

Civil War and Revolution: Anarchism in Spain

The Anarchist Federation's Nottingham group invites you to 'Civil War and Revolution: Anarchism in Spain', 1.00pm to 6.00pm, Sunday July 18th at the Sparrows' Nest anarchist library and archive, St. Ann's.

The event is an exhibition on Anarchism in Spain. It explores the role of anarchists in the civil war and social revolution, in particular the anarcho-syndicalist CNT-FAI. It features talks by members of the Solidarity Federation, which is the British sister organisation of the CNT: 'Spain, 1936-39' at 2.00pm, and 'The CNT today', at 4.00pm.

This event follows the re-dedication of the International Brigades' Memorial to 26 Nottinghamshire people who fought in defence of the Spanish Republic against Franco and against fascism. It takes place on Saturday July 17th, County Hall, Trent Bridge, West Bridgford, 10.30am to 12.00pm. This event is put on by the Nottingham Trades Council.

Contact us for directions to the Sparrows' Nest

Email: info@thesparrowsnest.org.uk

Phone: 07913 720136

<http://www.thesparrowsnest.org.uk>

<http://nottsblackarrow.wordpress.com>

Other Related Events

Exhibition: International Brigades' Memorial Trust *"'Antifascista!'", Council House, Market Square, 12.00pm Tuesday 20th to Saturday 31st July. Also organised by the Nottingham Trades Council.*

Film: Ken Loach's 'Land and Freedom', *on the International Brigades. Sunday 25th July, 2.15pm. Sponsored by The Sparrows' Nest and 'Peoples' Histreh'. Dedicated to those who fought fascism in Spain: ¡NO PASARAN! (They shall not pass). Advance tickets through us are only £5. Please send an SAE and cheque made payable to the 'Sparrows' Nest' and send it to 'The Sparrows' Nest, c/o Box AF, Sumac Centre, 245 Gladstone Street, Nottingham. NG7 6HX*

In this current period of economic crisis and the rise of fascism, it is interesting to look at historical parallels of what we face, namely the struggle of Spanish workers of the 1930s. Against a back-drop of economic hardship, 1936-9 saw a social revolution emerge out of a civil war, and then its defeat, with the resultant strengthening of European fascism.

Fascism was spreading across Europe. Hitler in Germany and Mussolini in Italy, and its spread seemed unstoppable. But there was also a huge rise in working class resistance and militancy, Union membership increased many times over in the space of just a few years in the early 30s.

The civil war in Spain became a rallying point for the international working class' fight against fascism. Almost 30,000 people from 53 countries around the globe voluntarily took up the fight in Spain, in what is one of history's greatest examples of international working class solidarity and anti-fascism.

In fact the events in Spain were the source of much international interest. It was a key battle in the European balance of power between the emerging authoritarianism and the bourgeois democracies who were trying to maintain peace. During the revolution in 1936 Britain, France and the USA were reluctant to support the Spanish republican government because they felt they had little control of the situation. And because when they did manage to exert some control it was with increasing communist influence. This did not sit well with the European democracies. As the communists attempted to present the war as a simple defence of democracy, the ruling classes of these democracies natural allegiance fell with General Franco and the Fascists.

At first the French popular front was ready to help. However the British Tory administration intervened and persuaded the French that this would

hurt their imperial interests in the Mediterranean. This led to the non-intervention committee, and European agreement on a non-intervention policy which the Germans and Italians systematically ignored. All this achieved was to deny the Spanish Republic arms, and make the fascist's eventual victory easier.

It was in this context that the international working class mobilised. Rising to the cause. The defence of freedom over oppression and tyranny. Acting where their governments had failed too. And so the International Brigades were born, with the main recruitment drive coming from the communists, who set each national group a quota of people to recruit.

However, before the formal establishment of the International Brigades, many foreigners were already arriving in Spain, to defend the republic or to forward revolution. These fighters often simply attached themselves to the various militias, those formed by the CNT anarcho-syndicalist union and FAI (anarchist federation of Iberia) or those of the POUM (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification), which George Orwell famously joined.



What these international volunteers witnessed in Spain was not simply a civil war, or even an international fight against fascism. What they saw was revolution, with anarchy established in many areas around the country. Most notably in Catalonia, Aragon and Andalusia. Factories were run by workers committees and agriculture was collectivised.

Everything from shops, restaurants and hotels and transportation and education was collectivised and run by workers. More schools were built, agricultural production was up and public services were improved. Over 8 million people created a new way of life for themselves and tasted freedom for almost 3 years, despite the ongoing war reigned down on them by the fascists

The Anarchists also experienced conflicts with the Stalinist backed communists who actively opposed the collectivisation. Further, because the European democracies refused to get involved, the only outside help was from soviet Russia, who were very careful about who they supplied arms too, and used this as a coercive tool, encouraging anarchist militias to join the international brigades and suppressing fighting units not under direct control

Of note was the equal involvement of women, who until the revolution were very much consigned to the traditional roles imposed by the church, and whose work was long, hard and undervalued. While full emancipation was never achieved, huge gains were made. Women were to be seen active in every facet of the revolution, from the front lines to the workplaces. Many observers at the time noted that women were in fact instrumental in the organising of committees, demonstrations, propaganda and much more.

But of course the war was eventually lost. The fascists prevailed and went on to fight across Europe in world war two. Anarchists and communists either fled, or they were imprisoned, executed or exiled. The fight however went on. From exile, anarchists such as Luis Andres Edo continued to resist the Franco regime until its demise (as he was also doing in Spain under Franco before exile). Today it seems history is beginning to repeat itself. We bear witness now to another capitalist economic crisis. We see a rise in racist and fascist sentiment and rhetoric.

The people of Spain wanted revolution. But they did not expect it so quickly. The spontaneous organisation of working people made another way of life possible within a short space of time. The question is, when the revolution comes around again, will we be able to build on the achievements of the Spaniards of 1936 or are we now so fractured that the fascists will prevail again?

