

# The CNT Defense Committees in Barcelona, 1933-1938: A Study of Revolutionary Autonomy and Popular Power

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The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) was a complex and multifaceted conflict that pitted the forces of the democratically elected Republican government against those of the Nationalist rebels led by General Francisco Franco. During the war, various factions emerged within both the Republican and Nationalist camps, each with its own political and ideological objectives. One of the most significant and influential factions on the Republican side was the anarcho-syndicalist National Confederation of Labor (CNT).

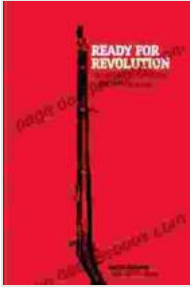
## Anarchism and the CNT

Anarchism is a political philosophy that advocates for the abolition of all forms of government and the establishment of a society based on voluntary cooperation and mutual aid. Anarchists reject the idea of a centralized state, arguing that it inevitably leads to oppression and exploitation. Instead, they believe in the creation of a decentralized, autonomous society in which individuals and communities are free to manage their own affairs without the interference of external authority.

**Ready for Revolution: The CNT Defense Committees in Barcelona, 1933-1938** by Agustín Guillamón

★★★★★ 4.1 out of 5

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Text-to-Speech	: Enabled
Screen Reader	: Supported
Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
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The CNT was the largest trade union confederation in Spain during the early 20th century. It was founded in 1910 as a federation of local trade unions and rapidly grew to become a major force in Spanish politics. The CNT's ideology was based on anarcho-syndicalism, which combines anarchism with a commitment to workers' control of the means of production.

## **The CNT in the Spanish Civil War**

When the Spanish Civil War broke out in July 1936, the CNT played a key role in organizing the Republican resistance to the Nationalist uprising. CNT militias fought on the front lines against Nationalist forces and played a leading role in the defense of Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia. In addition to its military involvement, the CNT also played a significant role in the social and economic transformation that took place in Republican-held territory.

In Barcelona, the CNT and its allies established a system of popular power based on workers' control and community self-management. Factories and businesses were collectivized, and workers' committees took control of the production and distribution of goods. Neighborhood assemblies were

formed, which allowed residents to participate directly in the decision-making process.

## **The CNT Defense Committees**

One of the most important initiatives undertaken by the CNT in Barcelona was the establishment of defense committees. These committees were responsible for maintaining public order, protecting the population from Nationalist attacks, and suppressing counter-revolutionary activity. The defense committees were armed and operated independently of the Republican government and the police. They were composed of CNT members and sympathizers, as well as members of other anarchist and revolutionary organizations.

The defense committees played a vital role in the defense of Barcelona during the war. They fought against Nationalist forces on the front lines and carried out security operations in the city. They also played a role in the suppression of the May Days uprising in 1937, which was an attempt by the Stalinist PSUC (Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia) to seize control of Barcelona.

## **Autonomy and Popular Power**

The CNT defense committees were a key example of the CNT's commitment to revolutionary autonomy and popular power. They operated independently of the Republican government and the police, and they were accountable only to the people they served. This autonomy allowed the defense committees to respond quickly to the needs of the population and to take action that the government was unable or unwilling to take.

The defense committees also played a significant role in the development of popular power in Barcelona. They helped to create a system of self-management and direct democracy that empowered the people of Barcelona to take control of their own lives. This system of popular power was a key part of the CNT's vision for a decentralized, autonomous society.

## **Challenges and Limitations**

The CNT defense committees were not without their challenges and limitations. They were often poorly organized and lacked adequate resources. They also faced opposition from the Republican government and the other factions within the Republican camp. The May Days uprising in 1937 was a major setback for the CNT and its defense committees.

Despite these challenges, the CNT defense committees played a significant role in the defense of Barcelona and the development of popular power in the city. They were a testament to the CNT's commitment to revolutionary autonomy and its belief in the power of the people to create a better society.

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