit.* pp.121-123.; on the PCdeC, "Dadas provisionales d'organització a Catalunya" 20.6.35. (ACCPCE); on the PSOE, A. Balcells, "El socialismo en Cataluña durante la Segunda República (1931-1936)", *Trabajo Industrial...*" *Op.cit.*

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in the Alt and Baix Empordà areas; the most important sections being in the towns of Figueres, La Bisball and Palafrugell. Other centres of importance for the party continued to be the provincial capital, with a hundred and forty members by July 1936, Anglès, Banyoles, Olot and San Joan de les Abadesses. Neither the Communist Party nor the USC seemed to have had more than the most rudimentary organisation in Gerona, and the PSOE was more or less non-existent.

In Lérida, where the number of POUM groups had nearly doubled since 1934 to probably over a hundred, the dissident communists' strength continued to be concentrated around the capital, in the *comarques* of La Norguera, Segrià and Urgell. The biggest sections were in the city of Lérida and in the *comarcal* centres of Balaguer, Borges Blanques and Tárrega. Only in a few Leridan villages had the PCdeC begun to make new recruits during 1935 and 1936, but without being able to seriously challenge the POUM's influence in the area. Likewise, the USC and PSOE had very few members in the province, their only real, albeit small, sections were probably those in the city of Lérida itself.

### **Federació Obrera d'Unitat Sindical.**

The POUM's base in the *comarques* may have been greater than that of any other working class organisation, but was of limited importance without support among the industrial proletariat of Barcelona. By early 1936, systematic repression and the FAI's tactics in previous years had combined to weaken the Catalan CNT. The POUM was convinced that the anarcho-syndicalists' grip over the capital's labour movement could at last be broken. In late 1935, the dissident communists described the Confederation as being "completely crushed organisationally" with little influence in the region. A few months later, Nin estimated that the Catalan CNT had "in reality" only between "forty and fifty thousand" members.<sup>70</sup> In retrospect, it is easy to see that the POUM seriously under-estimated the anarcho-syndicalists' support in Catalonia but at the time the CNT's decline seemed inexorable. Moreover, both Catalan Socialists and nationalists shared this view of the anarcho-syndicalists' loss of influence.<sup>71</sup> According to its own figures,

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70. Nin, "Importancia del Congreso (1)" *La Batalla* 22.5.36.; POUM, *A propòsit...* Op.cit. p.10.

71. Vidella, "Causas del desarrollo..." Op.cit. (see page 114., note 61); Jones, Op.cit. p.95.

the Confederation's regional membership had fallen from over 300,000 in 1931 to 140,000 by May 1936. Approximately fifteen percent of the non-agricultural working population and fifty percent of all trade unionists in Catalonia were now organised in the CNT, compared with thirty percent and eighty-five percent respectively five years previously. Yet the Catalan anarcho-syndicalists were far from being a spent force. The PCdeC was probably correct when it reported in January 1936 that despite the CNT's internal problems it had "conserved its union cadres in most major industries in Barcelona" and had "more possibilities than any other organisation of re-organising itself".<sup>72</sup> The POUM was less shortsighted about the Confederation's possibilities outside Catalonia. By actively encouraging working class militancy, the anarcho-syndicalists were growing in many areas at the expense of the UGT. In fact, the dissident communists criticised those Socialists who described the CNT as "finished". Such an attitude, *La Batalla* proclaimed, was "only based on ignorance about the Spanish working class movement", many times it had been said that the CNT was finished but it had "continued in good health", influencing "important sectors" of the masses.<sup>73</sup>

The dissident communists themselves still hoped that a general "trade union united front" could be formed in Catalonia. Those unions under their influence had continued to grow and according to Maurín, speaking at the FCI's Second Congress in April 1934, were "converting themselves into the axis of the working class movement" in the region. Some delegates to this Congress, especially those from Lérida, had argued instead for the establishment of what would effectively be a new trade union federation based on the numerous autonomous unions that now existed throughout Catalonia. This proposal was not completely ruled out, but the Party leadership believed it would be necessary to pose the problem as one of an extended united front rather than that of creating a new federation as such. None the less, appeals, prior to October 1934, to the CNT, UGT and Treintistas for a joint conference to discuss unity made little impact.<sup>74</sup>

Collaboration with the Treintistas during 1934, both in the Workers Alliances and in the Power Workers' and Metal Workers' United Fronts had continued to encourage the

72. M. González Urién and F. Revilla Gonzalez, *La CNT a través de sus Congresos* (Mexico 1981) p.310.; *Confederación Regional... Memoria del Pleno... 1933* Op.cit. p.9.; *Solidaridad Obrera* 6.5.36.; Hortelà, Op.cit. pp.103-108.; "Informe sobre la situación en Catalunya" Op.cit.

73. Nin, "Importancia..." Op.cit.

74. *La Batalla* 20.4.34., 14.7.34., 27.9.34.; *L'Hora* 4.8.34.

BOC that, despite the failure of their joint discussions in late 1933, unity with the syndicalists was still possible. Accordingly, following the October events the BOC had renewed its efforts to persuade the Treintistas to join with it in some form of united front. This had led, in March 1935, to a meeting between the two factions which issued a manifesto in favour of the unity of all the Catalan trade union movement. Yet these talks came to nothing and subsequent invitations by the Bloc for further talks were ignored or turned down.<sup>75</sup> Most of the Treintista leaders saw the BOC's proposals as little more than an attempt to set up a new trade union organisation under marxist leadership. Instead they saw no alternative but to rejoin the CNT and the majority of the Opposition Unions participated in the CNT's Saragossa Congress in May 1936. Nevertheless, the Catalan Treintistas were divided in their attitude towards the Confederation - the Sabadell and Manresa unions opposed re-joining the CNT. Consequently, the POUM remained hopeful that at least some of the syndicalists could be won to its position.

By early 1935, the BOC had begun openly to defend the fusion of the CNT and UGT as the final goal of any movement for trade union unity. The proposed unification of the French Socialist CGT and Communist CGTU on an open and equal basis was held up by the POUM as an example to be followed in Spain.<sup>76</sup> However, the effective position of both the CNT and the UGT alike of seeing "unity" as taking place through the absorption of all other forces made such a development unlikely in Spain in the short term. Faced with this problem the BOC now called for a "Conference of Trade Union Unity" with the intention of bringing together as many unions as possible in Catalonia which were outside the two main federations. Any resulting unified body would in turn join with the CNT and UGT when these two organisations were prepared to unify. As a first step towards this Conference, and also to give the POUM-led trade unions a more coherent image, the party set up during the summer of 1935 the "Trade Union United Front Committee". It was based on the former "Federation of Unions excluded from the CNT" and the dissident communists' Barcelona Local Federation. Outside of Catalonia, the POUM's members were instructed normally to work inside the UGT, because it was larger and there was a greater degree of internal democracy. From inside

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75. *Avant* 18.3.35.; *La Batalla* 28.6.35., 4.10.35.

76. *Ibid* 19.7.35., 4.10.35.; *Accion* 16.2.35.

the Socialist organisation they would "work for trade union unity" and the calling of a "merger congress" with the CNT. In exceptional cases, depending on local circumstances, the POUM's militants would work inside the CNT, Treintista or autonomous unions. The latter, as well as the non-unionised, would be encouraged to enter the UGT.<sup>77</sup>

In early 1936, with the lifting of most legal restrictions on open political activity, the POUM Executive Committee insisted on the need for a "total offensive" on the question of trade union unity and the organisation as soon as possible of the aforementioned conference.<sup>78</sup> A variety of initiatives at this time encouraged the party's belief that the tendency towards unity in action, which had developed so fruitfully during 1934, would continue. Both the Power Workers' and Metal Workers' United Fronts had recently been re-organised and the UGT Textile Workers Union in Barcelona had co-operated during 1935 with the POUM-led union in trying to keep the Sindicatos Libres from re-establishing themselves in the factories. Moreover, in Barcelona, the POUM's Local Trade Union Federation initiated a campaign in March 1936, with the support of the Treintistas, the Federació d'Empleats i Tecnic and a number of other unions, for the re-admission of all workers sacked after October 1934. Nevertheless, the UGT instructed its sections not to participate in this campaign "under any circumstances" after several Socialist unions, most notably the wood and rail workers, had attended its first meeting.<sup>79</sup> The inconsistent attitude of the UGT, Treintistas and UGSOC towards joint activity showed that, despite the optimistic tone of the POUM's propaganda, organisational unity would not be easy.

Of particular interest for the POUM was the creation, during the autumn of 1935, in Figueres, Mataró, Reus and Terrassa of joint Local Federations, usually involving all unions without exception. In Terrassa, the party's prestige had been boosted after the five week strike by hosiery workers over wage differentials in the winter of 1935-36. Led by the dissident communists, with the support of Treintista and POUM-led textile workers unions elsewhere in Catalonia, the stoppage, according to *Front*, resulted in a

77. "El Partido Unificado y la cuestión sindical", *Boletín del Bloque Obrero y Campesino (FCI)* July 1935.

78. *Acta del Comité Central...* Op.cit. pp.7, 26.

79. *La Batalla* 1.11.35., 29.11.35., 6.12.35., 28.2.36., 6.3.36., 27.3.36., 3.4.36; *Llum i Força* January 1936; *Octubre* 24.1.36.

"great victory".<sup>80</sup> The strike's success helped revitalise the sagging fortunes of the city's trade union movement, which had declined under the influence of the FAI. A number of autonomous unions had come together to form a new "Local Federation", which by 1936 grouped together some four thousand workers - about a quarter of the workforce.<sup>81</sup>

Unlike in Terrassa, the CNT in Reus participated in the setting up of a united Local Federation in December 1935. Most local unions were autonomous, some were under the BOC's influence, many having left the CNT in the early thirties. The Reus Federation claimed in December 1935 to include "all local trade unions", of which thirty-six are known to have existed with a membership of over five thousand workers. In Mataró, a Local Federation or "Local Committee of trade union understanding", as the CNT referred to it, was created in October 1935 involving the Treintistas, UGT, CNT and autonomous unions and representing between five and six thousand workers. Despite the Treintistas' participation, *Front* reported that their local leader, Joan Péiro, was opposed to a united body which he described as "absurd", so the syndicalists' exact relationship with the new federation was far from clear. The Figueres Federation was originally set up clandestinely in October 1935 on the initiative of the CNT, but the anarcho-syndicalists subsequently withdrew. Twelve different autonomous unions, some ex-CNT, with a total of seven hundred members, eventually adhered to the new body which was strongly influenced by the POUM.<sup>82</sup>

By early 1936, work had begun in earnest for the proposed unity conference. A manifesto published by the POUM's Barcelona Local Union Federation backed the Conference, which aimed not, it insisted, to form a new regional trade union *central* (centre) but a "movement for trade union unity". A further call was made some weeks later for a "conference of all Catalan Trade Unions without exception". The problem of division, it stated, could not be solved by absorption but by fusion". A united trade union organisation, the POUM tried to make clear, would not be the property of just

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80. *Front* 3.1.36.; 17.1.36.; *Comercio y Navagación* January 1936.

81. Interview with J. Marimon, 28.9.85.; Appendix Four.

82. *Ibid.*; *La Batalla* 1.11.35., 3.1.36., 8.5.36.; *Front* 20.12.35., 3.1.36.; *Solidaridad Obrera* 6.5.36.; *Treball* (Figueres) 4.7.36.; (UGT) *Primera Asamblea...* *Op.cit.*; *Confederación Regional de Trabajo, Memorias de la Conferencia Regional Extraordinaria celebrada en Barcelona durante los días 25,26 y 27 de Enero de 1936*; "Cens Electoral Social..." *Op.cit.* (1936).



one tendency, but represent the organised working class as a whole. Somewhat predictably, the other trade union groupings were not easily convinced by this line of argument. Having failed to get an agreement with the Treintistas, the Trade Union United Front Committee sent letters to the CNT, UGT, UGSOC and CADCI inviting them to participate in its unity initiative. These invitations could only have been of a propaganda value because neither the anarcho-syndicalists nor the UGT even bothered to reply. More serious contacts, however, were made at a local level, particularly with autonomous unions, but also with some CNT, Treintista and Socialist organisations. By late April, the party press spoke of the "extraordinary number of adherences" to the Conference that it was receiving.<sup>83</sup>

The Conference finally took place on 2 May, attended by two hundred delegates claiming to represent 60,000 workers, organised into a hundred and fifty different unions. The POUM line against the formation of a new union *central* as such but for the establishment of an "organisational grouping", which would be one step towards a broader and definitive unity, was accepted enthusiastically by nearly all those present. Most delegates represented "autonomous" unions, which reflected the dissatisfaction with the anarcho-syndicalist and Socialist federations, and confirmed the POUM's view that the problem of unity could not be resolved by entering either the CNT or UGT. The Conference decided to establish the Federació Obrera d'Unitat Sindical (Workers Federation of Trade Union Unity). Defending the slogan "neither an anarchist *central* nor a socialist one... but one *central* of all workers", the new organisation expressed its immediate desire to "table negotiations with all trade unions... to achieve" as soon as possible the "unification of the movement". It was optimistic that, from now onwards, "those unions that were not in the UGT or CNT would be in the FOUS". Although for the time being limited to Catalonia, this was not to be an exclusively Catalan Trade union federation - to create such an organisation would be a "crime" that could only help the ERC, the FOUS's General Secretary, Andreu Nin, claimed. Instead, the new Federation presented itself as the first step towards trade union unity in all of Spain.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, with the exception of perhaps Castellón, any pretension by the POUM of

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83. *La Batalla* 31.1.36., 13.3.36.; Nin, "Una iniciativa laudable. La Conferencia de Unidad Sindical" *ibid.*, 24.4.36. and 8.5.36.

84. *ibid.*; Nin "La Federación Obrera de Unidad Sindical" *ibid.* 15.5.36.; Federació Obrer d'Unitat Sindical, "A tots els treballadors de Catalunya" n.d. (CEHI).

organising the FOUS outside of Catalonia could not be taken seriously at this stage. In fact, talk of building the new grouping outside of Catalonia, apart from contradicting the dissident communists' earlier position in favour of entering the UGT, could only provoke even more hostility from the rest of the labour movement.

The exact strength of the FOUS is difficult to ascertain, but from the information available it is possible to calculate that those listed as attending its founding Conference represented just over 50,000 workers. Those unions involved were principally ex-CNT or had been organised by the BOC (or POUM) itself, plus a number of independent organisations with diverse origins and a few groups that had been in the UGT. The most notable factor about the new body was its spread throughout the whole of Catalonia, as opposed to the other trade union federations in the region which tended to be concentrated in and around Barcelona. Local Federations affiliated to the FOUS, and their approximate membership, were as follows:<sup>85</sup>

Terrassa	4,000
Reus	3,000
Lérida	2,500
Tarragona	2,000
Gerona	1,600
Olot	1,500
Sitges	1,000
Figueres	700

In Barcelona, the FOUS claimed the allegiance of seventeen unions with a total membership of between sixteen and seventeen thousand workers. Of these, ten thousand were grouped in the eight unions which made up the office and shop workers' United Front, of which the Sindicat Mercantil was the most important, with 3,921 members by June 1936. The only other unions of relative importance controlled by the POUM in the city were of textile and print workers and had 2,441 and 875 members respectively. In addition, the FOUS had sections among the city's garment makers, confectioners, power, metal, rail and transport workers.<sup>86</sup>

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85. see Appendix Four.

86. *ibid.*

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From the UGT the FOUS won the support of some of the Sitges unions and the Mataró printers' organisation. Some POUM militants in Catalonia, however, continued to be active inside the Socialist unions, particularly in Barcelona,<sup>87</sup> as there was no possibility of establishing a separate organisation in some sectors. Former Treintista unions from Palafrugell, El Pobla de Lillet, El Pont de Vilomara and, most noticeably, Igualada, also decided to join the new federation. Elsewhere, for instance in Manresa, Mataró, Vilanova i Geltrú and, in particular, Sabadell, the dissident communists claimed to have a growing influence inside the Treintista organisations.<sup>88</sup>

Among peasants, the FOUS's principal base was in Lérida, where the UPA claimed to have sixty-two different branches by June 1936 and probably had some four thousand members.<sup>89</sup> The only other peasant union to join the new Federation was from Olot, with a membership of about one thousand. Other peasant unions in the province of Gerona influenced by the POUM did not, as yet, affiliate to the FOUS. The dissident communists still claimed at this time to be "winning influence" in the leadership of the Rabassaires Union and to control many local committees. Yet the subsequent loss of their most important UdeR leader, Pau Padró, who left the party with Colomer's faction, could not have helped this process. Moreover, the BOC's idea, floated at the beginning of 1935, of creating a new "Provincial Agrarian Union" in Tarragona, even though this did not materialise, reflected a certain ambiguity in the attitude of the party towards working inside the UdeR.<sup>90</sup>

There was some limited opposition inside those unions led by the POUM to the foundation of the FOUS. According to one former party member, Josep Soler, the majority of the Gerona Local Federation favoured entering the UGT instead, although only the local Power Workers Union did not actually join the FOUS. Likewise there were problems inside the Barcelona Print Workers Union, where militants sympathetic to the Treintistas refused to go into the new federation. Furthermore, the Madrid POUM was, apparently, not too happy about the formation of the FOUS, in case it ended up like the PCE's ill-fated attempts to form a separate federation. Instead, the

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87. see page 151.

88. POUM, *A propòsit...* Op.cit. p.10.

89. See Appendix Five

90. *Boletín del Bloque Obrero y Campesino (FCI)* January 1935; POUM, *A propòsit...* Op.cit. p.10.

**dissident communists in the Spanish capital favoured their comrades entering the UGT in Catalonia, as in the rest of the country.<sup>91</sup> Notwithstanding these objections, however, the majority of unions influenced by the POUM seem to have been quite enthusiastic about the organisation of the new federation.**

Of course, the importance of the FOUS can only really be assessed by comparing it with other trade union groupings in Catalonia. The foundation of the new federation strengthened the POUM's belief that "since the damage done to the CNT by the FAI" those unions organised by the party were "surely the most important in Catalonia". Nin now asserted that the anarcho-syndicalists had "definitively lost their hegemony". The Catalan trade unions, claimed *La Batalla* in late May 1936, were now orientated towards the FOUS and not the CNT.<sup>92</sup> Yet those figures available, even if exaggerated, let alone subsequent developments during the Civil War, bely the POUM's optimism. Not only did the CNT's claimed membership in the region, despite being under half that of 1931, still outnumber that of the FOUS, but the numerical growth of the two Socialist federations, the UGT and UGSOC, made them, formally at least, important competitors to the new grouping.

In contrast to what is generally believed, details of trade union membership available in the Generalitat's "Social Census" of July 1936 show that the Socialist unions grew considerably during the first half of that year. However, contemporary sources were also dismissive of these unions. Nin stated that the UGT "never has been and never will be anything in Catalonia" and *Front* in May 1936 described the Socialist unions as a "super minority". Bonet, writing in February 1936, even though admitting that the Catalan Socialists had slightly broadened their base during 1931-33 because of their work in the Jurados Mixtos and the "lamentable acts of the CNT", claimed that they had been badly hit by the UGSOC split. Moreover, a PCdeC internal report at the beginning of 1936 described the Catalan UGT, in which the official Communists were increasingly influential, as having "little strength in Barcelona". Nor was the UGSOC considered to be of any importance; Arquer on the eve of the war dismissed it as an "impotent organisation destined to die without much ado". This discrepancy between the figures

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91. Soler, *Op.cit.* p.38.; *Octubre* 28.5.36.; A. Bueso, *Recuerdos de un cenetista* (Barcelona 1976) vol.1. p.285.; Interview with E.Rodriguez 5.5.83.

92. POUM, *Qué es...* *Op.cit.* p.16.; Nin, "La Federación..." *Op.cit.* ; *La Batalla* 29.5.36.

published by the Generalitat and most contemporary and later observations can, in part, be explained by the general passivity and conservatism of most of those sectors organised by the UGT, which according to Bonet had played "an insignificant role in the great battles of the Catalan proletariat". Likewise, the UGSOC, which according to both Bonet and the PCdeC had grown thanks to the support of the Catalan government was, if anything, even more moderate than the UGT. Both Socialist federations, which would soon re-unite, were based on a multitude of small, often craft-based unions; over two hundred and fifty existed by 1936. This fragmentation contrasted strongly with the unitary and industry-based unions favoured by the more militant sections grouped in the CNT.<sup>93</sup>

The FOUS was particularly weak in the city of Barcelona, where nearly half the Catalan working class was concentrated. Even allowing for the notorious unreliability of the CNT's official figures, it is quite obvious that in all the major sectors the FOUS was greatly outnumbered by the anarcho-syndicalists; although it is worth taking into account the inconsistencies in membership figures given at the time.

For instance, Maurín writing in *Leviatan* in October 1934 stated that the largest textile union in Barcelona only had three thousand members, when the CNT had publicly claimed a total of 20,000 affiliates in this sector a year beforehand.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, the UGT and UGSOC had over seventy-five, mostly small, unions in the city which, numerically at least, were considerably stronger than those unions led by the POUM. Using the CNT's and UGT's own sources, the "Social Census" and a more detailed knowledge of the FOUS's membership it is possible to make an approximate comparison of the three tendencies' implantation at the end of May 1936 in the four most important

93. "Cens Electoral Social..." Op.cit. (1934, 1935, 1936); Nin, "La Federación..." Op.cit.; Bonet, "La situación del movimiento sindical" *La Nueva Era* February 1936; *Front* 1.5.36., 17.7.36.; "Informe sobre la situación en Cataluña" Op.cit.; (UGT) *Primera Asamblea...* Op.cit. pp.15-19.

94. Maurín, "El movimiento obrero en Cataluña" *Leviatan* October 1934.

industrial sectors in the city, (the number of unions is given in brackets)<sup>95</sup>:

	CNT	UGT/UGSOC	FOUS
Construction & allied trades	(1) 15,000	(6) 6,955	-
Metal	(1) 15,000	(4) 17,245	(1) 528
Textiles	(1) 14,500	(1) 6,000	(1) 2,441
Transport & docks	(3) 10,500	(19) 10,000	(1) 249

In terms of industrial muscle, the FOUS only matched its rivals in the smaller, though not unimportant, gas and electricity and print sectors. Moreover, there were two important autonomous groupings, the CADCI and the Federació Obrera de Sindicats de la Indústria Gastronómica, led by elements of the future PSUC, competing with the FOUS. Only in *mercantil* sector was the POUM really influential and although the CADCI remained numerically stronger its amorphous nature still meant that the smaller Sindicat Mercantil maintained the prominence it had acquired during 1933-34. The following figures show the approximate balance of forces in this sector (again the number of unions is in brackets)

CNT	UGT/UGSOC	FOUS	CADCI
(1) 1,000 (in 1933)	(5) 2,000	(8) 10,000	(1) 13,000

Outside of Barcelona, the FOUS was far more important. This clearly reflected the POUM's political weight. Although the CNT had lost a good part of its membership to the Treintistas in the province of Barcelona and its overall claimed membership had dropped by over sixty percent since 1931, it still remained the majority trade union force in this industrially important area. In contrast, the Socialist unions had doubled their membership in the province since 1934. In the other provinces, the CNT had been unable to recuperate the loss of the majority of its unions in 1932 and, with the exception of a few localities, was extremely weak. — The Socialists had only slightly increased their forces in these provinces, especially in Lérida, where, with the exception of a small base among rail workers, they hardly had any unions under their control before 1934. The

95. *Solidaridad Obrera* 6.5.36.; "Cens Electoral Social..." Op.cit. (1936); *Actas de la Comisión Ejecutiva de la UGT*; Appendix Four.

UGT now had managed to organise a handful of unions and, in a number of Lérida villages, a few sections of its landworkers federation, the FNTT, probably thanks to the work of local Communist Party militants. In Tarragona, the Socialists also had some limited strength in the capital and Tortosa. It is therefore possible to make a rough calculation of the relative strength of the main trade union tendencies in Catalonia at this time, although it is necessary to take into account the existence of other groups such as the 40,000 or so workers grouped in the Treintista unions in the province of Barcelona, or the autonomous unions, the most important being those of the Federació d'Empleats i Tecnic (Technicians and Employees Federation). The Unió de Rabassaires with over 30,000 members also greatly outnumbered those peasant unions under the POUM's control. Again it is worth emphasising that these figures, especially those of the CNT, can only give a general indication of the forces involved by mid-1936<sup>96</sup>:

	CNT	UGT/UGSOC	FOUS
Barcelona (city)	85,000	65,000	17,000
Barcelona (province)	40,000	12,000	12,000
Gerona	4,000	1,500	7,000
Lérida	2,000	2,500	8,000
Tarragona	2,000	5,000	7,000

The relative importance of these trade unions cannot be judged solely on the number of their affiliates but also on their concentration in specific areas, their strategical weight and the number of unions involved. In this sense, it is obvious that the CNT still dominated much of the working class movement in and around Barcelona, as it had done since the end of the First World War. Likewise, the FOUS was hegemonic in nearly all the most important centres in the provinces of Gerona, Lérida and Tarragona. The problem for the new Federation was that it was precisely in those places where the anarcho-syndicalists were still strong that much of the real power of the organised Catalan working class lay and not in the outlying provinces.

The FOUS was created at a time when the level of industrial and social struggle was increasing sharply throughout Spain. This was basically the product of rising

96. See note 95.

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expectations after the Popular Front's electoral victory and of the workers movement's attempts to win back the ground lost under the previous Rightist administration. Another factor was the general European context of growing unrest and radicalisation as a response both to economic pressures and to the threat of fascism. The spontaneous character of many of the strikes now taking place in Spain was comparable to a similar movement developing in France. Moreover, in both countries working class militancy faced the opposition of a recently-elected Popular Front government. Catalonia was no exception to this trend, despite the myth of a "Catalan oasis" in which, unlike Spain, there existed "social peace", and from April onwards the number of strikes increased significantly.<sup>97</sup> While, in the rest of the peninsula, it was generally the CNT which was leading these struggles, in Catalonia it was the FOUS which claimed this role.

In the weeks leading up to the Civil War, the POUM trade unions were heavily involved in this strike movement. At the same time, however, they found themselves increasingly isolated from the rest of the labour movement. According to the General Secretary of the FOUS, Andreu Nin, the "vicious struggle of both the UGT and CNT against the new organisation" was the "best proof" of its importance.<sup>98</sup> The CNT's behaviour, at least, was consistent with the anarcho-syndicalists' traditional hostility towards marxist trade unions in general and specially those of the BOC or POUM in Catalonia. Furthermore, the FOUS appeared to all other tendencies as a new rival trade union *central* and not, as the dissident communists insisted, an organisational step towards broader unity. The CNT leaders were particularly dismissive because, according to them, a "marxist *central*" (national or regional trade union federation or "centre"), the UGT, already existed. They refused to take seriously the FOUS's professed desire to create a great federation that would be "neither socialist nor anarchist".

Likewise, the UGT instructed its unions, as it had in October 1933, not to attend the dissident communists' trade union conference. The actual creation of the FOUS hardened the Socialists' attitude even further. While in the recent past there had been a certain collaboration between sections of the Catalan UGT and those unions led by

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97. Vinyes, *Op.cit.* pp.303-335.

98. Nin, "La Federación Obrera..." *Op.cit.*



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the POUM or BOC, this, with a few exceptions, began to end. Nor can this change of attitude be separated from the process now taking place that would lead to the foundation of the PSUC and the consequent re-unification of the UGT and the UGSOC. The general growth of the Socialist unions in Catalonia at this time also probably encouraged their leaders to adopt a more hostile attitude towards their marxist rivals. Despite a general commitment to unity, the UGT also took advantage of the CNT's defence of the need for only one marxist and only one anarcho-syndicalist trade union *central*, to form a *de facto* alliance with the Confederation against the FOUS. The CNT, in turn, found itself collaborating, openly or otherwise, with the Catalan Socialists against the dissident communist unions, whose militancy posed more of a threat to the anarcho-syndicalists' influence in the region than did the activities of the relatively domesticated UGT or UGSOC.

The CNT's distrust of the FOUS was strengthened by some of the dissident communist-led unions involvement in the state-run arbitration committees, the Jurados Mixtos. The Socialist unions, of course, defended such participation, but the Confederation, whose rank and file the dissident communists hoped to influence, had always been uniformly hostile to the idea. In fact, during the first two years of the Republic the BOC had shared the anarcho-syndicalists' hostility and had violently denounced these arbitration committees as "class collaborationist" and only designed to weaken workers' struggles. This attitude first began to change during the office and shop workers' strike of November 1933, when the dissident communists found, despite their reservations, that it was tactically useful to intervene in the Juries.<sup>99</sup> The Right's electoral victory and the BOC's changing attitude towards the Socialists also led to a re-evaluation of the Jurados Mixtos' role. They were now seen, notwithstanding their intended role to dampen workers' militancy, as having in general benefited the proletariat.<sup>100</sup>

Despite Arquer's explanation that the commercial (*mercantil*) sector in Catalonia was "exceptional" and that it possessed the only Jurado Mixto in the region where "unions with a base" had taken part, many more unions under the BOC's and subsequently the

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99. See page 142.

100. See page 167.

**POUM's influence entered their respective arbitration committees between 1934 and 1936. The latter was the case with nearly all the unions controlled by the party in Barcelona and in the province of Lérida. Other dissident communist-led unions that participated in the Jurados Mixtos included the office and shop workers' unions of Sabadell, Terrassa and Badalona, textile unions in Reus, Gerona, Calella, Pobla de Lillet and El Pont de Vilomara and the Sitges shoemakers. Even so, the POUM still described the Jurados Mixtos as "tying working-class organisations to... the bourgeois state to avoid..." not only strikes but "the social revolution" itself. Therefore, its unions involvement in the arbitration committees, reiterated *Front* in February 1936, was "revolutionary opportunism" in a practical sense rather than "systematic... collaboration". This participation did not extend to all those sectors influenced by the POUM, and most of its unions in Gerona, Terrassa and Tarragona remained outside the Jurados Mixtos.<sup>101</sup>**

**The problematic nature of the dissident communists' involvement in the state's arbitration machinery was best reflected in the case of the Barcelona textile industry. The POUM's textile workers' organisation appears to have been one of its few unions of any importance in the Catalan capital that was not closed down after October 1934. Accordingly, the dissident communists continued to participate in the important bleachers' and dyers' Comisión Mixta (as the Jurados Mixtos were now called) despite the entry into this body during 1935 of the Sindicato Libre and other conservative unions. Such reactionary groups, with the backing of the authorities and employers alike, were attempting to take advantage of the repression directed against the Left since October 1934 to gain influence in the factories. Despite the relative weakness of these unions, their re-emergence in the Catalan workers movement alarmed many activists. The dissident communist textile workers' leaders tried to justify their continued participation in the arbitration committee by claiming that this was purely a tactical question because "not much, if anything, of use (could) be achieved by the Comisión Mixta to benefit the workers". Instead, they aimed, on the one hand, to denounce its activities and "impede its work" and, on the other, to help defend "CNT and other workers" sacked after October and prevent them from being replaced in the factories by members of the Sindicatos Libres.<sup>102</sup> These tactical niceties could not have impressed the anarcho-syndicalists,**

**101. *Adelante* 9.1.34., 10.1.34.; *Front* 28.2.36.; "Cens Electoral Social..." Op.cit. (1934, 1935, 1936)**

**102. *La Batalla* 20.9.35., 13.12.35., 20.12.35.; *Bulletí Oficial de la Generalitat de Catalunya* 27.8.35.; *Justicia Socia*; 7.9.35.; *Octubre* 26.12.35.**

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who had always refused to collaborate in principle with the state-run arbitration committees, let alone when these allowed right-wing "unions" to represent workers' interests. In addition, both the Central government, prior to November 1933, and the Generalitat, when controlled by the ERC, had favoured those unions which participated in the Jurados Mixtos, while attempting to smash the CNT. The latter's distrust of the dissident communists' intentions was therefore comprehensible.

Involvement in the Jurados Mixtos may have added to the CNT's suspicions about the FOUS, but there were even more fundamental differences emerging between the dissident communist and Socialist unions. Conflict arose because of the Popular Front parties' opposition to most of the strikes that were taking place. Nor was moderation just confined to the Socialist and Communist parties. Even the Treintista leader, Joan Peiró, criticised the "endless proliferation" of strikes. In contrast, the POUM welcomed this new outbreak of struggle as the beginning of a movement that could by-pass the inept and conciliatory Popular Front government and deal a death blow to reaction. The massive wave of factory occupations and strikes in France in June 1936 was held up by the POUM as an example both of how the workers could go much further than a Popular Front government wanted and of the "treacherous role" of the Communist Party which was trying, as in Spain, to undermine this movement. It had been such resolute action by workers in October 1934, the POUM often insisted, that had deterred the counter-revolution. In contrast, the smothering and holding back of workers' activity could only lead to demoralisation and defeat. Hence the one day general strike called by the CNT in Madrid on 17 April 1936, to protest at attacks on workers by fascist gangs, wrote Ignacio Iglesias of the Asturian POUM, had been "more important and decisive" in opposing the threat of the Right than "all the government's conciliation".

The anarcho-syndicalists' action was in stark contrast to the Socialists' and Communists' repeated calls for calm in the face of Rightist violence. Since the POUM believed that the only way to pre-empt a counter-revolution was by mass mobilisation at all levels, it enthusiastically supported the CNT's role outside of Catalonia. The anarcho-syndicalists, *La Batalla* stated in early June 1936, had two souls, an anarchist one and a "revolutionary syndicalist" one. The first was best reflected through the

activities of the FAI which had led "to catastrophic consequences since 1933"; the second was the "child of the masses' good workerist sense..." and therefore "of high revolutionary valour", and reflected the "revolutionary maturity of the Spanish proletariat". It was, according to the POUM, this "syndicalist" orientation that was the "principal motivation" behind the great strike movement in Madrid and elsewhere. In particular, the anarcho-syndicalists' "displacement", in some cases, of the UGT through these struggles was clearly a reflection, *La Batalla* claimed, of frustration with the Republican government and those workers parties which supported it. So when the authorities moved against the CNT in Madrid, the POUM did not hesitate in declaring its solidarity with the anarcho-syndicalists. Yet in Catalonia the CNT had had, according to the dissident communists, a very different role. Under the FAI's leadership the Confederation was accused of not only "sabotaging" the strike movement but even of "scabbing" on it. Working class militancy in the region was, the POUM claimed, being spearheaded by the FOUS and not the anarcho-syndicalists. The existence in Catalonia of a "true revolutionary marxist party", unlike in the rest of Spain, was also cited as another reason why the most militant workers were supposedly no longer turning towards the CNT.<sup>103</sup>

The first major dispute to break out in Catalonia in the spring of 1936, which both reflected the new mood of militancy and the continued divisions inside the trade union movement, was among metal workers. This dispute started in mid-March, when workers at factories in Barcelona and Badalona began to work only a forty-four hour week in protest at the imposition of a forty-eight hour one by the previous government. This action was supported not only by the Treintista, Socialist and dissident communist unions grouped in the Metal Workers United Front, but also by the CNT. The Generalitat, fearing the extension of the strike, decreed, as compensation, a forty-hour week to last for the same number of weeks as had the forty-eight hour week and without any loss of pay. This offer was accepted by the United Front as being a way of giving work to a "great number of unemployed". However, the CNT opposed the agreement, favouring instead a payment to compensate for the extra hours worked since the

103. *La Batalla* 29.5.36., 5.6.36., 17.7.36.; I. Iglesias, "Hay que organizar la ofensiva" *Ibid* 12.6.36.; *Front* 5.6.36.; Nin, "Son ineficaces las vagues?" *Treball* (Sindicat Mercantil) n.d. (July 1936) and "La acción directa del proletariado y la revolución española", *La Nueva Era* July 1936; Vinyes, *Op.cit.* p.320.

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forty-four hour week had been revoked. Thus, the anarcho-syndicalists, with the support of the Catalan UGT, called an all-out strike. The Socialist Metal Workers Union's decision to back this stoppage surprised the other unions in the United Front, which now felt obliged in the interests of "unity" to support the CNT's initiative. A further compromise agreement was finally forced on the employers, but much to the POUM's stupefaction, this pact was broken by the anarcho-syndicalists who pressed for a higher wage rise and other improvements. The UGT Metal Workers Union, on the instructions of its national leadership in Madrid, yet again followed the CNT's lead.

A second strike now took place, although confined to the anarchists' strongholds in Barcelona. The United Front, whose principal base was outside the capital, openly opposed this latest stoppage and even called on the Generalitat to force the owners to keep the factories open. The strike's leaders claimed the support of ninety percent of Barcelona's metal workers, although this was vigorously denied by the United Front. With the metal workers' organisations bitterly divided, the strikers were finally forced back to work empty handed in mid-April. The failure of this second strike, and the resulting confusion, according to the POUM metal workers, was to "demoralise a great part" of the sector's workers and "lower the prestige" of the unions. Instead of the far-reaching victory that a united struggle should have produced, the CNT's involvement alongside other unions, itself a rare event in Catalonia, had led to disaster because of the anarcho-syndicalists' aim to out-manoeuvre its rivals regardless of the cost.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, as other disputes illustrated, it would be unfair to lay blame for such competitiveness solely at the door of the CNT.

The antagonism felt by the Catalan CNT towards most of its rivals hardened by June 1936. According to the FOUS's Administrative Secretary, Pere Bonet, the Confederation's regional leadership had expressly forbidden its sections from entering into joint negotiations with other unions on working conditions. Experience was to show that this instruction seems to have applied to any collaboration specifically with the FOUS rather than the UGT. A particular case in point, though relatively unimportant, was constituted by the Barcelona hatters, who won considerable improvements in their

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104. *La Batalla* 6.3.36., 10.4.36., 17.4.36.; *Front* 10.4.36.; *Las Noticias* 21.3.36 to 15.4.36.; *Comercio y Navegación* April 1936.

conditions after a strike during most of June led by the FOUS. Despite appearing to be prepared to follow the FOUS, CNT hatters were instructed by the Confederation's leadership not to support the dissident communist-led action. Instead, the CNT presented a separate list of demands which led to two parallel strikes in the sector. Far more damaging, from the POUM's point of view, was the continuing union rivalry inside the textile industry. Violent clashes involving the FAI, while not seeming to reach the same levels as in 1933, still took place in Barcelona's textile factories. The enmity felt by the anarchists towards their marxist competitors was such that they had even refused, during 1935, to collaborate with the dissident communists and the UGT in fighting the *Sindicatos Libres'* attempts to re-establish themselves in the industry. The CNT, UGT and FOUS textile unions all presented separate sets of demands to the Catalan employers at this time, despite appeals by the dissident communists for a united front. The CNT, as usual, according to *Front*, initially refused all contact with other unions in the sector before making a belated appeal to the UGT for joint work. Similarly, despite the manifesto signed by the Lérida rail unions just before October 1934, by August 1935 the POUM-led *Sindicato Ferroviario del Norte* was complaining that the other unions were refusing to work with it. In contrast, there was a growing collaboration in the region between the Socialist and anarcho-syndicalist rail unions, once implacable enemies. Worse still for the POUM's proposals for unity was the collapse of the Power Workers United Front and its re-constitution in June 1936 without the FOUS but with the CNT instead.<sup>105</sup>

Despite these setbacks for the dissident communists, there was still some limited co-operation between the FOUS and some Socialist unions. One small victory for this co-operation was the successful confectioners' strike during the first weeks in June, which led to a wage rise, fifteen days holiday, and a seven-hour day. However, the UGT's Confectioners Union was so tiny that it had little choice but to support the FOUS in this struggle. More important was the initiative taken by the Barcelona and Terrassa woodworkers unions, affiliated respectively to the UGT and FOUS, to call a Regional Conference with the aim of drawing up a joint list of demands to present the employers. This attracted the support of a number of local UGT, FOUS and autonomous unions as

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105. *La Batalla* 16.8.35., 10.7.36.; *Front* 5.6.36.; *Las Noticias* 17.6.36., 30.6.36.; *Justicia Social-Octubre* 3.7.36.; Interviews with V. Ballester 3.4.84. and M. Arbonès 21.11.84.

well as the Sabadell and Manresa Treintistas. Yet such joint initiatives were increasingly rare and the POUM's influence in the Barcelona UGT Woodworkers Union must have played an important part in determining the initiative's success. Another exception to the general rule was the establishment, also during June, on the FOUS's initiative, according to *Front*, of the Barcelona "Transport Unions Liaison Committee" involving the UGT, UGSOC and the FOUS's diminutive union in the sector. Then, in July, the UGT Textile Workers Union finally agreed to discuss with its FOUS counterparts in the Catalan capital the presentation of a joint set of demands to the employers.<sup>106</sup> This limited collaboration between the FOUS and sections of the Catalan UGT had to be contrasted with the breaking of relations between the dissident communists and the Socialists in other sectors, where they had previously worked closely together, as was the case among metal, power and print workers.

The FOUS's most important interventions in the strike wave prior to the beginning of the Civil War were during the printers' and office and shop workers' strikes in June 1936. These two disputes most clearly demonstrated the POUM-led unions' strengths and weaknesses. It was no coincidence that two of the most important strikes in Catalonia at this time took place in the two sectors where the dissident communists had always been most influential. Here was the ideal opportunity for the FOUS both to boost its credibility and to differentiate itself from its rivals. The victorious outcome of the two strikes was exploited to the full by the dissident communists, as a reflection of the importance of those unions under its control. Moreover, hostility between the POUM-led unions and their rivals was to be even more marked because of the party's strength in these sectors.

Following the February elections, the FOUS's Sindicat d'Indústries Gràfiques had taken the initiative in re-forming the Printworkers United Front. However, the other Catalan print unions were reluctant to collaborate with the dissident communists. Not only did the CNT yet again reject all attempts to draw them into joint activity, but the UGT showed no interest in re-joining the United Front. Hence the "Regional Conference of Print Unions", organised by the Sindicat d'Indústries Gràfiques in

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106. *Front* 5.6.36., 12.6.36.; *Las Noticias* 19.6.36., 30.6.36., 8.7.36.

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mid-March was supported, almost exclusively by autonomous or POUM-led unions. The only exception were the Reus UGT print workers. The other delegations were from unions in Barcelona, Sabadell, Terrassa, Badalona, Gerona and Campevanol, most of which later joined the FOUS. A new list of demands was drawn up, but notwithstanding an "intense" campaign to win support for them from other unions, renewed attempts to involve the CNT and UGT proved fruitless.

The employers refused to discuss the printworkers' demands and a strike was declared on 16 June. It soon spread from Barcelona to Sabadell, Terrassa, Badalona, Manresa, Mataró, Gerona, Lérida and elsewhere in Catalonia. While the stoppage was reported to be total in the provinces, in the Catalan capital the United Front was faced with the opposition of the UGT, UGSOC and particularly the CNT, which issued a manifesto calling for the strike to be broken. To impose the strike, the Sindicat d'Indústries Gráficas did not baulk at using force, thereby provoking *Solidaridad Obrera* to protest about the activities of armed groups of "agents provocateurs" and "POUM fascists". Despite this opposition, within two days eighty-five percent of the city's print workers had stopped work. According to *La Batalla*, some CNT members also came out on strike. After five days of increasing violence, the stoppage was "temporarily" called off because the employers had agreed to discuss the United Front's demands in the Jurado Mixto. This in itself was heralded by the FOUS as a victory because it meant conditions would be discussed directly in Barcelona rather than exclusively in Madrid through the industry's National Wages Committee. Among the improvements won by the United Front were the forty-four hour week, sick pay, better holidays, regulation of apprenticeships and the recognition of Workshop Councils. The questions of wage rises and parity between different sectors were left to be negotiated. By not only forcing the employers to make these concessions but also by imposing the strike against the declared wishes of the CNT, the FOUS believed it had won an important battle inside the Barcelona trade union movement, hence strengthening the illusion that it could, at least in some sectors, permanently displace the anarcho-syndicalists.<sup>107</sup>

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107. La Junta. Sindicat d'Indústries Gráficas i Similars, "A tots els obrers de les Artes Gráficas" March 1936 (IMHB); *Front* 20.3.36., 5.6.36., 26.6.36.; *La Batalla* 15.6.36., 26.6.36.; *Las Noticias* 7.6.36., 14.6.36., 17.6.36., 19.6.36., 21.6.36.; *Solidaridad Obrera* 17.6.36., 18.6.36., 19.6.36.



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It was among the office and shop workers that the dissident communists again made their biggest impact. Following the 1933 strike the more radical elements had strengthened their influence in the sector's unions, particularly inside the CADCI which had fallen under the leadership of the PCP during 1934. There was, however, increasing rivalry between different factions of the *mercantil* movement. When the United Front had formally constituted itself as the Front Unic de Trballadors Mercantils (FUTM) in March 1934, neither the CADCI nor the UGT took part. Nevertheless, the BOC-led Sindicat Mercantil had been confident that the "immense majority" of the sector's 150,000 workers in Catalonia supported the FUTM's slogans.<sup>108</sup>

Once the Right had been thrown out of government, the *mercantil* unions were determined to win back the gains won in 1933 and which had been annulled by the authorities in June 1935. In particular, there was widespread discontent over the subsequent withdrawal of the "Carta de Trabajo" (work card), which had originally guaranteed all workers in the sector work until the end of 1936. The cards' withdrawal thereby removed what little job protection that these lowly-paid workers had been able to achieve. A new set of demands, including the re-establishment of the 1933 agreement, had been drawn up by the FUTM in October 1935. However, given that the employers refused even to discuss the United Front's proposals, a strike became inevitable. According to *La Batalla* the employers' intransigence had more to do with the ruling class's general political offensive against the proletariat than with economic reasons.<sup>109</sup>

Compared with two and a half years previously, the various *mercantil* organisations were considerably stronger. The eight unions that made up the FUTM had increased their total membership from around seven to ten thousand workers and the CADCI had grown from eleven to over fourteen thousand. Moreover, FOUS unions in Sabadell, Terrassa, Badalona, Lérida, Figueres and Manlleu, representing some two and a half thousand workers, had since joined the United Front, as had the UGT's Commercial Representatives Union in Barcelona. None the less, repeated calls by the FUTM on

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108. *Transports* April 1934; *Treball* (Sindicat Mercantil) 1.10.34.

109. FUTM, *Noves bases de treball dels estaments de l'engròs, detall i alimentació* n.d. (Barcelona) (IMHB); *La Defensa* November 1935, March 1936; *Lluita* (FET) 15.3.36., 17.6.36.; *La Batalla* 10.7.36.

the CADCI to join with it in presenting a joint set of demands to the employers came to nothing and by May 1936 the United Front had decided to go ahead alone. Meanwhile, POUM members inside the CADCI tried to force a change of line, if not of leadership. In the end, because neither the FUTM nor the CADCI could make any headway with the employers both factions temporarily came together to fight a common enemy. Accordingly, at a joint assembly in Barcelona on 10 June the two factions decided they had no alternative but to come out on strike.<sup>110</sup>

The stoppage began on 18 June, lasted nine days and unlike in 1933, extended outside of Barcelona to provincial centres such as Sabadell, Manresa, Terrassa, Mataró and elsewhere. Barcelona's commercial life was soon paralysed, most shops were closed down, no boats could leave the port because the customs officials were out and food distribution was subject to control by the strike committee. On the third day, the authorities ordered shops to open under police pressure, but this just led to increased action by pickets to force them to shut again. To avoid further violence, Companies agreed to the strike committee's request that the order to open shops forcibly be withdrawn. For the duration of the rest of the strike, all establishments, according to the *Sindicat Mercantil*, remained closed. As in 1933, the dissident communists' Action Groups, played an active role in dissuading any potential blacklegs. Thus scores of POUM militants were arrested, and some wounded, during the course of both the *mercantil* and printers' disputes. Once again, the office and shop workers made a great impression on public opinion, especially in the province of Barcelona where such a stoppage was unprecedented. The employers were soon forced to back down and by 27 June most of the strikers' demands had been conceded. A mass assembly agreed to go back to work the following day with the guarantee from the Generalitat's Labour Councillor that the rest of their demands would be met within the next eight days. Apart from re-establishing those improvements gained in 1933, the office and shop workers also won, among other things, a general wage rise of seven percent, a forty-four hour

110. "Cens Electoral Social..." Op.cit. (1934, 1936); *Treball* (*Sindicat Mercantil*) 31.10.35.; *Front* 20.3.36., 27.3.36., 1.5.36., 26.6.36.; *Las Noticias* 22.4.36., 28.4.36.; Interview with M. Alberich, 6.12.84.

**week in the wholesale sector and forty-seven in retailing, new holidays and the creation of an obligatory "Professional Census".<sup>111</sup>**

This new victory by the *mercantil* workers seems to have been equally as unexpected as in 1933 and its impact equally as dramatic. Once more this traditionally weak sector had sustained a strike, the extension of which was impressive by any standards. Over 100,000 workers were supposedly involved, despite the indifference of the CNT and the hostility of the ERC. Both the POUM and the parties that would soon constitute the PSUC tried to make political capital out of the victory. While *Octubre-Justicia Social* sang the praises of the CADCI's leadership and denounced the FUTM as "a tool of the POUM", *La Batalla* declared that the strike would "show the way for other sectors cheated by the Popular Front".<sup>112</sup> The success of the *mercantil* strike's militant tactics certainly contrasted with the Socialists' and Communists' generally cautious approach at this time, hence justifying, in part, the dissident communists' evaluation of its significance.

Outside of Barcelona, the FOUS was also involved in the growing industrial unrest. Its unions played a leading role in strikes by, among others, textile workers in Calella in March, in Gerona and San Joan de Abadesses in June and in the village of Alfarràs (Lérida) in July and leather workers in Igualada in the same month. As in Barcelona, some of these strikes led to disputes with rival unions. However, when the Gerona CNT building workers union went on strike it was forced to turn to the POUM-led Local Federation for support and the latter's construction workers came out in solidarity. In contrast, the Lérida CNT, with UGT support, brought its builders' union out on strike in June with the aim, according to *La Batalla*, of undermining the FOUS. Consequently, the POUM unions refused to back the stoppage and were bitterly denounced by the anarcho-syndicalists for being "scabs". At the same time, the local FOUS was organising its own struggles, of which its weaker CNT and UGT rivals were equally dismissive. On 22 June, the dissident communist-led *Sindicat Mercantil* in Lérida, no doubt inspired by the struggle of its Barcelona counterparts, struck after the

111. FUTM-CADCI, *Bulletí del Comité de Vaga* No.1., n.d. (Barcelona); *Las Noticias* 17.6.36., 23.6.36.; *La Batalla* 26.6.36., 3.7.36., 10.7.36.; *Treball* (*Sindicat Mercantil*) n.d. (July 1936); *Comercio y Navegación* June 1936; Interview with C. Rosa-Roc 27.9.85.

112. *Las Noticias* 23.6.36.; *La Batalla* 26.6.36.; *Justicia Social-October* 3.7.36., 17.7.36.; *Treball* (*Sindicat Mercantil*) n.d. (July 1936).

employers, backed by the local ERC, refused to discuss the union's demands. Seven days later, surprised by the shop and office workers' determination, the authorities were forced to negotiate and the stoppage was called off. The subsequent breaking off of these talks led to the FOUS Local Federation to organise on 6 July a two day general strike in solidarity with the *mercantil* workers which brought the city to a standstill. The CNT and UGT not only opposed the strike, but, according to the Local Federation, the anarcho-syndicalists offered their services to the employers, the town council and the local Commissioner for Public Order.<sup>113</sup>

The FOUS's role in the strike movement in Catalonia at this time was held up by the POUM as representing a break with the "suicidal confusionism of the CNT and UGT". The dissident communist unions, declared their press, had encouraged workers to participate in these struggles and exposed at the same time the "impotence" of the UGT and UGSOC, the CNT's "blacklegging" and reformism in general. The "merit of the FOUS" was, according to its leaders, that it was not "linked to any political convenience... like the PSOE or FAI" and therefore could "faithfully interpret the feelings of the working masses". Consequently, the POUM Executive Committee could claim in June 1936 that the party's "intensive" and "brilliant" trade union work in recent months had led the Catalan working class to "increasingly identify" with it.<sup>114</sup> Rhetoric aside, it is obvious that in the weeks leading up to the Civil War the FOUS's role in a number of important disputes increased its prestige and hence its influence. However, its attempts to project itself, as a non-sectarian, independent and unitary trade union movement did not, as has been shown, convince its rivals and the level of co-operation between those unions led by the POUM and other organisations decreased significantly at this time. The hostility of the UGT, in particular, in comparison with two years previously, was clearly illustrated in its tendency to side with the CNT against the dissident communists, as had been the case in Lérida and, at a regional level, among metal, print and power workers. The limited and belated collaboration between the FOUS's and UGT's transport and textile unions in Barcelona was the exception rather than the rule. In addition, what the POUM described as the "implacable campaign" against it by the CNT and FAI meant there was very little possibility that any lasting collaboration with the

113. *La Batalla* 15.6.36., 3.7.36., 10.7.36., 17.7.36.; *Las Noticias* 12.6.36., 17.6.36., 25.6.36., 7.7.36., 8.7.36.; *Justicias Social-October* 3.7.36.; *Camara Oficial de Gerona* 1936, p.138.

114. *La Batalla* 26.6.36.; *Front* 17.7.36.

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anarcho-syndicalists could be built in the short term. Moreover, the FOUS's own offensive strategy and competitiveness in exploiting to the full the new mood of militancy must have contributed to making relations with other unions even more uneasy. Instead, the most the FOUS could hope for was, apart from making new recruits, to win over individual sections of the other unions to its position regarding unity.

Finally, the dissident communists' underestimation of the Catalan CNT's potential support, despite its loss in membership since the beginning of the Republic, led them to have an exaggerated sense of their own importance. Although an important minority of militant workers in the region were grouped in the FOUS, the majority retained their sympathies for the anarcho-syndicalists, above all in Barcelona, and events during the first months of the Civil War would make this graphically clear. Not having a more balanced view of the situation inside the Catalan labour movement could only have harmed the POUM's prospects. Whether or not the dissident communists' confidence in the continued growth of the unions under their control was justified can only be speculated about. The circumstances facing the FOUS changed dramatically when, only ten weeks after its foundation, the Civil War broke out. Consequently the POUM leadership would be forced to rapidly re-think its whole trade union strategy.

### **The Gathering Storm.**

The strike wave of early summer 1936 and the expansion of most workers' organisations took place to a background of rumours of Rightist plots and growing street violence. Attacks on left wing militants were, *La Nueva Era* had commented in April, "not just sporadic acts..." but "obviously planned..." and represented a return to the terrorist tactics of the twenties. The threat of some sort of "fascist" take-over had become very real and this was increasingly reflected in the POUM's press and at its meetings. Economic sabotage and the growing activities of fascist groups and reactionary army officers were all signs that the "bourgeois counter-offensive", as Maurín referred to it in May 1936, had definitely begun. None the less, as the POUM leader had pointed out in *Hacia la Segunda Revolución*, conditions for the victory of "classic fascism", as in Germany or Italy were still not very favourable. Instead, a military

take-over led, according to *La Batalla*, by the likes of Generals Franco, Mola and Goded was a real possibility.<sup>115</sup>

From the POUM's point of view, the Right was aided in its plans by the "ineptness" of the government. In a speech to the Spanish parliament on 16 June, Maurín denounced the Republicans for allowing the "fascist hordes" to use both the press and parliament to spread their ideas, instead of employing "energetic measures" to eradicate the threat posed by the counter-revolution. Yet coercion alone was not enough in the fight against fascism and "political measures" were also essential. This meant, Maurín argued, not only the application of the Popular Front programme, of which "not one hundredth" had been carried out, but a general policy favourable to the working classes, which included the "nationalisation of the land, means of communication and great industries". The authorities, however, dedicated their time to persecuting the most radical sectors of the workers movement rather than combating the activities of fascist and similar groups. After three months of the new government's rule, constitutional guarantees continued to be suspended, the press censored and "the freedom of meeting and association was tolerated but not a right in itself". By "suffocating democracy", the Popular Front government would only prepare the ground for the "triumph of the Right", the dissident communists predicted. The terrible massacre of seventeen peasants by the Civil Guard at Yeste on 29 May confirmed for the POUM both the incapacity of the government to reform the old state machine and the consequences of its repressive policies. Even a subsequent article in *Front* following the massacre which called for the dissolution of the Civil Guard was totally cut out by the government censor.<sup>116</sup>

The crux of the POUM's analysis was, of course, as it had been throughout the Republic, that neither the bourgeoisie nor the petty bourgeoisie were revolutionary classes any longer and only the working class could destroy the basis of fascism. The fact that the Republican government was neither willing nor capable of undermining the power of the landowners, industrial capital, the church and army seemed to confirm the party's line of argument. However, power would not just fall into the working class's hands - it had to be taken. "Revolutionary marxism", *La Batalla* declared at the end of

115. *La Nueva Era* March-April 1936; Maurín, "Revolución democrático-burguesa o..." Op.ct. ; re: fascism see pages 224- 225.; *La Batalla* 17.7.36.

116. Maurín, *Intervenciones...* Op.ct. pp. 14-18; *La Batalla* 29.5.36., 5.6.36., 12.6.36.

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May 1936, could "not accept that the working class will be able to take power in stages... progressively replacing the bourgeoisie...". History showed that this could only happen through the "violent seizure of state power..." which the Spanish working class would do "aside from parliamentary and electoral struggles".<sup>117</sup> Yet a major obstacle to the working class taking such a path was the continued support for the Popular Front of the Socialist and Communist parties. The practical implications of their position had been seen after the Yeste massacre, when the PSOE and PCE parliamentary deputies withdrew a proposal to dissolve the Civil Guard because, in *La Batalla's* words, it was "necessary to avoid a government crisis at any cost". In fact, the Socialist deputies, both left and right, consistently supported Santiago Casares Quiroga, who had taken over from Azaña as Prime Minister, by holding back, at his request, awkward questions about "military conspiracies and the provocation of disorder". As Maurín had argued in the Cortes on 15 April, if the Socialists believed, as their German and Austrian counterparts had, that it was possible to "stabilise the democratic Republic" then they would also end up with a "fascist regime... headed by Gil Robles, Calvo Sotelo or some other aspiring Führer or Duce".<sup>118</sup>

As the military uprising approached, the POUM became more and more exasperated by the antics of the PSOE. While on one hand Prieto's "profoundly menshevik and republican" faction only wanted the workers movement to act as "faithful supporters of the Popular Front", on the other, the Socialist left lacked either a "coherent doctrine", a "concrete platform" or a "firm line", the result of which was a constantly "contradictory" and often "leftist language" combined with a "centrist practice". In fact, despite the bouts of revolutionary rhetoric, Largo Caballero and his supporters in parliament did nothing in practice to hinder the work of the government. "The country was socialist", Maurín had written in May, paraphrasing an observer of Italy between 1919 and 1920, "but socialism did not know what to do with the country". Even more swingeing attacks were made in the dissident communists press on the PCE, whose "opportunist degeneration" was described as equalling that of the PSOE's centre and right wings. According to *La Nueva Era*, the Communist Party's defence of "Republican order" as *Mundo Obrero* had described it, "meant defending at any price a capitalist regime against

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117. *Ibid* 29.5.36.

118. *Ibid* 12.6.36.; Maurín, *Intervenciones...* Op.cit. pp.7-11.; Preston, Op.cit. p.197.

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the proletariat". From here there was only a short step, the POUM's theoretical journal concluded, "to a call for full power" to the bourgeoisie so it could "defend its interests against the revolutionary movement by use of repressive measures". This persistence, declared the POUM leadership on 12 July, in subordinating the working class to the maintenance of the Popular Front at a time of profound social and political instability when the working masses were increasingly radicalised was "treason and a crime", the consequences of which would be dearly paid for. The strategy of the PCE and some sections of the PSOE would, the dissident communists argued, not just lead to the "burning up" of the Republicans but also the workers parties which supported them. Accordingly, those sections of the working class which the Socialists and Communists influenced could become demoralised and this would only help strengthen fascism. Instead, the workers movement had to "take advantage of every minor revolutionary struggle to get closer to the definitive battle."<sup>119</sup> Given the determination of the Right to oppose even the mildest of social reforms and its preparations for a military coup, the only alternative for the Left was mass mobilisation, as it had been in October 1934. Yet neither the Socialists nor the PCE were prepared to take this option until it was forced upon them by the military uprising. Moreover, the only alternative to the Socialist and Communist Parties with a mass following, the CNT, lacked the political coherence to channel its undoubted militancy into a serious challenge to the Right.

Faced with the threat from the authoritarian Right, however, most workers' organisations at least advocated the formation of some form of "workers militias". Exactly how such bodies would be set up was a point of contention. The POUM had first posed the question in an article by one of the party's Madrid leaders, Luis García Palacios, in November 1935. He called for, as part of a general development of independent revolutionary working class organisation, the "re-organisation and re-arming" of the militias that had developed before October 1934. With the steady rise in the number of terrorist attacks and rumours of military conspiracies, the party increasingly stressed the need for such paramilitary bodies. The dissident communists were extremely critical, nevertheless, of what they saw as the "demagogic phrasemongering" of the Socialists and, particularly, of the PCE, who "stirred up feelings

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119. *La Batalla* 12.6.36., 17.7.36.; Maurín, "Revolución democrático-burguesa o..." Op.cit. ; *La Nueva Era* July 1936.



in meetings with easy words... put on uniforms (and organised) military parades..." but did not properly structure these bodies on an offensive and defensive basis. The same parties repeatedly urged their followers not to respond to "fascist provocations" and called on the government to disarm and deal with reactionary groups. "For the POUM, action against the extreme right had to be carried out by the workers organisations themselves, because the government obviously could not be relied upon to do it." More specifically, the dissident communists berated the PCE for having banners at its meetings "referring to non-existent workers and peasants militias" while denouncing in its press the actual formation of such militias as a "Trotskyist provocation".<sup>120</sup>

The POUM itself had few resources to set up a serious militia structure, although the JCI continued to organise, as it had in 1934, its own para-military style parades. When the opportunity arose for direct action against fascist and other right wing groups, as increasingly was the case, above all in Madrid, the dissident communists were quick to get involved. Thus, when the fascist Falange Española briefly took over a radio station in Valencia on 11 July, the local POUM joined with anarchist and syndicalist militants in leading a spontaneous demonstration which, despite the opposition of the Popular Front parties, attacked the offices of the rightist Derecha Regional, the newspaper *Diario de Valencia* and the employers' association.<sup>121</sup>

Notwithstanding the POUM's own, albeit limited, paramilitary activities, the dissident communists did not believe the creation of "militias" could be based on any one party alone or left to the youth. "The arming of the proletariat", which the creation of such militias would effectively entail, had to involve not just the organized labour movement, but all workers, whether they were affiliated or not. The ideal mechanism for achieving this involvement, the POUM leaders argued, was the Workers Alliance. Throughout the first half of 1935, the dissident communists had insisted that the Alliances, despite temporary setbacks, would continue to prosper. Hence, when the idea of the "Popular Front" had first been put forward, they had predicted that it was doomed to failure. However, by early 1936, it was quite obvious the reverse had happened and Nin had been forced to admit in *La Batalla* that the Alliances had been

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120. *La Batalla* 8.11.35., 10.4.36., 17.7.36.

121. *Ibid.*

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reduced to a "vegetative existence". In an attempt to overcome this situation, the POUM Executive Committee had written, in March 1936, to those organisations which had made up the Catalan Alliance proposing its re-organisation. Essentially, this document repeated the POUM's usual arguments about the Alliances' role in the revolutionary process, their existence as "super-organisations" rather than just a tendency in the workers movement, the need for a national body and some detailed structural proposals. In addition, the dissident communists spoke, as they occasionally had during 1935, of the need to construct workplace committees elected by all the workers regardless of their affiliation. Maurín had also recently suggested the creation of such committees as a further attempt to transform the Alliances into soviet-style organisations.

Nevertheless, not only was the establishment of Spanish "soviets" still a long way from fulfilment, but this latest initiative by the dissident communists to resurrect the Workers Alliance in Catalonia, even in its previous form, also came to nothing. Its failure was mainly due to the deterioration of the POUM's relations with the other marxist groups because of their moves towards political unity and their support for the Popular Front. Nor could the POUM expect much support from the Treintistas, most of whose unions were preparing to rejoin the CNT. There were some limited signs, however, that at a local level the idea of the Workers Alliance was still popular. On 1 May there were a number of joint meetings throughout Catalonia involving different workers groups and, at least in Palafrugell and Figueres, even including the anarchists. In Barcelona, the UGT Bank Workers Union took part in a rally with the FUTM and other POUM-led trade unions.<sup>122</sup> Yet without the full support of the rest of the working class movement, the Workers Alliances could never be built. Socialists, "official" Communists and anarcho-syndicalists alike showed little interest, in practice, albeit for different reasons, in even re-organising those Alliances which had been established in 1934, let alone completely new ones.

The Socialists' ambiguous, if not hostile, attitude towards the Alliances continued into 1936, although some local sections of the PSOE and UGT still expressed support

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122. *La Batalla* 23.8.35., 8.5.36.; Nin "Las Alianzas Revolucionarias" *ibid* 5.6.36.; "Alianza Obrera. Proyecto de reorganización que presenta el Comité Ejecutivo del POUM" *ibid* 27.3.36.; Maurín, "La Alianza Obrera..." *Op.cit.*

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for them. Thus, the Socialist Party leadership had found it necessary to issue a circular at the end of 1935 instructing its members to remain inside the Alliances "where they existed" until the question was finally resolved at the PSOE's next National Congress. Largo Caballero seemed to provide the dissident communists with some hope when, in April 1936, he had spoken in favour of organising the Alliances on a "provincial, regional and national level". A few weeks later, however, the UGT leader again referred to the PSOE rather than the Alliance as exercising the dictatorship of the proletariat. If the Alliances existed at all, he declared, they would only act as auxiliaries to the party.<sup>123</sup> Largo Caballero's continued lack of clarity over the question of workers' unity only fuelled the POUM's growing impatience with the left Socialist leader's political confusion. The initiative to re-build the Alliances would have to come from elsewhere.

While the Socialists continued effectively to oppose the re-organisation of the Workers Alliances, the PCE, in theory at least, had remained very much in favour. In reality, however, the Stalinists did little to encourage the Alliances, favouring instead the creation of "Popular Front Committees". This was consistent with the PCE's political orientation since 1935, so calls by official Communists for the "re-enforcing of the Workers and Peasants Alliances" as future "soviets" parallel to the Popular Front were understandably dismissed by the POUM as "pure demagoguery".<sup>124</sup>

If the dissident communists were frustrated with their marxist rivals' reticence by early 1936 to involve themselves effectively in the Workers Alliances, the CNT in contrast, seemed increasingly to favour some sort of unity in action. Since October 1934, the anarcho-syndicalists had mellowed in their attitude towards the rest of the working class movement, even to the extent of providing crucial votes for the Popular Front in the elections. The proposal by the Confederation's Congress in Saragossa, in May 1936, for a "Revolutionary Alliance" with the UGT appeared to mark an even more important step towards workers unity. This proposal was enthusiastically welcomed by the POUM, which severely criticised the Socialists' lack of foresight in not taking up the anarcho-syndicalists' offer of unity. It was "obvious that despite its limited nature", Nin wrote in May 1936, that if the Revolutionary Alliance became a reality it would be "a

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123. *La Batalla* 3.1.36., 15.5.36., 22.5.36., 5.6.36., 12.6.36.; *Claridad* 11.5.36.

124. *La Batalla* 17.7.36.

step forward that would lead to a vast Workers Alliance being formed of all proletarian organisations...". Some caution, however, was necessary. Nin warned that the CNT's desire to reduce this Alliance to just itself and the UGT was a "naïve subterfuge" whereby the anarcho-syndicalists thought they could avoid the problem of unity with political parties. Moreover, it was not true as the Confederation claimed, that it and the UGT "controlled the totality of the workers movements in Spain", because many thousands of workers were organised outside these unions. Yet the decision by the CNT to accept, in principle, unity in action with the UGT meant, the POUM Central Committee declared on 12 July, that there still existed an "extra-ordinarily favourable atmosphere for the Workers Alliances to become a reality".<sup>125</sup> None the less, the dissident communists' experience during the recent strikes in Catalonia contrasted with their optimism about the possibilities of strengthening working class unity. On a practical level, the workers' movement was divided as ever. If there was an exception to this division, it was reflected in a limited, but growing, co-operation between the Catalan CNT and the Socialists. Anarcho-syndicalist antagonism towards the dissident communists in Catalonia was as strong as always.

Since April 1936, the POUM had repeatedly called for the establishment of a government of all those parties that supported the Popular Front. The formation of such a government was seen as the best way to undermine the "illusions" that many workers had in the Popular Front strategy. By late June, the level of agitation in the country had reached such a fever pitch that the dissident communists were convinced that these "illusions" were beginning to be shattered. Nowhere was this better symbolised than in the Madrid construction workers' strike, which involved both anarchist and Socialist workers in a bitter and increasingly revolutionary battle with employers and government alike. In addition, among others, the city's central heating and lift engineers, clothing, sanitation and wood workers had also downed tools. By mid-June over 110,000 workers were involved in these disputes. In contrast to the Socialists and Communists, who were desperately trying to curb working class militancy in the Spanish capital, the POUM declared that it was necessary to win these strikes at any cost. "Only idiots and traitors could speak of helping the government" at this time.

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125. Nin, "Importancia del Congreso" Op.cit. and "Las Alianzas Revolucionarias" Op.cit. ; *La Batalla* 17.7.36.

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Instead, the dissident communist organisation in Madrid called for all these conflicts to be placed under the leadership of one united strike committee which could, in turn, prepare for a general strike of all the city's workers.<sup>126</sup>

Not only in Madrid, but throughout the country the Popular Front appeared to be losing control of the masses. On 3 July, *La Batalla* described the government as helpless in the face of social unrest, a "formidable economic crisis" and "attacks at all levels by reactionary forces". "A great gulf had opened up between the government, and the militant will of the popular masses" declared the editorial of *La Nueva Era*. The "few and timid" reforms of the government, it claimed, were the result of pressure brought to bear by the direct action of the proletariat, so in these circumstances to support the Popular Front was to put "a brake on the mass movement" and "play the game of the reactionary Right whose victory would only be possible (if)... the working class took a passive attitude". Therefore, the editorial insisted, mass action "should not only continue but should be broadened and intensified". For this action to be effective, the workers had to "break their connections with the bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties" and adopt, instead, an independent and "intransigent revolutionary class position".

By mid-July, rumours of a Rightist coup had reached a new pitch, the rightist leader, Calvo Sotelo had been assassinated in retaliation for the murder of a left wing Republican Assault Guard officer, and the Madrid construction workers' strike had radicalised further, despite all attempts by the Socialists and Communists to dampen it down. The POUM described the situation as reaching a new and decisive turning point. On the one hand, the working masses were now acting on their own, as the strike movement was "broader and deeper every day", while on the other, the far Right was "preparing to win back lost ground" through a military coup. More than ever, the POUM insisted, the situation was "polarising towards social revolution or fascism". The only solution lay in "implacably destroying all traces of fascism". Failure to do so, warned *La Batalla*, would lead to a terrible defeat for the masses. "The workers movement must make an internal truce", the party concluded, "unite in action... rapidly form a National Workers Alliance... then by jointly moving forward" its power would be

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126. El Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista, "A todos los huelguistas madrileños. Al proletariado en general" n.d. (Madrid) (CEHI).

irresistible and it could "impose those progressive solutions that (would) lead to its final victory".<sup>127</sup> The term "progressive solutions" could only have been a way of avoiding the censor and obviously meant the seizure of state power. Nevertheless, even at this stage and in a situation of mass radicalisation, the POUM still felt it necessary to call for an "authentic Popular Front government". This call reflected not only the persistence of support for the Popular Front among important sectors of the working classes, but also the weakness of the dissident communists themselves. Although their analysis of objective circumstances and the options open to the workers movement may have been quite accurate, they had little possibility of influencing the course of events on their own.

The military uprising was now expected at any moment and, at the POUM Executive Committee's meeting on 15 July, it was decided to mobilise the party in readiness. Most militants now slept at party headquarters and groups were sent to watch army barracks where, as Companys had confirmed in an interview with Maurín and Nin, it was suspected that preparations for a coup were being made. Throughout Catalonia, the party's Local Committees were advised to try and establish relations with the CNT and other organisations with the hope of formalising some form of co-operation. Nevertheless, there were still some doubts as to when the army would make its move. Thus Maurín, after being told by a Republican deputy in Madrid that nothing would happen in the next few days, made his fateful decision to leave on 16 July for Galicia to participate in the POUM's Regional Plenum and a series of meetings which were scheduled for the following days. Meanwhile, the POUM, as in October 1934, had organised in Barcelona a "Military Committee" headed by Rovira. The thirty or so Winchester rifles, hidden after the October uprising, were now taken from their hiding place. On the night of 18 July party militants, like those of other workers' organisations, waited tensely for confirmation of reports of a military rebellion in North Africa. According to Gorkín, the only leaflet circulating in Barcelona that night warning of the imminence of a *coup d'état* was one signed by the POUM Executive Committee. At the same time, party delegations visited other workers organisations in a last-minute, but unsuccessful, attempt to persuade them to form a "Revolutionary Workers Front" to lead the struggle

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127. *La Batalla* 3.7.36., 17.7.36.; *La Nueva Era* July 1936.

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against fascism. Similarly, visits to the Generalitat and Police headquarters to ask for arms brought only evasive replies or outright refusals.<sup>128</sup>

Within the next few hours, the problem of arming and uniting the working class movement would be dramatically posed on the streets of Barcelona and thousands of other cities, towns and villages throughout the peninsula. A new and terrible stage of the Spanish revolution was about to begin.

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128. Alba, *Dos revolucionarios...* Op.cit. p.241.; Jeanne Maurín, *Cómo se salvó Joaquín Maurín* (Madrid 1980) pp.47-48; Gorkín, "El error fundamental", POUM, *L'experience Espagnole* (Paris 1939) p.4.; Rosa-Roc, Op.cit. pp.135-142.

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## 7. SOME CONCLUSIONS

Obviously the POUM, and before it the BOC was never able to fulfil the aim it had set itself. Its ambition to become the political vanguard of first the Catalan and then the peninsula's working masses was cut short by the Civil War. Whether or not the POUM could have consolidated its organisation remains a purely hypothetical question. Certainly, as its history shows, there were a number of serious obstacles to this. The party's role in the workers movement can be evaluated at several levels - the actual nature of its organisation, its relationship to, and analysis of, the rest of the Left, and its contribution, both in terms of theory and action, to the development of revolutionary politics during the Second Republic.

Despite all its limitations, the BOC-POUM did create an organisation which differed from other sectors of the workers movement in a number of important ways, other than in its political line. The BOC's internal structure was, in comparison to the official Communist parties at this time, relatively open and democratic. Like most dissident communist groups internationally, its insistence on the need to maintain party democracy was seen as a defence of the "true" essence of Leninist democratic-centralism. The BOC's and POUM's complete lack of material resources undoubtedly obstructed the emergence of any bureaucratic tendencies. Without any financial aid from outside, the party was completely dependent on the contributions of its own militants. Apart from membership dues - the highest of any Spanish workers' organisation at the time - extra funds were specially raised for electoral campaigns and to sustain *La Batalla*. According to Victor Alba, the members' individual contributions, whether dues or donations, amounted to around twelve pesetas a month from a normal salary of some two hundred pesetas. In contrast, the maximum monthly dues paid by PCE members in 1935, not taking into account any extra payments, was only two pesetas. Getting payments in, however, was another matter. By the middle of 1934, only 1,260 of the BOC's 4,700 members in Catalonia had fully paid their dues. Neither the POUM nor the BOC had any paid full-time staff, other than Maurín who, apart from being General Secretary, edited *La Batalla* and ran the party's shabby central office in Barcelona. Any other help with administrative or organisational work was voluntary, carried out in



members' spare time or by unemployed or student members. Lack of finance and the problems it created was a recurring theme in the party's organisational reports.<sup>1</sup>

What the POUM and BOC lacked in material means was made up for by the membership's enthusiasm. Identification with the party was strong among most militants and they dedicated much of their spare time to party activities. This contrasted with the more distant relationship between the majority of workers and their trade unions or the passivity which characterised most of the membership of the Socialist organisations. The relative smallness of the BOC, its geographical concentration, an important level of internal party life and its educational, cultural and sporting activities all helped to strengthen this identification. Consequently, there was a great tendency for party members to mix socially as well as politically, and even for entire families to be affiliated. The intensity of party activity was reflected in the 1933 "Organisational Report" which tried, although without much success, to differentiate again between BOC and FCI militants. Each Federation member was supposed to dedicate one day a week to his or her FCI cell, one day to the BOC cell under his (or occasionally her) control, one day to his OSR cell, one day for a party workplace meeting, one day to study under the guidance of one of the party's Commissions and one day for a meeting of BOC cell secretaries. "This way" the report concluded, "Sundays were left free for going to public meetings or for extraordinary assemblies". This schedule meant that each FCI militant "should dedicate at least an hour a day to party work". Such a level of activity was probably rarely achieved by FCI members, let alone BOC affiliates, while the formal difference between the two organisations still existed, but it helps illustrate what was, at least theoretically, expected.<sup>2</sup>

Manual workers, lowly paid clerks, shop assistants and peasants made up the vast majority of the BOC's and POUM's membership. Most were male, and nearly all were under thirty years old. The party's youthful base was fairly typical among revolutionary organisations - the Bolsheviks for instance had been particularly noted for this. The BOC's social composition was also reflected in its leadership. Seventy militants are known to have served on the Bloc's Central Committee from March 1932 through to

1. Alba, *El marxismo...* Op. cit. pp.73-4.; POUM, *A propòsit...* Op. cit. pp.11-12.; Cruz, Op. cit. p.34.; see Appendix Two.

2. Alba, *El marxismo...* Op. cit. pp.74-5.; *La Batalla* 23.3.33.

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September 1935 and out of the sixty-four whose occupation can be identified, twenty-nine were manual workers and twenty-four from the white collar and service sectors. Although the party had few intellectuals or professionals these were more prominent on the Executive Committee during this same period - six of the seventeen militants who were on this body can be classified in this way. Equally relevant are the BOC's electoral lists. Of the fifty different members who were presented at the General Elections of 1931 and 1933 and the Catalan poll of 1932, twenty-eight were manual workers.<sup>3</sup>

Of more interest is an examination of the relationship between the party's social make-up and its mass base. Although in the principal industrial centres - Barcelona and its surrounding area - many BOC members were manual workers, the dissident communists never managed really to broaden their influence among this sector. Instead, it was the anarcho-syndicalists, whether the FAI, Treintistas or any other tendency, that kept the allegiance of the majority of the most militant elements of the organised industrial working class. The same reasons that explain anarchist influence among these workers can be helpful in explaining the BOC's and POUM's, or for that matter any marxist grouping's, weakness. There were basically two types of manual workers influenced by the party - those, often isolated militants, in the main industrial concentrations and those from the smaller provincial towns or cities.

It is quite clear from examining the party's trade union base that, in general, it was the more Catalan sections of the working class that were attracted to its politics. These workers tended to be more stable in terms of job security, Catalan-speaking and often based outside of Barcelona. It was from among such workers, as has been seen, that the Treintistas won much support; though such generalisations have their limitations because many workers who could have fitted this description remained loyal to an anarchist-led CNT in Barcelona.

There was undoubtedly a certain arbitrariness as to which particular faction dominated the trade union movement. The influence of anarchists in the Catalan

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3. *ibid.* 25.6.31., 1.9.32., 3.11.32., 22.6.33., 29.6.33., 16.11.33., 20.4.34., 1.5.34.; individual occupations have been ascertained from the BOC press in general during this period and from oral testimonies.

capital and Treintistas in many important provincial centres did not mean that their supporters were clearly divided between, for example, radicals and moderates or Catalans and immigrants. Although such differences existed on a very general level, they only partly reflect the divisions in the CNT. The ideological orientation of local trade union leaders and cadres also helped determine which anarcho-syndicalist tendency dominated in particular industries or towns. Moreover, the differences between the sociological composition of those provincial unions controlled either by the Treintistas or the BOC was even less definable. The clearest example of this is the fact that the textile workers in Sabadell tended to be organised in the Treintista Opposition Union while in neighbouring Terrassa many were in the FOUS. Likewise, the rebel Regional Power Workers Union's sections were controlled by whatever faction, Treintista or dissident communist, that was strongest in any given locality. By often being the first people to organise most of the local trade unions, as was the case in Lérida and much of Gerona, meant that the dissident communists soon led what was a fairly small movement. The predominance of both the Treintistas and the BOC-POUM in the provinces leads to the conclusion that those workers under their respective influence shared some common ground, not least in their rejection of anarchist methods. It also seems probable, given their authority in Gerona, Lérida and Tarragona, that the BOC and POUM attracted those sectors of the workers movement identified most strongly with the cause of Catalan national liberation. Mass support for nationalism in these, largely, rural areas was even more widespread than in and around Barcelona, where the influx of immigrant workers had created a more heterogeneous political atmosphere. The influence of rural Catalonia obviously would have permeated the small industrial centres in the *comarques*. Furthermore, many workers in such places came from the surrounding countryside and, as Maurín observed in 1931,<sup>4</sup> the mentalities of the Barcelona proletariat and the Catalan peasantry were quite distinct.

The nature of party cadres, as opposed to rank and file members, also throws light on the BOC and POUM's base. Among the leadership there appear to have been more skilled or semi-skilled workers - printers, railway and metal workers and even artisans - than unskilled. Workers from a more skilled background had often played an important

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4. Maurín, *La revolución española* Op. cit. pp.152-153., and see page 105

role in marxist organisations elsewhere in Europe. In contrast, the anarchists in Barcelona, though including many skilled workers in their ranks, tended to win much of their mass support from amongst the unskilled, particularly in the building industry. The Trotskyist Molins i Fàbrega, writing in 1931, claimed that the BOC related to a "working class elite", to that "layer... that thinks of itself to be situated above the proletariat in general and closer to the petty bourgeoisie".<sup>5</sup> This judgement is similar to that made by the PCE about the dissident communist PCC in 1930 and reflects, in a crude fashion, the nature of at least the BOC's original base in Barcelona. It is also worth noting that there was no strict correlation between the party's trade union base and its political base. With the exception of the province of Lérida, the BOC certainly never received the electoral support of many of the trade unionists who were nominally under its leadership locally. In part this can be explained, as the dissident communists themselves often claimed, by their supporters voting for the ERC in order to prevent a right-wing victory or by the younger militants being unable to vote. Workers in BOC or POUM-led unions who opted to vote for the Esquerra, were probably no different in this sense to many others, affiliated to the CNT, Treintista or Socialist unions who did the same. Mass electoral support for the left nationalists was obviously quite generalised in Catalonia during the Republic.

Compared with their influence among the industrial proletariat, the BOC and POUM had a more solid political base in some sectors of the peasantry and what can be loosely termed "white-collar" workers. The tendency for the latter's most militant components to turn towards marxism rather than anarchism was quite marked and the USC and PCP also had a base among these workers. As with the provincial workers and peasants, the mass of badly-paid office, shop and service workers tended to be distinguished from Barcelona's industrial proletariat by their distinct social and political outlook. While the peasantry provided the rural base for Catalan nationalism these white collar workers were an important part of its urban support. The fact that the anarcho-syndicalists sometimes dismissed both peasants and groups such as the *mercantil* workers as not being "real" proletarians also helped the Socialist and Communist groups to influence the more radical elements in these sectors. The

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5. N. Molins i Fàbrega, "La posición política y las fuerzas del Bloque Obrero y Campesino", *Comunismo* December 1931.

dissident communists, being the most dynamic of the Catalan marxist factions, managed to win to their ranks, even before the Republic, many of the most able white collar militants. Thus, quite a few leading members of the BOC originated from this sector.

Given the great number of party nuclei in rural districts, peasants clearly made up an important part of the BOC's and POUM's membership. There are several reasons for this. Again, being the first group to organise in any area undoubtedly influenced the party's ability to dominate the leadership of the local peasant movement, even to the extent that the dividing line between party and union was occasionally unclear. Politically, the BOC could appeal to certain sectors of the rural masses on the basis of the party's defence of national rights. The failure of the ERC, for instance in Lérida, to take up seriously the peasants' grievances also helped the dissident communists win support in some parts of the countryside. The relative pragmatism of the BOC's agrarian programme also allowed it to relate directly to the problems of many Catalan peasants. Likewise, the initial conception of a "Workers and Peasants Bloc", through which peasant sympathisers of the communist and proletarian FCI could be recruited aided in this process. Although in the urban areas the difference between the Bloc and Federation soon broke down, it seems that in many villages the scattered and often tiny BOC groups remained fairly loosely organised. In Gerona, for example, where there were a great number of such groups and isolated members, a committee would usually be set up between various villages which would meet with a member of the Comarcal Committee every three or four weeks for "general discussions".<sup>6</sup> Party work was hindered in those areas where only small nuclei existed not just because of the dissident communists' weakness but also due to the influence of the Right and local landowners. These problems were less common in *comarques* and villages where the BOC and POUM had a strong base, but this was only the case in the minority of places where they claimed to have members. Furthermore, despite the numerical importance of its peasant support, there were very few party leaders from this background. Between 1932 and 1935 only two peasants are known to have been on the Central Committee and only four were presented as candidates in the Catalan and national elections.

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6. Interview with M. Gayolà, 20.6.84.

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The BOC-POUM's lack of a base in the major industrial centres was crucial to its inability to build a mass communist party in Catalonia during these years. Instead, those sectors under its leadership, above all in the *comarques*, did not have the social and political weight needed really to influence the outcome of the class struggle. BOC-led peasant movements in Gerona (1932) and Lérida (1933) clearly illustrated these limitations. On both occasions, the Generalitat managed to defuse the situation with promises of reform. The predominance of small property owners and a variety of forms of tenant farming limited the revolutionary potential of the Catalan peasantry as a class. Any revolutionary marxist party in Spain had to win support from the peninsula's rural masses. Yet it was the day-labourers and poor peasants of the south, rather than the Catalan peasantry, that were more likely to provide the backbone for a revolutionary movement in the Spanish countryside. In Catalonia, as elsewhere, the main demand was for land. The BOC might have convinced many peasants that the problem could be solved only by the installation of a workers' and peasants government, but this meant gaining the support of the urban masses. Moreover, the party, with a few local exceptions, failed to win the leadership of the *rabassaires*, who at an economic level were the most important section of the Catalan peasantry.

Finally, the events of October 1934 showed both the strength and weakness of the BOC. Outside of Barcelona, the success of the rebellion was largely due to the party's influence. In the Catalan capital itself, however, because of the hostility of the CNT, the movement received at best only passive support from the majority of organised workers. Without the latter's active involvement the Workers Alliance and the BOC were forced to depend on the Generalitat and hence the uprising was defeated.

Winning mass support was therefore the dissident communists' over-riding problem, despite minor successes in this respect. Theoretical considerations apart, circumstances meant that this task had to begin in Catalonia and this implied breaking the hold of petty bourgeois nationalism and anarcho-syndicalism over the bulk of the Catalan masses. Subsequently, the BOC's and POUM's analyses and relationship with these two tendencies was crucial to the party's future. One obstacle to the party's growth was a tendency, publicly at least, to overestimate its own strength and

**correspondingly under-estimate its rivals' importance. This proved a mistake, and not just in relation to the Catalan nationalists and the anarchists. Even the other marxist groups which, although obviously much weaker than the BOC and POUM, had a political potential, especially in Barcelona, that perhaps should not have been so readily dismissed. Nevertheless, the POUM leaders' reflections on the trajectory of the ERC and, in particular, on the origins and nature of anarcho-syndicalism were often very apposite. However, the short-term conclusions they drew from this analysis were sometimes misleading.**

For instance, following both the elections of November 1932 and November 1933, as well as after October 1934, the BOC confidently predicted the imminent demise of the ERC. Instead, despite the various internal crises the left nationalists suffered, their political support remained fairly solid, as was clear by early 1936. However, by defending Catalan national rights and a flexible, but militant, agrarian programme, the BOC and POUM were able at least to begin to undermine the ERC's support in some areas. Furthermore, this process was aided by the left nationalists' tendency to veer often to the left or right depending on local circumstances. This was reflected most clearly in the Gerona and Lérida countryside, but also in some urban areas where there was often a dichotomy between some sectors of the masses' support for the ERC at elections and their apparent preparedness to accept revolutionary leadership in certain situations. The most obvious example of this was during October 1934. In the same way as there was a dual and often contradictory relationship between the CNT's base and the ERC in Barcelona, there was a similar tension between the BOC and the Esquerra in the *comarques*.

This underestimation of its rivals was even more marked with regard to the anarcho-syndicalists. As early as 1931, when in fact the Catalan CNT was at its strongest, the BOC began to boast of how it was going to win the Confederation to communism. Then, after their expulsion from the unions and the growing internal crisis, which led to a steady decline in the CNT's fortunes, the dissident communists repeatedly announced in their press that the anarcho-syndicalists would soon cease to be the dominant force in the Catalan labour movement. There appeared little

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appreciation in the party's propaganda of the reasons for the appeal of anarchism. After all, its basic ideas and practice found a mass audience among important sections of the Catalan labour milieu for a number of historical and social reasons. The subsequent resurgence of the CNT during the first months of the Civil War can only be understood by taking these reasons into account. In contrast, Maurín and other POUM leaders had themselves, particularly in the late twenties, analysed in some depth the causes of anarchist strength. The importance of the anarchists is also clear in *Hacia la Segunda Revolución*, where Maurín describes the masses that had followed them during 1930 to 1932 as "the prime material for a true Bolshevik party".<sup>7</sup> None the less, this appreciation of the roots of Catalan anarchism is lacking in much of the BOC and POUM's daily politics. Instead, because of the CNT's apparent demoralisation and loss of members on the one hand and the party's growth, specially in trade union terms, on the other, the dissident communists were confident that they provided the marxist alternative which could pull the workers away from the anarchists' grasp.

The BOC's increasingly hostile attitude towards the anarcho-syndicalists, from 1932 onwards, had a lot to do with its members' day-to-day experiences of sectarianism and even violence. However, this hostility, combined with assurances that the FAI and other anarchists were "finished" as a force in Catalonia, harmed the BOC's chances of building a mass party. Nor could the dissident communists' attempts to form united fronts or trade unions that often included the more moderate sectors of the Catalan workers' movement, not to mention their participation in the Jurados Mixtos, have helped relations with the CNT. Similarly, the POUM's trade union orientation and the creation of the FOUS must have appeared to many working class activists as an attempt to bring together all those factions which were united, above all, by their opposition to the anarchists. Moreover, by 1936, if not earlier, the POUM seems to have given up the idea of winning over the base of the CNT in the short term and it hoped to by-pass this problem by building the party in the rest of Spain. This led to perhaps a disproportionate emphasis on the left Socialists and little time dedicated to the problem of the anarcho-syndicalists.

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7. Maurín, *Revolución y contrarrevolución...* Op. cit. pp. 105.,133.



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The outbreak of the Civil War undoubtedly changed the whole political context in which the POUM had hoped to grow. This was particularly true outside Catalonia, where the various party nuclei had little time to consolidate themselves and justify the national leadership's expectations. The question of creating a state-wide party had been clearly posed by Maurín since 1932. The events of October 1934 reinforced, in his eyes, the urgency of this task. Yet, while in Catalonia, and to a lesser extent the Levante, the POUM could claim to have a solid base, despite having, as yet, failed to win really mass support, elsewhere the party never got beyond amounting to a few scattered groups. The hopes placed in winning over sections of the left Socialists were never realised because the tendencies which were already militating against such a development, above all the growing influence of Stalinism, were greatly reinforced during the war. Opposition to the pro-PCE leadership of the JSU was also cut short because of the changes in the political situation after July 1936. In retrospect, the best moment to have created an independent communist party throughout the peninsula was in 1930-31, when the PCE was on the point of total collapse and the various dissident factions outnumbered those still loyal to the party leadership. However, unity was not possible, at least until the oppositionists had clarified their attitude towards the CI. Yet by then the PCE had overcome its internal crisis and provided, once again, a pole of attraction for many who considered themselves communists.

Another problem the BOC and POUM faced was the loss over these few years of a series of militants, who at various times had played an important role in the development of Catalan dissident communism. Of the original FCC-B Regional Committee, expelled by the PCE in July 1930, only Maurín is known to have still been in the party by 1936. Similarly, of the seventeen members who made up the BOC's electoral lists in June 1931, eleven had definitely left the organisation five years later. The loss of one-time leaders of the FCC-B and BOC, the most important being Arlandis, Colomer and Miravittles, must have also harmed the party's development. Added to this was the general lack of intellectuals and the completely dominant role played by Maurín in this sphere. At one level, given his capabilities as a revolutionary leader, this dominance strengthened the party's political coherence, but relying more or less solely on one theoretician alone had its pitfalls. The incorporation of the ICE began to help to change

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this situation but, as the loss of Maurín in the war would show, his role in the party was still crucial.

The BOC and POUM did create what was probably the most important independent communist grouping of the many that began to proliferate internationally in the nineteen-thirties. Although small and never growing as its leaders hoped, the POUM by 1936 had an important base in the most industrialised part of the Spain. Furthermore, it grouped in its ranks, at one time or another, many of the founder members of Spanish communism. The POUM's "importance" was soon to cost the party dearly, as it became the prime target of its powerful Stalinist detractors. Accused of "Trotskyism" and therefore by association, according to CI propaganda, of being "agents of fascism", the party would find itself suppressed not by the bourgeois counter-revolution but at the hands of its Communist rivals. The "Trotskyist" tag has stuck for some historians but this is no more correct an assessment than that of "right communists" was for the BOC. From a strictly analytical point of view, these labels cannot apply, although it is quite clear that the POUM shared many of Trotsky's positions. The BOC, after 1932-1933, and the POUM, even more so, identified themselves quite explicitly with the revolutionary epoch of Russian Bolshevism, the essence of which was encapsulated in the policies of the first four Congresses of the Communist International. In turn, they were equally explicit in their rejection of subsequent developments in CI policy as a betrayal of this earlier period. This posture brought the POUM much closer to Trotskyism than any other dissident current in international communism at the time, but its strategical and tactical differences with the former Bolshevik leader put it clearly apart from his movement.

Attempts by historians or former party members to portray the POUM as somehow "original", a specifically Catalan phenomenon, the product of Maurín's genius or perhaps not even really "communists" at all, are equally spurious.<sup>8</sup> Certainly at its foundation the BOC defended a number of positions that can be described as "original". Above all, the very conception of the BOC itself as breaking with "traditional Bolshevik" methods of organisation. Even so, the attempt to form a looser peripheral organisation, the Bloc, separate from a purer communist vanguard, the FCI, never really prospered.

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8. Monreal, Op. cit. p.52.; Cruz, Op. cit. p.268.; Morrow, Op. cit. p.43.; Pané and Coll, Op. cit. p.41.

Increasingly from 1932-33 onwards, the two organisations were functioning as one, and it was the BOC, not the FCI, that united with the ICE to form the POUM in 1935. Furthermore, these earlier criticisms by Maurín that Bolshevik-style organisation was not suited to Spanish conditions are not repeated after 1932 and the POUM's "Leninist orthodoxy" became very apparent. Other "original" lines of thought can be found in the BOC's early position on the national question and revolutionary power. Again Maurín's unorthodox references during 1931-32 for the need to instigate national liberation movements in diverse areas of the peninsula, other than the "historic nationalities", soon disappear. Equally unorthodox demands by the Bloc for the CNT to "take power" were never repeated after the debacle of the January 1932 insurrection. In fact, once the BOC leadership had begun to clarify publicly during late 1932 its attitude towards the CI so its politics increasingly took on what has correctly been described as an "orthodox dissidence".<sup>9</sup> The Catalan communists' originality had its roots in their distinct development inside the region's labour movement and their subsequent unease at the dictates of the Madrid-based PCE leadership. These factors created the basis for a more independent political line and the attempt to apply their own version of communist orthodoxy to Spanish conditions. It was this which led them not only to break with the official communist movement, but also to reject much of the tactical orientation of Trotskyism.

What Maurín and his co-thinkers did accomplish was the provision of a basic marxist framework for understanding Spanish society in the 1930s. No other workers' organisation in the peninsula could match even this modest achievement and the fusion of the BOC with the ICE reinforced its theoretical capacities still further. Maurín's analysis of Spain's historical development and the consequent strengths and weaknesses of the contending class forces set his grouping clearly apart from the ideological poverty of the PCE. From 1929 onwards, this analysis bore directly on the political activity of, first the FCC-B, then the BOC and finally the POUM. His insistence on the political weakness of the middle-classes seemed to be borne out in practice by the behaviour of Republican governments both between 1931 and 1933 and in 1936 when faced with the need to implement fundamental social and political reforms (the "democratic

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9. Vinyes, *Op. cit.* p.235.

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revolution"). In addition, the petty bourgeois parties' pathetic performance in the November 1933 elections and their ineptitude in dealing with the threat of a military rebellion in the first half of 1936 further vindicated the dissident communist leader's position. Time and again the workers' and peasants' readiness to enter into struggles that often had revolutionary overtones confirmed for Maurín and his collaborators that only these masses were capable of dragging Spain out of its lethargy and backwardness. As in Russia, this popular revolution, they believed, would give way to the implantation of socialism. The danger of fascism and the possibility of a Spanish military equivalent was also a constant feature of the party's propaganda from 1932-1933 onwards. The opportune nature of these warnings does not, in retrospect, have to be spelt out. Finally, the BOC's and POUM's analysis of its rivals, be they anarchists, Socialists or Stalinists, despite some errors in its practical application, was generally coherent. The dissident communists' achievements in this field have to be placed in a context of the great theoretical poverty that characterised the rest of the Spanish workers movement at this time.

For the "socialist-democratic" revolution to be carried through, Maurín, the BOC and the POUM consistently argued, it was necessary for three great forces to combine in one revolutionary movement - the proletariat, the peasantry and the struggle for national liberation. Formally, communists had always differed from socialists and anarchists in defending this line of argument, but the BOC and POUM went much further than the PCE, especially before 1934, in trying to develop a political practice in Catalonia that could really win over the agrarian and national movements to the side of the proletariat. Their "failure" to build what Maurín described as this "triple front" does not diminish the relative clarity of his party's political line in comparison with other aspiring revolutionary organisations.

The dissident communists' analysis was combined with a strategy aimed at actually building an organisation capable of leading the revolution. Thus, they advocated a policy of workers unity at all levels to overcome the chronic divisions in the Spanish, let alone Catalan, working class movement. The BOC's defence of the united front tactic had important repercussions both for the party's consolidation and for the Catalan labour

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movement as a whole. Some form of trade union unity had been defended by the FCC-B since the 1920s and this finally bore fruit in 1933. The united front proved an important innovation, not only in terms of a coalescence of new forms of trade union militancy but also in its political outcome. The Workers Alliance was, at a practical level, to be the BOC's most important initiative in terms of working class politics in the peninsula. Parallel to this were less successful attempts to overcome the lack of the mass revolutionary party needed to pull the workers away from the influences of reformist socialism and anarcho-syndicalism by uniting at least some of the various marxist factions. The creation of the POUM was to be a step in this direction, but circumstances prevented this from developing further.

In assessing the role of the Catalan dissident communist organisations, it is necessary to take into account both the very real possibilities presented to them during the turbulent years of the Second Republic and the enormous difficulties they had to overcome. They were faced with the mass influence of anarcho-syndicalism in Catalonia, a confused, but apparently revolutionary, left-wing Socialist movement elsewhere in Spain and a small, but growing, official Communist Party with the prestigious backing of the world's first socialist state. In this context, the BOC and POUM's achievement was, often against the stream, to have attempted to build an independent communist organisation first in Catalonia and then in the peninsula in general. The dissident communists' subsequent inability to carry this aspiration through cannot detract from their historical contribution to both the theory and practice of revolutionary marxism in Spain.

# Appendix One

## FCC-B membership in 1929.

The following figures are from the FCC-B's Regional Plenum of 3.2.29. and information produced in November of the same year. The latter only relates to those that were defined as "active". Both documents can be found in the ACCPCE.

	Members		Cells	
	February	November	February	November
<b>BARCELONA</b>				
Argentona	5	-	1	-
Barcelona	32	24	8	5
Canet de Mar	4	4	1	1
Castellgalí	-	3	-	1
Manresa	4	5	1	1
Mataró	5	7	1	1
Monistrol	4	4	1	1
Rubí	1	-	1	-
Sant Vincenç	2	-	1	-
Sabadell	1	-	1	-
Terrassa	6	9	1	1
<b>GERONA</b>				
Gerona	25	23	5	5
<b>LÉRIDA</b>				
La Fuliola	10	12	3	2
Lérida	10	-	3	-
Sarroca	2	-	1	-
Tàrrega	8	6	2	1
"Vilanova"	5	-	1	-
<b>TARRAGONA</b>				
Bellvei	1	-	1	-
Reus	-	4	-	1
Vendrell	1	-	1	-
<b>BALEARIC ISLANDS</b>				
Palma	10	8	4	2
Alaró	5	-	1	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>22</b>

## Appendix Two

### BOC membership in 1934.

The following information was reported to the FCI's Second Congress in April 1934 and published in *La Batalla* 20.4.34. The *Boletín del BOC* in June of that year provided more details, including a break down of money paid and owed in relation to party cards issued. From this latter information it is possible to make a rough calculation of the number of fully paid-up members at this time, although it must be pointed out that various important party sections, such as those of Tarragona, Vendrell, La Bisbal, Vilanova i Geltrú, Borges Blanques and Torroella de Montgrí, had yet to pay anything and many others had handed over very little. Figures given in the document, *A propòsit d'un manifest fraccional*, which was published at the end of 1935, put the total BOC membership in 1934 at 4,423, organised in seventy-four sections and one hundred and forty-five nuclei.

Province	Sections (April)	Nuclei (April)	Cards asked for by June 1934	Approximate number of fully paid-up members (June)	Approximate BOC membership (given at FCI congress)
Barcelona	23	11	1255	750	1800
Gerona	12	66	399	185	1100
Lérida	20	39	646	260	1200
Tarragona	11	11	268	65	600
Castellón	5	5	70	15	200
Valencia	1	3	50	-	100
Alicante	-	1	-	-	5
Huesca	-	8	-	-	100
Saragossa	-	2	-	-	15
Asturias	1	-	20	-	25
Madrid	-	1	3	-	10
Balearic Is.	-	1	-	-	5
Logroño	-	1	-	-	10
Orense	-	1	-	-	5
Zamora	-	1	-	-	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>2711</b>	<b>1275</b>	<b>5180</b>

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## Appendix Three

### The BOC and POUM In Catalonia 1931-1936.

The following is a list of BOC and POUM groups in Catalonia for which references have been found. This information is based on the party's press between 1931 and 1936 and on the number of party membership cards issued by June 1934 and April 1935 respectively (see *La Batalla* 20.4.34 and the *Boletín del Bloque Obrero y Campesino* of June 1934 and May 1935). In relation to the province of Gerona some additional details about membership have been provided by J. Soler (letter, 21.4.87). Many of the groups listed were not party "sections" as such but rather "nuclei" or in the "process of construction", and probably consisted of only a handful of members. Former ICE groups are also mentioned.

<i>Comarca</i>	Town/Village	Year founded(or first mentioned)		
<b>PROVINCE OF BARCELONA</b>				
<b>Alt Penedès</b>				
	Vilafranca del Penedès	(1934)	1934: 17 cards;	1935: 35 cards.
<b>Anoia</b>				
	Igualada	1932	1934: 25 cards;	1935: 20 cards
<b>Bages</b>				
			1934: 100 cards for Monistrol, El Pont de Vilomra, Sant Vicenç, and Manresa.	
	Artés	(1934)	1935: 9 cards.	
	Avinyó	(1936)		
	Callús (ex-ICE)	(1935)		
	Cardona	(1933)		
	Castellgalí	(1933)		
	Fonollosa	(1934)		
	Manresa (plus ex-ICE)	1931	1935: 20 cards.	
	Monistrol	1931		
	El Pont de Vilomara	1931	1935: 5 cards.	
	Rajadell	1931		
	Sallent (plus ex-ICE)	1931	1935: 6 cards.	
	Sant Fruitós de Bages	(1933)		
	Sant Vicenç de Castellet	1931	1935: 8 cards.	
	Súria	(1936)		
<b>Baix Llobregat</b>				
	Cornellà	(1934)	1934: 30 cards;	1935: 18 cards.
	Gavà	(1934)		
	Martorell	1931	1935: 7 cards.	
	Sant Vicenç dels Horts	1936		



<b>Barcelones</b>			
Badalona	(1934)	1934: 30 cards;	1935: 9 cards.
Barcelona (plus ex-ICE)	1931	1934: 500 cards;	1935: 500 members.
Esplugues de Llobregat	(1934)		
Sant Adrià de Besòs	1931		
Sant Just Desvern	(1934)		
Santa Coloma de Gramanet	(1934)	1934: 15 cards	
<b>Bergueda</b>			
Berga	1931		
Fígols	(1936)		
Gironella	1931		
Guardiola	(1936)		
La Pobla de Lillet	1933	1934: 10 cards;	1935: 18 cards.
Puig-reig	(1934)		
<b>Garraf</b>			
Sant Pere de Ribes	1936		
Sitges (plus ex-ICE)	1931	1934: 75 cards;	1935: 30 cards.
Vilanova i Geltrú	1931	1934: 65 cards.	
<b>Maresme</b>			
Argentona	1931		
Caldes de Estrach	1931		
Calella	1931	1934: 10 cards;	1935: 16 cards.
Canet de Mar (ex-ICE)	1931		
Mataró	1931	1935: 45 cards;	1935: 28 cards.
Premià de Mar (ex-ICE)	(1932)		
Teià	1931		
Vilassar de Dalt	1931	1934: 12 cards;	1935: 13 cards.
<b>Osona</b>			
Sant Hipòlit de Voltregà	(1936)		
Torelló	(1934)		
Vic	1933	1934: 10 cards.	
<b>Solsones</b>			
Navés	(1934)		
<b>Vallès Occidental</b>			
Cerdanyola/Ripollet	(1933)	1934: 30 cards;	1935: 40 cards.
Rubí	(1934)	1934: 12 cards.	
Sabadell (plus ex-ICE)	1931	1934: 120 cards;	1935: 125 cards;
		1936: 150 members.	
Sant Cugat	(1933)	1934: 44 cards;	1935: 35 cards.
Sant Perpètua de la Moguda (ex-ICE)	1931		
Terrassa	1931	1934: 80 cards;	1935: 75 cards.
<b>Vallès Oriental</b>			
Aiguafreda	(1936)		
Cardedeu	(1936)		
Granollers	1933	1934: 6 cards;	1935: 7 cards.
Llinars del Vallès	(1936)		
Mollet	1935		

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**PROVINCE OF GERONA****Alt Emporadà**

Agullana	(1932)	1934: 10 members.
Arenys d'Empordà	(1936)	
L'Armentera	1931	1934: 30 members; 1935: 20 cards
Avinyot de Puigventós	(1934)	
Boadella	(1936)	
Cadaqués	(1934)	
Camallera	1933	1934: 10 members.
Colera	(1934)	
L'Escala	1933	1934: 10 members.
Les Escaules	(1936)	
Espolla	(1935)	1935: 30 cards.
Figueres	1933	1934: 100 members; 1935: 40 cards
Fortià	(1933)	
La Junquera	(1936)	
Llança	1931	1934: 15 members.
Lladó	(1934)	
Maçanet de Cabrenys	(1934)	
Peralada	(1934)	
Port Bou	(1934)	
Rabós d'Empordà	(1934)	
Sant Pere Pescador	(1934)	
Santa Llogaia d'Algama	(1933)	
Vilabertràn	(1934)	
Vilajoan	(1934)	
Vila-sacra	(1934)	

**Baix Empordà**

Albons	(1934)	
Bagur	(1934)	
La Bisbal	1931	1934: 30 members; 1935: 25 cards.
Calonge de les Gavarres	(1934)	
Castell d'Aro	1933	
Corçà	(1934)	
L'Estartit	(1934)	
Fonteta	(1934)	
Gualta	(1934)	
Monells	(1933)	
Mont-ras	(1934)	1936: 30 members.
Palafrugell (plus ex-ICE)	1932	1934: 30 members.
Palamós	(1934)	
Pals	(1934)	
Peratallada	(1934)	
Sant Feliu de Guíxols	1932	1934: 15 members.
Santa Cristina d'Aro	(1933)	
La Tallada d'Empordà	(1934)	
Torroella de Montgrí	1933	1934: 15 members; 1935: 15 cards.
Ullà	(1934)	
Verges	(1934)	
Vulpellac	(1934)	

<b>Cerdanya</b>			
Alp	1935		
Bellver	1935		
Puigcerdà	1935		
<b>Garrotxa</b>			
Les Preses	(1932)		
Montagut de Fluvià	1936		
Olot	1931	1934: 40 members;	1935: 50 cards.
Sant Privat d'En Bas	1934		
Santa Pau	1936		
Tortellà	1934		
<b>Girones</b>			
Banyoles	(1932)	1935: 40 cards.	
Bescanó	1932	1934: 20 members.	
Bonmati	(1933)		
Bordils	(1932)		
Caçà de la Selva	(1934)		
Celrà	(1933)		
Cervià del Ter	1933	1934: 20 members.	
Gerona	1931	1934: 100 members;	1935: 110 members; 1936: 140 members
Juià	(1934)		
Llagostera	(1934)		
Madremanya	(1934)		
Salt	(1932)		
Sant Gregori	(1933)		
Sant Joan de Mollet	(1934)		
Sant Jordi Desualls	(1933)		
Sarrià de Ter	(1934)		
<b>Ripollès</b>			
Ripoll	(1932)		
Sant Joan de les Abadesses	1931	1934: 20 members.	
Vilallonga de Ter	(1934)		
<b>Selva</b>			
Amer	(1932)		
Anglès	1931	1934: 20 members.	
Arbucies	(1934)		
Breda	(1934)		
Caldes de Malavella	(1934)		
La Cellera de Ter	(1936)		
Maçanet de la Selva	(1934)		
Osor	(1933)		
Sant Hilari Sacalm	(1934)		
Santa Coloma de Farners	(1933)		
Tossa	(1934)		
Vidreres	(1933)		
Vilobí d'Onyar	(1934)		

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**PROVINCE OF LÉRIDA****Alt Ribagorça**

Bof (1934)

**Alt Urgell**

Coll de Nargó (1934)

**Les Garrigues**

Arbeca 1932

Borges Blanques 1932 1934: 50 cards; 1935: 25 cards.

L'Espluga Calba (1934)

La Granadella (1934)

Juneda (1934)

La Pobleta de la Granadella (1936)

Torregrossa 1931 1932: 27 members; 1935: 28 cards.

El Vilosell (1936)

Vinaixa (1934)

**La Norguera**

Ager (1936)

Alentorn (1934)

Alfarràs (1932) 1934: 36 cards; 1935: 20 cards.

Algerri (1936)

Alòs de Balaguer (1934)

Artesa de Segre (1932) 1934: 20 cards.

Anyà (1936)

Les Avellanes (1936)

Balaguer 1931 1934: 100 cards; 1935: 100 cards.

Baldomar (1934)

Bellcaire d'Urgell (1932)

Bellví 1931 1934: 23 cards.

Butsenit de Montges (1933)

Camarassa (1934)

Castelló de Farfanya 1931

Cubells (1934)

Foradada (1936)

Gerb (1936)

Linyola (1934)

Meràrguens (1934)

Montgai (1934)

Oliola (1936)

Os de Balaguer (1934)

Penelles (1936)

Ponts (1934)

Preixens (1936)

La Sentiu de Sió (1934)

Térmens (1934)

Torrelameu 1931 1934: 25 cards; 1935: 25 cards.

Tudela de Segre (1934)

Ventoses (1936)

Vilanova de Meià (1936)

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**Pallars Jussà**

Figuerola d'Orcau (1934)  
Tremp (1934)  
Vilaller (1934)

**Pallars Sobrià**

Llavorsí (1934)

**Segrià**

Alcarràs (1934)  
Alcoletge (1934) 1934: 5 members.  
Alguaire (1936)  
Almatret (1934) 1935: 1 card.  
Almenar 1931 1934: 20 cards.  
Bell-lloc (1934) 1935: 10 cards.  
Corbins (1934)  
Golmés 1931 1934: 30 members.  
Lérida 1931 1932: 300 members; 1934: 200 cards;  
1935: 150 cards; 1936: 200 cards.  
Llardecans 1931 1934: 10 cards; 1935: 7 cards.  
Maials (1933) 1934: 22 cards; 1935: 18 cards;  
1936: 24 members.  
Miralcamp (1934)  
Mollerussa (1934)  
Raimat (1935)  
Rosselló (1936)  
Sarroca de Lleida (1934)  
Seròs (1933) 1934: 30 members.  
Torres de Segre (1933) 1934: 20 cards.  
Vilanova d'Alpicat (1934)  
Vilanova de la Barca (1934) 1934: 20 members.  
Vilanova de Segrià (1936)

**Segarra**

L'Aranyó (1936)  
Cervera (1934)  
Guissona (1934)  
La Manresana (1936)  
Les Oluges (1936)  
La Prenyanosa (1936)  
Sant Antolí (1936)  
Tarroja de Segarra (1936)

**Urgell**

Agramunt 1931 1934: 6 cards.  
Belianes (1936)  
Bellpuig d'Urgell (1934)  
Bellver (1936)  
Castellnou (1936)  
Castellserà (1934)  
Ciutadilla (1936)  
Claravalls (1936)  
Donzell (1936)  
La Fuliola 1931 1934: 16 cards.

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<b>Guimerà</b>	1931		
<b>Ivars d'Urgell</b>	1931	1934: 20 cards.	
<b>Nalec</b>	(1936)		
<b>Puigverd d'Agramunt</b>	(1936)		
<b>Rocallaura</b>	(1936)		
<b>Sant Martí de Maldà</b>	(1934)		
<b>El Talladell</b>	1936		
<b>Tàrraga</b>	1931	1932: 100 members;	1934: 50 cards;
		1935: 35 cards.	
<b>El Tarròs</b>	(1936)		
<b>Vallbona de les Monges</b>	(1936)		
<b>Verdú</b>	1932		
<b>Vilagrassa</b>	(1936)		

## PROVINCE OF TARRAGONA

### Alt Camp

<b>Aiguamúrcia</b>	1935		
<b>Bràfim</b>	(1933)		
<b>Cabra del Camp</b>	(1933)	1934: 13 cards;	1935: 11 cards.
<b>Figuerola</b>	(1936)		
<b>El Pla de Cabra</b>	(1934)		
<b>Les Pobles</b>	1935		
<b>El Pont d'Armentera</b>	1935	1935: 23 members.	
<b>Santes Creus</b>	1935		
<b>Valls</b>	(1933)	1934: 40 cards;	1935: 20 cards.
<b>Vila-rodona</b>	(1936)		

### Baix Camp

<b>Reus</b>	1931	1934: 62 cards:	1935: 75 cards.
<b>La Selva del Camp</b>	(1934)		

### Baix Ebre

<b>Alcover</b>	(1934)
<b>Tortosa</b>	(1934)
<b>Xerta</b>	(1934)

### Baix Penedè

<b>Bellvei</b>	(1933)		
<b>Vendrell</b>	1931	1934: 40 members;	1935: 10 cards.

### Conca de Barberà

<b>Barberà</b>	(1933)	1934: 12 members;	1935: 15 cards.
<b>Montblanc</b>	1931	1934: 34 cards;	1935: 11 cards.
<b>Sarral</b>	(1933)	1934: 12 cards;	1935: 18 cards.

### Ribera d'Ebre

<b>Móra la Nova</b>	(1934)	1934: 2 cards.
<b>Miravet d'Ebre</b>	1936	1936: 10 members.
<b>Serra d'Almors</b>	1936	

### Priorat

<b>Bellmunt</b>	(1936)
<b>Cornudella</b>	1936
<b>Falset</b>	(1935)
<b>Gratallops</b>	(1934)
<b>Poboleda</b>	(1934)
<b>Vilella Baixa</b>	1936

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**Tarragonès**

<b>El Catllar</b>	<b>1933</b>		
<b>Constantí</b>	<b>1936</b>		
<b>Creixell</b>	<b>1936</b>		
<b>Pobla de Montornès</b>	<b>(1934)</b>	<b>1934: 3 cards.</b>	
<b>Tamarit</b>	<b>1936</b>		
<b>Tarragona</b>	<b>1931</b>	<b>1934: 100 cards;</b>	<b>1935: 50 cards.</b>
<b>Torredembara</b>	<b>1936</b>		
<b>Vilallonga del Camp</b>	<b>(1933)</b>	<b>1934: 40 members.</b>	
<b>Vila-seca de Solcina</b>	<b>(1934)</b>	<b>1934: 10 members;</b>	<b>1935: 10 cards.</b>

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**OVERALL TOTALS**

Known BOC groups by 1934.

Known BOC/POUM groups by 1936.

**BARCELONA:**

Alt Penedès	1	1
Anoia	1	1
Bages	11	14
Baix Llobregat	3	4
Barcelones (less Barcelona)	5	5
Bergueda	4	6
Garraf	2	3
Maresme	8	9
Osona	2	3
Solsones	1	1
Vallès Occidental	5	6
Vallès Oriental	2	5

**GERONA:**

Alt Empordà	20	25
Baix Empordà	22	22
Cerdanya	-	3
Garrotxa	4	6
Gironès	16	16
Ripollès	3	3
Selva	12	13

**LÉRIDA:**

Alt Ribagorça	1	1
Alt Urgell	1	1
Les Garrigues	7	9
La Norguera	21	32
Pallars Jussà	3	3
Pallars Sobrià	1	1
Segrià	17	21
Segarra	2	8
Urgell	9	22

**TARRAGONA:**

Alt Camp	4	10
Baix Camp	2	2
Baix Ebre	3	3
Baix Penedès	2	2
Conca de Barbarà	3	3
Ribera d'Ebre	1	3
Priorat	2	6
Tarragonès	5	9

**Overall Totals**

BARCELONA	45	58
GERONA	77	88
LÉRIDA	62	98
TARRAGONA	22	38

**ALL CATALONIA**

206	282
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# Appendix Four

## Trade Unions under BOC and POUM Influence, 1931-1936

This appendix contains details of the known membership of those trade unions claimed to be under BOC and POUM control between 1931 and 1936. Most of those listed sent delegations to the "Conference of unions expelled from the CNT" of June 1932 (indicated with an "a"), the "Regional Congress of Unions" held in October 1933 ("b") or the founding Congress of the FOUS in May 1936 ("c")<sup>1</sup>. With those unions that simply "adhered" to, but did not attend, these congresses, the corresponding letter (a, b or c) is in brackets. Often unions were represented by delegations from Provincial or Local Federations rather than from each separate section. Where details of the latter, partial or otherwise, are known these are also given. Information on the Lérida UPA, which attended both the 1933 and 1936 Congresses, can be found in Appendix Five.

The principal sources used are: *La Batalla* 1931-1936; the Generalitat's "Social Censuses" of 1934, 1935 and 1936;<sup>2</sup> and CNT figures up to 1933 (marked "CNT")<sup>3</sup>. Other sources used are indicated with separate footnotes at the end.

Finally, rather than use the full Catalan or Spanish title of each union concerned I have chosen to translate, as accurately as possible, the names of the trade represented.

	Founded Congresses		Membership			
	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936
<b>REGIONAL:</b>						
Petroleum (CAMPSA)	1933	c				
Power Workers <sup>4</sup>	1934	c		2100	2000	2500
<b>BARCELONA (City):</b>						
Local Federation:						
Catalan Railways	1933	b		184	283	
Diverse Industries	1936	c				
Garment Makers	1935	c				570
Metal	1934	b c		200		528
Printing	1933	b c		211	319	875
Sindicat Mercantil (see FUTM)						
Textile	1933	b c	2000	2500 <sup>5</sup>	1188	2441
Transport	1935	c				249
Front Unic de Treballadores Mercantils (FUTM):						
Accountants	1934	c		1097		1500 <sup>6</sup>
Customs	1920	b c		647		564

Groceries (Unió Ultramarina)	1895	b c		378 <sup>7</sup>	498	488	527
Ironmongery	1932	c		500 <sup>7</sup>	578		500 <sup>6</sup>
Messengers	1912	c			400		453
Shopworkers Assoc.	1898	c			817	836	810
Sindicat Mercantil	1933	b c			2000		3921
Travelling Reps.	1932	c			1286	1647	1592
Others:							
Confectioners	1925	c			292	304	383
Intellectuals	-	a					
Leather	1934	b					210
Power Workers	-	c					
<b>BARCELONA Province):</b>							
<b>Aiguafreda</b>							
General		- c					
<b>Artés</b>							
General		(c)					
<b>Badalona</b>							
Office and Shopworkers	1934	c				112	120
<b>Calella</b>							
Hosiery	1899	c					1430
<b>Cerdanyola-Ripollet</b>							
General		b c					
<b>Granollers</b>							
Textile Overseers	1924	(c)				195	
<b>Hospitalet</b>							
Petroleum (CAMPSA)	1933				301		
<b>Igualada</b>							
Construction	1934	c		250(CNT)			124
Leather	1936	c		300(CNT)			199
Textile		- c		400(CNT)			
<b>Manlleu</b>							
Office Workers (Textile)	-	c					
<b>Manresa</b>							
Ribbon Makers	-	ab	500(CNT)				
<b>Mataró</b>							
Barbers	-	c	72(CNT)	35(CNT)			
Printers	1932	c			35		
<b>Monistrol</b>							
General (Textile)	1931	ab c	550				
<b>Pobla del Lillet</b>							
General	1932	(c)			170	124	124
<b>El Pont de Vilomara</b>							
General (Textile)	1931	a c		250 (CNT)	94		111
<b>Sabadell</b>							
Office and Shopworkers	1932	c		550 <sup>7</sup>	607	631	700 <sup>6</sup>
<b>Sitges</b>							
Local Federation	-	c					
Construction	-	b c					
Shoe makers	1933	b c	800 (CNT)	600 (CNT)	600 (CNT)	325	710

<b>Terrassa</b>								
<b>Local Federation:</b>								
Carpenters	-	c						
Hosiery	1933	bc						1500 <sup>8</sup>
Office & Shop Workers	1931	bc	817 <sup>9</sup>	900 <sup>7</sup>	893 <sup>9</sup>	838		837
Printers	-	abc	95	107				100 <sup>8</sup>
			(CNT)	(CNT)				
Textile	-	c						500 <sup>8</sup>
Textile Overseers	-	c						800 <sup>8</sup>
Vic								
Peasants	-	(c)						
<b>GERONA</b>								
<b>Anglés</b>								
General	-	a	1000	800				
			(CNT)	(CNT)				
Textile	-	b						
Wood	-	b						
<b>Campdevanol</b>								
Printers	-	c						
<b>Figueres</b>								
Local Federation:	1935	(c)						700 <sup>10</sup>
Bankworkers	1931				44			47
Barbers	1934					44		48
Clothing	-							
Construction	-							
Decorators and Painters	-							
General	-	c						
Hostelry	1932					84		81
Metal	-							
Municipal Employees	-							
Power Workers	1932				92	97		90
Shop & Office Workers	1932				58	70		98
Tanners	-							
<b>Gerona</b>								
Local Federation:	1931	abc	2500			1900 <sup>11</sup>		1600
Barbers	-							
Bricklayers	-	b						
Chemical Industry	-	ac						
Construction	1933	abc				528		
Food	-	ac						
General	-	bc						
Metal	-	abc						
Printers	-							
Textile	1931	ac				298		
Transport	-	abc						
Wood	-					35		
Olot								
Local Federation:	-	c				1000 <sup>12</sup>		
Construction	1932					282		
Decorative Arts	-					270		
Hostelry	1923					28		
Leather	1933					60		
Power Workers	1934					38		35

Printers	-				
Textile	1932			613	
Woodworkers	-			133	
Peasant Federation	1933	c		1000 <sup>13</sup>	
<b>Palafrugell</b>					
General	-	a (c)	500		578
<b>San Joan de les Abadeses</b>					
General	-	ab c	600 300 (CNT)(CNT)		
<b>LÉRIDA</b>					
<b>Almatret</b>					
Miners	-	c			
<b>Alfarràs</b>					
General	-	b	500(CNT)		
Textile	1934	c			359
<b>Balaguer</b>					
General	-	b	150 103 (CNT)		88
<b>Lérida</b>					
Local Federation:	1931	ab c			
Bakers	1932			61	60
Barbers	-	ab c			79
Chemical Industry	-	a	80(CNT)		78
Confectioners	1926			77	
Construction	1933	c			581
Food Processing	-	b c	84(CNT)		121
General	1931	b c		114	133
Hostelry	1931	b c			161
Metal	-	ab c	200(CNT)		190
Municipal Labourers	1936	c			109
Power Workers	-	ab c	200(CNT)		100 <sup>14</sup>
Printers	-		72(CNT)		20
Railways	-	ab	400(CNT)	400	
Shop & Office Workers	1931	ab c	180(CNT)	200 <sup>7</sup>	451
Transport	-	c			
Woodworkers	-	ab c			159
<b>Tàrraga</b>					
General	-	ab c	97(CNT)		356
<b>TARRAGONA</b>					
<b>Reus</b>					
Comarcal Union Cttee.	-	a			
Sindicato Unico	-	a	1769 1667 (CNT)(CNT)		
Local Federation <sup>15</sup>	-	(c)			
Construction	-	(c)			
Leather	1934	(c)			233
Mines	-	c			
Railways	-	a			
Textile	1931	c			679
<b>Salamó</b>					
Women Workers Union	-	c			

<b>Tarragona</b>				
<b>Local Federation:</b>	-	a		
<b>Construction</b>	-	a c	635(CNT)	
<b>General</b>	1933	b	230(CNT)	81
<b>Labourers</b>	1934	c		396
<b>Metal</b>	-		250(CNT)	
<b>Mosaic Workers</b>	1932			29
<b>Painters</b>	1934	c		57
<b>Petroleum (CAMPSA)</b>	-		72(CNT)	
<b>Pin Makers</b>	-		210(CNT)	
<b>Power Workers</b>	-			
<b>Railways</b>	-	ab	140 65 (CNT)(CNT)	
<b>Stonecutters</b>	-			
<b>Telephones</b>	-		16(CNT)	
<b>Transport</b>	-	b	700 120 (CNT)(CNT)	
<b>Woodworkers</b>	1933	a c	153 154 (CNT)(CNT)	131
<b>Torredembara</b>				
<b>General</b>	1936	(c)		81
<b>Vendrell</b>				
<b>Bricklayers</b>	-	c		
<b>General</b>	-	b		
<b>Vimbodí</b>				
<b>Railways</b>	-	a		

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## Appendix Four Notes.

1. *La Batalla* 10.6.32., 26.10.33., 8.5.36.; *Adelante* 24.10.33.
2. "Cens Electoral Social..." Op.cit.; *Butlletí Oficial de la Generalitat de Catalunya* 26.7.34., 22.11.35., 3.7.36.
3. *Solidaridad Obrera* 8.12.31., 26.4.32.; *Memoria de los comicios...* (June - August 1931) Op.cit.; *Memoria de la Conferencia Regional...* (March 1933) Op.cit.
4. Membership figures from: *Adelante* 6.3.34.; "Informe sobre la situación de Cataluña" n.d. (1935) (ACCPCE); *Las Noticias* 11.7.36.
5. *Adelante* 27.12.33.
6. *Front* 27.3.36.
7. *Lluita* (FET) 15.9.33.
8. Interview with J. Marimon 28.9.85.
9. *Associació d'Empleats i Tecnicos* 1932-36.
10. *Treball* (Figueres) 4.7.36.
11. *Catalunya Roja* 30.8.34.
12. *ibid.* 16.8.34. The list of those unions in the Federation is probably incomplete, given that by 1936 this body claimed to include all the city's unions.
13. J. Pujiula "1934: Als cinquanta anys dels fets d'octubre", *L'Olotí* 18.10.84.
14. *Lucha Social* 14.2.36.
15. In 1934 the Local Federation claimed to include seventeen different unions. By 1936 the new "unified" Federation was reported to be based on all the unions in the city, of which it is possible to identify at least thirty-six, although without being able to verify which ones could be considered as under direct POUM influence.

## Appendix Five.

### The Unió Provincial Agrària of Lèrida 1934-1936.

The following details are taken from *La Batalla* 23.3.33, which reported on the UPA Assembly of that month, and from the "Social Census" of 1934 and 1936 (*Butlletí de la Generalitat de Catalunya* 26.7.34. and 3.7.36.). At the end of 1933 the Unió claimed 8000 members and by June 1936 over 60 sections. It has only been possible to identify 42 sections by the summer of 1936, of which the membership, some 2500, is known for 30 of these.

	Founded	Membership	
		1934:	1936:
<b>Les Garrigues</b>			
Borges Blanques	1933	147	194
L'Espluga Calba	-	-	-
Juneda	1930	250	183
Torregrossa	1933	181	(to FNTT)
<b>La Norguera</b>			
Balaguer	-	-	19
Bellví	1933	70	94
Butsenet de Mongai	1933	-	44
Linyola	1932	108	108
Penelles	-	-	-
Preixens	1933	31	31
La Sentiu de Sió	-	-	-
Torrelameu	-	-	-
Vallfogona de Balaguer	1936	-	20
<b>Segarra</b>			
Cervera	1933	24	24
<b>Segrià</b>			
Albatàrrec	1934	-	26
Alcarràs	1933	111	111
Alcoletge	1936	-	70
Almatret	-	-	-
Almenar	1933	120	-
Corbins	1934	-	113
Golmés	1933	60	60
Lèrida	1931	394	425
Llardecans	1934	-	26
Miralcamp	-	-	-
Puigverd de Lleida	1933	118	118

<b>Sarroca</b>	<b>1933</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Seròs</b>	<b>1936</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Torres de Segre</b>	<b>1933</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Torre-sona</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Vilanova d'Alpicat</b>	<b>1933</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>Vilanova de la Barca</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Urgell</b>			
<b>Agramunt</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Anglesola</b>	<b>1933</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Barbens</b>	<b>1933</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Castellserà</b>	<b>1933</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>La Fuliola</b>	<b>1932</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>Ivars d'Urgell</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Llorenç de Vallbona</b>	<b>1933</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Sant Martí de Maldà</b>	<b>1932</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Tàrrega</b>	<b>1932</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Tornabus</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Verdú</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Vila-Sana</b>	<b>1936</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>44</b>



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## Appendix 6

### The BOC, ICE and POUM outside of Catalonia 1931-1936.

Details about the POUM's strength outside Catalonia are very sparse. In most cases the POUM's sections and nuclei were formed on the basis of existing ICE and BOC groups. Apart from passing references, there is little known about many of these groups. This is particularly the case with some of those groups of communists who initially sided with the Trotskyists in 1931 or the supposed BOC nuclei in Logroño, Orense and Zamora, of which there are no further references.

Information regarding the Bloc and POUM is based on reports in their press up until July 1936, in particular the list published in *La Batalla* 20.4.34. Most information relating to the ICE has been taken from P. Pagès, *El movimiento trotskista en España (1930-1935)* pp. 70-92, with some additional details from "Informe General del C.E. de la O.C.E." in *Boletín Interior de Información y Discusión - Oposición Comunista Española de Izquierda*, February 1932. Prior to March 1932, those ICE groups listed as having been constituted in 1931 were, of course, in the OCE.

In relation to the regions of Aragon, Galicia and the Levante the actual provinces in which there were dissident communist groups are indicated.

Town	Year founded (or first mentioned)	
<b>ANDALUSIA</b>		
Algeciras (Cadiz)	ICE	(1932)
Cadiz	ICE	(1932)
Fuensanta de Martos (Jaen)	ICE	(1931)
Gerena (Sevilla)	ICE	?
	POUM	1936
Huelva	POUM	(1936)
Jaen	ICE	(1931)
Seville	ICE	1931
	POUM	1936
<b>ARAGON</b>		
Huesca		1934: 100 members.
Albelda	BOC	(1934)
Alcolea de Cinca	POUM	(1936)
Barbastro	BOC	(1934)
Binefar	BOC	(1934)
Bonansa	BOC	(1934)
Castillonroy	BOC	1933
Estadilla	BOC	(1934)

<b>Fraga</b>	<b>BOC</b>	<b>(1934)</b>	
<b>Monzon</b>	<b>POUM</b>	<b>1936</b>	
<b>Ontineña</b>	<b>POUM</b>	<b>1936</b>	
<b>Selgua</b>	<b>POUM</b>	<b>1936</b>	
<b>Tamarite</b>	<b>BOC</b>	<b>(1934)</b>	
<b>Saragossa</b>			<b>1934: 15 members.</b>
<b>Mequinenza</b>	<b>BOC</b>	<b>(1934)</b>	
<b>Saragossa</b>	<b>BOC</b>	<b>(1934)</b>	
<b>ASTURIAS</b>			
<b>Albaña</b>	<b>BOC</b>	<b>1934</b>	
<b>La Felguera</b>	<b>BOC</b>	<b>(1934)</b>	
	<b>POUM</b>	<b>(1936)</b>	
<b>Gijon</b>	<b>ICE</b>		
	<b>POUM</b>	<b>(1936)</b>	
<b>Mieres</b>	<b>BOC</b>	<b>1932</b>	<b>1934: 25 members.</b>
	<b>POUM</b>	<b>(1936)</b>	
<b>La Rebollada</b>	<b>BOC</b>	<b>1934</b>	
<b>Ollinogo</b>	<b>BOC</b>	<b>1934</b>	
<b>Oviedo</b>	<b>BOC</b>	<b>(1934)</b>	
	<b>ICE</b>		
	<b>POUM</b>	<b>(1936)</b>	
<b>Sama</b>	<b>ICE</b>	<b>(1932)</b>	
	<b>POUM</b>	<b>(1936)</b>	
<b>BALEARIC ISLANDS</b>			
<b>Palma de Mallorca</b>	<b>BOC</b>	<b>1934</b>	<b>1934: 5 members;</b>
	<b>POUM</b>	<b>(1936)</b>	<b>1935: 15 cards.</b>
<b>BASQUE COUNTRY</b>			
<b>Ablitas (Navarra)</b>	<b>ICE</b>	<b>1932</b>	
<b>Bilbao</b>	<b>ICE</b>	<b>1931</b>	
	<b>POUM</b>	<b>1935</b>	
<b>Pamplona</b>	<b>ICE</b>	<b>(1932)</b>	
	<b>POUM</b>	<b>1935</b>	
<b>Santurce</b>	<b>POUM</b>	<b>1936</b>	
<b>Sestao</b>	<b>ICE</b>	<b>(1932)</b>	
	<b>POUM</b>	<b>(1936)</b>	
<b>Vitoria</b>	<b>ICE</b>	<b>(1932)</b>	
	<b>POUM</b>	<b>1936</b>	
<b>CANARY ISLANDS</b>			
	<b>ICE</b>	<b>(1932)</b>	
	<b>POUM</b>	<b>(1935)</b>	
<b>CANTABRIA</b>			
<b>Astillero</b>	<b>ICE</b>	<b>1931</b>	
	<b>POUM</b>	<b>(1936)</b>	
<b>CASTILLA-LEON</b>			
<b>Alarez (Salamanca)</b>	<b>ICE</b>	<b>1932</b>	
<b>Baltañas (Palencia)</b>	<b>ICE</b>	<b>1931</b>	
<b>Hornillos (Palencia)</b>	<b>ICE</b>	<b>1931</b>	
<b>Lantadilla (Palencia)</b>	<b>ICE</b>	<b>(1932)</b>	
<b>Leon</b>	<b>ICE</b>	<b>1931</b>	<b>1932: 5 members</b>
	<b>POUM</b>	<b>(1936)</b>	
<b>Mayalde (Zamora)</b>	<b>BOC</b>	<b>(1934)</b>	<b>1934: 5 members</b>

Peñaranda (Salamanca)	ICE	1932	
Palencia	ICE	1931	
	POUM	(1935)	
Riaño (Leon)	ICE	(1932)	
Salamanca	ICE	1931	
	POUM	(1936)	1936: 30 cards
Segovia	ICE	(1932)	
Soria	ICE	(1932)	
Tejares (Salamanca)	ICE	1932	1932: 40 members
	POUM	1936	
Valladolid	POUM	(1936)	
Villada (Palencia)	ICE	1931	
	POUM	(1936)	
Zamora	ICE	1931	
<b>CASTILLA-LA MANCHA</b>			
Almansa (Albacete)	ICE	(1932)	
<b>ESTREMADURA</b>			
Berlanga	ICE	(1932)	
Fuente de Cantos	ICE	(1933)	
Llerena	ICE	(1932)	
	POUM	(1936)	1936: 122 members
Maguilla	ICE	(1932)	1932: 50 members
Villagarcía de la Torre	POUM	1936	
<b>GALICIA</b>			
<b>La Coruña</b>			
Cesuras	POUM	1936	
La Coruña	ICE	1931	
	POUM	1936	
Ferrol	ICE	1931	
Finisterre	POUM	1936	
Hombre	ICE	(1932)	1932: 10 members
Mariños	ICE	(1932)	1932: 12 members
Noya	ICE		
Padrón	ICE		
	POUM	1936	
Puente del Puerto	POUM	1936	
Pontedeume	ICE	1931	1932: 12 members
Santa Eugenia de Ribeira	ICE		
Santiago de Compostela	ICE		
	POUM	1936	1936: 70 members
Teijeiro	ICE	1931	
Lugo			
Lugo	ICE	1932	
	POUM	(1936)	
<b>Orense</b>			
Barco de Baldeorras	ICE	1931	
Orense	BOC	(1934)	1934: 5 members
<b>Pontevedra</b>			
Rianxo	POUM	1936	

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**LEVANTE****Alicante**

Alicante BOC (1934) 1934: 5 members  
Torrellano ICE (1934)

**Castellón**

Albocácer POUM (1936)  
Alcalá de Chivert BOC (1934)  
Bechí POUM 1936  
Benicarló BOC 1933 1934: 15 members  
Borriol BOC 1932 1934: 12 members  
Burriana BOC 1935  
Cabanes BOC (1934)  
Cálig POUM 1935  
Castellón BOC 1931 1934: 50 members;  
1935: 30 cards.  
Chert POUM 1935 1936: 20 members  
Grao POUM 1935 1936: 35 members  
La Jana POUM (1936)  
Moncófar POUM (1935)  
Pobla Tornesa BOC (1933) 1934: 20 members  
Teresa de Viver BOC (1934)  
Torás POUM (1936)  
Torreblanch POUM (1935)  
Torre Embesora BOC (1934)  
Villareal BOC (1934)  
Vinaroz BOC 1932 1934: 20 cards;  
1935: 29 cards.

**Valencia**

Burjasot BOC (1934)  
Faura (Los Valles) BOC (1934)  
Pueblo de Sagunto BOC (1934)  
ICE (1934)  
Ribarroja POUM 1935 1936: 50 members  
Valencia BOC 1933 1934: 50 cards;  
1935: 45 cards;  
1936: 70 cards.

**MADRID**

Madrid ICE 1931  
BOC 1932 1934: 10 members  
POUM 1935 1936: 70 members  
Perales de Tajuña POUM 1936  
Tielmes de Tajuña POUM 1936

**LA RIOJA**

Logroño BOC (1934) 1934: 10 members.

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