

Collectives in the Spanish Revolution

Gaston Leval

Translation and Foreword: Vernon Richards

Introduction: Pedro García-Guirao

Gaston Leval's study brings together two aspects that are generally difficult to unite—analysis and testimony. He visited the towns and villages of revolutionary Spain where people had opted to live a libertarian communist lifestyle almost without precedent in history, collectivising the land, factories, and social services.

Collectives in the Spanish Revolution demonstrates clearly that the working class are perfectly capable of running farms, factories, workshops, and health and public services without bosses or managers dictating to them. It proves that anarchist methods of organising, with decisions made from the bottom up, can work effectively in large-scale industry involving the coordination of many thousands of workers in many hundreds of places of work across numerous cities and towns, as well as broad rural areas.

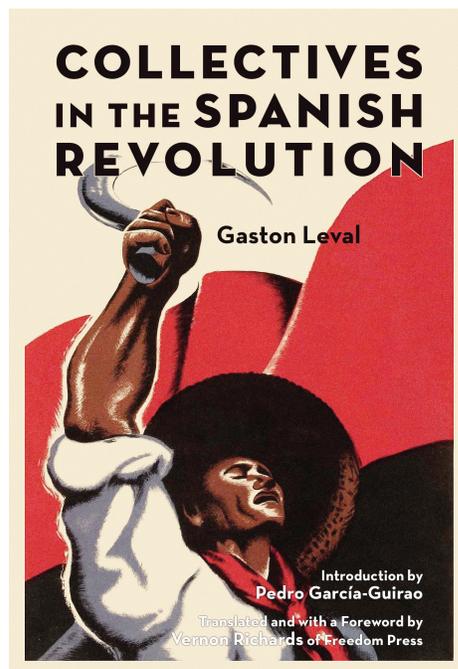
Leval's history of anarchy in action also gives us an insight into the creative and constructive power of ordinary people. The Spanish working class not only kept production going throughout the war but in many cases managed to achieve increases in output. They improved working conditions and created new techniques and processes in their workplaces. They created, out of nothing, an arms industry without which the war against fascism could not have been fought. The revolution also showed that without the competition bred by capitalism, industry can be run in a much more rational manner. Finally it demonstrated how the organised working class inspired by a great ideal has the power to transform society.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Gaston Leval (1895–1978) was the son of a French Communist. He escaped to Spain in 1915 to avoid conscription during the First World War and joined the anarcho-syndicalist Confederación Nacional del Trabajo trade union. Leval lived in Argentina during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, from 1923 to 1936. He returned to Spain and became a militant fighter while documenting the revolution and both urban and rural anarchist collectives.

Across seven decades, **Vernon Richards** maintained an anarchist presence in British publishing. His chosen instrument was Freedom Press, based in Whitechapel, in London's East End. He edited the anarchist paper *Freedom*—and its prewar and wartime variations—into the 1960s. Earlier, he had been imprisoned in 1945, translated the Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta, and photographed George Orwell.

Pedro García-Guirao currently teaches Spanish language, politics, and history at the University of Southampton (UK). He is among a new generation of scholars who are venturing into the critical study of taboo and uncomfortable subjects that have masked the history of Spanish anarchism through the Spanish Civil War, the Franco regime, and the democratic transition.



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