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The CNT
and the
Russian
Revolution

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Introduction

Early reactions from anarchists to the events of the Russian Revolution ranged from the ecstatic to the enthusiastic and not until the early twenties was there a cohesive understanding amongst them about the brutality and counter revolutionary nature of the Bolshevik coup d'etat. In 1917 it seemed as though the old order could be overthrown and that single fact (momentous as it was) remained a cause of celebration for some years.

As this pamphlet shows the CNT (with some telling exceptions) was part of the general acclaim although with experience this mood would change. In reading Llorens we become aware of the disparity of views and tendencies in the CNT and the enormous state pressure under which they had to operate. We become aware also of the methodology of the CNT. Pestana, in Moscow, doesn't just flinch at what the Bolsheviks are saying. He also flinches at the undemocratic way in which they run their conferences. No direct democracy in the running of the Second Congress of the Third International. Pestana himself comes well out of these events perhaps suggesting a need to re-examine his later actions.

Our knowledge of the importance of the activities of such militants as Gaston Leval is constantly growing and we can see the central role he has both in the future trajectory of the CNT and in the release of some Russian anarchists. The Kate Sharpley Library plans to reprint some of his very early work which includes his account of his activities and the militants he met.

So, instinctively and politically the CNT moved away from the Bolsheviks. Driven to them by the search for allies in the attempt to bring about a general insurrection of the proletariat they sensed their centralist and statist tendencies and broke off contact. Llorens' pamphlet presents a lucid and multi-layered view of these events. Events which will need to be learned and analysed by all class struggle anarchist militants.

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The Revolutionary circumstance

By 1917 the CNT had been in existence for a bare 7 years, much or that time as a clandestine organisation. 1917 - which was to prove a watershed year in the history of this century - was to prove a watershed for the CNT as well. In August, 6 months after the Russian people's revolution in February, and 3 months before the Bolsheviks' coup d'état, the CNT embarked upon a great wave of revolutionary, insurrectionist strikes, thereby aligning itself with the efforts made by the labour movement elsewhere (Hungary, Italy, Germany..) in what was to be the most important window on revolution in Europe. The failures of the labour movement in Italy and Germany were to leave the way open for the success of fascism and national socialism: the consolidation of Bolshevik power on the ruins of the people's revolution would lead on to a regimented communism. Totalitarianism, in both its avatars, was poised to lord it over Europe.

In Spain, things took a different turn, but ultimately the outcome would be similar - the Franco dictatorship. Even so, historians have often sought to identify the essential characteristics of the CNT as the reason why it proved impossible for a socialist revolution to be brought off successfully at that time. Far from sharing that view, we maintain that the libertarianism of the Spanish labour movement was no hindrance, but rather a boon, and that, if it was unable to join in more successfully with the revolutionary trend in Europe, this was due to collateral considerations. The CNT was quickly robbed of the initiative in this situation, for - excepting in Catalonia, and, to a lesser extent, in Levante and Andalusia - it had but little foothold in the remainder of the country: hence the isolation of the strikes of 1917 and 1919 (the La Canadiense strike), played out in industrial Catalonia.

We should also take into account an external factor of crucial and dramatic significance: repression. Every available resource of the State and the bourgeoisie was deployed in an attempt to curtail the rise of anarcho-syndicalism: gangs of gunmen were hired, repressive paramilitary corps (like the Somaten) were set up, constitutional rights were suspended or trampled underfoot (by the ley de fugas, mass deportations, illegal arrests. etc.), the bourgeoisie created and subsidised a yellow labour union (the so-called "free union"), the army and police connived with the gunmen and the forces of repression themselves operated outside of the law... Against that backdrop, what was achieved was considerable indeed. In fact the macabre battery of repression deployed in order to finish it off was testimony to the revolutionary potential of the CNT.

Likewise consideration should be given to the fact that the CNT was not the creation of some enlightened vanguard nor did it spring fully formed from its foundation congress. A lot of factors converged in the creation of this anarcho-syndicalist organisation: the workerist traditions of the First International and the more recent experience of labour combinations (the Solidaridad Obrera association etc.), reaffirmation of the repudiation of political interference and subordination (experiences

with the Lerroux-ists, republicans and party socialists), the very traditions of libertarian thinking and the example of contemporary French revolutionary syndicalism (the CGT). Out of the confluence of all these elements sprang the C.N.T., but it was through the hard knocks of social struggle and organisational coexistence that its liberating goals were constantly being reframed. Outlawed in 1911, within just months of its foundation the CNT's unions could not operate openly until 1916. The problems it faced, therefore, in following the European trend towards revolution will readily be appreciated. Yet it managed to contemplate the prospect, and although affiliation to the Third International was mooted at its first national congress, in the La Comedia theatre in Madrid in 1919, that congress also served, as we shall see, to acknowledge the need for expansion and for establishment of links with like-minded international revolutionary organisations.

The CNT's international outlook.

The La Comedia congress (1919)

The CNT's first congress provided a platform for an interesting debate and a sharing of experiences. With regard to the analysis of the revolutionary events in Russia, with which we are concerned here, that should be placed in the overall context of the quest for international contacts and openings, something that is often overlooked because of the importance of the debate that surrounded the issue of affiliation to the Third International.

Reports of the abolition of tsarism and the initial successes of the people's revolution in February were enthusiastically welcomed in libertarian labour circles. The subsequent Bolshevik coup in October, portrayed as a socialist revolution, was also heartily welcomed. Later it would emerge that the Bolsheviks espoused dictatorial methods in order to put paid to popular participation, hobble the soviets, subjugate the unions and cooperatives to government policy and, in the end, outlaw all political or trade union groups and indeed prohibit the right of tendency even within their own party. But all these measures, which were to speed the Bolshevik regime towards a totalitarian State by 1918, were neither known about nor appreciated until some time later.

To the credit of libertarians, they were among the first to criticise the Communists' revolutionary despotism, but the criticisms and testimony here began to emerge after 1920, when Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, Peter Kropotkin, Rudolf Rocker, Luigi Fabbri, etc. began to publish their views, experiences and analyses, to which those of Russian anarchists like Maximoff, Arshinov, and, above all, Voline, were added years later.

Thus, in international anarchist circles, the Russian revolution was heartily welcomed, not as a model to be imitated, in that the details of what had happened were not available, but rather as an instance of social change, evidence that bourgeois rule was

susceptible to overthrow. As the historian Josep Termes states, the Russian revolution's impact upon the CNT was emotional.¹ The CNT and anarchist press generally was awash with articles that were lyrical paeans to the Bolsheviks, who were seen as revolutionary heroes. Few dared mention the Bolsheviks' authoritarian roots and hold aloof from what the new Communist state was about. Among that few were Federico Urales, Jose Prat, and Dionysios, but, as Josep Termes points out, "they were as so many drops of water in a sea of anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist enthusiasm for the revolution of the soviets."²

Thus, the 1919 congress explicitly dealt with the question of support for the Russian revolution when it tackled the item on the agenda regarding affiliation to the Moscow-sponsored Third International. The debate was tough and heated. For the critics, there was the solitary voice of the Asturias representative, Eleuterio Quintanilla, who spoke against affiliation to the Muscovite International. From the opposing camp came the unwary opinions of anarchists carried away by unthinking enthusiasm: people like Manuel Buenacasa and Eusebio C. Carbo, who were joined by the voices of the marxist sector that had affiliated to the CNT around that time - not out of any ideological agreement, but because they held that it was the only revolutionary instrument of the Spanish proletariat, in that they looked upon the UGT as a rather lame labour grouping unduly under the thumb of the PSOE. This marxist group comprised mainly of Arlandis, Nin and Maurin. In both cases, the advocacy of affiliation was conditioned by the attitude of the socialists, who had agreed at their December congress to remain in the Second International. Andreu Nin openly declared: "I, who was a member of the Socialist Party up to the day that it resolved at its congress to stay with the Second International, hereby announce .. (...) that I have resigned from it in order to campaign unconditionally along with you on the pure ground of the class struggle." For his part, Buenacasa said; "Since the Socialists have not done so (...) we, who are not socialists, must agree unanimously to back the Russian revolution". Carbo said much the same.³

Quintanilla's line was one that behoved an organisation that had defined itself at this very same congress as libertarian communist. Quintanilla sharply differentiated between the notion of libertarian communism embodied by the CNT and the authoritarian communism for which the Bolsheviks stood. But the debate was won hands down by the supporters of affiliation.⁴ The prevailing enthusiasm for the success of the revolution in Russia and the socialists' attitude which was adjudged to be lacking in solidarity and downright treasonable won over Quintanilla's rigorous analysis. Even so, a contribution from Salvador Segui managed to amend the CNT's affiliation to the Third International: at Segui's suggestion, affiliation would be on a provisional basis. CNT delegates would travel to examine the situation at first hand.

This intervention by the "Noi del sucre" (Sugar Baby) was crucial. Used to discussions and negotiations with selfish and short-sighted employers who had to be hobbled: conversant with the manner in which discussion with those in government, military or civilian, had to be conducted: knowing better than anyone else how to

behave at a meeting or assembly, as he proved beyond question during the La Canadiense strike (1919), Segui had an extraordinary strategic vision. If we review his contribution on this item at the Congress, we see that in fact he manages to turn affiliation into a formal libertarian critique and the Third International into the CNT's chance to break out of its isolation, as indeed turned out to be the case. Segui opened by agreeing with the majority view in the Congress, just as he did at the Las Arenas rally in 1919, but then he began to introduce the critical points, having sugared the pill in that way. His criticisms were very diplomatic, but telling: the "apparent enthronement of a dictatorship", the monopolisation of the economy by the State instead of its being managed directly by the trade unions, etc. Finally, he suggested and ensured that provisional affiliation to the Third International should be regarded as a step in the direction of establishing "a real workers' International" - something that the Muscovite version could never be - this to be accomplished through a summons that would be issued by the CNT, making use of the profile and contacts that its conditional (and critical) affiliation to the Third International would afford it. As may be seen, Segui's intervention was a masterpiece of strategy. We have always believed, by the way, that the allegation, voiced after his death, that he was about to "evolve" towards party politics was a complete nonsense. Catalonia had never had so many politicians (Layret, Companys, governor Bas, no less..) "touched" by anarchism, of a libertarian disposition, and long-windedly singing the praises of the CNT as in these days when Segui used to invite them into his tertulia at the Cafe Espanol on the Paralelo. If anyone was "evolving" it was - much against their will, no doubt - those politicians.

Returning to the Congress, it should be considered, as we said earlier, that the matter of the Third International was merely one element of the internationalist outlook then making headway in the CNT. In the end, the important thing was the need to maintain international contacts with a view to engaging the national bourgeoisie in a battle on all fronts, pressing for a boycott of goods from countries where workers might have gone on strike. This "real revolutionary International" - by contrast with the phoney one (the Third International) would be the IWA set up in Berlin in 1922, it never achieved the requisite and desirable strength.

Thus, Simo Piera, who was secretary of the La Canadiense strike committee and one of the militants closest to Segui explained: "The CNT believed that a tremendous opportunity had come along for it to use its strength in an attempt to bring about the long awaited general insurrection of the proletariat, not just in Iberia, but throughout Europe. With our activities geared to that purpose, we made the first moves in that ambitious social upheaval. Delegates were chosen to have talks with trade union organisations abroad: Evelio Boal went to Portugal: Salvador Quemades went to France: Eusebio Carbo went to Italy: Angel Pestana to Germany and Russia, and myself to Holland, where the first Trade Union Congress organised after the first world war was held in August."⁵ The upshot of all these overtures was varied, but, be that as it may, they all failed to produce the sought after results.

Angel Pestana's trip to Russia.

The CNT delegation due to visit Russia had a number of adventures. For a start, there were several suggestions as to who should be on the Commission. At first, the plan was to send Eleuterio Quintanilla, the greatest sceptic with regard to the soviet experience, and the Seville doctor Pedro Vallina, but both of these nominees declined for personal reasons. Then Eusebio Carbo and Salvador Quemades were appointed: having visited the Italian and French trade union organisations, they were due to meet up in Paris before setting out for the land of the soviets.

The climate of optimism and enthusiasm prevailing during the Congress was in cruel contrast with a tough and by no means encouraging political situation. The CNT was persecuted, the employers had declared a lock-out and with the attacks from hired gunmen at their height, life was very hard for libertarian labour activists. Nor did the international situation which the CNT delegates confronted offer any grounds for optimism. Travelling on a shoe-string budget and without passports, they faced all manner of misadventures. The upshot was that Pestana, the first pick for the trip to France and Germany, was luckier than Quemades and Carbo who were arrested, with the result that it fell to him to make the trip to Russia. In fact, upon reaching Berlin, Pestana learned that the Second Congress of the Third International had been summoned, and he applied to the CNT for leave to attend as a delegate. Receiving the permission, he managed to breach the blockade and on 27 June arrived in Petrograd, over a month after setting out from Barcelona.⁶

The Russian Communists had a high regard for the CNT. Partly on account of the CNT member Pere Foix who visited Russia in a personal capacity, and, even more so, Victor Serge, by then a Bolshevik militant and a former anarchist with connections to the Bonnot Gang.. Serge had lived in Barcelona in 1916-1917. There he had frequented CNT circles and was a personal friend of Salvador Seguí.⁷ Disillusioned with the socialists, the Bolsheviks were keen to recruit the revolutionary syndicalists and, in Lenin's phrase, recruit "the best of the anarchists".⁸ Angel Pestana was welcomed and treated with this consideration in mind. Invited by Zinoviev to join the Executive Committee of the Third International, Pestana nonetheless felt ill at ease. As the representative of a trade union organisation, he felt out of place among party politicians. Thus, having spelled out his inhibitions, he was invited to participate in the meetings leading up to the foundation of the Red International of Labour Unions, whose foundation congress of the following year would be attended by a second CNT delegation.

During the deliberations of the Second Congress of the Third International, Pestana was unfavourably impressed not merely by what was said, but also and from the very outset, by the Congress's methodology in its debates and decision-making. Used to the CNT gatherings where direct democracy was their pride and glory, the CNT delegate could not fathom the fierce struggle surrounding the make-up of the "Praesidium" of the Congress. Later he realised the extent of the powers of that body;

"The praesidium is the Congress, the rest being a caricature - a caricature of a congress, I mean (...). The initiative of the Congress resides with the chairman, who can propose and dispose as he deems fit, leaving the delegates with nothing to do but discuss."⁹ With the aggravating feature that such discussion, constantly overshadowed by the Praesidium, was likewise diluted and prey to the arbitrary whim of the chairman. Thus, whilst delegates had to confine themselves to at most ten minutes in making their cases, there was no time limit upon the Praesidium members' right of reply. Pestana sampled this for himself, forced to listen for three quarters of an hour while Trotsky berated his earlier ten-minute address, and was denied the opportunity to reply. As if that were not enough, the whole thing ended with accords being endorsed that had never even been offered for discussion.

The contributions from the CNT delegate were of a markedly critical tenor. Despite the attempts to seduce him to the Bolshevik cause, Pestana refused to be silenced. On the basis of the strictest anarcho-syndicalist rationale, he criticised the idea that the success of the Russian revolution was to be credited to the Bolshevik party: "As I see it, the revolution, comrade delegates, is not and cannot be the work of one party. A party does not make a revolution: a party cannot do more than mount a coup d'état, and a coup d'état is no revolution."¹⁰ He criticised the subordination of labour organisations to parties, according to the Leninist theory of "transmission belts" and he opposed the slightest subordination of the Congress and of the International to the dictates of the Russian Communists. Even so, as the mandate which the CNT had awarded him was to cast its vote for affiliation, only another organisational accord had the capacity to rescind it, as he himself conceded. Hence, the decision to quit the International was not to be taken for some time to come, when the CNT was able to gather together and hear Pestana's scathing report.

Alongside the proceedings of the Congress, Pestana drafted "three or four articles published in Pravda and dealing with our organisation's fighting spirit, its characteristics and persecutions. In one of them, he also spoke of the role of women in our social struggles."¹¹ In addition to a report for the Third International on social organisations in Spain.

During the night on two months that Pestana stayed in Russia, he had occasion to make the acquaintance of many of the most outstanding representatives of the international labour movement and had personal dealings with the first echelon of the Russian Communist Party. Despite the constant carping of the CNT delegate, the Bolsheviks persisted in treating him as one of their own. The CNT was one of the labour organisations with the greatest revolutionary potential. Trotsky invited Pestana to found a Communist Party of Spain: "I am confident that comrade Pestana will be one of the founders of the party"¹² and from Maurin we learn that "personally, Pestana made an excellent impression on the Communist leaders, especially on Lenin, who later disclosed that Pestana was: an intelligent, puritanical working man, endowed with a great facility for observation and critical sense, for whom the idea of freedom was the keystone of his ideological edifice."¹³

Even so, it speaks well of Pestana that he stuck doggedly to his libertarian outlook and was able to shrug off the Bolsheviks' siren songs. Years later, when Pestana founded his Syndicalist Party and drifted away from the CNT, he would not contradict himself by renouncing his brilliant short Moscow speech against the idea of revolutionary political parties. The Syndicalist Party was floated as a spokesman for the workers' revolutionary aspirations and not as the agent of any revolution.

That "great facility for observation and critical sense" in Pestana which had won Lenin's praises, is plain in the texts on his stay in the USSR which he wrote while in prison in Barcelona. However much the Bolsheviks might try to gild the facts, Pestana did not fail to notice the new regime's dictatorial character and the dire straits in which the Russian people lived. Apropos of this, Victor Serge notes: "And to the pretty schemes illustrated with green circles and blue and red triangles, Angel Pestana reacted with a good-humoured grin, mumbling 'I get the strong impression that I'm having my leg pulled here'."¹⁴ Pestana did not take the bait and the CNT was a tasty morsel that was not gobbled up by Bolshevik despotism, but it came within an ace of doing so, but for one hitch, in this instance Gaston Leval, a member of the second CNT delegation to the land of the soviets. Leval's companions, namely, Nin, Ibanez and Arlandis, were phenomenally seduced. Years later, during the Spanish revolution and civil war, Stalin's policy was to hinge upon the destruction of the CNT, which was busy proving that it was possible to accomplish revolution in a context of freedom, the very opposite of what the Russian Communists had done.

The CNT's Communists.

The second delegation.

Pestana's journey home was a fraught one. He passed through Italy, where he was arrested and had his papers confiscated. When at last he made it to Barcelona, a long spell in a cell in the Modelo prison awaited him. There he was to write his Memorandum for the National Committee, as well as the two books on his time in the USSR, *Seventy Days in Russia*, *What I Saw* and *Seventy Days in Russia*, *What I Think*.⁽¹⁵⁾

Pestana's imprisonment was part of the whole battery of repression deployed to smash the



Angel Pestana

CNT and decimate its ranks. The Confederation's own general secretary, Evelio Boal, was murdered, under the notorious practice known as the *ley de fugas* (shot while trying to escape), and Segui too fell to the assassins, as did more than 300 libertarian trade unionists. Thus, with the best known libertarian militants imprisoned, deported, exiled, if not murdered, outright, Nin and his group managed to hoist themselves on to the National Committee. They tried to use their influence on the Committee to steer the CNT towards pro-Bolshevik marxist positions and even issued a manifesto denouncing the anarchists. Pestana's report not being available, it was decided that a further delegation should be sent to the land of the soviets, in response to Moscow's invitation to the CNT to take part in the foundation congress of the Red International of labour Unions. Peirats's view is that this delegation was put together with the connivance of the Soviets, who were disgusted by Pestana's reaction and happy to have a pro-Bolshevik CNT National Committee thus, Peirats writes: "This delegation (...) was put together by Moscow to sort out what they would have thought of as Pestana's blind spots. And it certainly brought off its mission."¹⁶ The members of the commission, chosen at a plenum in Barcelona on 28 April 1921¹⁷ were - Andreu Nin and Joaquin Ibanez from the North. To these were added, at the last moment, Gaston Leval, who was proposed by the anarchist sector, rightly scandalised by the Bolshevism of the line-up.

Gaston Leval was the most commonly used alias of the French anarchist Pierre Piller. Having refused to perform military service, he had travelled through Spain and won the confidence of anarchist circles. He was unable to attend the La Comedia congress, because he was imprisoned in Valencia at the time. With his facility for languages and because he was trusted he was proposed as an addition to the CNT's Bolshevik commission. Leval wrote several texts relating in detail his travels and stay in Russia.¹⁸ In one of them, he asks: "How come four Communists were appointed to represent the CNT?" In addition to the factor (already mentioned) of the repression suffered by the main libertarian militants, Leval adds the

"availability" of those chosen, which would corroborate Peirats's view regarding a conspiracy with the Russian Communists. In that sense we might speak, borrowing the Frenchman's term, of "trickery" by Nin's group. According to Maurin, the presence of Leval was down

to Arlandis's having objected that the anarchist groups too should appoint a representative.¹⁹ Indeed, Arlandis was the most libertarian of the lot of them: a one-time individualist anarchist, he had a brother active in Madrid anarchist circles and as late as the La Comedia congress had professed himself a libertarian, although he later added that there was no incompatibility between that and his defence of the dictatorship of the proletariat. He would soon mend his ways and in Russia he opted for dictatorship and jettisoned his libertarian values.

Gaston Leval joined the rest of the commission in Berlin, where he was able to appreciate the "Communist" character of his "colleagues". Rudolf Rocker, the German libertarian, had occasion to make their acquaintance as they passed through the German capital: "This delegation, which had not been elected by any CNT congress, and whose travelling expenses, indeed, were paid by Russia, was from the outset determined to deliver the CNT to the Comintern. The only one of its members who was an honourable exception was the French anarchist Gaston Leval."²⁰ who, let it be said by the way, funded his trip with contributions from the anarchist groups of Barcelona.

Gaston Leval and the release of Russian anarchists.

As soon as he arrived in Russia in June 1921, Gaston Leval contacted Victor Serge. Serge at that time took a line that quite startled Leval. A registered member of the Russian CP, Serge would, in private conversations, criticise the harshness of the regime, the Cheka, Lenin himself.. But in public he held his tongue and indeed wrote admiring articles. So much so that Leval, finding this attitude hypocritical and saccharin, ventured to say as much, earning Serge's hostility. In his Memoirs Serge omits all reference to Leval and even attributes Leval's points to Arlandis.

For his part, Xavier Paniagua, who has studied the figure of Leval thoroughly, in the article cited below, imagines that the negative view that Leval took away from Soviet Russia was due to the fact that "his contacts were essentially with anarchists opposed to the Bolshevik government". That argument might cut some ice if the person allegedly so influenced were not already anarchist himself, but when an anarchist such as Leval maintains contacts with his co-religionists, what one can expect is a confirmation of values likely to be held in common. Nor does it seem fair to suggest that Leval saw things in black and white terms. Indeed, the opposite is rather the case: he participated in the proceedings of the Congress, where he swapped views and opinions with the motley international representatives assembled there. He had the "honour" of meeting the flower of the Communist Party in person, Lenin and Trotsky included. He had talks with Soviet generals: with Alexandra Kollontai, the Bolshevik forced to disband her Workers' Opposition group: with Steinberg, a Left Social Revolutionary and minister in the first Bolshevik cabinet, not to mention Serge and his Communist fellow delegates. Proof of Leval's efforts to familiarise himself with

the real social conditions in Russia were his visits to schools, prison, his constant dealings with all manner of people, and when the proceedings of the Congress were wound up, he expressed a wish to stay on for some months and sign on as a worker in some firm, but his request was refused.

Along with the heavyweight deliberations of the Congress, where there was little that Leval could do, since the CNT's affiliation had to be cancelled by its membership as a whole and not by its delegates, the most outstanding task he carried out during his time in Russia was to secure the release of a group of anarchist prisoners, 14 in all, who included the Russian libertarian movement's most prominent members: people like Maximoff, Yartchuk and Voline.²¹

When, just after he arrived in Russia, Gaston Leval had learned of the indiscriminate jailing of anarchists, he resolved to make certain overtures in an effort to secure their release. He called on the head of the terrifying Cheka, Felix Dzerzhinsky, on Lunacharsky and even paid a call on Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov himself. Around the same time he managed to inveigle his way into the Butyrky prison and see Voline. Leval was startled to find his comrades held incommunicado and forbidden visitors²² and had to pass himself off as a Russian and sneak in among a band of the wives of the Russian anarchists. One by one, Voline rebutted the absurd charges of counter-revolution and being in cahoots with the White generals, charges that the Bolsheviks used in order to keep them in prison indefinitely and without necessity of trial. But to begin with Leval's overtures availed him nothing. Those attending the Congress had no interest in this whole business causing an incident with their hosts. In Victor Serge's estimation "the foreign delegates made up a rather disappointing crew, enchanted by their access to considerable privileges in a starving country, quick to admire but slow to reflect. There were few workers and far too many politicians among them."²³

For their part, the anarchist prisoners resolved to go on hunger strike, a course that was imitated in several other Russian prisons, where some inmates perished. By day 11 of this strike, it looked as if this measure was starting to have an impact. Leval managed to chivvy a panel of international delegates into approaching Lenin. After a lot of insistence, the new tsar agreed to receive them. The commission had made up its mind to press for the release, not just of the anarchists, but of all imprisoned leftists. Meanwhile Leval refuted, one by one, the allegations that Lenin levelled against Voline and his colleagues and Lenin was left in a difficult position with regard to the rest of the delegation. In the end, he promised to look into the matter.

At last the government agreed that only the 14 hunger-striking Butyrky anarchist prisoners would be released, not to become free men, but rather to be banished from the country. Even so, days passed before the promise was honoured. Leval reckoned that the Bolsheviks were playing for time until the Congress would be wound up and the whole episode forgotten about. Learning that Trotsky was to pay a courtesy call on the Italian delegates, Leval - along with Arlandis - showed up at the rendezvous point and decided to tackle Trotsky directly, reminding him of the undertaking given.

Trotsky was fuming, grabbed him by the lapels of his jacket, shrieked abuse at him and wound up vehemently insisting that the undertaking would be honoured.

A little while later, the Russian anarchists from the Butyrky went into exile, where they were to head the libertarian dissident movement. For their part, the CNT delegates returned to Spain. Leval was given only half as much money as the others to defray his travel expenses, doubtless by way of thanks for his services rendered.

When the CNT was able to assemble once again, in a plenum in Zaragoza in 1922, Pestana's Memorandum was available as was Leval's report. The upshot was that, in spite of lobbying by Nin, the conditional affiliation given to the Third International at the 1919 Congress was revoked, and the CNT conference moved on from there to support the establishment of a revolutionary syndicalist International, the IWA, launched that same year.

The histories of these CNT delegates vary. Andreu Nin spent many years in Russia, where he was a secretary of the Red International of Labour Unions, although by then he had severed his ties with the CNT. Close to Trotsky in his outlook, he too fell into disfavour and returned to Barcelona, where, in addition to making outstanding translations into Catalan of Russian writers (Tolstoy, Pilnyak, etc.) he launched the POUM. In 1937, he was murdered by the Stalinists of the PCE. Maurin, Nin's colleague in his efforts to set up a non-Stalinist marxist party, was imprisoned under the Franco dictatorship and ended his days in exile. Of Ibanez we know that he was living in Russia in 1927 and that he shared the Communist enthusiasm for bureaucracy and authoritarianism: around this time he acted as the amanuensis for Diego Hidalgo when the latter visited the land of the soviets.²⁴

Gaston Leval had the wit to tour the libertarian collectives that had sprouted after the revolution in 1936 and later wrote the finest eye-witness account of them, which long remained one of the few reference books on the topic. In France, he founded groups, publications and publishing ventures and in 1978, shortly before his death, he paid one last visit to Barcelona. We managed to hear him lecture there on the collectives in quite a feat of memory. He struck us as a quiet, intelligent man at ease with himself. Someone worthy of trust.

Lenin. The profile of a dictator.

Both Angel Pestana and Gaston Leval left Russia convinced that the route to popular liberation was not the one trodden by the Bolsheviks. As Kropotkin had written "They have shown us how not to make a revolution."

But if the radical critique of the Communist regime has taken nearly a century to make any headway, even in the early stages, and following a cautious vote of confidence, these libertarians began to propagate their severe critique, adducing testimony and analysis.

The CNT's two libertarian delegates also helped add to the drip-drip of the libertarian critique of the Communist State. Pestana held that the establishment of a police state was utterly unacceptable: "Terror is so intense that no one can live at ease or in security. One denunciation, some incident, one little suspicion - that is all it takes."²⁵ That terror had been introduced because the Bolsheviks had put an end to the people's revolution. Gaston Leval put it bluntly; "Annihilation of the soviets as factors of administrative creativity and of trade union and labour organisations formed or in the process of being formed: annihilation too of the Constituent Assembly which implied the annihilation of all other parties and the total; suppression of the right to give expression to one's thoughts."²⁶ And so the revolution was done away with.

Both CNT delegates are agreed also in holding Lenin responsible for the establishment of a dictatorship rooted in terror, contrary to the line that the marxist Left has been taking (being keen to absolve Lenin and, with him, Leninist theory). In pursuit of this stupid white-washing operation, all of the blame has been heaped on Stalin: this is a gambit that has had the approval of the Russian Communist regime itself since the days of Khrushchev.

Whenever Pestana published his writings on Russia, in 1924, Stalin was not yet master of the situation and the description which the CNT delegate offers us of Lenin is not exactly the profile of a benefactor of mankind, but rather that of a dictator. Pestana sketches a brief psychological profile of the new tsar, bringing out, above any other feature, his authoritarianism. Thus, he notes: "He reduces everything down to authoritarian principles, to handy norms, to matters of uniformity."²⁷ Paradoxically, by Pestana's reckoning, Lenin possesses a typically Germanic character. From which there arises a tragic imposture, in that the Russian people do not in any way share the features of their dictator: "The Russian people is apathetic, slow-moving and incredibly indolent even for Latins (...) Inimical to method, formula and regimentation, it leaves everything to chance, to fortuitousness, to accident (...) everything about it, its thinking and its actions, is saturated with mysticism and spiritual dynamism."²⁸ Hence the severity of the Leninist dictatorship: it was not only the imposition of certain political values, but also the imposition of a system and a way of life radically at odds with the very character of the people. Pestana writes: "Lenin lived in thrall to the materialist conception of history that Marx evolved from his researches. He could devise no other solution to the social question than to encase it within a series of formulas and pragmatic rules. No thought, no will, no meeting of minds. That would be redolent of the bourgeois and the democrat. No allowance for character or temperament. In society there must be but one temperament, one character, one will, one initiative and one thought. So the brains and hearts of most men are redundant. Out of this reduction of man, this desire to destroy the loftiest and innermost parts of him, arises the moral conflict, the clash that was to shake revolutionary Russia most profoundly, the tragedy of the revolution."²⁹

For his part, Gaston Leval saw Lenin's "success" as being due not to any talent, but rather to his deftness in political manoeuvring and hypocrisy. In his writings,

²⁵ and ²⁶ The only subsequent publication of any of his books on the USSR of which we have any record is *Lo que yo pienso (setenta días en Rusia)* Ed. Doncel, Madrid, 1976.

according to whether they were written before or after the conquest of power, for consumption within the party or for publication, addressed to a public of international militants or long-suffering subjects, he argued differing and contradictory lines. In his view, anything was valid, provided that it got him into power and kept him there. Leval saw it as obvious that Lenin owed his "success" to his Macchiavellian amorality.

Aligning himself with what was to become one of the core theses of the libertarian interpretation of the Russian revolution, as best expressed in Voline's *The Unknown Revolution*, Leval asserts that "the whole of Stalinism is present in essence in Leninism."³⁰

Finally, Leval would have endorsed these words of Pestana's, which amount to an evaluation of the contribution of the CNT's libertarian delegates to the dissent from Communist totalitarianism: We have been in Russia. We have seen how the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is to say, what is regarded as such, operates, and we have seen the people groaning under the most atrocious tyranny, enduring the most horrific persecutions, subjected to the foulest exploitation. And who was it that was tormenting, ridiculing and vilifying the people? The bourgeoisie? No. A party that was thrown up by the revolution and to this claims to govern in the name of the most vilely oppressed class .. Dictatorship of the proletariat? Dictatorship of those who have taken the proletariat for a long-suffering mule upon which they can ride with confidence."³¹

Notes

1. Josep Termes writes: "The Russian revolution did have an impact upon the CNT and a very considerable one at that, but it has to be said that it changed it emotionally and not in terms of either its ideology or its tactics: in any event, it fuelled the desire of the Confederation's members to take power and introduce a proletarian regime." It should be remembered, though, that any seizure of power had to be understood in a libertarian sense: destruction of state power and its replacement by direct, communal and trade union democracy. With that proviso, which never appears to be redundant, we have to acknowledge the essentially emotional influence pointed out by Termes. See his article "Repercussions de la revolucio d'octubre a Catalunya" in *Serra d'Or* Barcelona, December 1967, p. 38.
2. Op. cit. p. 38. Alongside Termes's valuable article, use should also be made of Antonio Bar's text *La CNT en los anos rojos* Ed. Akal, Madrid 1981.
3. Termes, op. cit. p. 39.
4. For a detailed analysis of Quintanilla's position, see the biography by Ramon Alvarez Eleuterio Quintanilla Editores Mexicanos Unidos, Mexico 1973.
5. Simo Piera *Records i experiencies d'un dirigent de la CNT* Ed. Portic, Barcelona, 1975, p. 100.
6. Pestana relates the vicissitudes of his journey in the early pages of his *Memoria que al comite de la CNT presenta de su gestion en el II Congreso de la Tercera Internacional el delegado Angel Pestana* Biblioteca Nueva Senda, Madrid (1921?). Reprinted in *Angel Pestana Trayectoria sindicalista* Ed. Tebas, Madrid, 1974, with introduction by Antonio Elorza.
7. Victor Serge was to wind up having problems of his own with the Communist Party. His father in law, a Russian anarchist, was subjected to a painful trial. This coincided with the arrival in Russia of the Rumanian author Panait Istrati, who, disheartened by what he saw in the socialist paradise, was to pen one of the earliest critical books to come from the pen of a committed writer. See *Vers l'autre flamme* Ed. Gallimard, Paris, 1987, wherein he offers lots of information about the case of Victor Serge. Following a spell in Siberia, Serge was to end up in exile in Mexico, where he was to publish his interesting *Memorias de un revolucionario* Ed. El Caballito, Mexico, 1973.
8. See Victor Serge, op. cit. p. 124.
9. Angel Pestana *Informe de mi estancia en la URSS* Ed. Zero, Madrid, 1968. pp 29 and 30. This edition is equivalent to the above named *Memorias*.. excepting the first pages to which we refer in the preceding note.
10. Ibid. p. 35 .
11. *Memoria*.. in *Trayectoria sindicalista* Ed. Tebas, Madrid, 1974, p. 490.
12. Cited by A. Saborit in the articles in which he polemicalised with J. Peirats. Included in *J. Peirats Figuras del movimiento libertario espanol* Ed. Picazo, Barcelona, 1978, p. 148.
13. Quoted by Angel Maria de Lera in *Angel Pestana. Retrato de un anarquista*. Ed. Argos Vergara, Barcelona, 1978, p. 155.
14. Victor Serge op. cit. p. 137.
15. Both texts were published by Nueva Senda publications of Meadrid, dated by Pestana as 1924 (the edition makes no reference to date). In 1968, ZYX of Madrid published two pamphlets by Pestana: *Informe de mi estancia en la URSS* and *Juicios y consideraciones acerca de la Tercera Internacional*. Although many have been laid astray that way, these are not his two *Setenta dias* books, but rather, incomplete) two parts of his *Memoria to the CNT National Committee* (see notes 6 and 9). The only subsequent publication of any of his books on the USSR of which we have any record is *Lo que yo pienso (setenta dias en Rusia)* Ed. Doncel, Madrid, 1976.

16. Peirats, op. cit. p. 121.

17. Although the texts of the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist largely talk about the Lerida Plenum, Maurin, one of the participants, assures us that it was held in Barcelona. There have also been doubts raised about the organisational legitimacy of it, but it seems that it was about as organisationally legitimate as conditions would allow. So there was not, as Leval claims, anything anomalous about it. See Xavier Paniagua's article "La visio de Gaston Leval de la Rusia sovietica el 1921 u in Recerques Ed. Ariel, Barcelona, 1974, pp 202 and 203. And Leval's contribution to the Peirats-Saborit controversy, op. cit. p. 155 and 156.

18. Gaston Leval wrote several books describing his stay in the USSR. See his article "Lenin, sepulturero de la revolucion rusa", published in Spanish by the magazine Reconstruir Buenos Aires, 1970 and reprinted in pamphlet form in Mexico, undated (1984). Xavier Paniagua includes along with the article named above a lengthy appendix with texts that Leval sent to him in person. Part of these were published by Daniel Guerin in his anthology Ni Dios Ni Amo, Ed. Campo Abierto, Madrid, 1977, Vol. II, pp. 212-221. Leval wrote several autobiographical works: apparently he deals with the matter in some detail in Circuit dans une vie, but that remains unpublished and we have no knowledge of its having been published.

19. J. Maurin La CNT y la m Internacional Cited by X. Paniagua op. cit. p. 203.

20. R. Rocker Revolucion y regresion Ed Cajica, Mexico, 1967, p. 399.

21. G. D. Maximoff, an anarcho-syndicalist who wrote a book denouncing Communist rule, The Guillotine at Work: 20 Years of Terror in Russia Chicago, 1940. Yartchuk was one of the leading lights of the Kronstadt Commune and in 1923 he wrote an eye-witness account of it. Voline, as mentioned, wrote the best critical book on the Russian revolution The Unknown Revolution published after his death (the latest Spanish language edition is by Editores Mexicanod Unidos, 1985)

22. Disagreeably surprised by the harshness of the Communists' prison regime, Leval commented: "I remembered that in the Spain of Alfonso XIII, from which I had come, and during the time of one of the ghastliest repressions the country experienced outside of the Francoist era, one could always visit prisoners, unless they were being held secretly. My friends called to see me in the Modelo prison in Valencia and in the one in Barcelona, without difficulty. They needed only ask for me during visiting times and the gaolers would take me down to the interview room. In the cities through which I passed afterwards, I always visited my imprisoned comrades. In the Russia of Lenin and Trotsky, that was not possible." Gaston Leval "Los anarquistas en prision. (Verano de 1921)" in D. Guerin Ni Dios ni Amo Ed. Campo Abierto, Madrid, 1977, Vol. II, p. 214 .

23. Victor Serge op. cit. p. 170

24. See Diego Hidalgo Un notario espanol en Rusia Ed. Alianza, Madrid, 1985.

25. Angel Pestana Lo que yp pienso (setenta dias en Rusia) Ed. Doncel, Madrid, 1976, p. 167.

26. G. Leval Lenin, sepulturero de la revolucion rusa Mexico, undated (1984), p. 19.

27. Angel Pestana op. cit. p. 225.

28. Ibid. p. 225.

29. Ibid. P. 231.

30. G. Leval op. cit. p. 23.

31. A. Pestana op. cit. p. 10.

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