# CASAS VIEJAS

There are few episodes of history more misunderstood and (often purposefully) misreported than the Spanish revolution and civil war of 1936-39. And within this extraordinary popular eruption and conflict, the role and character of the anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists are perhaps the most misrepresented of all who participated.

"Establishment" and liberal historians and journalists have most usually taken the easy option and ignored the peoples' revolution all together in their writings. They have also often taken an easy way out by dismissing the Spanish anarchist movement — one that penetrated to the very core of Spain's peasant and urban proletariat life — as an insane effort stirred up by utter cranks.

A few works have been brought out by general non-anarchist publishers over the years which show some understanding of the conditions and particulars that brought on the revolution and war. The "standard works" and easily-available texts, however, have dismissed anarchism and its adherents as primitive fanatics. This is particularly true of E.J. Hobsbawn, Raymond Carr, Gabriel Jackson and Hugh Thomas, generally regarded in the English-speaking world as major academic authorities on either Spain or revolutionary politics. (Carr has finally had the honesty to admit that his own writings on Spanish anarchists are "silly nonsense", but please excuse us if we don't praise him for this belated confession).

Now an American anthropologist, Jerome R. Mintz, after five years spent living in the Andalusian village of Casas Viejas, has produced a work that brings to the contemporary reader a detailed understanding of why and how the revolution took place and just who its participants were. Mintz' *The Anarchists of Casas Viejas* (University of Chicago Press, 336 pages, $20) is one of the most carefully-constructed and well-informed works of political sociology produced on the European anarchist movement.

The action by the campesinos (farm workers) of this small village actually took place in January 1933, three years before the revolution prompted by General Franco's fascist attack on the Spanish republic. But, as Mintz shows, the conditions which brought on the final revolt against facscism, capitalism, and the state had been building for centuries and were acute in Andalusia in the early 1930s.

The starving, poverty-stricken farm workers of Casas Viejas were locked into a system which had slowly developed since the medieval period when the Moors had been driven out of Spain. For several hundred years after the reconquest there was no true capitalism in this area of southern Spain. Much land was held in common by the towns and a practical level of prosperity existed for the peasants. This changed in the 18th century when propery began to pass into private ownership and the campesinos were pressed into an increasingly severe form of wage slavery.

Anarchism came to Spain in the mid- to late-19th century and found ready adherents among the workers who still had a memory of their former communal democracy. The movement grew rapidly throughout the country but became particularly strong in Catalonia and Andalusia where an independence of spirit was a regional characteristic. By 1933 there were 300 anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists in tiny Casas Viejas.

The militants of the national anarchist federation at that time had decided to call the revolution. It was set to coincide with a planned railroad workers' strike. The strike failed, the message to halt the planned insurrection was not believed in Casas Viejas, and on January 11, 1933, the doomed workers laid seige to the local Civil Guard headquarters. The government sent in a unit of Assault Guards under the direction of an incompetent and liar, and when the battle was over and the firing squads had completed their work, 22 village workers and three Civil Guards were dead.

The attempt at revolution was a disaster, the needed unity in the anarcho-syndicalist ranks was never achieved, and the sincere and loyal campesinos paid the price of years of abuse and repression. Because no writers bothered to talk with the survivors until Mintz arrived to live among them, they also received the abuse of misrepresentation.

Mintz has written a superb book. It will do more to make the naturalness and good sense of anarchist teachings and practice understandable to the general public than many a fat work of theory of standard "objective" history. He has used the techniques of gathering oral history well, digging out the crucial details and poetry of Andalusian life as he pursues his interviews with the anarchist survivors or their friends or children. From the growth of the movement in 1910 to the development of theory, from the details of the workday in the field to the description of shanty meals, he slowly charts his way into the anarchist world and peels away the misconceptions and falsehoods to reveal the tragic story of the insurrection and the peasants' lives and struggles of half a century ago.

There are a number of sound lessons in this book for anarchists today. The split and uncertainties in the national anarcho-syndicalist movement of the 1930s demonstrates the need for the most extensive groundwork before launching an act to totally smash both capital and the state in one concerted effort. It also raises many questions concerning the type and nature of national organizations and federations: just what is the most practical shape of a network for implementing a revolutionary program in time of crisis? Is a gradual, inch-by-inch approach to revolutionary change more workable?

These are matters in which all anarchists today should be thoroughly grounded, for they are the keys to success or failure for putting anarchy into practice. If Mintz' study has one great lesson it is that the good fruits we seek will never come forth if the roots of the tree are being eaten away by worms and disease. Revolution and social justice can only be brought about through a total transformation of life, one that must begin in our very daily existence.

G. Rukavishnikov



# E.A.T.

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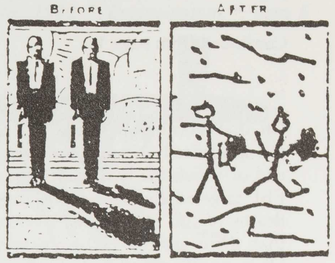



## the executive anarky training group

Anarchists from across the mid-Atlantic area met in Philadelphia September 17-19. In an atmosphere of high energy and optimism, they dedicated themselves to the building of a region-wide mutual aid community and libertarian network.

Organized by the Ladies Liberal League of Philadelphia and the Wooden Shoe Collective, the E.A.T. (Executive Anarchy Training) Conference drew anti-authoritarians from New York, New Jersey, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. It was organized in part as a follow-up to the discussions and alliances begun at AAA's Mid-Atlantic Anarchist Symposium and Conference held in D.C. last May.

E.A.T. developed with two principal points of focus: to examine the anarchist situation/condition in current politics, and to formulate concrete plans for anarchist projects throughout the region. Strategies for addressing these points developed in a series of workshops dealing with such topics as libertarian economics, creation of a contra-capital system, feminism, community education, technology and The Chip, and New Wave music, culture and social criticism.

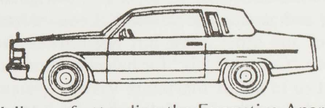
An E.A.T. general session, a regional meeting of AAA, and a rank-and-file caucus meeting of the Industrial Workers of the World also took place. Out of these meetings emerged plans for the establishment of an anarchist project fund and the possibility of taking over the lease of a small communal farm in Maryland as a mid-Atlantic community base.

The Anarchist Project Fund was the only concrete project to emerge from the weekend. After the idea was developed in the workshop addressing a contra-capital system, it was suggested that AAA administer the fund. That evening at the AAA regional meeting it was decided that a new group — Certain Philadelphia Anarchists — would collect all monies and coordinate funding requests, and that *Emancipation* would regularly report on the status of the Fund. This decision was then proposed to the general session held on Sunday and was accepted by the whole of the E.A.T. Conference. A solicitation for money with which to start the Fund resulted in the collection of $126.

The general response of the participants to the 2½ days of meetings and discussions was highly positive. "I think we've really got a movement going" was a recurring opinion. Evident in all the proceedings was a conviction that we must nourish the anarchist forces that exist today both within and to one side of the "progressive left", and encourage the anarchist tendencies in American society.

Much of the success of the free-form work sessions came from the organizers' approach: lay out the basic framework, then let the conference participants create the events. Slowly, over the course of the two days, a sense of direction and a feel for practical strategies began to emerge. The E.A.T. Conference, like the AAA Symposium-Conference in May, was clear evidence that the anarchist movement is pulling itself back together and that it understands its goals.

Mingo



I had the privilege of attending the Executive Anarchist Training Conference held in Philadelphia the weekend of September 17-19. It was my first anarchist conference and the first time I have ever been in the presence of activist anarchists in any form.

From my perspective, which is presently that of a non-anarchist, I was more than pleasantly surprised that a large number of the people involved were willing to put their futures on the line in order to promote change. And, from what little I know, total dedication is the primary step in promoting change.

I don't know what the condition of the group was one year ago or even two months ago but from my brief contact with these people (I consider myself a colleague), I saw a lot of excitement along with quite a bit of frustration.

The only 'ingredient' missing was a definite sense of direction. Well, not really a sense of direction. The conference seemed to know where it wanted to go, but a method of implementing its ideas and actually seeing progress being made were missing.

This is where we have to devote our energies. If we don't take some form of noticeable and/or (preferably and) physical action, we will not only fail to incite more people to create freedom, but we will also lose the few dedicated people we now have.

Overall I would judge the E.A.T. Conference a success. It got concerned people discussing what needs to be done to improve human conditions. It also helped define the group's abilities and capabilities.

Now all that remains is putting these ideas to practice.

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