

## NEW HISTORY PUBLISHED

## Bookchin on Spanish anarchism

By Sam Dolgoff

**The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Years—1868-1936**, by Murray Bookchin; Free Life Editions (New York).

The Spanish Anarchists, is not, like so many other books, a mere catalogue—a calendar of events. My old friend, Murray Bookchin, analyzes the events and forces which shaped the Spanish anarchist movement in relation to the economic and social background. Years of meticulous research went into the writing of this book.

Murray writes that the "Spanish Civil War was very much part of my own life and affected me more deeply than any other conflict in a lifetime that has seen a terrible international war and decades of nearly chronic warfare that followed it." He has eminently succeeded in transmitting this feeling on every page. The result is the best survey of Spanish anarchist history in English.

I have neither the capacity nor the space to deal adequately with a work of such magnitude, and I must therefore confine my comments to a few general observations—not to provoke polemics, but to stimulate discussion. (Unless otherwise noted, the source of all quotes is Murray.)

By way of supplementing Murray's remarks on Proudhon and Bakunin: Proudhon may have to some extent been "limited by the social barriers of a craftsman and a provincial" but Proudhon also envisaged large-scale industry, and was a precursor of syndicalism and workers' self-management. Proudhon wrote:

"In future, large-scale industry and wide culture must be the fruit of association. . . we want associations to be the first components of a vast federation of associations. . . the means of production must be managed by associations of workers. . ." Proudhon anticipated Kropotkin's theory of Mutual Aid and the theory of building the countersociety within the "shell of the old":

"Beneath the apparatus of government," wrote Proudhon, "under the shadow of its political institutions, society was slowly and silently producing its own organization, making itself a new order which expressed its vitality and autonomy. . ."

Contrary to Murray's assertion that "Proudhon's emphasis was neither revolutionary, much less anarchistic," a contract voluntarily negotiated is by definition a free agreement. And free agreement is a cardinal principle of anarchism.

**Bakunin's Urban Workers**

Bakunin's intense concern with revolutionizing the peasants, poorest workers, oppressed racial minorities and alienated intellectuals has given rise to the erroneous impression that Bakunin paid slight attention to the problems of the industrial

proletariat in the comparatively advanced industrial nations of western Europe.

Bakunin, on the contrary, counted on the urban workers to play a leading part in radicalizing the peasants and marginal groupings. The most fruitful years of his life were dedicated to promoting the principles of a libertarian labor movement in the International. The noted Bakunin scholar, Arthur Lehning, emphasizes this:

good description of the Russian family. . ."

In respect to Murray's tendency to overestimate the revolutionary role of the Spanish peasantry (in the 1880's) I would suggest a more balanced assessment: If "rural folk. . . from a pre-capitalist life-style. . . the landless peasants and laborers. . . who gave Catalan anarchism its mass following," were indeed more revolutionary than the already urbanized proletariat; there were, on the

in tendency on the part of such exclusively-organized societies in particular, to separate themselves from the masses and develop a sort of elitist leadership complex.)

The "affinity group" defined by Murray as "an organizational form based on friendship and deep personal involvement," is not simply "a remarkable achievement of Spanish anarchism." The world is honeycombed with "affinity groups", from chess clubs to anarchist propaganda groups like the

anarchists are killers and bandits and the national organ of the CNT carried an article to the same effect.)

Murray argues that "the terrorism of the Spanish anarchists was designed to provoke the Spanish bourgeoisie and undermine the stability of the social system." But Kropotkin warned that "it is not by such. . . acts that revolutions are made." And as Durruti matured he condemned his and his group's former terrorist tactics:

"Terrorism," Durruti declared, "must not compromise the life of the movement nor its prestige before the working class. . . banditry is in opposition to the revolutionary practice of anarchism. . . carrying out the Great Revolution requires other tactics—mass action, expropriation of factories, of mines, of the land. . . the method used will be direct action and the revolutionary general strike. . ."

Murray's statement that the "CNT lacked revolutionary foresight. . . lacked discussion of problems that might face the organization during revolutionary period," are unconsciously refuted in his text:

"The uprising of the fascists was predicted and the CNT issued a prophetic manifesto; it was in anarcho-syndicalist Barcelona that serious preparation and effective efforts were undertaken to cope with the military rebellion."

**Eight Million Collectivists**

Murray even calls attention to the fact that at the same time the CNT-FAI sparked a Libertarian Social Revolution affecting eight million people self-organized into rural collectives and socialized urban industries.

There is no substance whatsoever to the assertion that voting for leftist parties in the February 1936 elections to free 30,000 political prisoners led the CNT-FAI to join the republican government a few months later. One does not have to endorse the ideas of the governmental collaborationists to take into account the tragic circumstances, which rightly or wrongly, led them to adopt this policy. Murray also refers to the "increasing bureaucratization of the CNT," but offers no evidence to support so serious an accusation. Throughout his book, Murray's statements are carefully documented.

Regretably he slipped up in this case.

In his concluding chapter, Murray makes it abundantly clear he feels that "material want limits the forward thrusts of revolution and prevents the workers from directly organizing and controlling society. . . communism will be the result of abundance. . ." "In an interview a few years ago, I addressed myself to this problem in the following terms:

"If the realization of the socialist ideal depends on affluence and abundance, we are finished. No such thing will take place in the foreseeable future. If we cannot learn to live together in a condition of relative scarcity, we are sunk. . . in the absence of ethical motivations, abundance in relatively affluent countries, instead of leading to free socialism (for me a synonym for anarchism), led instead to the bourgeoisie of the proletariat and the erosion of the socialist movement."

If scarcity halted the "forward thrust of revolution," abundance made revolution itself more and more unlikely. The phenomenal productive capacity of modern technology (as Murray implies) enabled modern State capitalism (or State "socialism") to quench the fires of revolution by adopting socialistic welfare measures.

It is just such developments which make it all the more necessary to re-examine traditional socialist theory and explore new roads to freedom. The foregoing remarks touch on themes still being debated in the anarchist movement. Murray merits high praise for posing these problems and stimulating discussion by providing adequate data—pro and con.

**The Spanish Anarchists** constitutes an invaluable source for all concerned with the history and impact of Spanish Anarchism.

(Sam Dolgoff is the author of, among other works, **The Anarchist Collectives: Workers' Self-Management in Spain, 1936-39** and the newly published **The Cuban Revolution: An Anarchist Perspective**.)

Murray Bookchin will reply to Sam Dolgoff's review of **THE SPANISH ANARCHISTS: THE HEROIC YEARS, 1868-1936** in the next issue (no.5) of **THE OPEN ROAD**.



Mass rally of anarcho-syndicalist CNT during Spanish Revolution.

"Bakunin's main historical achievement lies in having linked the ideas of anarchism with the movement for the emancipation of the working class and having sown the ideas of anti-authoritarian socialism and the theory and practice of Anarcho-Syndicalism above all in Spain (my emphasis)."

Bakunin was not a strict collectivist. The anarchists in the International originally called themselves "communists", but to distinguish themselves from the Statists who also called themselves "communists" and to avoid confusion, Bakunin and the anarchists took the name "collectivists." James Guillaume, Bakunin's close comrade, states flatly that "the collectivist internationalists never accepted the theory of 'to each according to the product of his labor. . . how the products of collective labor will be equitably shared must be left to the judgment of each group. . ."

Although Bakunin "deeply admired the traditional collectivist aspects of the Russian village (the mir)," he deplored the:

"paternalism, the absorption of the individual by the mir, and the cult of the Czar. . . the despotism of the husband, the father, of the oldest brother over the family. . . the expression 'whitewashed graveyard' is a

other hand, hundreds of thousands of counter-revolutionary peasants who re-enforced the armies of the reaction. If the already urbanized industrial workers were conditioned by capitalism, it is no less true that the rural masses were conditioned to be faithful servants of their masters, the Lords of the Land, the hierarchy of The Church and the State.

In one of his best chapters, Murray tells us that in the 1930's hundreds of thousands of peasants joined the UGT reformist Socialist Party-dominated peasant syndicates and even "made serious inroads into traditionally anarchist areas. . ." The peasants are by no means as revolutionary as Murray assumes, and petty peasant landlords are at least as bourgeois minded as the urbanized, relatively affluent workers—if not more so.

The reformist, urban industrial workers may not meet our revolutionary expectations, but the revolutionary implications of their unremitting, violent struggles to wrest from the employers and from the State immediate economic and social improvements must never be under-estimated.

Murray's idealization of the "affinity group" as the perfect anarchist organizational form renders him unable to perceive its limitations. (There is a built-

up tendency on the part of such exclusively-organized societies in particular, to separate themselves from the masses and develop a sort of elitist leadership complex.)

But the anarchists have also insisted that since the necessities of life and vital services must be supplied without fail and cannot be left to the whims of individuals, they are social obligations voluntarily assumed which every able-bodied individual is honor-bound to fulfill if he or she expects to enjoy the benefits of collective labor. The intricate network of federations and confederations reflecting the complexity of social-economic life must therefore underpin the free society. Both "affinity groups" and such stable organizations anarcho-syndicalist organized as a vast network of cooperative labor, constitute the very essence of anarchism as a viable social order. The problem of the relationship between group affinity and economic function needs clarification.

I did not expect to run across a passage lauding the anarchist terror groups, in spite of the disastrous consequences for the anarchist movement. (Even now Federica Montseny, in a recent interview, strove to dispel the impression that

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