

literature. With the ample summaries provided, the book is readable and accessible, despite the large numbers of tables (sixty-one) and the technical nature of the subject. Alter demonstrates that event-history data, though difficult at times, are not intractable. Many important questions can be approached with them. Although the generality of results for one Belgian industrial city for a circumscribed time period may be a concern, this work is nonetheless a must for libraries and for scholars interested in the economic, family, and demographic history.

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BARRIO ALONSO, ANGELES. *Anarquismo y anarcosindicalismo en Asturias (1890–1936)*. Siglo veintiuno editores, Madrid 1988. xx, 460 pp. Ptas 1887.

From the last years of the 19th-century anarchism and anarchosyndicalism gained a considerable degree of support in the Iberian peninsula. The industrial centres of Cataluña, in particular, came to be connected with a libertarian, rather than authoritarian, form of socialism. When in 1910–11 a permanent anarchosyndicalist trade-union organisation, the CNT, was established, support, as much for its creation as for its maintenance, came principally from that region and at the II National Congress in 1919 the Catalan regional confederation still represented some 60% of the CNT's membership.

However, the reasons why the Spanish anarchosyndicalist movement has continued to interest and excite is not because of its expansion at the end of the second decade of the 20th century but for its development during the fourth decade, because it was precisely then that the organisation expanded to become genuinely nationwide. The dominance of the Catalan region declined steadily: from some 60% in 1919 to 55% in 1931 and to less than 30% in 1936. The events of the Republican period increased the importance of other regional confederations – Andalucía, Aragón and Asturias.

Asturias resounds in the accounts of the Second Republic for what took place there in 1934, namely the insurrection against the newly formed right-wing coalition government. A key factor behind the insurrection was the formation in the region of a "workers alliance", essentially between the two trade-union organisations, the socialists of the UGT and the anarchosyndicalists of the CNT (the independent communists were also included but were few in number with no union organisation, while the official communists, who did have a union organisation, only joined on the very eve of the uprising).

The presence of the CNT in this alliance was, and is, a point of singular importance as it ran counter to the opinions of most of the other regional confederations and was opposed at national plenums both before and after it was signed. Why did the Asturian confederation enter the alliance? Was there something different or special about the libertarian movement in the region, and if so, what? These are the questions which have been repeatedly asked and which any book dealing with the subject of anarchism and anarchosyndicalism in Asturias should be looking to answer.

It should be stated from the start that this book by Angeles Barrio Alonso has developed out of her earlier, preliminary study, *El anarquismo en Gijón (Industrialización y movimiento obrero, 1850–1910)*, which was published in Gijón in 1982 (Biblioteca Julio Somoza). This is something which is quickly detectable, firstly because where the title reads Asturias much of the detailed content on the beginnings of the trade-union movement in the first chapter is actually on Gijón, and secondly, because the style of the succeeding chapters is significantly different.

As mentioned above, one of the questions that anyone researching the libertarian movement in Asturias should be seeking to answer is why, and how, that movement was different from that of the rest of the country. Here, the opening chapter provides certain pointers, underlining the presence and “decisive” influence (p. 52) of the anarchist theoretician Ricardo Mella, in the region during the opening years of the twentieth century; the consequent rejection of Catalan tutelage in the form of Federico Urales and his paper *Tierra y Libertad*; and the development of a school of thought around Mella from which was to come one of the key figures of the Spanish anarchosyndicalist movement, Eleuterio Quintanilla.

As so often tends to be the case, more questions are unearthed than are actually answered. Thus we are shown how the early socialist propagandists Varela, Cadavieco and Manuel Vigil, were directed to the port of Gijón by their unexpected failure to find echo of their proselytism among the miners. But, why this failure? We see also how the socialists lost out in Gijón to the burgeoning anarchist movement. Again, however, exactly why is not so clear, although the strength of the “progressive” republican political current, in this case the Federal Party, is dwelt upon.¹ Later, with the principal socialist group having moved to Oviedo at the turn of the century, we are informed that the miners constituted an integral part of its support, though the change in attitude of the said miners is not explained. Neither is the failure of the anarchists to penetrate the mining communities where, indeed, in 1902, their propaganda efforts apparently provoked reactions of “authentic hostility” towards them (p. 56).

However, while the opening chapter, founded on the work done for the study of Gijón illuminates the subject of early trade-unionism in Asturias, the ensuing chapters, and particularly the final three, which carry the story of Asturian anarchosyndicalism from 1917 to 1936, are in a totally different mould. Firstly, they are written from an essentially national perspective, dealing mainly with a series of events of national importance from the general strike of 1917 to the IV National Congress of the CNT in 1936, although each point receives a regional treatment. Secondly, that regional treatment is increasingly concentrated on and around the thoughts, writings and interventions of the one or two well-known figures of the Asturian libertarian movement: Quintanilla, José María Martínez and Avelino González Mallada.² Anyone who goes to this book, therefore, in the hope of gaining

¹ This ties in with my own research in Aragón, and particularly in Zaragoza, where the socialists lost out to a progressive republican current epitomised by Joaquín Costa who represented a far more attractive and authentically radical alternative than the dogmatic small group of socialists.

² It is of interest to note here that an anarchosyndicalist militant, himself regional secretary of the Asturian CNT during the 1930s, Ramón Alvarez, has compiled impressive and well-documented accounts of the lives and activities of both Quintanilla

a detailed understanding of the life of the Asturian CNT during the first twenty-five years of its existence is doomed to be disappointed.

In fairness to the author, however, this is mentioned at the start. After affirming that the object of the book is to analyse the anarchist movement in Asturias (p. xiii), we are then told that the difficulties occasioned by the lack of sources and the “chronic” extension of the book meant that the aim had to be changed to that of a study of “the dominant tendencies” in the anarchist movement (p. xvii). As such, the author states that no attempt has been made to offer an exhaustive analysis of the anarchosyndicalist union base; rather, only what was considered “absolutely imprescindible” has been included. This means that from the second chapter, which deals with the setting up of the CNT, the book refrains from making any real, far less detailed examination of the nature of the anarchosyndicalist organisation. This is a pity, because it immediately throws into question the value of a book where the first chapter responds to an earlier one and the remaining four, dealing with the CNT, eschew a detailed investigation of that body.

Moreover, the failure to investigate more thoroughly the syndical base in the region means that the ideological survey of chapters three, four and five, tends to be based on the same generalised and ill-understood concepts of both the anarchosyndicalist and the socialist organisations. Thus, the author refers to the benefits obtained by the socialists from their collaboration with the military dictatorship of Primo de Rivera during the 1920s, ignoring the fact that Asturias was the one region where UGT membership actually declined during this period. Furthermore, one is assailed with the same common misconceptions about the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI). Despite citing the book by Juan Gómez Casas on the movement in the bibliography, *Historia de la FAI* (Madrid, 1977), we are informed that not only is “practically nothing” known about the FAI in Asturias but that its numerical strength is even less known (p. 364, n.87). Yet, in the afore-mentioned book, Gómez Casas published the minutes of the FAI national plenum of October 1933 (p. 157), where Asturian affiliation is clearly put at twenty-two groups and just under two hundred members. Of course, if the idea is to retain the classic image of a vast secret organisation manipulating the CNT from the background, then it is hardly an advantage to cite such figures. Extending further on the same theme the author states that the FAI was “majoritarian in the unions of the Aragonese region”. As the present writer can confirm, having studied the Aragonese anarchosyndicalist movement thoroughly, such a comment merely highlights the author’s rather superficial understanding of the CNT, as much nationally as in Aragón. If we refer again to the October 1933 minutes we see that at the height of FAI development the Aragonese network counted with just six hundred members, less than 2% of the CNT membership in the region.

It is evident as we reach the final stages of the book that we have strayed well beyond the principal area of research and study. Small but basic errors intrude: Peiró, not Pestaña was Director of *Solidaridad Obrera* in July 1931 (p. 343), and CNT definitely did not recommence publication at the start of 1935 (p. 410). There appears a certain haste to conclude the work although we are now with the key

(*Eleuterio Quintanilla. Via y obra del maestro* (Mexico, 1973)) and González Mallada (*Avelino G. Mallada. Alcalde anarquista* (Barcelona, 1987)).

event, that which underpins in good measure any thesis that Asturias was different. Yet the 1934 insurrection is passed over all too rapidly, without a really thorough analysis of the curious trajectory of the single CNT regional confederation to support the “workers alliance” tactic, much less any investigation of the vital role that the CNT, especially in Gijón and La Felguera, played in the events themselves: the only significant leader to die was precisely the CNT’s José María Martínez. The suggestion, therefore, at the end of the conclusion (p. 432) that the proposal for a revolutionary alliance in 1936 – realised after the civil war had begun – “vindicated morally and materially all the previous trajectory of the regional confederation” is in no way an argument proven in the book. Equally, the assertion that the new orientation, accepted at the IV National Congress of the CNT in May 1936, “ratified the validity of Asturian postulates”, made at the start of the book (p. xvi), is, in the circumstances of a very brief summary of this factor at the congress and a complete lack of investigation into the situation of the Asturian anarchosyndicalist movement in 1936, no less unproven.

In conclusion then, the book, while providing a good deal of useful material on the early moments of trade-union development, particularly in Gijón, and whilst providing an analysis, from an Asturian point of view, of certain of the issues that occupied anarchosyndicalists during the first twenty-five years in the life of the CNT, does not give much data on the Asturian CNT itself, most certainly not on the organisation beyond Gijón and La Felguera. This is a big disappointment because that is precisely what is required and precisely what someone looking at the title of the book would assume to be present. The author claims that a lack of sources was responsible for this, adding that this lack “contributed in making extraordinarily difficult the verification of some previously formulated hypotheses” (p. xviii). No researcher should be seeking to prove preconceived hypotheses and certainly not at the expense of accurate and detailed investigation. Unfortunately, when it comes to working-class and trade-union history in Spain there have been too many theses and not enough basic research, though thankfully the position is gradually changing with a new generation of younger students.

G. A. Kelsey

JULLIARD, JACQUES. *Autonomie ouvrière. Études sur le syndicalisme d’action directe.* [Hautes Études.] Gallimard, Le Seuil, Paris 1988. 300 pp. F.fr. 140.00.

In many ways, this is a very good book. It is full of intelligent arguments, forceful attacks on much recent history writing, and controversial re-interpretations of turn-of-the-century French syndicalism and of the usually overlooked Georges Sorel. At the same time, however, Jacques Julliard has written a book that must cause feminists to despair. Despite his careful research into his subject, he has managed totally to neglect all recent feminist scholarship. And this work has not merely been compensatory studies of hitherto invisible women militants or women’s unions. Rather, feminists have rewritten the history of unionism in France, as well