

Cogs in the military machine? War experience and antimilitarism during the Spanish Civil War¹

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on how the Spanish Civil War was experienced and understood by those who in previous years had declared themselves pacifist or antimilitarist, mainly the pacifist movement around the *War Resisters' International* (WRI) and the antimilitarist and anarchist trade union *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT). In the article, I deal with the different ways in which these men and women analysed the reality of war, starting with the use of violence and the attitude towards the creation of an army, followed by the questions of recruitment and finishing with the ideological repression behind Republican lines. These perspectives will help us understand the militarization process that occurred on the Republican side, the way that the culture of war was experienced and the strategies that were sometimes carried out to prevent some of its negative consequences.

KEYWORDS

Spanish Civil War; Pacifism; Antimilitarism; War Culture; Anarchism

Introduction: the antimilitarist perspective(s)

The civil war of 1936 marked the arrival of modern war in the Spanish state, the industrial war that had devastated Europe between 1914 and 1918. With its own nuances and characteristics, Spanish society was now also affected by the processes of

¹ This paper was originally presented in 2014 at the International Conference entitled “Resisting War in the 20th Century” at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa and is the fruit of long discussions with several friends working in social movements, especially related to antimilitarism and historical memory. I also want to thank Robert Curwen for his help with the English version of the text.

social transformation that the continent had previously experienced. Not without controversy, these processes have in part been described in the historiography as “brutalization” and the spread of a “war culture”.² Besides these processes, the Great War also shook European conscience and politics in another direction, giving rise to the spread of an anti-war sentiment that had been uncommon until then. This was reflected in the birth of the War Resisters’ International (WRI)³ in 1921.

In the Spanish case there is no doubt that it was the civil war that unleashed brutalization and the spread of a war culture, although it is possible to find certain precedents in social conflict and the policies of public order prior to the war as well as in the colonial experience. Only five years after including the renunciation of war in its constitution, in line with the resolution of the Brand-Kellogg Treaty,⁴ the country became immersed in a three-year war as a consequence of the attempted *coup d’état* of July 1936.

In light of this situation, this article aims to analyse the reactions to the logic of war and militarization of those on the anti-fascist side who had previously defended a discourse clearly opposed to them. The article focuses on two traditions of thought, both of which

² The concept of brutalization was proposed years ago by the German historian Mosse to describe the changes that took place in German society as a consequence of the experience of World War I. MOSSE, G.L. *Fallen Soldiers. Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp.159-181. Many years later, in 1938, the anarchist and anti-militarist thinker Emma Goldman, whose position we shall be analysing over the course of this article, also pointed to the pernicious ethical consequences derived from the experience of war, from which thousands of youths had returned brutalized and degraded. See PORTER, David, ed. *Vision on Fire. Emma Goldman on the Spanish Revolution*. Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press, 2006, p.237. The spread of “war culture” in the frame of the “European civil war” has been widely explained by TRAVERSO, Enzo. *A sangre y fuego. De la guerra civil europea*. Valencia: PUV, 2009 and for contemporary Spain by GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA, E., “La cultura de guerra como propuesta historiográfica: una reflexión general desde el contemporaneísmo español”. *Historia Social*, 61, 2008. For his part, Ledesma provides an interesting reflection on the usefulness of the concept in the 1930s and the dangers of its uncritical use and makes an interesting historiographical critique of the supposed “escalation of violence” in Spain during the spring of 1936. See LEDESMA, José Luis. “Qué violencia para qué retaguardia, o la República en Guerra de 1936”. *Ayer*, 76, pp.92-93 and LEDESMA, José Luis. “La ‘primavera trágica’ trágica de 1936 y la pendiente hacia la guerra civil”. In: SANCHEZ PÉREAZ, F. (coord.) *Los mitos del 18 de julio*. Barcelona: Crítica, 2013.

³ For the birth of the WRI, which was initially named Paco (Peace in Esperanto), see the study by PRASAD, D. *War is a crime against humanity: The Story of War Resisters’ International*. London: War Resisters’ International, 2005, pp.87-100. A global survey of the rise of pacifism following World War I can be found in the works of Prasad, D. *Ibid.*, pp.101-190 and CASTAÑAR, Jesús. *Teoría e Historia de la Revolución Noviolenta*. Barcelona: Virus, 2012, pp.119-214. Also interesting is the collection edited by Brock and Socknat with several studies on pacifism in the interwar period. BROCK, P. and SOCKNAT, T. (eds.) *Challenge to Mars: Essays on Pacifism from 1918 to 1945*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. Zahn provides a survey of German pacifism and the repression it suffered under Nazism. ZAHN, Gordon C. “Pacifist during the Third Reich”. In: BERENBAUM, Michael, (ed.) *A mosaic of victims. Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis*. New York and London: New York University Press, 1990.

⁴ While a large part of the legislative work of the II Republic can clearly be described as having a demilitarizing character, with article 6 of the constitution itself and the reforms of Azaña, there are authors who note continuity between the political and military policies of Republican Spain and the later unleashing of bellicose and repressive dynamics. GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA, E., “Experiencia en combate. Continuidad y cambios en la violencia represiva (1931 – 1939)”. *Ayer*, 76, 2009. The continuity between the colonial war and the tactics of the insurgent army has been analysed by NERÍN, G. *La guerra que vino de África*. Barcelona: Crítica, 2005. For a critical review of the treatment of violence in the history of the II Republic, see GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA, E. “La historiografía sobre la violencia política en la Segunda República española: una reconsideración”. *Hispania Nova, Revista de Historia Contemporánea*, 11, 2013.

saw the need for a specific social movement in opposition to the army and militarism: one tradition was explicitly pacifist and non-violent while the other was explicitly anti-militarist, but considered the use of revolutionary violence.⁵

On the one hand, we find initiatives that echo the positions of the WRI, such as the *Orden del Olivo* (Order of the Olive Branch), created in 1932 by some trade union adhesions to the WRI and the Spanish League of War Resisters that was created in 1936 and was affiliated to the WRI. The majority of the men and women who participated in it were close to the libertarian milieu, presided over by the libertarian doctor Amparo Poch.⁶ From this milieu a critique emerged of the role of violence in revolutionary processes, such as the revolution of October 1934, for example, as well as of the limited interest shown by the revolutionary currents in defusing the pre-war climate, which had been increasing since that year.⁷

On the other hand, we find the majority of the anarcho-syndicalist movement, grouped around the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI – *Federación Anarquista Ibérica*) and the National Confederation of Labour (CNT – *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*), which was much more concerned with the anti-militarist critique, without that meaning, as we shall see, a renunciation of violent means for political action.⁸

⁵ This is an approach that is based on the political identity of the subjects themselves. I therefore rule out describing the pre-war republican regime as “anti-militarist”, as was done by the journalist and man of letters Chaves Nogales in his interesting chronicle *La Defensa de Madrid of 1938*. Sevilla: Espuela de Plata, 2011 [1938], p.25.

⁶ A. Rodrigo has written an interesting biography of this Spanish pacifist and also compiled her writings on feminism and naturism. Consult, respectively, RODRIGO, A. *Una mujer libre. Amparo Poch y Gascón, médica y anarquista*. Madrid: Flor del Viento, 2002 and *Amparo Poch y Gascón, textos de una médica libertaria*. Zaragoza: Alcaraván Ediciones, 2002.

⁷ AGIRRE, Xabier. “Los insumisos del 36: El movimiento antimilitarista y la guerra civil española”. In: Movimiento de Objeción de Conciencia. *En legítima desobediencia. Tres décadas de objeción, insumisión y antimilitarismo*. Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2002, pp.28-31; RODRIGO. *Una mujer libre. Op.Cit.*, p.78 and DE LIGT, Bartholomeus. *The conquest of violence. An Essay on War and Revolution*. London, Pluto Press, 1989 [1937], p.191.

⁸ A global view of anarchist politics during the II Republic and the Civil War is provided by CASANOVA, J. *De la calle al frente: el anarcosindicalismo en España (1931-1939)*. Barcelona: Crítica, 1997. Ortega Pérez reviews the antimilitarist principles of anarcho-syndicalism and its different currents, some of which argued that a strong antimilitarist position was compatible with the incorporation of armed practice in political action and even with the existence of structures close to military ones. ORTEGA PÉREZ, J., “Durruti y las tradiciones del antimilitarismo”. In: MORALES TORO, A. and ORTEGA PÉREZ, J. (eds.), *El lenguaje de los hechos. Ocho ensayos en torno a Buenaventura Durruti*. Madrid: La Catarata, 1996. Regarding this, Chris Ealham even writes about “militarized trade unions” during CNTs insurrectional strategy in the first half of the 1930s. See his *La lucha por Barcelona. Clase, cultura y conflicto 1898 - 1937*. Madrid: Alianza, 2005, pp.227-230. In fact, a large part of the arguments at the Zaragoza Congress in May 1936 and at the plenary of the FAI of June that year focused on the proposals of the *Nosotros* group to create the embryo of a revolutionary army based on the Defence Cadre of Barcelona, a proposal that was rejected by the majority. On this, see GUILLAMÓN, Agustín. *Los Comités de Defensa de la CNT en Barcelona (1933 – 1938)*. Barcelona: Aldarull Edicions, 2011, pp. 27-51. At the Zaragoza Congress, Cipriano Mera opposed the creation of armed militias, and even rebuked the defenders of this position: “Ascaso and García Oliver will tell us what colour they want for the braids and shoulder patches”. See OLAYA MORALES, Francisco. “Preámbulo”. In: MERA, Cipriano. *Guerra, exilio y cárcel de un anarcosindicalista*. Madrid: La Malatesta, 2011, p.17. At the same congress it was decided to implement a campaign “to foment aversion to bellicose action and a refusal to do military service”. Cited in RICHARDS, Vernon. *Enseñanzas de la Revolución Española*. Madrid: Campo Abierto Ediciones, 1977, p.134. For an

In spite of their differences, both traditions were situated in the social orbit of anarchist or libertarian culture, and might have become closer had the war not begun, if we consider that in January the FAI began a discussion on the proposals of non-violent struggle made by Bartholomeus De Ligt, an activist of the WRI, and published the De Ligt Plan.⁹ Other examples of this proximity were the campaign of disobedience to military service¹⁰ and the meeting that the Libertarian Youth planned to hold in Barcelona on 18 July 1936, cancelled following the *coup d'état*, at which leaders of the WRI and the anarchist movement would have participated together.¹¹ Perhaps, all this was a sign of a break with the earlier position of limited receptiveness to the spread of disobedience and non-violent struggle, in the framework of anarcho-syndicalism's change of course in the first half of 1936.¹²

We know that both traditions were devastated by the dynamics of war. However, their perspective is especially useful for understanding the dynamics of militarization that emerged not only at the battle front, but also in the rearguard. In this respect it is worth noting the proposal of one of these antimilitarists, Simone Weil, who stated that:

The very essence of the materialist method is that, in its examination of any human event whatever, it attaches much less importance to the ends pursued than to the consequences necessarily implied by the working out of the means employed. One can neither solve nor even state a problem relating to war without having first of all taken apart the mechanism of the military struggle, that is, without having analysed the social relations it implies under given technical, economic, and social conditions.¹³

Thus, based on this antimilitarist perspective, or better put, these antimilitarist perspectives, namely the writings left to us by these men and women, I will now analyse how they experienced and adapted to a context that collided frontally with their ideals. My analysis is based above all on personal documents (letters and memoirs), in which the

evaluation of the rich historiography on anarcho-syndicalism in the 1930s, see MARTÍN NIETO, I. "De la clase obrera a la acción colectiva. La historiografía sobre el movimiento libertario durante la Segunda República y la Guerra Civil", *Historia Social*, 73, 2012.

⁹ In the preface to the edition, the anarchist editor of *Tierra y Libertad* (Land and Freedom) underlines that De Ligt's ideas were to be put in practice by the Spanish proletariat, and mainly by the CNT and the FAI, who were "the first ones to do it". See DE LIGT, Bartholomeus. *Movilización contra toda Guerra*. Barcelona: Ediciones Tierra y Libertad, 1936, pp.7-8. For more on the thought and career of this Dutch pacifist, see his own work, *The conquest of violence*. *Op.Cit.*, and the study by NOORDEGRAAF, Herman. "The anarchopacifism of Bart de Ligt". In: BROCK and SOCKNAT (eds.) *Challenge to Mars*. *Op.Cit.*

¹⁰ Shortly before the start of the war, the WRI's publication, *The War Resister*, reported on the implementation of "an intense campaign of propaganda in favour of the principles and tactics of resistance to war, (...) with the most favourable reception being found amongst anarchist organizations and the CNT". Cited in AGIRRE. "Los insumisos del 36...". *Op.Cit.*, p.31.

¹¹ A. Rodrigo gives details on the program of the meeting, at which texts by De Ligt were to have been read. *Una mujer libre*. *Op.Cit.*, pp. 105-106.

¹² De Ligt was critical of Spanish anarchists for their limited receptiveness to the spread of nonviolent struggle in the years prior to the war. See DE LIGT. *The conquest of violence*. *Op.Cit.*, pp. 198-199. The change of course in 1936 is explained by CASANOVA. *De la calle al frente*. *Op.Cit.*, pp.132-152.

¹³ Article titled "Sobre la Guerra [Reflections on War]", published in *La Critique Sociale*, n° 10, November 1933, reproduced in WEIL, Simone. *Formative Writings*. New York: Routledge, 2010, p.174. In the same article, and based on the analysis of different internal dynamics generated in the war process, she concluded that "revolutionary war is the tomb of the revolution" (p.166).

protagonists often clearly set out the contradictions they were experiencing. Starting from this documentation, which can be enriched by new research, I attempt to provide a global explanation – one going beyond the existing fragmented historiography in this respect – of the analyses and experiences of these people who identified themselves as antimilitarists. My analysis is arranged around four of the main aspects of the process of militarization that began after 18 July 1936: the acceptance of the need for war; the militarization of the armed resistance; the recruitment and disciplining of soldiers; and the repression of political dissidence.

II. War and violence: necessary evils?

The start of the Spanish Civil War brought about a *de facto* fracture in the international pacifist movement, divided between those who continued to reject violence as a method of opposition to fascism and those who, facing the gravity of the situation, decided to choose the armed option, supporting the republican side in different ways.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the nonviolent argument remained the official position of the WRI, although it supported the implementation of mechanisms of solidarity with republican Spain, on the line defended by De Ligt. This Dutch pacifist held that, “Considering the ideological traditions and the social, political and moral conditions (...) the Spanish anti-militarists could do nothing else than resort to arms before the military invaders”.¹⁵ De Ligt stressed that in his opinion the most coherent position would have been to organize a non-violent popular defence on a massive scale, with broad international solidarity, as well as trying to disarm the army and weaken militarist attitudes prior to the war.¹⁶

A similar position was adopted by one of the most representative leaders of the Spanish pacifist movement at the time, Julio Brocca. In a letter to R. Brown, the honorary secretary of the WRI, Brocca declared that,

In the circumstances in which the fascist insurgency has taken place, the people had no other alternative than to face violence with violence (...) From the first moment, I placed myself without reserve at the service of freedom,

¹⁴ There was a strong discrepancy between those whose position changed to one of calling for armed support for the republican side (Einstein, Brockway...), and the position of those, like Bart de Ligt, who tried to uphold disobedience, passive resistance or boycott the main tools of opposition to fascism. See AGIRRE. “Los insumisos del 36...”. *Op.Cit.*, pp. 31-33 and CASTAÑAR. *Teoría e Historia de la Revolución Noviolenta. Op.Cit.*, pp. 203-214. The case of the American section of the WRI, the War Resisters’ League, has been studied in depth by BENNET, S. H., “Pacifismo socialista y revolución social no violenta: la War Resisters League y la Guerra Civil Española”. In: JULÍA, S. (ed.) *La Guerra Civil española 1936-1939. Actas del Congreso Internacional La Guerra Civil española 1936-39, celebrado en Madrid los días 27, 28 y 29 de noviembre de 2006*. Madrid: Sociedad Estatal de Conmemoraciones, 2008. An account of the split in the Dutch movement can be found in NOORDEGRAAF. “The anarchopacifism of Bart de Ligt”. *Op.Cit.*, pp. 97-98. Cyril Joad, another of the proponents of British pacifism, also underscores that facing bombings like that of Guernica and bearing in mind the impossibility of promoting revolutionary initiatives from the grass roots up, feeding the military escalation would take Europe over the edge of the precipice, and he thus preferred to opt for a policy of continental demilitarization and boycott of the German armaments industry. JOAD, Cyril Edwin Mitchinson. *Why War?* Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1939, p.35.

¹⁵ DE LIGT. *The conquest of violence. Op.Cit.*, p. 198.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 198-200.

without renouncing, however, my principles of absolute resistance to war; that is, I have done, and continue to do, as much as I can by word and deed for the anti-fascist cause, but without participating in violent actions.¹⁷

Another of these pacifist militants, Amparo Poch, acted in a similar way. This doctor and anarchist militant worked as a doctor in a libertarian battalion in the first months of the war; she later went on to manage children's homes under the control of the Ministry of Health, directed at the time by the anarchist Federica Montseny.¹⁸ Following her dismissal in June 1937, she subsequently worked in Barcelona in the *Casal de la Dona Treballadora* [House of the Working Woman], belonging to the organization *Mujeres Libres* [Free Women], of which she was a co-founder.¹⁹ Like Brocca, she managed to combine her social work and her support for the anti-fascist side with a critical position in regards to "this repugnant war that shames us".²⁰

While we have documentary accounts of the experience of pacifist leaders, there were certainly many other unknown individuals who found themselves involved in the war in spite of their anti-war sentiment. One of them was Celestino García, a young man who, in the shadow of the chimneys and smoke of the *Altos Hornos de Vizcaya* [Biscay Blast Furnaces], was a naturalist and vegetarian. He associated with anarchist circles although he kept apart from politics and was more concerned with health and spiritual questions, above all with the work of the Hindu thinker Krishnamurti. García and a companion of his from the town of Sestao tried to avoid going to war so as not to have to bear arms; when recruitment became imminent, they spoke to friends from the CNT to enlist in the Bakunin battalion, where they obtained positions as adjutants and couriers, often exposed to enemy fire, but in which they did not have to carry weapons.²¹

As noted above, the war produced a rupture in the pacifist movement at the international level, with many of its members going to Spain to take part in it. One of them was Simone Weil, who explained her decision as follows:

I don't like war; but I found the position of those outside the war far more horrifying than war itself. When I understood that, as much as I tried to believe otherwise, I couldn't ethically refuse to participate in the war – that's to say, I couldn't wish every day, every hour, victory for some and defeat for

¹⁷ Cited in AGIRRE. "Los insumisos del 36...". *Op.Cit.* pp. 31-33.

¹⁸ RODRIGO. *Una mujer libre. Op.Cit.*, pp.149-171. The social activity of Amparo Poch during the war is also recounted in this study.

¹⁹ ACKELSBURG, Martha. *Mujeres Libres. El anarquismo y la lucha por la emancipación de las mujeres*. Barcelona: Virus, 2006, pp. 153-161.

²⁰ An expression found in her article "Todos juntos. Impresiones del mitin de las juventudes revolucionarias", published in *Tierra y Libertad*, 20 February 1937 cited in RODRIGO. *Una mujer libre. Op.Cit.*, p. 176.

²¹ Interview conducted in Santurzi, Biscay (Bizkaia), March 2005. More information on this Biscayan pacifist can be found in MENDIOLA, Fernando and BEAUMONT, Edurne. *Esclavos del franquismo en el Pirineo*. Tafalla: Txalaparta, 2006, p. 112.

others while doing nothing myself, I told myself that I must put Paris behind me and I caught a train to Barcelona with the intention of enlisting.²²

While in the explicitly pacifist world the war caused a split in many collectives, the anarchist movement was in no doubt about the need for an armed response to the attempted *coup d'état*, a response that was in fact decisive for stopping the coup in many cities like Barcelona, Madrid or San Sebastián/Donostia. Once the war was underway, therefore, it is possible to find a whole series of writings and statements in the anarchist world that clearly express a rejection of more diplomatic options and, above all, the logic of non-intervention as an excuse for isolating the Republic. This can be appreciated in the following citation from an article by Camillo Berneri:

Nobody hates war more than us, but we believe that the moment has come for verifying the formula that was spelt out on another occasion by Léon Blum himself: 'It is necessary to accept the eventuality of war, in order to save peace' (...) Pacifism follows a road paved, like the road to hell, with good intentions, but this road leads to the abyss.²³

Another militant who clearly expressed herself in this respect was Emma Goldman, who, facing the importance of the moment not only for Spain but for the world, declared that, "I consider, therefore, that I must set aside the inner aversion that the cruelty of war produces in me".²⁴

Furthermore, in the letters that Goldman sent to several of her comrades from other countries, she clearly posed the insufficiency of the methods based on civil disobedience or passive resistance for confronting fascism. She also made a critique of Gandhi's proposals and asserts that nonviolence could not achieve significant social transformations, something that was especially verifiable in the framework of a civil war: "Most important of all is that mechanized warfare and violence used by the state make non-resistance utterly futile. What do you think non-resistance could do during bombardment from the air – a daily occurrence in Spanish cities and towns?"²⁵ In another of her letters, moreover, she mentioned the posture of Dutch pacifism, in reference to De Ligt's group, and stated that, "It is really expecting too much to expect our gallant comrades to abide by the kind of pacifism entertained by comrades in Holland".²⁶

²² Letter to George Bernanos. In: WEIL, Simone. *Escritos históricos y políticos*. Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2007, p. 509.

²³ "Entre la guerra y la revolución", article published 16 December 1936 and reproduced in BERNERI, Camillo. *Entre la revolución y las trincheras: recopilación de nueve artículos de Camillo Berneri [en] Guerra di classe, Barcelona, 1936-1937*. Paris: Ediciones Tierra y Libertad, 1946, pp.13-14.

²⁴ Letter to the Irishwoman Sheehy-Skeffington, 12 November 1936, cited in PORTER. *Vision on Fire. Op.Cit.*, p. 223.

²⁵ Letter to Hall, a North American anarchist, 27 May 1938, cited in Ibid., pp. 237-241. There are also references to the insufficiency of passive resistance in her letter to Cassius Cook, 8 February 1937 cited in Ibid., pp. 223-224.

²⁶ Letter to the Dutch anarchist William Jong cited in Ibid., p. 225. In this letter, moreover, she alludes to the practice of nonviolence, observing that "passivity is pre-eminently an Eastern characteristic" (p.224).

Now, in spite of these antimilitarists having no doubt about the need to take part in the war, in many of them we find an evident bitterness about its consequences. Weil, for example, expressed scepticism about the way in which the atmosphere of war smothered revolutionary sentiment. She had no doubt about the good faith of

our anarchist comrades in Catalonia. Yet what do we see over there? Alas, there also we see forms of compulsion and instances of inhumanity that are directly contrary to the libertarian and humanitarian ideal of the anarchists. The necessities and the atmosphere of civil war are sweeping away the aspirations that we are seeking to defend by means of civil war.²⁷

These concerns were even shared by some who did not reject violence as a political tool, such as the case of Durruti, who stated at the War Committee: “If this situation [of war] is prolonged, it will put an end to the revolution, because the man who emerges from it will be more of a beast than a human”.²⁸

In a similar take, Emma Goldman also posed the problem of violence in her reflections in a complex and multifaceted way, transmitting her constant concern about its consequences while defending its need, both facing revolution and in the case of the war in Spain. She stated that, “The function of Anarchism in a revolutionary period is to minimize the violence of revolution and replace it by constructive efforts. This has been done in Spain”.²⁹

This statement was, however, accompanied by a certain disappointment in this period, the spring of 1938, concerning the consequences derived from involvement in the war and the use of violence:

More and more I come to the conclusion that there can be no Anarchist revolution. By its very violent nature Revolution denies everything Anarchism stands for. (...) Whatever the reason it is certain, as Spain has again proven, that nothing remains of Anarchism when one is forced to make concessions that undermine the ideal one has struggled for all one's life. You see, my dear, I do not feel very happy in my shoes.³⁰

III: Debates on militarization

One of the main questions that surfaced on 18 July 1936 concerned the tools for confronting the *coup d'état*. The weak and slow government response was very quickly

²⁷ Draft for an article titled “Reflections That No One Is Going to Like”, October 1936 cited in WEIL. *Formative Writings. Op.Cit.*, p. 185.

²⁸ Statement by Durruti during conversations at the War Committee of the CNT, reproduced in PAZ, A. *Durruti en la Revolución española*. Madrid: Fundación Anselmo Lorenzo, p. 549.

²⁹ Letter to Hall, a North American anarchist, 27 May 1938, cited in PORTER. *Vision on Fire. Op.Cit.* p. 238.

³⁰ Letter to Mark Mratchny, 4 March 1938, cited in *Ibid.*, pp.236-237. In fact, this critical position towards the war became more pronounced in Goldman during 1939 in the period leading up to World War II, when she thought that the anarchist movement should call for non-participation and rebellion. *Ibid.*, pp. 242-247.

overtaken by rapid grass-roots action, principally by the trade union organizations UGT and CNT. This rapid process quickly resulted in the formation of armed structures in the framework of the political and trade union organizations: the militias.³¹

Leaving aside the importance of having armed bodies of their own in order to obtain quotas of power in the rearguard, the organization of militias in the libertarian world made it possible to temporarily resolve a dilemma, that of creating large armed organizations with a logic different from that of the army. In this respect, there are numerous testimonies that describe the militias as having a form of internal organization with a very low level of militarization, as well as its characteristic war-like spirit. The latter was expressed at a meeting where the march of volunteers towards Zaragoza was organized in the early days of the war, “we want to be militiamen of freedom, not soldiers with a uniform”.³²

However, the rapid advance of the insurgent troops in the southwest directly drew attention to the problems of this type of militia units, which had been formed without any type of training or military instruction. Several voices were raised that criticized their efficacy using different arguments (dispersion of authority, degree of tactical preparation and women’s participation in war, for instance).³³ At the same time, and in the framework of that debate, the idea gradually took hold that a regular army was needed, within which the militias should be integrated and militarized; a series of steps were taken to this end, culminating in the creation of the Popular Army in October 1936.³⁴

³¹ For a global view of the formation of militias and their characteristics, see ALPERT, Michael. *El ejército popular de la República, 1936 – 1939*. Barcelona, Crítica, 2007, pp. 35-66.

³² Cited in SEMPRUM-MAURA, Carlos. *Revolución y contrarevolución en Cataluña*. Barcelona: Tusquets, 1978, p.193.

³³ A good summary of this debate, with abundant testimonies, can be found in BOLLOTEN, Burnett. *La guerra civil española: revolución y contrarevolución*. Alianza: Madrid, 1989, pp. 411 – 423 and MATTHEWS, James. *Soldados a la fuerza. Reclutamiento obligatorio durante la Guerra Civil 1936 – 1939*. Madrid: Alianza, 2013, pp. 47-54. In fact, in the libertarian world critical voices were also raised on the lack of military preparation of the militias, like those of MERA. *Guerra, exilio y cárcel de un anarcosindicalista. Op.Cit.*, pp. 49-50 or several of the testimonies of militiamen from the CNT that can be found in FRASER, Ronald. *Recuérdalo tú y recuérdalo a los otros. Historia oral de la Guerra Civil Española (2 vols.)*, Barcelona: Gijalbo Montadori, 1997, vol.I, pp.179-180 and vol.II, pp. 47-49. On the other hand, as the question of efficacy was at the centre of the debates, there was a clear attempt to improve it, but without accepting militarization. A concrete example of this is provided by Albert Minnig, a Swiss brigade member with libertarian leanings, who describes the effort to fortify their column on the Aragón front and the congratulations received from Soviet officers who visited them. He remarked with satisfaction that, “We are pleased, as it is a good answer to the militarization which has been instilled in the sappers and officers at the barracks of Barcelona, Valencia and Albacete since six months ago”. MINNIG, Albert. *Por el bien de la revolución. Crónica de un anarquista suizo en el Frente de Aragón*. Barcelona: Alikornio Ediciones, 2005, p. 48.

³⁴ There has also been historiographical controversy over the creation of this army. The process is described in ALPERT. *El ejército popular de la República. Op.Cit.* With respect to the reasons for this process, this author attributes more importance to the problems of the militias (which were generally recognized) and the criteria of the professional officers than to the strength of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE – *Partido Comunista de España*). In fact, and this is a key idea, the rise of the communists is not only explained by Soviet influence, which was also present, but by its clear support for a “militarized” solution, in the sense of organizing a strong and disciplined army. In fact, according to Alpert, the PCE was the party that most clearly understood the transformations of modern war and the importance of a centralized and disciplined military body.

This process was carried out with important debates, mainly in the libertarian milieu,³⁵ since militarization ran directly counter to the latent antimilitarist spirit, above all in the anarchist columns, where it was still thought that “the army is chains, the symbol of tyranny”.³⁶ Another good example of this is the following article in the anarchist newspaper *Nosotros*:

When this word [militarization] is pronounced – why not say it? –we feel uneasy, we get anxious, we shudder, because it brings to mind constant attacks on dignity and on the human personality. Up until yesterday to militarize meant – and there are still many who wish for the same thing today – to regiment men in such a way that their wills are annulled by breaking their personalities in the cogwheels of the barracks.³⁷

Another of the components of the debate was the possibility of organizing guerrilla groups, an option that was also initially proposed by some of those who were later to defend militarization, such as Cipriano Mera. This option was subsequently defended by another anarchist who shared military responsibilities with him, Abraham Guillén, who made a strong critique of republican military strategy, defending a guerrilla war in the Francoist rearguard. Guillén based his arguments on the contrast between the militarized model of war he attributed to the Communist Party (in which the conquest of territory would lead to control of the population) and a more demilitarized model, in which the power of the population, combining armed resistance with non-collaboration, would ensure a subsequent victory, even at the cost of losing territory at first.³⁸

Now, in spite of the reticence encountered, militarization was accepted largely on the basis of technical and pragmatic arguments about the need for having a well-organized army to win the war. In the end, in the case of the CNT, some authors speak of a “two-phase militarization”: first, maintaining a certain autonomy (in fact, the general-secretary of the CNT went as far as to say that, “this transformation does not imply a fundamental change, since command in the brigades will be exercised by the same men who exercised

³⁵ In reality, the tradition of the left was one of disaffection with military questions, and the process was in fact full of explanations, visits to the fronts and orders that dedicated more paragraphs to giving justifications than to detailing what needed doing, all of which illustrates the difficulties of the process. Ibid, pp.75-77. The debate in the libertarian world has been analysed by several authors such as BOLLOTEN. *La guerra civil española. Op.Cit.*, pp.511-535; RUIZ GIMÉNEZ, A. “Las milicias confederales: de la columna a la división”. In: MORALES TORO and ORTEGA PÉREZ (eds.), *El lenguaje de los hechos. Op.Cit.*, SEMPRUM-MAURA, Carlos. *Revolución y contrarevolución en Cataluña. Op.Cit.*, pp.207-220 and MAINAR, Eladi. *De milicians a soldats. Les columnes valencianes en la Guerra Civil espanyola (1936 – 1937)*. València: Universitat de Valencia, 1998, pp.85-104. Paz analyses the opposition of the Iron Column [*Columna de Hierro*] which was the last to accept militarization. He reproduces the minutes of the assembly of militiamen held on 9 March 1937 in which foreign volunteers took part and that debated the process of militarization. PAZ, A. *Crónica de la Columna de Hierro*. Barcelona: Virus Editorial, 2001, pp.151-157. Fraser, for his part, also reproduces the arguments of CNT militiamen in both respects. FRASER. *Recuérdalo tú y recuérdalo a los otros. Op.Cit.* vol.I, pp. 179-180 and vol.II, pp. 47-49.

³⁶ *Frente Libertario*, 27 October 1936, cited in BOLLOTEN. *La guerra civil española. Op.Cit.*, p. 511.

³⁷ *Nosotros*, 11 February 1937, cited by BOLLOTEN. *La guerra civil española. Op.Cit.*, p.511.

³⁸ GUILLÉN, Abraham. *El error militar de la República. La pérdida de la guerra civil*. Madrid / Valle de Arán: Queimada Ediciones, 2012.

it in the columns”)³⁹ and later, following the events of May 1937, becoming increasingly integrated in the brigades of the Popular Army.

In fact, the process was accepted by the principal leaders, including those who before the war had deeply disagreed on the formation of armed groups, like García Oliver or Cipriano Mera. The former declared in a speech of March 1937:

Today, while still being a convinced antimilitarist, in face of the fascist oppression... (...) I affirm that the Spanish proletariat – anarchist, syndicalist, socialist or communist – will never be independent and free and will never be able to analyse any of its ideological positions, if it does not have (...) a suitable instrument for war, namely military technique and the army placed at the service of the revolution.⁴⁰

For his part, Cipriano Mera wrote that “We have to wage war as it is presented to us by a regular army, equipped with all the modern means of combat”.⁴¹

Nonetheless, in many cases such acceptance was given in full awareness of the contradiction it involved for antimilitarist ideals and of the dangers implicit in the new method of organization, with the result that, insofar as they could, some individuals made small gestures of resistance, even symbolic ones. An example of this is Manuel Carabaño, an anarchist militiaman who described his experience as follows:

In the end we accepted [militarization] with considerable enthusiasm. What we never accepted was the normal discipline of the army. I refused to wear a uniform, I took my officer’s insignia and sewed them onto a leather jacket I used for going hunting (...) We never gave military salutes.⁴²

A similar experience was that of Félix Padín, a young member of the CNT from Bilbao, who was named a sergeant in the Durruti Battalion, and who explained in his memoirs that although sometimes they had to ensure some kind of discipline with the soldiers, he “did not like to wear military insignias”.⁴³

Emma Goldman provides another example of this contradictory experience. She showed understanding for her Spanish comrades and came to accept militarization as a necessary incoherence, but at the same time she was aware of what it signified. She made this clear

³⁹ Interview published in the newspaper *Nosotros*, 11 February 1937, reproduced in MAINAR. *De milicians a soldats. Les columnes valencianes en la Guerra Civil espanyola (1936 – 1937)*. *Op.Cit.*, pp.162-163.

⁴⁰ Talk at the *Coliseo* of Barcelona in January 1937, organized by the Propaganda Commission of the Regional Committee of Catalonia. GARCÍA OLIVER, Juan. *El Eco de los Pasos*. Barcelona: Ibérica de Ediciones y Publicaciones, 1978, p. 409.

⁴¹ Article in *Solidaridad Obrera*, 23 March 1937, reproduced in SEMPRUM-MAURA, Carlos. *Revolución y contrarevolución en Cataluña*. *Op.Cit.*, p.214. In his prologue of the book by Guillén, Vadillo underlines that some antimilitarist union leaders, such as Mera, had surprisingly very good aptitudes as army officers. GUILLÉN. *El error militar de la República. La pérdida de la guerra civil*. *Op.Cit.*, p.14.

⁴² Oral testimony in FRASER. *Recuérdalo tú y recuérdalo a los otros. Historia oral de la Guerra Civil Española*. *Op.Cit.* Vol.11, p.50.

⁴³ PADÍN, Félix. *Memorias*. Iruñea-Pamplona: Memoriaren Bideak/Gerónimo de Uztariz, 2009, p.41.(www.esclavitudbajoelfranquismo.org)

in a very eloquent speech in Paris in mid-September 1937 at the conference of the IWMA (International Working Men's Association), in which she recognized the contradiction that acceptance of war and militarization meant for Spanish anarchism, while at the same time expressing her confidence that: "For the present there is no danger that they will become cogs in the military wheel".⁴⁴ As we shall see in the next section, that confidence was not always confirmed in the experiences of her antimilitarist comrades.

IV. Recruitment and discipline

Parallel to the formation of a regular army was the need to have a multitude of soldiers available, willing and trained to form part of it. This leads us to consider the mechanism for recruiting and disciplining a large part of the young, male population of the zone under republican control, irrespective of the opinion they might have held about the war.⁴⁵

The imposition of conscription also resulted in an increase in desertion⁴⁶ as a response. This could be in order to avoid enlistment, for which purpose courses of action like flight to mountainous areas, self-mutilation or exile were chosen;⁴⁷ or it could involve taking advantage of the situation on the front to change sides and continue fighting in accordance with one's own ideology, which in its turn brought a growing concern by the authorities on both sides to repress such practices.

Nonetheless, the repression of desertion also raised critical voices in the libertarian camp, such as those of Emma Goldman or Simone Weil, who stated:

⁴⁴ PORTER. *Vision on Fire. Op.Cit.* p.234.

⁴⁵ According to Alpert, the militias as a mechanism of generalized recruitment were not sufficient for meeting the demands of the war. In fact, the number of those recruited in this way was around 92,000, while the number of men in the Popular Army rose to 500,000 in June 1937. ALPERT. *El ejército popular de la República. Op.Cit.* p.90; p.67. Seidman speaks of some 120,000 volunteers enrolled in the militias out of a total of over one million men mobilized by the republican army. The proportion is similar on the insurgent side, with 100,000 volunteers out of some 1,200,000 recruits. SEIDMAN, Michael. *A ras de suelo. Historia social de la República durante la Guerra Civil.* Madrid: Alianza, 2003, p.67.

⁴⁶ Although traditionally ignored by historians, in recent years desertion has drawn the attention of historians, not only in broader works on attitudes to the war, such as Seidman or Matthews on recruitment, but also in monographic studies like those of Corral or McLaughlin. SEIDMAN, Ibid.; MATTHEWS. *Soldados a la fuerza. Reclutamiento obligatorio durante la Guerra Civil 1936 – 1939. Op.Cit.*; CORRAL, Pedro. *Desertores. La Guerra Civil que nadie quiere contar.* Barcelona: Debate, 2006; McLAUCHLIN, T., *Desertion, Control and Collective Action in Civil Wars.* PhD Thesis, Department of Political Science McGill University, Montreal, 2012; McLAUCHLIN, T., "Desertion, Terrain and Control of the Home Front in Civil Wars". *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2014, published on-line (doi: 10.1177/0022002714547901). McLaughlin (2012 and 2014), includes solid empirical research on the case of the province of Santander in a broader analysis of desertion in the context of civil wars. An analysis of the policies for repressing and punishing desertion can be found in the abovementioned research by Seidman, Matthews (pp.267- 317), Corral and McLaughlin (2012, pp.123-149).

⁴⁷ The importance of the characteristics of the terrain in the rear-guard has been confirmed in the statistical analysis of desertion in the province of Santander. Consult McLAUCHLIN. "Desertion, Control and Collective Action in Civil Wars". *Op.Cit.* Seidman, for his part, has stressed the importance of exile as a course of escape. SEIDMAN. *A ras de suelo. Historia social de la República durante la Guerra Civil. Op.Cit.*, p.181.

We loathe military constraint (...) Well, in Spain there is military constraint. In spite of the influx of volunteers, mobilization has been ordered. The defence council of the Generalitat, in which our FAI comrades hold some of the leading posts, has just decreed that the old military code is to be applied in the militias.⁴⁸

This controversy not only arose with the soldiers who were mobilized, but also with those volunteers who at a certain moment decided to withdraw from the front, with the argument that their enlistment had been completely voluntary. This was initially confronted by some anarchist leaders, like Durruti, using the power of persuasion and upholding the principle of each person's freedom of action, as reflected in his testimony in the Madrid press: "Concerning the person who wants to go home claiming that he leaves voluntarily, since he came as a volunteer: after putting a few ideas to him, I send him home on foot. I've hardly ever reached that extreme".⁴⁹ In his memoirs, Cipriano Mera also referred to some of his men abandoning the front, in this case civil guardsmen.⁵⁰ He reproached them for their conduct and left them free to choose: "If you were not from the CNT, it could be said that it was revenge taken against former civil guardsmen; I should shoot all of you. Leave your weapons in a stack and get going to Madrid". Although a little later Mera stated that, "the majority of the guardsmen reacted well and re-joined the battalion," he also concluded those pages by including his own reflections on the need for greater discipline to avoid such situations: "so I started to realize that self-discipline was something very complicated and that, during war, the instinct of self-preservation turns out to be stronger in men than fulfilling their duty".⁵¹

In fact, the reality of war resulted in a gradual hardening of discipline in the army.⁵² A good example of this change of attitude is provided by the anarchist García Oliver. When in September 1936 the lieutenant A. Bayo suggested to him the need for greater discipline and even the use of the death penalty to improve the performance of his troops, who had just failed in their attempt to take Mallorca, García Oliver, at the time head of the War Committee of Barcelona, replied as follows:

Don't think of those methods of coercion and punishment. A comrade who slips up should be corrected affectionately, making him understand his mistake, but never depriving him of his life. The worker has actively entered into a revolutionary period where he is the boss and master instead of the

⁴⁸ The text by Weil is from her draft article "Reflections That No One Is Going to Like", October 1936 WEIL. *Formative Writings. Op.Cit.*, pp.184-185. Goldman's complaints on forced recruitment are included in her letter to Rudolf Rocker, 5 June 1938, cited in PORTER. *Vision on Fire. Op.Cit.* p.130.

⁴⁹ PEIRATS, José. *La CNT en la Revolución Española*. París: Ruedo Ibérico, 1971. Vol.I, p.209.

⁵⁰ The Guardia Civil was (and is) a Spanish police corps, with the peculiarity of being militarized.

⁵¹ MERA. *Guerra, exilio y cárcel de un anarcosindicalista. Op.Cit.*, pp. 59-60.

⁵² It is thus increasingly frequent to find appeals to discipline, both by specific leaders like Cipriano Mera (Ibid., p.47), and in the libertarian press. Even in the CNT newspaper, military conduct was praised and the need of fostering obedience was noted, under threat of death for those who did not carry out orders. See BOLLATEN. *La guerra civil española. Op.Cit.*, p. 520. Within this notion of strengthening of discipline, there was also an obsession with putting a stop to expressions of fraternization or the exchange of products on fronts where there was little activity, such as the Extremadura front. SEIDMAN. *A ras de suelo. Historia social de la República durante la Guerra Civil. Op.Cit.*

slave. And he can no longer be treated as in earlier times and you military leaders must convince yourselves of that.⁵³

Months later, in March 1937, however, these are the words he used to address the students at one of the military schools: “Officers of the Popular Army, you must observe an iron discipline and impose it on your men, who, once they have joined the ranks, must cease to be your comrades and become cogs in our army’s military machine”⁵⁴ in an expression that breached the trust that Goldman would express some months later. Moreover, it closely resembled the type of soldier sought by other republican forces, like the “automaton soldier” referred to by the ERC (Republican Left of Catalonia) leader Pedro Puig Subinyá.⁵⁵

In this case we also find expressions criticizing this type of soldier, as in the article published by *Solidaridad Obrera* subsequent to the discourse of García Oliver cited above:

In recent days we have witnessed events that have destroyed our soul and even made us a little pessimistic (...) When our chests are heaving with ideas of freedom, with libertarian conceptions and rebel thoughts in perfect consonance with our permanent activity, it is incomprehensible that comrade ministers should express themselves in such terms.⁵⁶

Beyond the question of whether or not these measures were necessary, the effect on some anarchist leaders of this strengthening of discipline can also be appreciated, such as the case of Peirats who stated in his memoirs that, “As militarization was imposed on the militias, disciplinary measures were stepped up and the nascent military caste really took its role to heart. Its members had quickly assimilated all the defects of the former soldiers and none of their virtues”.⁵⁷

In fact, from 1937 onwards, in the framework of militarization and following the rise of the communists, some voices were raised in the libertarian milieu that were more understanding of the practices of desertion, like that of one of the few anarchist military commissars, Ángel González Gil-Roldán. According to Peirats, who summarizes and also

⁵³ Cited in BOLLATEN. *La guerra civil española. Op.Cit.*, pp.426-427.

⁵⁴ Reported in *L'Espagne Nouvelle*, 14-15, 31 July 1937, cited by SEMPRUM-MAURA. *Revolución y contrarevolución en Cataluña. Op.Cit.*, p. 213.

⁵⁵ Report by Pedro Puig Subinyá, Brigade Commissar of the 62 Division, promoted to the Permanent Committee of his party, *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (Catalonian Republican Left), in December 1938: “And the best soldier is not the one who obeys because he understands that the order is a correct one, but the one who obeys without thinking why he does so, without knowing whether the order he has received is correct or incorrect. However inebriated, inhuman or repulsive it might seem, it is time for us all to realize that we cannot make war (and, above all, we cannot win it) if we persist in the absurd idea of creating citizen-soldiers, with an exact understanding of what they are doing and why they are doing it. The soldier that is essential today is the one who knows nothing, who comprehends nothing, who understands nothing: the automaton soldier, the machine soldier (...)” Cited in PEIRATS. *La CNT en la Revolución Española. Op.Cit.*, vol.III, p.183.

⁵⁶ Máximo Llorca, in *Ideas*, 29 April 1937, cited in BOLLATEN. *La guerra civil española. Op.Cit.*, p.520.

⁵⁷ Cited in PEIRATS. *La CNT en la Revolución Española. Op.Cit.*, vol.III, p.170.

quotes from one of his reports, desertions were due to a combination of factors linked to the military situation, hardship and political tensions. He even notes that

many deserters were from the communist brigades, where they ran the risk of death because of their political ideas, or where life was made morally impossible. When dealing with affiliates and militants of the CNT, desertion often consisted in a clandestine reintegration in the confederal units.⁵⁸

V. Repression of political dissidence

Finally, we must also consider how the pacifist and antimilitarist tradition fit in with the implementation of repressive dynamics against political and religious dissidence in the republican rearguard. While occurring on a lesser scale than on the insurgent side, repression was unleashed above all in the early months, and an important role was played in it by militants of antifascist political organizations, which, in the absence of a state apparatus, began to take justice into their own hands in different ways. The participation of anarchist groups, which were therefore immersed in the antimilitarist tradition, is confirmed in these events, in which they shared responsibility with other organizations.⁵⁹

Criticism of these events could also be found in all the antifascist political traditions,⁶⁰ both at the time and *a posteriori*, so it makes no sense to mechanically equate denunciation of the repression with the existence of pacifist or antimilitarist postulates. For this reason, I will leave aside criticism proceeding from other political forces and concentrate on postures where criticism of the repression was made from a tradition that included antimilitarism in its theoretical principles, namely anarchism. I will consider such criticism in relation to the capture of prisoners of war, repression in the rearguard or the repression set in motion following the events of May 1937, following which members of left-wing groups also began to suffer political persecution, basically those close to the POUM (The Workers' Party of Marxist Unification) and also anarchists. Hence, what

⁵⁸ Ibid., vol. III, pp. 169-170.

⁵⁹ For a comparative analysis of the repression on both sides, in which greater intensity and planning by the Francoist insurgents is clear, see the compilation by ESPINOSA, F. (ed.) *Violencia Roja y Azul. España, 1936 – 1950*. Barcelona: Crítica, 2010. The responsibility of the different antifascist forces in repression has been the subject of historiographical and political debate, and it is clear that it was not the responsibility of any one specific force. In his analysis of the province of Zaragoza, Ledesma concludes that the importance of such conduct varied according to locality, without the composition of the local committees being a factor. In fact, Ledesma points out that “it doesn’t seem bad advice to look for the reasons for these [repressive] attitudes in other more significant places than the acronyms on the political or trade union membership cards of those who held them”. LEDESMA, José Luis. *Los días de llamas de la revolución. Violencia y política en la retaguardia republicana de Zaragoza durante la Guerra Civil*. Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2003, pp.243-244. For his part, Oliver frames the repression unleashed in both rear-guards in the context of the evolution of the death penalty in contemporary Spain. OLIVER, Pedro. *La pena de muerte en España*. Madrid: Síntesis, 2008, pp.123-153.

⁶⁰ A synthesis of the most significant ones is provided by LEDESMA, José Luis. “Una retaguardia al rojo. Las violencias en la zona republicana”. In: ESPINOSA. (ed.) *Violencia Roja y Azul. España, 1936 – 1950. Op.Cit.*, pp.202-209.

follows is an analysis of the critical voices that were raised from an openly antimilitarist stance, both on the military frontline and in the rear guard.

One of these voices was that of Cipriano Mera, who openly opposed reprisals in the early months of the war, when the atmosphere was clearly favourable to them. In his memoirs, he recounted how on more than one occasion he opposed these reprisals, such as the case of Sigüenza, when he prevented the shooting of the town's bishop: "with rifle in hand I told the comrades that we had come to Sigüenza to fight against those who had risen against the people, and not to commit crimes or take reprisals against the vanquished".⁶¹

Indeed, ideological repression was an important concern for many antimilitarists, such as Emma Goldman, who reflected that, "the idea that while an armed attack on the Revolution calls for an armed defence, it doesn't also, to my mind, necessitate the shooting of people whose only crime is their difference of opinion".⁶²

Surely, Simone Weil was one of those who posed this problem in a more dramatic mode, for example, in her letter to the French writer Georges Bernanos:

In Barcelona, on average 50 men were killed every night in punishment expeditions (...) But maybe figures are not the essential on this matter. The essential is the attitude regarding killing someone. (...) Seemingly brave men told each other with a brotherly smile how they had killed priests or 'fascists'.⁶³

And in the rearguard, Joan Peiró was surely the person who most radically criticized this dynamic in a series of articles dating from the start of the war.⁶⁴ Peiró thought that repression was needed for fighting fascism and for the triumph of the revolution, but he expressed his criticism against "the modern vampires, those irresponsible who shed blood for the very pleasure of shedding it, as if their only aim were dishonouring revolution".⁶⁵

The concern was collective, and in fact in the first weeks of the war we find several calls, besides Peiró's, in the anarchist press appealing for this dynamic to be stopped. A good example of this is the manifesto published by the FAI on 30 August, which stated that,

⁶¹ MERA. *Guerra, exilio y cárcel de un anarcosindicalista*. *Op.Cit.*, p. 42. He also cites other similar situations (p.33), including his encounter with one of his former guards from Burgos prison, where he had been subjected to beatings. The encounter took place during the capture of Guadalajara prison, where the anarchists freed all the prisoners; Mero refused to take any type of revenge, saying that his gesture was "characteristic of the anarchists", and he advised his former jailer to lose himself quickly in the crowd (p.37).

⁶² Letter to Mark Mratchny, 8 February 1938, cited in PORTER. *Vision on Fire*. *Op.Cit.*, p. 224. She also expressed her concern on this question in a letter to Tom Bell dated 8 March 1937, cited in *Ibid.*, pp. 225-226.

⁶³ Letter to George Bernanos, 1938 in WEIL. *Formative Writings*. *Op.Cit.*, p.525. This letter was published in France through the initiative of Albert Camus in the antimilitarist and libertarian magazine *Témoins*, in 1955, and was a source of an important debate amongst its readers. See CAMUS, Albert. *Escritos libertarios*. Barcelona: Tusquets, 2014, pp.167-172.

⁶⁴ Peiró, who was later Industry Minister in Largo Caballero's government, received criticisms because of his writings, which in 1936 he gathered together in the book. PEIRÓ, Joan. *Perill a la reraguarda*. Mataró: Edicions llibertat, 1936.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

“we are the enemies of all violence, every imposition. We are sickened by all blood that is not the blood spilt by the people in its great endeavours for justice”.⁶⁶

However, this stance did not only reflect the position of the elite, but was also found in many local committees and leaders of the republican rearguard. In the case of Catalonia, Izard provides an interesting collection based on monographic studies, many of them local ones, which collect numerous cases where these local authorities stopped repressive dynamics or hid right-wingers and churchmen to save their lives.⁶⁷ We also find similar cases in the collectives of Aragón, where the local leaders put a stop to the repression unleashed by groups that were going from village to village or returning from the front, as in the case of Más de las Matas (Teruel), where the militiamen who had taken the village decided that there would be no reprisals. Ernesto Margeli, a militant of the CNT, explained that this was the stance of the local authorities, who had occasion to confront itinerant patrols that said they were also acting in the name of the anarchist trade union: “murder was a form of conduct that was absolutely anti-anarchist. Unfortunately, not all the comrades had enough education to understand it like that”.⁶⁸

One of the main references when it came to stopping repression in the rearguard was Melchor Rodríguez, an anarchist from Seville, who from the outset played a prominent role in curbing the antifascist repression in Madrid. Following an initial four-day period in the post in November 1936, he was Delegate of Prisons for several months between 4 December 1936 and March 1937. He was under the orders of the Minister of Justice, García Oliver, also from the CNT, with whom he had a tense relationship. During this period he implemented radical measures to guarantee the basic rights of prisoners, which saved the lives of hundreds of them and gave rise to numerous tensions with those in charge of public order on the Madrid Defence Board,⁶⁹ close to the Communist Party. While in this case, moreover, propaganda gave a clear humanist colour to the work of Melchor Rodríguez, who was nicknamed “the Red Angel”, on more than one occasion the activist himself stressed that his conduct responded to a political conception of anarchism, where there was no room for the extermination of the political enemy. In his speech accepting a small gift from several prison functionaries when he had been relieved

⁶⁶ Collected in PEIRATS. *La CNT en la Revolución Española. Op.Cit.* vol. I, p.175 who also reproduces several articles from the anarchist press, vol.I, pp. 173-175.

⁶⁷ IZARD, Miquel. *Que lo sepan ellos y no lo olvidemos nosotros. El inverosímil verano del 36 en Cataluña.* Barcelona: Virus, 2012, pp.283-302.

⁶⁸ Testimony in FRASER. *Recuérdalo tú y recuérdalo a los otros. Op.Cit.* vol.11, pp. 68-71. This historian also provides similar testimonies, like that of Saturnino Carod, leader of the CNT column that captured Calaceite (Teruel) (vol.1, pp. 178-179).

⁶⁹ His activity during those months is recounted in the book by DOMINGO, A. *El ángel rojo. La historia del anarquista Melchor Rodríguez.* Córdoba: Almuzara Domingo, 2009, pp. 167-227 who in spite of the detailed descriptions does not provide such full details on the sources of information (grouped at the end), so it is difficult to distinguish each of the cases. In his memoirs, the Basque nationalist J. Galíndez cited the work of Rodríguez in defending a large number of prisoners, and stressed the important role he played in curbing summary executions. GALÍNDEZ, J. *Los vascos en el Madrid sitiado.* Tafalla: Txalaparta, 2005, p.89.

of his post, he insisted that his work involved putting into practice “the socialist-libertarian idea”.⁷⁰

This critical posture upheld by the anarchist tradition against violations of human rights became more evident from May 1937 onwards, when the repression in the rearguard also started to be directed against the left-wing opposition on the republican side, and especially against the POUM. In fact, the murder of the anarchists Berneri and Barbieri during the May Events, and the subsequent trial of the POUM, were accompanied by the creation of the Military Intelligence Service (SIM – *Servicio de Inteligencia Militar*), which largely drew on Stalinist practices imported by soviet agents; a number of voices from the libertarian world were raised against this situation.⁷¹

Paradoxically, however, the alternative put forward by those who in the final year of the war criticized the centralization of power and the growing weight of the communists in the Negrín government, amongst whom a large part of the anarchist forces was found, was to organize a *coup d'état*. This was Colonel Casado's *coup*, in which the antimilitarist Mera played a key role, and with which the logic of militarism once again inundated the republican rearguard on the eve of defeat.⁷²

VI. By way of conclusion

As we have been able to see in the course of these pages, the same thing happened to international pacifism and antimilitarism as occurred in Spain: the hurricane of war ended up carrying away a large part of the experiences promoted in earlier years, with the result that the majority of those opposed to the logics of war and militarism ended up accepting them, more or less willingly and with greater or less conviction. In fact, in Spain the war

⁷⁰ Speech by Melchor Rodríguez, 17 April 1937, on the occasion of the tribute in his honour organized by the teams of prison functionaries. A facsimile edition of the texts of this event may be found in DOMINGO, A. and GUTIÉRREZ MOLINA, J.L. (2009) *Melchor Rodríguez, el “Ángel Rojo”*. *Reconocimiento a una figura olvidada*. Valdemoro (Madrid): Organismo Autónomo Trabajo Penitenciario y Formación para el Empleo, 2009.

⁷¹ For the May Events, see the synthesis by GALLEGO, F. *Barcelona, mayo de 1937. La crisis del antifascismo en Cataluña*. Barcelona: Debate, 2007. Peirats denounces the practices of political cleansing in the army on the basis of reports by the SIM, involving the murder of non-communists on the accusation of wanting to cross over to the enemy zone. PEIRATS. *La CNT en la Revolución Española. Op.Cit.*, vol.III, pp.221-226. He also denounces that the words pronounced by Irujo as the new Minister of Justice on putting an end to the “uncontrolled elements” gave rise to an internal repression against anarchists, with the excuse that they had participated in repressive acts at the start of the war, while nothing was done against those from the communist or socialist ranks who had done the same (vol. III, pp.234-235). There is still a lack of studies on the repressive process during the Negrín government, but the reality of the work camps of the SIM is well known. See BADIA, Francesc. *Els camps de treball a Catalunya durant la Guerra Civil (1936–1939)*. Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 2001.

⁷² In his memoirs, Mera even described the clashes, which he justified by the need to curb communist hegemony. Mera. *Guerra, exilio y cárcel de un anarcosindicalista. Op.Cit.* A detailed analysis of the final period of the Republic has recently been made by VIÑAS, Ángel and HERNÁNDEZ SANCHEZ, Fernando. *El desplome de la República*. Barcelona: Crítica, 2009.

put an end to an incipient and potentially fruitful – we will never know – collaboration between the anarcho-syndicalist movement and the WRI.

From then onwards, the option of arms was adopted by the great majority of antimilitarists, and was, in part, understood by those who rejected it, so the logic of war facilitated their militarization and integration in the modern disciplined army, in which dissidence and desertion were harshly punished. At the same time, the rearguard was also the setting of a cruel repression that was debated and discussed in antimilitarist terms.

The aim of these lines has not been to raise the question of who was more coherent or practical at that time, but to make a contribution that helps us to better understand the process of militarization on the republican side. This process was understood very lucidly, more often with bitterness and internal contradictions, by those who described themselves as pacifists or antimilitarists. It was in this scenario where, irrespective of the stance taken, these militants put into practice the challenge posed by Simone Weil, that is, analysing “the social relations implied in military struggle”.

This approach enables us to observe how the logic of war and the new hierarchies favoured by the use of violence and its centralization overrode those who proposed different ways of resolving conflicts and social organization. These women and men in no sense questioned the need for a military victory over the insurgents, but they observed patterns of conduct based on militarism and authoritarianism, such as accepting the logic of war, militarization, conscription and ideological repression; at times they denounced these patterns of conduct, and at others they promoted them against their own principles.

Returning to these questions today should help us not only to improve our analysis of the social dynamics developed in the framework of war, but also to enrich certain discourses on anti-Francoist, democratic memory that have focused above all – due to the weakness of institutional initiatives – on revealing the human and social consequences of the Francoist repression. However, we would be doing a disservice to the historical knowledge of the ideas of those repressed by Francoism if we were to close our eyes to certain processes of militarization that also strongly affected those who experienced and suffered from them. In fact, those who clearly defined themselves as being opposed to military logic and values tried, if only in part, to curb or mitigate them in the context of the war.