

The Spanish Revolution 70 years later

Fifth Estate history

Barry Pateman

2016

And, so we return to Spain. Nearly 70 years after the people's response to a right-wing military uprising, those events remain a source of wonder, optimism, confusion, strife and tragedy. It was a high mark of personal and social possibility that has yet to be matched. It was a real revolution of everyday life that shattered the patterns and relationships created by the agencies that constituted a growing capitalism.

Yet it was also a tragedy, comprised of millions of individual and interdependent tragedies; the curtailment of the revolutionary project by brave and well respected anarchists in the name of realism, what activist and historian Jose Peirats called, "a new theology of circumstantialism;" the slaughter of thousands who attempted to change and enrich their lives, by communists and their supporters; and a long, slow painful retreat relieved only by the individual courage of isolated groups of militants throughout the world.

Yes, we return to Spain and always will. Not just to "give flowers for the fallen," as Pietro Gori writes, but because what happened all those years ago still resonates with our practice as anarchists today. We must also remember that despite all of this tragedy, all of this mess, so many in Spain touched, if only for a moment, a "living Utopia."

By the mid-1930s, the anarchist movement in Spain, based around the CNT-FAI, was the largest in the world. Formed in 1910, the CNT was a national grouping of unions, decentralized to avoid state repression, as well as to guard against any growth of permanent bureaucracy in its organization.

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