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Individualisms in Madrid during the Spanish Civil War*

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The historiography of the Spanish civil war has traditionally focused on those persons who identified themselves with the various political and religious causes that confronted one another—Left and Right, Republicans and Nationalists, Catholics and anticlericals, fascists and antifascists, the reactionary elite and progressives, Communists and anarchists. More recently, historians have begun to investigate broader social categories that are less specifically political, such as workers and women. The treatment of both political and social subjects has usually emphasized social solidarities of working-class activism, radical politics, and gender militancy. These explorations have, of course, added enormously to our knowledge of the Spanish civil war and revolution. Yet in the search for the collective identities of politics, class, and gender, historians have forgotten the anonymous individuals who asserted their own interests against the demands of various causes and collectivities. This article is an attempt to rectify that omission, at least partially, by examining Madrid during the Spanish civil war.

The battle for Madrid was one of the most dramatic episodes of the entire conflict. It aroused the attention of the world, inspired thousands throughout the globe to volunteer to fight in Spain, and moved writers, such as André Malraux and Ernest Hemingway, to create some of the best examples of the literature engagé of the 1930s. Likewise, historians have been moved by the Madrid example. Robert Colodny calls it “the central epic of the Spanish conflict” and refers to the people of the city as “an armed community” battling against fascism. Paul Preston agrees that the defense of Madrid was “a heroic effort which involved the whole population.”¹ Wartime Madrid has remained perhaps the prime example of popular antifascism.²

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¹ Robert G. Colodny, *The Struggle for Madrid: The Central Epic of the Spanish Conflict (1936–37)* (New York, 1958), p. 55; Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939* (Chicago, 1986), p. 88.

² Carlos Serrano, ed., *Madrid, 1936–1939: Un peuple en résistance ou l'épopée ambiguë* (Paris, 1991).

Many workers were willing to sacrifice to save the capital from Nationalist forces. Tens of unions and factory committees reported the deaths of dozens of militants at the front. In the opening months of the war, rank-and-file workers seldom objected to deductions from their paychecks to finance measures of solidarity designed to assist families of the fallen. Wage earners donated to organizations such as Socorro Rojo Internacional and Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista. War widows and their children had priority of employment in many firms. At the beginning of the conflict, those who missed work usually did so for what was considered to be a good reason—to aid an injured family member or to help evacuate children from a city subjected to constant Nationalist attacks. The committed gave their time freely for the cause.

Yet even at the beginning of the war, solidarity was not universal, and there were many workers who could be described as individualistic. Most wage laborers seem to have had a marginal allegiance to their union, whether the anarchosindicalist Confederación Nacional de Trabajo (CNT) or the more Marxist Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT). They joined one or the other organization because it enabled them to keep their jobs, to obtain basic services (such as health care), or to stay out of the hands of the various official and unofficial police forces, which were liable to take measures against those not affiliated with a Popular Front organization. Autonomous locals, which had not affiliated with any major labor federation, thought it advisable for reasons of antifascism or opportunism to join one of the newly empowered organizations.³ For instance, it was publicly announced that all newspaper vendors had to join either the CNT or UGT by October 20, 1936, if they wished to continue to receive their allotment of the daily press.⁴ A CNT postal worker complained about new adherents, concluding that “from the beginning the CNT and the UGT have erred in admitting unknown comrades.”⁵ Many did not pay their dues, and on May Day in 1937 militants checked each member’s union card to make sure that it was up to date.⁶ Workers who were too far behind in payments might lose their jobs. In one major graphics firm, the Unión Bolsera Madrileña, delegates were requested to keep a list of all workers who had not joined a Popular Front organization.⁷ Yet in this firm the control committee itself was hardly a paragon of revolutionary or even

³ Acta de la Junta, September 7, 1936, and January 3, 1937, 2448; Sindicato Postal Rural, September 8, 1936, 2625. Unless otherwise noted, all cited documents, except periodicals, are located in the Archivo Histórico Nacional, Sección Guerra Civil, Salamanca; the numbers following dates in these citations represent folder numbers.

⁴ *El Liberal*, October 9, 1936.

⁵ CNT carteros, September 2, 1937, 2321.

⁶ Acta de la Junta, May 1, 1937, 2448.

⁷ Comité de control, January 17, 1937, 1008.

trade-union virtue: none of its members had joined a union before July 19, the day after the *pronunciamiento* (military coup d'état) erupted.⁸ It seems that the truly devoted were not in the rear but fighting at the front. As a way of ensuring loyalty to the cause, both unions were reluctant to allow members who had joined after July 19 to serve in positions of responsibility.⁹ To circumvent these restrictions, one worker falsified his union card.¹⁰ A chauffeur, who was a bit too eager to hedge his bets, was expelled from the CNT transportation union for belonging to four political parties.¹¹ Despite it all, throughout the war the unions pressured the nonaffiliated to join to increase each organizations' financial base and political power.¹²

Noncommitted individualists have bad reputations among historians, who tend to identify them either with lack of class consciousness or with free-market capitalism. Yet there are several types of individualisms, not all of which Adam Smith would have found congenial. In Madrid during the war, these individualisms conflicted with union and party desires for wage earners to work and sacrifice for the Republican, Socialist, or syndicalist causes. Acquisitive individualists made consumption, not class struggle, their main priority. Entrepreneurial individualists ignored restrictions on overtime and deal making. Subversive individualists refused to work and violated both state and private property rights. They acted in ways that both capitalists and revolutionaries would call either criminal or lazy.

Acquisitive individualists showed almost immediately that they were more willing to struggle for higher wages than for the Republic. Early in the conflict, the Graphic Arts Union, an important organization in the largely service economy of the Spanish capital, discouraged demands for higher wages.¹³ It asked that the rear guard not create difficulties for those who ruled by asking them for more money.¹⁴ One militant considered all wage hikes "antisocial" and believed—with the "most advanced" parties and unions—that wage earners should labor extra hours without pay. Yet the control committee of the Unión Bolsera Madrileña was forced to deal with what were, according to at least one of its members, "immoral" and "mean-spirited"

⁸ Asamblea, March 14, 1937, 1008.

⁹ Sociedad de obreros de linoleum, March 17, 1937, 708; Asamblea, Sindicato único de transporte, June 10, 1937, 991; Reunión de comités, February 19, 1938, 991; Asambleas, September 6, 1936, and February 7, 1937, 858; *Claridad*, March 4, 1937. CNT, December 21, 1937, implied that Communists wanted to bend the rules for the newcomers.

¹⁰ Reunión, July 10, 1937, 991.

¹¹ Reunión de comités, April 26, 1938, 991.

¹² *Ibid.*, May 3, 1938, 991.

¹³ Acta, September 10, 1936, 1008.

¹⁴ A todos los obreros, n.d., 1008; Acta, October 18, 1936, 1008.

demands for higher pay and more overtime.¹⁵ Although the union had ordered the end of piecework for women workers, the control committee insisted that pay would still be tied to individual production.¹⁶ Throughout 1937 some female wage laborers and unskilled workers remained discontented with their salaries.¹⁷ White-collar workers asked for higher salaries, which, they claimed, were needed because they were obliged to dress in a more respectable manner than their blue-collar counterparts.¹⁸ The printers of another graphics firm demanded extra pay because, they asserted, they were performing tasks of higher-paid workers. The Workers' Council rejected the pay raise, claiming that "many comrades are doing jobs that aren't their own but don't ask for more money."¹⁹ Both the CNT and the UGT felt compelled to tell graphics workers to delay their demands for back pay.²⁰

Workers in other branches were reluctant to labor for the war effort unless they received back pay and a wage increase, leading one activist to doubt his colleagues' antifascism.²¹ The UGT leaders, Wenceslao Carrillo and Pascual Tomás, urged metallurgists to work extra hours without pay and not to make material demands.²² Nevertheless, civilian workers became "demoralized" because wage earners who were militarized (i.e., paid by the War Ministry) were making considerably more than they were.²³ Activists placed responsibility for financial losses and lack of competitiveness in the Boetticher y Navarro company, a metalworking and engineering firm, on "an endless number of comrades who did absolutely nothing." The factory council agreed that in the future it must "control with extraordinary vigilance prices . . . as well as workers' participation at the workplace." A week later, the president of the council affirmed that "few comrades sacrifice disinterestedly. . . . They [workers] must be given some kind of financial incentives."²⁴ In the same enterprise, one committee member accused higher-paid metallurgical workers of showing "little spirit of sacrifice."²⁵

Tensions over piecework showed the strength of acquisitive individualism. Female workers in the graphics industry refused to agree to low piecework wages.²⁶ It seems that to protest poor pay they went on strike. In the construction industry, higher wages were no guarantee of increased produc-

¹⁵ Acta, November 1, 1936, 1008.

¹⁶ Acta, May 9, 1937, 1008.

¹⁷ Actas, June 20, 1937, and September 21, 1937, 1008.

¹⁸ Acta, October 23, 1937, 1008.

¹⁹ Consejo obrero de sucesores de Rivadeneyra, July 23, 1937, 660.

²⁰ Comité de enlace, May 26, 1937, 832.

²¹ Asamblea, Boetticher y Navarro, May 16, 1937, 858.

²² *Claridad*, March 4, 1937.

²³ Acta, Reunión del pleno, Boetticher y Navarro, June 16, 1937, 858.

²⁴ Acta de la sesión, June 22, 1937, 858.

²⁵ Asamblea, Boetticher y Navarro, November 30, 1937, 858.

²⁶ Reunión de pleno, April 12, 1937, 832.

tivity.²⁷ Activists agreed that “incentives were necessary for the working class in the rear.” In the Unión Bolsera Madrileña, managers felt that they could permit food distributions during working hours since, they concluded, the piecework system would discourage female workers from wasting work time.²⁸

Within the CNT, member unions fought over the question of wage hikes. The CNT construction union demanded a 25 percent increase for its fortification workers, citing as a precedent the raise that the transport union had granted to its workers. Transport disenchantedly defended its hike by pleading that its hand had been forced by “many comrades who possess only stomachs.”²⁹ Representatives of the CNT Local Federation supported wage raises since, they asserted, the government was interested only in helping well-paid ministers, not starving workers. When comrades did request better pay, they sometimes did so in the name of their families, a collective entity that aroused more sympathy from ruling organizations than individual needs or desires.

In 1938, as food and other basic commodities became even scarcer, demands for pay hikes became more frequent. Militant CNT mailmen criticized their colleagues for being “overly materialist, only concerned with eating,” “unconcerned with ideas,” and “failing to meet the test” of war and revolution.³⁰ Both the CNT and UGT were critical of “the majority” of workers’ committees in individual firms, which, the unions claimed, raised wages in total disregard of either CNT or UGT guidelines.³¹ Both CNT and UGT activists feared that if wages were raised in one locality, others would demand similar increases. On the other side, workers became impatient with what they considered a slow response to their desires for more pay.³² A few who could take matters into their own hands paid themselves salaries that others found “immoral,” “unprofessional,” and “damaging to the industry.”³³

Acquisitive individualists were reluctant to sacrifice financially for the cause. They objected to forced contributions for various social purposes. Militants of the graphics union punished those “comrades” who refused to contribute one day’s pay to celebrate April 14, which marked the founding of the Second Republic.³⁴ Activists complained that “many” postal workers

²⁷ Sesión, Comité de enlace, edificación y madera, UGT-CNT, September 13 and 27, 1938, 2124.

²⁸ Acta, Comité de control, Unión Bolsera Madrileña, January 17, 1937, 1008.

²⁹ Federación local de sindicatos únicos, July 5, 1937, 159.

³⁰ Reunión de comité, carteros urbanos, February 1, 1938, 2321.

³¹ Acta, Comité de enlace, edificación y madera, CNT-UGT, July 26 and August 16, 1938, 2124.

³² Asamblea de linoleum nacional, August 20, 1938, 3686.

³³ Cooperativa regional, Espectáculos, February 12, 1939, 3686.

³⁴ Comité de enlace, May 26, 1937, 832.

gave nothing to help children of those forced to leave Madrid.³⁵ Young CNT members, some of whom earned “good money,” often neglected to pay their dues to the confederation’s youth organization.³⁶ One woman publicly declared her “disgust” at what she considered the “egoism” of some comrades who wanted to cut contributions to the Red Cross.³⁷ Limited resources and sexist attitudes made male CNT militants rather ungenerous toward the anarchosindicalist women’s group, *Mujeres Libres*.³⁸ The financial commitment of workers to any organization, including the union itself, was often tenuous.

It is difficult to know whether acquisitive individualists doubled as entrepreneurs. The main priority of entrepreneurial types was not immediate consumption but rather earning wages or making deals. Entrepreneurial individualists defied the rules of the statist and union-dominated economy to engage in money-making activities. Some small industrialists and their workers ignored a union ban on piecework in certain industrial sectors.³⁹ Militants recommended a cutoff of supplies to these workers and their employers so that they would be forced to join collectives.⁴⁰ Officials of the CNT complained that some preferred to work in private firms rather than collectivized ones.⁴¹ The food workers’ union protested the competition of street vending, a common way for the unemployed and marginal workers to earn money. Other unions agreed that street vendors were responsible for speculation and price-gouging and recommended the centralization of all food sales.⁴² Officials and militants constantly blamed egoistic “speculators” and “monopolists” for high food prices.⁴³ Some demanded the death sentence for offenders, and harsh penalties, including long prison terms, were instituted to deter wheeling and dealing. Despite draconian laws and heavy fines, widespread black marketeering continued throughout the war.⁴⁴ For example, authorities shut down one clandestine slaughterhouse that had produced almost 400,000 kilos of horse meat.⁴⁵

³⁵ CNT carteros, October 1937, 2321.

³⁶ Acta de la reunión, May 23, 1938, 159.

³⁷ Unión Bolsera Madrileña, March 14, 1937, 1008.

³⁸ Federación local de sindicatos únicos, July 7, 1937, 159; Acta de la reunión, January(?) 15, 1937; May 22, 1937; September 27, 1937; February 20, 1938; and May 3, 1938, 991.

³⁹ Junta directiva, January 31, 1937, 2448.

⁴⁰ Ibid., January 17 and 31, 1937, 2448.

⁴¹ Federación local de sindicatos únicos, July 7, 1937, 159.

⁴² CNT federación local, August 11, 1938, 159.

⁴³ *Informaciones*, September 15, 1936; *La Libertad*, September 9, 1936; CNT, June 17, and October 7, 1937.

⁴⁴ CNT, October 7, 1937.

⁴⁵ Ibid., December 21, 1937; *El Socialista*, May 28–June 5, 1937.

A venerable entrepreneurial activity, prostitution was tolerated but not appreciated by authorities. The UGT labeled prostitutes "the principal element of the fifth column."⁴⁶ It identified prostitution with "the old regime . . . robbery, deceit, crime." At the outbreak of war, it was claimed, prostitutes had enthusiastically joined the people's militia; however, sex professionals were soon accused of following the dictates of fascism by selling their bodies to their male comrades. Unsurprisingly, ladies of leisure exerted a powerful attraction over well-paid soldiers of the regular army. Militants regretted that at a time when gasoline and public transportation were desperately needed for the war effort, long lines of cars awaited their turn in the suburbs of "immorality." From these encounters with "thieves and spies," Republican soldiers would contract diseases that would keep them out of action longer than battle wounds.

Entrepreneurial individualism also manifested itself in the desire to work overtime. In watchmaking and repair, "many union members and bosses" ignored the legal forty-four-hour workweek.⁴⁷ To prevent violations of overtime rules, union leaders named a commission that was empowered to close workshops that were laboring on Saturdays. Violations of the forty-four-hour workweek continued to disturb union watchmakers in 1937. Some workers—especially war widows—received two salaries, a practice considered "immoral" by certain activists in the communications union.⁴⁸ A newspaper employee was told that he could not hold two jobs.⁴⁹ A few workers objected to the employment of their former bosses, whom they felt did not need additional salary.⁵⁰ In the midst of the battle of Madrid, milkmen established regulations punishing those engaging in unauthorized overtime by ordering them to perform fortification work.⁵¹

Entrepreneurial and acquisitive individualisms, although obstacles to revolutionary or Republican solidarity, were much less damaging to the cause than was subversive individualism. Included under this rubric are asocial or antisocial phenomena such as absenteeism, petty theft, apathy, and indiscipline. These actions revealed the failure of the revolutionary social projects to induce workers to sacrifice. Revolution and war increased the pressures of the workplace, but workers resisted this intensified socialization by avoiding worktime. One case of faking illness appeared among linoleum workers at the beginning of the conflict: inspectors did not find the "sick" worker at home

⁴⁶ The following paragraph closely follows *Claridad*, March 4, 1937.

⁴⁷ Acta, September 7, 1936, 2448.

⁴⁸ Acta, Federación de comunicaciones, June 2, 1938, 159.

⁴⁹ Acta, Comité de control obrero, June 4, 1937, 834.

⁵⁰ Dependientes de carbón, CNT-UGT, May 23, 1937, 991.

⁵¹ Acta de la junta general, November 18, 1936, 3686.

during their visits and concluded that he was pursuing his own interests.⁵² UGT graphics workers accused their colleagues of “disobeying the work schedule and being absent without justification.”⁵³ To correct such problems, militants recommended more frequent inspections and harsher sanctions. In one firm where absenteeism was not uncommon, wage earners were warned that they must not use a bombardment as an excuse to miss work.⁵⁴ The following year, the bomb-aid workers themselves were accused of coming to work late and leaving early and, in general, of being profoundly “immoral” at the workplace.⁵⁵ Absenteeism was not confined to blue-collar workers: some journalists and newspaper editors were fired for abandoning their jobs during the “crisis.”⁵⁶

The Boetticher y Navarro company, controlled by a CNT-UGT committee, demanded early in the war that workshop delegates stop “abuses” such as leaving before the siren.⁵⁷ Workers who refused to work Saturdays and Sundays were warned that they might be fired.⁵⁸ This threat proved somewhat ineffective; early in 1938, for instance, a repairman refused to fix hospital machinery on Sunday. Facing problems of unauthorized absences, the firm posted strict rules concerning entering and leaving the factory.⁵⁹ Workers often arrived as much as an hour late for factory assemblies.⁶⁰ An assembly unanimously approved a motion that required dismissal of comrades who missed three meetings. Members were also threatened with the loss of food rations if they did not attend meetings and were menaced with fines if they left early.⁶¹ Tougher measures, including immediate expulsion from the firm, were proposed later in the year to coerce “unenthusiastic” members to be present.⁶² To increase participation, this firm—like others—debated whether a Sunday assembly would attract a larger audience.⁶³ Assemblies were usually held immediately after the end of the workday (5:30 P.M.) in order to compel the

⁵² Acta del comité de control, October 13, 1936, 3686.

⁵³ Acta, Comité de enlace, May 26, 1937, 832.

⁵⁴ Consejo obrero, Rivadeneyra, July 23, 1937, 660.

⁵⁵ Acta, Comité de enlace, edificación y madera, UGT-CNT, September 6, 1938, 2124.

⁵⁶ Acta, Comités de control de *El Liberal* y *Heraldo de Madrid*, August 16, 1937, 834.

⁵⁷ Sesión, October 2, 1936, 858.

⁵⁸ Acta de la sesión, April 25, 1937, 858.

⁵⁹ Acta de la asamblea, November 30, 1937, 858.

⁶⁰ Asamblea, February 7 and March 14, 1937, 858.

⁶¹ Acta de la reunión, March 7, 1937, 858.

⁶² Acta de la asamblea, August 1, 1937, 858; Acta de la reunión, November 27, 1937, 858.

⁶³ Acta de la asamblea, March 4, 1938, 858.

workforce to attend.⁶⁴ Even meetings of union militants and company officials were sometimes characterized by significant absenteeism.⁶⁵

Very early in the war, the workers of the UGT-affiliated Unión Bolsera Madrileña were subjected to stringent penalties for lateness.⁶⁶ Punishments created tensions between the male president of the Executive Commission and female workers, and absenteeism among women continued to plague the company throughout 1937.⁶⁷ At the beginning of 1938, a female wage earner was punished for excessive absences with loss of her right to participate in the firm's food distribution for two months. Several women who had taken what the Control Committee considered to be unfair advantage of a generous leave policy lost their sick pay.⁶⁸ Activists were warned that they too must stop using the excuse of their union duties to miss work. The Control Committee mandated weekly inspections of the ill and the public posting of the names of those whose absences had been unjustified.⁶⁹

Workers of this company were also reluctant to attend meetings. Even the Control Committee, which should have been composed of workers dedicated to the efficient functioning of the enterprise, had to enact penalties against its own members who were absent without justification.⁷⁰ It was not infrequent that "many" of the rank and file missed factory assemblies and other official gatherings.⁷¹ An activist was "disgusted" by the failure of half the workforce to attend a general assembly.⁷² The loss of two-thirds of the audience during a long meeting prompted one militant to complain of a general lack of respect for the Control Committee.⁷³ To enforce attendance, the assembly approved a motion to deny absent workers access to company food distribution for three months. Despite these repressive measures, many workers continued to miss assemblies.⁷⁴

Illiterate females frequently avoided classes that were designed to teach them how to read.⁷⁵ The majority of the thirteen women (out of seventy-two females employed) who knew neither how to read nor how to write had poor attendance records. Nor were other women who needed to improve their skills

⁶⁴ Acta de la reunión, November 22 and 27, 1937, 858.

⁶⁵ Ibid., March 7, 1937, 858; Acta de la asamblea, March 14, 1937, 858.

⁶⁶ Acta, October 6, 1936, and January 31, 1937, 1008.

⁶⁷ Acta de la reunión, June 16, 1937, November 28, 1937, and January 2, 1938, 1008.

⁶⁸ Ibid., January 31, 1938, 1008.

⁶⁹ Acta del comité del control, May 4, 1938, 1008.

⁷⁰ Acta de la reunión, March 7 and 14, 1937, 1008.

⁷¹ Acta de la asamblea, April 18, 1937, 1008.

⁷² Ibid., May 30, 1937, 1008.

⁷³ Ibid., June 20, 1937, 1008.

⁷⁴ Ibid., March 27 and April 12, 1938, 1008.

⁷⁵ Acta, Asamblea general, June 20, 1937, 1008.

diligent, and sometimes only their instructors turned up. As the classes continued over a three-month period, attendance in one dropped from eighteen to thirteen and the other from twelve to five.⁷⁶ A male activist called for sanctions against the illiterate absentees, and repressive measures were approved at the beginning of 1938.⁷⁷ They were effective in reducing absenteeism, thereby improving the morale of the female teachers.⁷⁸ Women's social roles as wives and mothers certainly contributed to absenteeism, lateness, and failure to attend classes. The personal took precedence over the professional. The family and its small circle of friends were the *patria chica* (mother country) of the female urban wage earner. Still, what one journalist termed "female indifference" frustrated the committed.⁷⁹ Women, it was hoped, would "stop being frivolous and devote themselves to the common cause of the proletariat." Activists publicized Moors' and fascists' rapes of young girls and the massacres of women and children to motivate women to support the revolution.

Apathy and indifference were not restricted to one gender. Early in the revolution, male linoleum workers were threatened with the cutoff of their food coupons if they did not pay the fines levied for missed meetings.⁸⁰ And the menace of repression did not resolve the issue: on one occasion nearly a year later the linoleum workers were unable to call the roll because the person who had it was absent.⁸¹ Like accidents, sickness had to be proven.⁸² Too long an illness—even if verified by a doctor—might lead to dismissal.⁸³ Suspicions were aroused when one female comrade who had been on sick leave since December 1936 was seen walking the streets. With the complicity of her physician, she had used a falsified medical certificate to avoid work for five months. A general assembly voted to punish her with a one-month suspension of pay.⁸⁴ Other firms were also forced to consider employing their own physician to investigate doubtful illnesses.⁸⁵ In the graphics industry, a worker who had suffered a long-term illness was required to visit three physicians.⁸⁶

⁷⁶ Ibid., October 3, 1937, 1008. Compare the Communist newspaper, *Mundo Obrero*, August 25, 1937: "Illiterate women have the greatest desire to learn. They all study zealously."

⁷⁷ Acta, Comité de control, January 2, 1938, 1008.

⁷⁸ Acta, Asamblea general, March 27, 1938, 1008.

⁷⁹ CNT, November 19, 1937.

⁸⁰ Junta general, Sociedad de obreros de linoleum, October 3, 1936, 3686.

⁸¹ Acta de la junta general, Sociedad de obreros de linoleum, August 21, 1937, 3686.

⁸² Rivadeneyra, August 6, 1937, 660.

⁸³ Comité de taller, Prensa gráfica, September 3, 1937, 660.

⁸⁴ Acta, Asamblea general, Unión Bolsera Madrileña, May 30, 1937, and June 20, 1937, 1008.

⁸⁵ Acta, Prensa gráfica, October 8, 1937, 660.

⁸⁶ Acta, Comité de taller, Prensa gráfica, August 30, 1937, 660.

In another firm, during the second day of sick leave, a doctor was dispatched to visit the supposedly ill wage earner.⁸⁷ Textile union officials of the CNT punished a female textile worker who was accused of repeated and willful absences by transferring and then firing her.⁸⁸ She was later readmitted after she pleaded the excuse of a sick mother and promised improved attendance.⁸⁹ Lateness was pervasive enough to force the textile unions, whose adherents were largely female, to impose a ten-minute tolerance limit, after which a worker would lose an hour's pay. If wage earners did not return on time following the lunch break, they would be locked out of the workshop.⁹⁰

Several newspaper employees lacked punctuality.⁹¹ Show-business workers were guilty of "repeated laziness" with regard to attendance at meetings.⁹² The construction commission noted that meetings usually started one and a half or two hours late, providing a bad example for the rank and file and undermining militants' authority.⁹³ One meeting had to be convened twice since almost half of the comrades had missed the first.⁹⁴ A committee of CNT postmen criticized both militants and rank and file for missing assemblies and approved financial penalties and demotions for recidivists.⁹⁵

Toward the end of the war, absences were frequent and numerous among wage earners in a number of industries. Some workers gave a higher priority to their own search for food and other necessities than to wage labor for the collective.⁹⁶ Others claimed that they had been injured in accidents and then went off to work in their own garden plots.⁹⁷ Absenteeism plagued the CNT collectivized metallurgical industry, a key sector of production for the war effort.⁹⁸ Militants equated absenteeism with immorality, and some claimed that foremen were reluctant to crack down on malingerers. Those serious about increasing attendance rates argued that the union should use its repressive powers to prevent "immorality." Militants, they believed, should not be afraid of making enemies among the workers. A few activists demanded that a physician be named to control the sick and to expose faked illness, but others—aware of the limits of medical science—argued that

⁸⁷ Unión Bolsera Madrileña, June 16, 1937, 1008.

⁸⁸ Reunión del consejo, November 14, [1938?], 3686.

⁸⁹ Ibid., November 28, 1938, 3686.

⁹⁰ Ibid., November 21, [1938?], 3686.

⁹¹ Actas, April 6, June 4, and June 25, 1937, 834.

⁹² Cooperativa regional, Industria de espectáculos, January 1, 1939, 3686.

⁹³ Circular, February 24, 1938, 2124.

⁹⁴ Acta, October 19, 1938, 1039.

⁹⁵ Acta, Comité de carteros, October 14, 1937, 2321.

⁹⁶ Acta, Comités de control de *El Liberal* y *Heraldo de Madrid*, May 30, 1938, 834; Acta, Comité de enlace, UGT-CNT, edificación y madera, October 4, 1938, 2124.

⁹⁷ Acta, CNT edificación, September 18, 1938, 2124.

⁹⁸ The following is from Acta de la industria socializada, June 25, 1938, 3686.

doctors were often unable to distinguish real from phony illnesses. This was undoubtedly a proper diagnosis of the situation, since other firms experienced the dilemma of having to choose between the wage earner's own physician, who testified to his patient's legitimate illness, and the house doctor, who was usually more skeptical.⁹⁹ At the end of 1938, militants continued to criticize both doctors, who failed to root out the "immoral," and insurance companies, which were thought to be more interested in maintaining high premiums than in reducing the duration of sick leave.¹⁰⁰ Funds disbursed for sick leave had reached levels that were "so alarming" that one official proposed imposing "standards that would stop all the abuses and irregularities."¹⁰¹ It was once again suggested that the appointment of a physician affiliated with the union would put an end to abuses and thus improve the finances of the metallurgical industry. During periods of bad weather, absenteeism among metallurgical and other wage earners engaged in night work was so high that output fell dramatically.¹⁰² This drastic decline of productivity combined with acute food shortages at the end of 1938 to create a "disastrous economic situation."¹⁰³ At the beginning of December, a three-member commission was charged with the mission of stopping phony illnesses, and two men were chosen to discuss the issue with the insurance company.¹⁰⁴

Given workers' individual needs and desires to avoid the commitments of the workplace, leaves (*permisos*) became one of the most difficult and time-consuming issues of the civil war. Confusion reigned concerning which organizations—committees, unions, or government—were authorized to issue leaves and safe-conduct passes.¹⁰⁵ Issues involving the personal sphere aroused debates as heated as any concerning war or peace, revolution or Republic. The disparity between firms that allowed summer leave and others that did not generated some of the most animated discussions of the war.¹⁰⁶ Members of one engineering firm complained that leaves had been awarded too frequently, despite the fact that workers who wished to exit the city needed the signature of an official of their firm and the consent of military authorities, who were supposed to approve the pass only if travel was required for

⁹⁹ Acta, Prensa Española, February 6, 1939, 1039.

¹⁰⁰ Acta de la reunión, November 13, 1938, 3686.

¹⁰¹ Reunión del pleno, November 20, 1938, 3686.

¹⁰² Ibid. In October 1938, rain caused ceramics workers to leave their jobs without permission. The absent workers were then threatened with dismissal (Acta, Comité de control de ventas, October 23, 1938, 2124).

¹⁰³ Reunión del pleno, November 20, 1938, 3686.

¹⁰⁴ Acta de la reunión, December 4 and 11, 1938, 3686.

¹⁰⁵ Reunión del pleno del comité de enlace, May 26, 1937, 832.

¹⁰⁶ Acta, Junta general, Prensa gráfica, June 18, 1937, 660.

job-related activities.¹⁰⁷ In the Unión Bolsera Madrileña, officials protested that leaves were granted too readily and that workers attempted to bypass the regular chain of command in order to obtain them.¹⁰⁸ "Abuses" of *permisos* continued in this firm in 1938. In one week, the firm issued sixty leaves, "few of which were really necessary."¹⁰⁹ The "enormous number of irregularities" hindered production at a time when "for our own pride we should work hard since not to work would be self-destructive." Despite complaints and warnings, the personnel kept demanding more leave. The control committee became "disgusted" and commented that "some requests were written with little respect and too much irony."¹¹⁰

Among others, CNT postmen noted "many abuses" of leave.¹¹¹ Even union activists "weren't on the job, using their organizational responsibilities as an excuse." Many militants wanted clear rules regarding *permisos* so that wage earners would not accuse them of being unfair. One comrade was singled out for "always talking about everything, working little, wanting a lot of leave, and talking back as though he were a big shot."¹¹² To correct the abuses, one member suggested several changes. First, absences to assist a sick wife would no longer be accepted. Second, before approving an individual's request for leave, substitutes must guarantee that the work of the absentee would be completed. The assembly unanimously approved the latter proposal along with others that specified that those who did not work would not be paid and that their dismissal would be widely advertised in the press.

Male and female workers in many enterprises continued to complain of "unfair" leave policy until the end of the war. This type of grumbling is itself an assertion of the individual's right to at least equal treatment. Building workers were "universally" demoralized because some got leave and others did not.¹¹³ Likewise, workers demanded that holidays be celebrated by all or by none.¹¹⁴ The UGT Sindicato de Comercio and the CNT Sindicato Mercantil agreed to raise salaries but, at the same time, terminated all *permisos*.¹¹⁵ One militant proposed a total prohibition on leave, which he felt was "immoral in these moments when comrades are risking their lives in the

¹⁰⁷ Consejo obrero, Rivadeneyra, August 6, 1937, 660.

¹⁰⁸ Acta, Comité de control, September 21, 1937, 1008.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., April 5, 1938, 1008.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., April 12, 1938, 1008.

¹¹¹ CNT carteros, January 4, 1938, 2321. For other complaints, see Acta, Junta directiva, March 2, 1937, 473.

¹¹² CNT carteros, January 4, 1938, 232.

¹¹³ Acta, Comité de enlace, edificación y madera, UGT-CNT, August 2, 1938, 2124.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ CNT, June 26, 1937.

trenches.”¹¹⁶ Other firms tightened requirements. Denial of leave was employed as a punishment for the indisciplined.¹¹⁷

Like abuse of leave, petty theft revealed a certain distance between the militants' social project and the priorities of individual workers. Perhaps pilfering was most dramatic in the transportation sector since chauffeurs and mechanics profited throughout the war from their easy mobility and relative liberty.¹¹⁸ Some chauffeurs came to prefer speculative or even criminal activities to regular wage labor. According to one CNT militant, transportation workers acted “shamefully, worse than when the bourgeoisie ran things. They stole tools, blankets, and jackets. We should send an inspector into [their] homes. [I ordered] fifty or sixty comrades who were not doing anything back to work. . . . [I even] fired a pervert [i.e., a gay worker].”¹¹⁹ Activists were reluctant to discuss the situation in public but said in private that the only way to correct the problems in the garages and repair shops was to empower a “slave driver” (*negrero*) to stop theft, disobedience, drunkenness, and even sabotage. This slave driver must have been somewhat ineffective since “immorality” continued to flourish among drivers.¹²⁰ In 1938 two apprentices were expelled from a Madrid workshop because of pilfering of auto parts.¹²¹ Using deceitful documentation, a driver stole potatoes, and when he was caught was sent to the fortification brigade.¹²² With the complicity of most of their colleagues, chauffeurs lent vehicles and services in exchange for food, and mechanics made repairs on private cars in public garages in return for favors.¹²³ These abuses led activists to conclude that workers had no “class consciousness.”

Drivers who were supposed to transport mail, as well as mailmen themselves, would give priority to those who bribed them with food and money.¹²⁴ Postal workers were tempted to convert what they were handling to their own personal use, and by the spring of 1937 the service had won a “public and notorious reputation for disorder.”¹²⁵ In the fall of 1937 a mailman was convicted of stealing.¹²⁶ Throughout the war, drivers were

¹¹⁶ Acta, Comité de enlace, edificación y madera, UGT-CNT, August 2, 1938, 2124.

¹¹⁷ Junta directiva, Obreros de linoleum, UGT, March 17, 1937, 708.

¹¹⁸ Acta de la reunión, Sindicato único de transporte, May 22, 1937, 991.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, August 23, [1936?], 991.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, March 14, 1938, 991.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, May 3, 1938, 991.

¹²² *Ibid.*, June 7, 1938, 991.

¹²³ Acta de comités, July 8, 1938, 991.

¹²⁴ CNT carteros, February 26, 1938, 2321.

¹²⁵ *Claridad*, March 15, 1937.

¹²⁶ CNT carteros, January 4, 1938, 2321.

known for their selfishness.¹²⁷ This “dirty business” (*negocio sucio*) of chauffeurs and their agents created “scandals worthy of fascists.”¹²⁸ The offenders were totally indifferent to the needs of the collectivity. They refused to permit accompanying postmen to take a change of clothes or even stamped packages. Instead, they filled the available space with their own highly priced merchandise.

Soldiers with access to automobiles might imitate their civilian counterparts. A military chauffeur loved to go joyriding in his Cadillac in the company of known prostitutes who, according to one CNT militant, “were morally unhealthy for those of us who really believe in the cause for which we are fighting.”¹²⁹ The driver’s taste for expensive cigarettes led others to suspect him of pimping and perhaps of black marketeering. For the good of the “social cause,” a libertarian activist demanded that he be disciplined. Militants kept insisting upon a tough policy, including dismissal of those who accepted or tolerated bribes. Yet the activists themselves sometimes set a poor example for the rank and file. A union official engaged in what others considered to be shady dealings in supply contracts was publicly drummed out of the organization.¹³⁰

Militants identified pilfering and theft with “fascism.” A certain Señor Herrera, treasurer of the CNT Federación Local, was accused of both playing with union funds and maintaining contact with the family of the daughter of the right-wing General Arleguá. The family’s maid, it appears, had reported a conversation between the accused and a priest.¹³¹ According to others, the CNT treasurer had helped the woman’s family acquire food and a safe-conduct pass. Furthermore, he had revealed the names of those responsible for arresting her husband. Herrera admitted that he had had contact with the family but denied that it was fascist. He protested that he had never met with a priest nor had he acquired a passport for his friends. The treasurer was also

¹²⁷ Acta, Comités de control de *El Liberal y Heraldo de Madrid*, August 16, 1937, 834.

¹²⁸ CNT carteros, April 29, 1938, 2321.

¹²⁹ Informe, CNT, Sección defensa, November 28, 1938, 3432.

¹³⁰ Acta de la reunión, April 25, 1938, 991. It may have provided some consolation when Madrid investigators concluded that the situation in Cuenca was even worse than in their own city. In Cuenca workshops, “a spirit of banditry” existed: “When a car is left on the street all of its parts are stolen.” One militant concluded that problems in Cuenca, like those of Madrid, could only be resolved with a “hard hand” (*mano dura*). See Reunión, January 9, 1937, 991; and Informe de la comisión que fué a Cuenca, February 7, [1937?], 991.

¹³¹ The following information is from Federación local de sindicatos únicos de Madrid, June 24, 1937, 159. The family may have been caught with a clandestine radio.

accused of embezzling CNT funds, but given the chaotic condition of the CNT books it was hard to make this last charge stick. The gathering resolved to investigate further and to punish the accused by forbidding him to hold union office.

Given individual priorities, the bombing of Madrid did not always inspire the sacrifice depicted by novelists and historians. For instance, the committee of a firm working for the defense industry felt compelled to move its machinery to a new location despite an order from the Junta de Defensa that discouraged transfers of plant equipment during periods of enemy bombardments.¹³² Although the firm was located in a “dangerous area,” which was presumably vulnerable to attack by *franquistas*, the move was made in response to not only the Nationalist danger but also that from a less identifiable internal foe who was stealing “machines, tools, and materials.” Despite the committee’s efforts to end the looting, theft continued to harm the firm’s efforts to produce for the Republican cause.

Although the search for food and other commodities became desperate in 1938, wage earners and the unemployed had invented scams to get more than their fair share even at the beginning of the war when food shortages created the first queues. Con artists posed as CNT militants to fleece subscription money from a gullible public that thought it was supporting the official organ of the confederation.¹³³ Swindlers posted signs on gambling machines falsely indicating that the proceeds were destined for the antifascist Red Cross.¹³⁴ In a situation in which the unions had frequently confiscated the property of landlords who had fled, many workers refused to pay rent.¹³⁵ Militiamen were reprimanded for practicing “proletarian shopping trips” or, more precisely, what would become known in the second half of the twentieth century as *auto-réductions*. In this case, they skipped paying for public transportation.¹³⁶

Laborers were suspected of inflating expense accounts for meals.¹³⁷ Some shop clerks divided the available victuals among themselves and ignored the needs of remaining comrades.¹³⁸ The offenders were punished, and steps were taken to stop unauthorized members who claimed to represent the collective from acquiring food.¹³⁹ But these repressive actions did not produce the desired results. Food-service workers continued to be reprimanded for their

¹³² This paragraph is based on a letter to Talleres E. Grasset, December 28, 1936, 445.

¹³³ *La Libertad*, August 1, 1936.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, September 18, 1936.

¹³⁵ Acta de la reunión, January 7, 1937, 991.

¹³⁶ *Milicia Popular*, October 13, 1936.

¹³⁷ Acta, Boetticher y Navarro, UGT-CNT, October 8, 1936, 858.

¹³⁸ Acta, Unión Bolsera Madrileña, December 3, 1936, 1008.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, December 20, 1936, 1008.

indiscipline and tardiness.¹⁴⁰ Bakers ignored rationing and took whatever bread they needed.¹⁴¹ The mayor of Madrid threatened to close down stores and lay off both CNT and UGT clerks if abuses continued.¹⁴² One firm voted to suspend a food-store manager who either had engaged in embezzlement or had permitted trafficking in necessities.¹⁴³

Workers in certain building firms had to be restrained from dividing up company revenues and granting themselves unjustified leave. To prevent individual construction firms from engaging in unauthorized distributions, a centralized sales committee was established to receive all payments.¹⁴⁴ Even some of the committed might cooperate with subversive individualists if it was in their interest to do so. Members of one firm wanted to look the other way when it was learned that a number of their colleagues had falsified coupons in order to obtain soap, which had become a precious commodity. They realized that without deception they would have remained unclean, like so many other urban dwellers in wartime.¹⁴⁵ Like soap, coal became scarce and tempted a number of previously trustworthy workers. A comrade in charge of distributing the black gold was caught in the act of stealing a sack weighing thirty-three kilos. He and his accomplices were either fired or suspended. Metallurgical workers with access to war-industry coal pilfered it during the winter of 1938.

Toward the end of the conflict, when Madrid experienced numerous shortages, the theft of foodstuffs from gardens and depots increased. The expression "earning one's daily bread" was no longer used metaphorically. Control committees became suspicious of the Voltairian practice of cultivating one's garden, which was too often done on company time.¹⁴⁶ Stealing fruits and vegetables from plots seems to have become a regular occurrence, and guards employed to prevent pilfering were probably bribed.¹⁴⁷ The president of the Linoleum Workers' Society demanded discipline and vigilance from his constituents, but his pleading fell on deaf ears since he himself was found to be using his position to get extra food coupons.¹⁴⁸ Members voted to punish

¹⁴⁰ *Claridad*, March 15, 1937.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, March 17, 1937.

¹⁴² *El Socialista*, June 11, 1937.

¹⁴³ Acta, Asamblea general, Boetticher y Navarro, May 17, 1938, 858.

¹⁴⁴ Acta, Comité de enlace, edificación y madera, CNT-UGT, October 25, 1938, 2124.

¹⁴⁵ Acta, Junta general, September 6, 1937, 858. On coal, see Linoleum nacional, April 11, 1938, 3686; Reunión, Consejo, Industrial Sidero-Metalúrgica, November 20, 1938, 3686. Another worker preferred stealing cash to coal (see Reunión, Consejo, Industrial Sidero-Metalúrgica, December 11, 1938, 3686).

¹⁴⁶ Linoleum, September 3, 1938, 3686.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Sociedad de obreros de linoleum, April 15, 1938, 3686.

him by confiscating his meal card. Nor was he the only elected official to be accused of fraud.¹⁴⁹ Construction activists suspected a CNT technician working in the fortification brigade of establishing, with the help of civilian workers, a garden to supply the local commander. Militants in the communications sector named a commission to investigate those who might have trafficked in company food coupons.¹⁵⁰ In this context of a desperate effort to increase calorie intake, it should come as no surprise that urban dwellers would complain of price-gouging by peasants.

Pilfering and petty theft implied indiscipline and disobedience. The *Unión Bolsera Madrileña* named an inspector to control "those who don't do anything and place them where they would be useful, stopping the many cases in which comrades do whatever they wish and do not perform their duties."¹⁵¹ As a result of continued disobedience, certain supervisors, including a woman in charge of a female workshop, had become demoralized. Supervisory personnel were unable to prevent young workers from congregating during work hours.¹⁵² Problems of indiscipline, some of which resulted in suspensions for fighting, continued throughout 1937. In March 1938 the seven-member Control Committee, composed of both men and women, explained its decision to resign: "When we became committee members, a climate of indiscipline existed. We felt that this problem would be resolved since workers of the *Unión Bolsera Madrileña* have a superior class consciousness. Yet, comrades, we are quite powerless to impose the necessary discipline and respect. . . . We irrevocably resign."¹⁵³ The assembly decided that it was unable to elect a new committee because of significant absenteeism. It scheduled a general assembly that was to be compulsory for all workers under the threat of a fine equivalent to one day's pay.

The connections between discipline and politics provoked heated debate in one firm very early in the revolution.¹⁵⁴ Members demanded the dismissal of foremen who were associated with both strict discipline inside the workplace and reactionary politics outside it. The dismissals were carried out, but the authority of remaining foremen was strengthened. Workers were warned that repeated acts of indiscipline would result in expulsion from the factory. Furthermore, they were expressly forbidden to leave the shop floor to observe the air battles over Madrid.¹⁵⁵ Both office and manual workers had to carry a

¹⁴⁹ Acta de la junta directiva, October 7, 1937, and October 16, 1937, 2448.

¹⁵⁰ Acta, Pleno de comité y militantes, Federación de comunicación, teléfonos, June 2, 1938, 159.

¹⁵¹ Acta, Comité de control, January 3, 1937, 1008.

¹⁵² Ibid., January 31, 1937, 1008; Asamblea general, April 18, 1937, 1008; Reunión extraordinaria, January 11, 1938, 1008.

¹⁵³ Asamblea, March 27, 1938, 1008.

¹⁵⁴ Junta, Boetticher y Navarro, November 1, 1936, 858.

¹⁵⁵ Sesión, November 13, 1936, 858.

pass in order to leave the workplace.¹⁵⁶ Acts of insubordination nevertheless continued, and sanctions were taken against those who missed work or who left meetings early.¹⁵⁷ To stop abuses, the committee voted to monitor all telephone calls. Militants believed that publicizing bad conduct would shame the offenders into conformity.¹⁵⁸ In the fall of 1937, activists lamented generalized indiscipline in "every section of the factory . . . abandoning work, lateness, insubordination regarding tasks."¹⁵⁹ Special measures were to be taken against recidivists, who could be transferred to another factory, put into a fortification brigade, or even sent to the front. Yet these menaces did not halt cases of low productivity and even drunkenness.¹⁶⁰ Toward the end of the conflict, officials of this firm had to punish "certain comrades who repeatedly came to work in varying states of inebriation, a violation of morality and work discipline."¹⁶¹ Intoxication increased the risk of accidents and seems to have promoted fights among wage earners, some of whom remained armed, despite repeated calls from all Popular Front organizations to turn weapons over to authorities.

In diverse industries, other violations occurred. Two linoleum workers were sanctioned for indiscipline early in the conflict.¹⁶² Six men who had previously been warned not to play cards on company time were caught again and punished.¹⁶³ Bookbinders were sometimes unwilling to follow the spirit, if not the letter, of their contract. They refused to labor at an assigned task, provoking the ire of managers.¹⁶⁴ In the textile sector, discipline declined at the end of the war. On February 6, 1939, in a CNT workshop where usually only a few workers were absent, "nobody came to work."¹⁶⁵ Officials recommended that all wage earners of the workshop be fired and rehired on an individual basis. Fines levied for personal breaches of discipline were to be devoted to collective purposes.

The evacuation of the government to Valencia in November 1936 and the struggle of the international brigades did not arouse a spirit of sacrifice among some workers. For personal reasons, sixty-two communications workers

¹⁵⁶ Sesión del pleno, December 13, 1936, 858.

¹⁵⁷ Acta del pleno, January 2, 1937, 858; Reunion, March 3, 1937, and March 7, 1937, 858.

¹⁵⁸ Reunión, April 18, 1937, 858. The Fifth Regiment of the Popular Militia also practiced public shaming by printing the names of those expelled for indiscipline or faking illnesses (see *Milicia Popular*, September 11, 1936).

¹⁵⁹ Acta de la reunión y comisiones sindicales, October 26, 1937, 858.

¹⁶⁰ Reunión de comité, March 17, 1938, 858.

¹⁶¹ Acta de la reunión del comité, October 29, 1938, 858; Memoria, October 31, 1938, 858.

¹⁶² Sociedad, September 22, 1936, 708.

¹⁶³ Acta, Comité de taller, September 3, 1937, 660.

¹⁶⁴ Acta, Prensa gráfica, October 8, 1937, 660.

¹⁶⁵ Acta, Consejo técnico, February 6, 1939, 3686.

refused orders from their director to leave Madrid after the national government had abandoned the city.¹⁶⁶ Management felt justified making the transfers since the Nationalists had cut telephone and telegraph lines to the capital while communications work in the provinces had increased. Thus, leaving Madrid became a patriotic duty in addition to a professional one. In fact, since the Nationalist bombings of the city in the fall of 1936, the government had encouraged nonessential personnel to depart in order to mitigate growing shortages of food and housing.¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, these sixty-two employees insisted for their own reasons that they should remain in the city. Almost all of the disobedient workers had joined the CNT or UGT well after July 1936, thus indicating a degree of opportunism since, as we have seen, a union card had become a prerequisite for survival in wartime Madrid. In a plea to its militants, CNT telephone officials commented bitterly on the indifference to the union shown by the "majority of comrades." They accused the inactive of "scientifically sabotaging antifascism and the Republic."¹⁶⁸

The overwhelming majority of the sixty-two who had refused the transfer had joined the UGT after July but then switched to the CNT, believing that the latter organization would defend them against the transfer order. These "butterflies" (*mariposas*) were not, in general, right-wingers. Five had been members of the monarchist Acción Popular, and only one had belonged to the Falange. To gain members, the CNT local supported the refusals of the disobedient wage earners, subsequently embarrassing the CNT Regional.¹⁶⁹ According to militants from both unions, the saga of the telephone transfers indicated that most of the rank and file and even many of their leaders were not revolutionary but instead merely opportunistic.¹⁷⁰ A CNT activist pessimistically concluded his short history of the Spanish workers' movement: "In reality, neither union is dominated by revolutionary militants but rather by people who had to have a union card for practical reasons. . . . In the telegraph section, except for a small number of revolutionaries, the rest don't really care about the union." In other sectors, workers would switch from one union to another for personal or financial reasons, not because of ideology.

To counter individualists and the politically suspect, the unions would cooperate by informing each other about the political or work record of prospective members. The UGT told the CNT about postal workers that had been expelled for being "alienated from the regime."¹⁷¹ One union would

¹⁶⁶ See list of workers in Sindicato de comunicaciones, 159.

¹⁶⁷ Julio Aróstegui, ed., *Historia y memoria de la guerra civil: Encuentro en Castilla y León* (Salamanca, 1988), pp. 143–44.

¹⁶⁸ Cotizantes, militantes, revolucionarios, May 9, 1938, 159.

¹⁶⁹ Resumen, [n.d.], 159.

¹⁷⁰ Comité provincial de enlace, CNT-UGT, July 30, 1938, 1619.

¹⁷¹ CNT carteros, November 12, 1937, 2321.

brief the other about punishment of indisciplined workers.¹⁷² Nonunion personnel of draft age would be reported to military police. Both organizations attempted to collaborate to stop chauffeurs' blackmarketeering.¹⁷³ In the construction sector, the CNT-UGT Joint Committee was aware of dismissals from either union.¹⁷⁴ Union militants forbade workers from attending any meeting that was not authorized by either the CNT or UGT.¹⁷⁵ When wage earners defied this directive and independently held a meeting, union activists invaded and suspended it.¹⁷⁶ Given the monopoly of the CNT and UGT in the workplace, many workers must have concluded that collective action against the unions was less effective than individual means of protest.

* * *

A focus on individualisms—whether subversive, acquisitive, or entrepreneurial—alters the traditional emphasis on collective militancy during the Spanish civil war. Political parties and union organizations were not the only significant forces during the conflict. Many workers did not follow the collectivist paths laid down by various organizations but instead put the personal before all else. They had little faith in the social utopias proposed by anticlerical militants who, ironically enough, came to inherit a position similar to that of priests, who attempt to convince their congregations of the reality of an afterlife. The wage earners' lack of faith in an unknown future demonstrates neither the workers' "false consciousness" nor their submission to capitalist hegemony but rather their anti-idealism and everyday materialism. They should not be classified as "masses," for many individuals demonstrated their own "will to power" by defying laws and morals that were the orthodoxies of the group. Wage-earning individualists should make historians aware of the limits of both the traditional Marxist concept of "working class" and the recent social and cultural anthropological approaches that favor the group and exclude the individual. A social history from below might not only explore the collectivist struggles of class and gender but also analyze the conflict between the individual and society.

¹⁷² CNT carteros, April 29, 1938, 2321; *Acta*, Boetticher y Navarro, December 10, 1936, November 9, 1937, and December 29, 1937, 858; *Acta*, Sociedad editora universal, April 9, 1937, 834.

¹⁷³ CNT carteros, April 29, 1938, 2321.

¹⁷⁴ *Acta*, Comité de enlace, edificación y madera, CNT-UGT, August 8, 1938, 2124.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, August 16, 1938, 2124.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, August 30, 1938, 2124.