

thought here, not least for the comparative light it sheds, when placed in a wider context, on these broader European developments.

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RUIZ, DAVID (Dirección). *Historia de Comisiones Obreras (1958–1988)*. Siglo Veintiuno editores, Madrid [etc.] 1994. xx, 543 pp. Ptas 4000.

Following the Nationalist victory in 1939, the new regime established by General Franco set out to complete the task begun with the war itself, the destruction of the organized labour movement in Spain and disarticulation of the working class itself. Strikes were declared illegal, unions and political parties banned and thousands executed, imprisoned or driven into exile. An authoritarian corporatist system of labour relations was created, based on the notion of individual contracts between workers and employers and enforced membership of both in the State's Vertical unions, the last redoubt of the proto-fascist *Falange*. The episodic acts of collective protest which did take place in the 1940s, notably in Catalonia and the Basque Country, provoked further fierce repression. More generally, workers' resistance was confined to absenteeism, individual acts of indiscipline and sabotage. Yet by the time of Franco's death in November 1975, strike levels were comparable to those in other Western European countries and the labour movement had become a major force in the struggle for democracy. Although this is not unexplored territory, this useful book is the first attempt to produce a serious general history of the principal collective protagonist of this metamorphosis, the *Comisiones Obreras* (CCOO) or Workers' Commissions.<sup>1</sup>

Two excellent chapters outline the circumstances from which the CCOO first emerged: the evolution of the elaborate but increasingly redundant Vertical Union apparatus set up by the State, and the situation and experience of the working class in the immediate post-war decades. Repression and the struggle for survival itself – only in the late 1950s, or even later in the countryside, would living standards reach pre-war levels – made the 1940s a decade of “hopeless resignation” for the working class. Ruiz relates the shift towards “mobilization for demands” to broad social, economic and cultural changes which began in the 1950s and intensified during the following decade. A mass exodus of mainly young migrants, with little or no experience or tradition of organization, flooded to the cities to work in the industrial sector, where they found poor working conditions, worse housing, and wages eaten away by inflation. The vehicle for the labour protests of these and other workers, would not be the pre-war organizations, the socialist UGT or the anarchist CNT, but *Comisiones Obreras*. These were informal workers' commissions usually elected in illegal assemblies to present the grievances and demands of workers in a

<sup>1</sup> Besides the important works cited below, other recent studies of the working-class and labour movement under Franco and during the Transition include: M. Del Alamo, *CC.OO. del País Valencià. Aproximació a la seua història (1966–1992)* (Valencia, 1994); J. Foweraker, *Making Democracy in Spain: Grass Roots Struggle in the South 1955–1975* (New York, 1989); C. Molinero and P. Ysàs, “*Patria Justicia, y Pan*”. *Nivell de vida i condicions de treball a Catalunya 1939–1951* (Barcelona, 1985); M. Redero San Román, *Estudios de la Historia de la UGT* (Salamanca, 1992); and the many contributions to J. Tusell, A. Alted and A. Mateos (eds), *La oposición al régimen de Franco* (Madrid, 1990), I.

single workplace, which dissolved again once the conflict had been resolved. They appeared first in the traditional industrial areas of Catalonia, Madrid and Asturias in a climate of growing discontent, and were promoted and led by an amalgam of clandestine opposition groups. The Communists were prominent almost everywhere, independent socialists were involved in many places, as were a number of Catholic workers' organizations. Able to operate openly and counting on some tacit support from the Church hierarchy, these radical Catholic groups provided both activists and, very importantly, places of sanctuary for CCOO meetings and assemblies. Despite this, constant police harassment and the sacking or imprisonment of visible leaders, ensured that these remained ephemeral, isolated and uncoordinated initiatives during the 1950s.

Thirteen chapters trace the expansion of the workers commissions in as many regions of Spain between 1958 and the formation of the regional organization and the national Confederation in 1977–1978. The introduction of collective bargaining in 1958 radically altered the context for labour relations. By providing a focus and channel for workers' demands and protest, collective bargaining contributed to the multiplication of the CCOO in the early 1960s as workers mobilized to obtain improved wages and conditions. Led by Catholics and Communists, opposition labour organizations also intensified their strategy of penetrating the official Vertical Unions by presenting candidates for election to the "workplace committees" which now had a real, if restricted role to play in collective bargaining. The development of the CCOO was still very uneven, conditioned by variations in productive and urban structures as well as by traditions of resistance.<sup>2</sup> García and Eric stress the importance of these in their account of Asturias, where as in Castilla-Leon, mobilization was initially restricted almost exclusively to the miners.<sup>3</sup> Everywhere the CCOO were strongest in industrial areas, with workers in the expanding metal sector leading the way in Barcelona, Madrid, Seville, Zaragoza and Vizcaya. Unlike in the 1930s, however, agricultural workers were hardly involved in the wave of protest in the 1960s. Strike action became increasingly common, opposition candidates were elected in ever greater numbers to "workplace committees", and the CCOO's activity became more continuous and coordinated. The combination of pressure applied from within the official structures and external mobilization by the CCOO proved successful. In the context of economic expansion and rising productivity workers secured important gains in wages and conditions after 1960. Economic demands motivated most collective action, but the existence of a regime which perceived all conflict as a threat to public order which had to be repressed ensured that protest easily acquired a political dimension, as workers demanded freedom of association, the right to strike and other democratic liberties. Success, and the CCOO's commitment to operating in the open, brought their own costs. Opposition representatives on workplace committees were sacked, and known-activists in the CCOO imprisoned or banished. Then in March 1967, the Supreme Court declared the CCOO illegal.

<sup>2</sup> See also S. Balfour, *Dictatorship, Workers and the City. Labour in Greater Barcelona since 1939* (Oxford, 1989) for a detailed analysis of the impact of different urban and industrial structures on patterns of labour protest.

<sup>3</sup> See also R. García Piñeiro, *Los mineros asturianos bajo el franquismo (1937–1962)* (Madrid, 1990); C. Benito del Pozo, *La clase obrera asturiana durante el Franquismo* (Madrid, 1993).

As the pressure on the CCOO increased, labour conflict declined and tensions within the movement intensified. Power struggles between organizations as well as strategic and ideological differences were the source of internal divisions. These were particularly traumatic in Catalonia and the Basque Country where the national question was a further source of divergence. Always hegemonic in some areas, the Communists now emerged as the dominant force in the CCOO everywhere, consolidating the conception of these as a "new-type" socio-political movement and the basis of a future unitary labour movement under democracy. After 1970, there was a major upsurge in labour conflict and organization, which now spread to areas and sectors with no recent tradition of protest. Teachers, bank employees and other white-collar workers, notably those in the booming tourist industry in the Balearic Islands, formed CCOO and struck for the first time. So too did isolated groups of agricultural workers, although labour mobilization in the countryside would come, if at all, only after Franco's death. The greater politicization of labour disputes was paralleled by a rise in directly politically-motivated action in open defiance of the regime and in demand for democratic rights. Although incapable of imposing desired "democratic rupture" after 1975, the pressure for reform from the labour movement led by CCOO and the UGT was a vital force in the transition to, and consolidation of, democracy in Spain.

Soto's final chapter covering this period is undoubtedly the contribution to this volume most critical of the CCOO. He charges the union with errors of analysis and strategy (the failure to appreciate changes in the composition of the working class or to produce a coherent response to the current economic recession) as well as a tendency towards bureaucratization and the loss of the grass roots and participatory character which defined the movement from its beginnings. Above all, Soto argues that through its subordination to the Communist Party during the transition, CCOO sacrificed the interests of the working class to the political goal of democracy. This led to a policy of moderation and to the acceptance of unfavourable agreements, notably the Pact of the Moncloa in 1977 and the National Employment Accord in 1981. Much of this is indisputable and widely accepted. However, on this last point at least, the alternatives open to the union are much less clear. Research has shown that at the end of the 1970s workers' fear of redundancies and factory closures made them reluctant to strike and that there was widespread, if not universal, acceptance within CCOO of the need for restraint in order to favour democratic consolidation.<sup>4</sup> Equally, as recognized by Soto and argued at length by others elsewhere, the task facing CCOO, the construction of a strong labour organization from a socio-political movement which had developed under the very different conditions of the dictatorship was a by no means easy one.<sup>5</sup> Yet in difficult economic and political circumstances, CCOO has managed to establish its political independence, consolidate its organization (if not build the united labour union it aspired, and continues to aspire, to) and maintain its mobilizing power and position at the fore of the Spanish labour movement.

By no means a definitive work, this book nevertheless provides much new information about the history of CCOO. Authors have clearly benefited from

<sup>4</sup> R. Fishman, *Working-Class Organization and the Return to Democracy in Spain* (Ithaca and London, 1990), pp. 214–246.

<sup>5</sup> Balfour, *Dictatorship, Workers and the City*, pp. 236–258.

access to previously unavailable archive material as well as to many protagonists of the events they relate, oral sources being particularly important for the early history of the informal CCOO. However, information and description are not always accompanied by analysis in the uneven regional accounts. Due to the absence of rigorous editing and a general chapter covering the evolution of CCOO between 1958 and 1977, these are also prone to some unnecessary repetition. Although not hagiographic, this is certainly sympathetic towards CCOO. Rival union organizations merit scant attention, unless it is to subject them to often justifiable criticism, making it difficult to follow their changing relations with CCOO, and hence the background to the 1988 general strike with which this book ends. This is a crucial area scarcely considered in Soto's none the less stimulating chapter, which can also be read as a contribution to the ongoing debate about the future strategic, organizational and ideological orientation of the movement. This volume suggests that many of the issues at the centre of the current debate have historical precedents and roots. By casting light on these, therefore, this book aids comprehension of the present. And the future?

*Justin Byrne*

**Rapports secrets soviétiques. La société russe dans les documents confidentiels 1921–1991. Recueil de pièces d'archives provenant du Centre de conservation de la documentation contemporaine, des Archives d'État de la Fédération de Russie. Textes réunis, trad. et prés. par Nicolas Werth et Gaël Moulec. Gallimard, Paris 1994. 699 pp. F.fr. 190.00.**

This is the first collection of Soviet secret documents aimed at a large Western audience. It includes more than 300 reports written by the secret police and other state and party organs between the launching of the NEP and the collapse of the USSR. The editors have arranged these documents under seven major headings, and, within these, chronologically. The first, "Ordre et désordre socialistes", includes reports on alcoholism, juvenile delinquency and corruption, etc. It is followed by sections on agriculture, industry, religion, forced labor and resistance and dissidence. The book concludes with a selection of documents relating to the most famous "affairs" which marked Soviet history, from the Kirov affair to the "doctors' plot".

The material contained in this book is extremely rich. Here, I shall merely point to some of the historical problems on which this collection casts new light. However, the reader who browses through this volume and gets lost in an unsystematic reading of the documents offered by Werth and Moulec will be amply rewarded.

Before beginning, a general remark is in order. The fact that police reports are among the main sources for the study of Soviet history says, in itself, something important about the character of this history. It presents itself, and in the documents it left even more than in its reality, as the history of a state which tried to reduce to a minimum the autonomy of the society upon which it was feeding. This explains why today we are forced to look at that society through the glasses built and used by the powers-that-be to spy upon and, if necessary, to repress it.