

The Spanish Anarchists

Sir,

I would like to take issue with some of the points made by Matt J. Doolan, in his article on the Spanish Civil War in a recent edition of *New Hibernia*.

Firstly, he claims that "the Anarchists proved more a liability than an asset" to the anti-Fascist cause", during the Civil War. Such a statement is not borne out by the facts. After all the Anarchists were the major force on the anti-Franco side — their trade union, the C.N.T., numbering over 1½ million workers at the outbreak of the War. More to the point though, it was the resistance, led by C.N.T. workers in Barcelona and other cities, along with the early advances by the Anarchist militias in the Aragon that stopped the Franco Dictatorship in the first place. The confusion, in his mind, is perhaps explained by the fact, that he is unaware, that in opposition to Franco there was not just those seeking the restoration of the Republic, but also of far more significance, there was a movement for social revolution among the workers and peasants, that aimed to sweep away the old and unjust social order in favour of a libertarian communist society. A liability, this social revolution wasn't, but rather, *the whole point* of the fight against Franco.

Secondly, Mr. Doolan would have done well back in 1936 if he had investigated the conditions that drove many (with enthusiasm, it must be added) to "desecrate churches, convents and Catholic schools". He would have found a Jesuit order that controlled over 30% of the wealth in Spain alongside a social order in which 67% of the land was in the hands of only 2% of the population. In such a scenario of great wealth and even greater poverty, the Catholic Church openly and derisively defended the status quo. It should come as no surprise that they were meted out, the treatment they were.

Lastly and perhaps most importantly, George Orwell — who would surely turn in his grave, to find his name mentioned in support of Mr. Doolan's views — leaves us an observation (in *Homage to Catalonia*) well worth remembering, 50 years on: "Barcelona (which was under the control of the anarchists at the time) was startling and overwhelming. It was the first time I had been in a town where the working-class was in the saddle... (I) immediately recognised it as a state of affairs worth fighting for."

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