

form of the Gulag at any particular moment.<sup>6</sup> The author is not to blame for these problems, but the question remains whether it was not perhaps premature of him to attempt an institutional history of the Gulag.

*Leo van Rossum*

ESENWEIN, GEORGE and ADRIAN SHUBERT. *Spain at War. The Spanish Civil War in Context, 1931–1939*. Longman, London [etc.] 1995. xii, 313 pp. £36.00.

NASH, MARY. *Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War*. [Women and Modern Revolution Series.] Arden Press, Inc., Denver 1995. xvi, 261 pp. Ill. \$32.00. (Paper: \$22.00.)

Historical research on 1930s and 1940s Spain – the key decades of structural and hegemonic crisis – remains a process of intense empirical reconstruction, interpretative revision and political contention. Apart from the complex legacy of the Franco dictatorship, this process has been further fuelled by the “end of the Cold War”. Its end has brought into sharp relief the reductionism of much of the received historical wisdom on the civil war (1936–1939) which, well into the 1980s, hindered the assimilation among wider audiences of new research perspectives – most particularly on the social and political evolution of the Republic during the conflict.

The most fruitful recent insights have come from historical research which either recontextualizes the Spanish experience in terms of the crises of modernity undergone by various states and societies in inter-war Europe, or which constructs from below the social and cultural histories of the civil war (indeed of the 1930s as a whole) in order to invest the abstract, two-dimensional ideological categories of explanation encountered in the standard accounts with a much more rounded historical understanding. Both of the books under review here explicitly set out to contribute to this task – albeit at quite different levels of specialism.

Mary Nash’s much-needed volume on the social and political mobilization of women in wartime Republican Spain makes a valuable contribution. It opens with a broad analytical overview of women’s history and gender discourse in Spain in the contemporary period (1890s to 1930s) – extremely useful in its own right given the limited English material available. In chapter two Dr Nash first sketches the wider context of the civil war – although perhaps rather too mechanically for the purposes of illuminating the particular story she goes on to tell. Second, she explores the different constructions of “women” in Republican rhetoric/iconography in order to set up the analytical lens through which the rest of the book’s material is focused: namely the ambiguities of these gender constructs and the contradiction between them and the lived experiences of women in Republican Spain. These experiences are all explored in turn – from political militancy through welfare service and war production on the home front to women as the intended object of eugenic reforms to their essential role in reproducing the minimum conditions of daily life (especially food procurement).

<sup>6</sup> See p. 133. Further evidence of lacunae in the documentation can be found on pp. 117–118, 133, 152, and 158.

Dr Nash states at the outset that her focus is social and cultural rather than political. She is primarily concerned with the impact on Spanish women of their home front mobilization and on the resulting modification of gender norms. But this history of mobilization is in fact integral to our political understanding of the civil war. For the war's meaning is inextricably bound up with this accelerated process of mass political mobilization of the previously unorganized (women and youth in particular) which had a modernizing democratic potential – albeit one blighted by rebel victory in 1939.

Of course “progressive” and “modernizing” have always to be understood in relative terms. The ambiguities of the early months of Republican state dislocation and emergency militia defence allowed some women – the *milicianas* – to assume a fighting function alongside men. But as Mary Nash points out, from very early on in the conflict, even as propaganda images of attractive, young *milicianas* were being churned out, so “real” women were being pushed back to their “proper” place on the home front. *Miliciana* propaganda was in fact aimed at male recruitment. At the same time, the reaffirmation of conventional gender roles was a crucial component in the reconstruction of the liberal Republican state under a centre-left coalition government of Popular Front. The embargo-ridden Republic increasingly needed women's labour (in factories and social services) to sustain the war effort. But systematic attempts to incorporate women to the labour force began belatedly and never achieved their goal. There was, moreover, continuing social resistance to it even though the need was desperate by late 1937. Dr Nash's analysis does not take adequate account of how the underdevelopment and dislocation of the Republic's bureaucratic agencies impeded women's home front mobilization. But there is no denying the primarily liberal ideological motivation behind the eclipse of the “real” *miliciana* and the rise of the “home front heroine”.

Nevertheless, home front mobilization was itself a significant social and cultural departure, especially in Spain where gender discourse bore the heavy imprint of Catholic norms. For the thousands of women who were directly or indirectly incorporated to war tasks by the two principal women's organizations – the anarchist *Mujeres Libres* (ML) and the (significantly larger) liberal, inter-class, Popular-Frontist *Association of Antifascist Women* (AMA) – the experience of training, work and collectivity was liberating in the sense that it instilled a sense of personal identity, self-confidence and independence. This was irrespective of the quite significant ideological differences between ML and AMA. In any case, *Mujeres Libres*'s more radical concentration on the *process* of women's empowerment and on a critique of established gender norms was of necessity diluted by the practical imperatives of the war.

AMA's mobilizing capacity was much greater than that of *Mujeres Libres*'s. Mary Nash estimates a figure in the sixty thousands for AMA compared to ML's twenty thousand members. But, as she explains, AMA's membership figures do not convey its real strength. For, like all the Popular Front organizations, AMA could temporarily mobilize many thousands more around specific wartime campaigns or support activities. The organizational core of AMA, as of most of the other Popular Front organizations, was formed by Spanish Communist Party (PCE) militants. While Communist Party membership did itself increase massively in the Republican zone during the war (notwithstanding the inflationary tendencies usually evident in the party's official statistics), it was the PCE's func-

tion in impelling mass mobilization through the Popular Front organizations which explains its wartime centrality. The PCE was instrumental in channelling substantial human resources to sustain the war effort – something particularly crucial given the effects of embargo and Republican state crisis. The AMA is thus paradigmatic of the PCE's wider modernizing function: it brought the people to the state. In particular here, the promotion by AMA (and to a lesser extent by ML) of an image of woman as “combative mother [. . .] and homefront heroine” offers an excellent example of how such organizations mediated modernity in a period of rapid and dislocating social change. In Mary Nash's words, “[m]otherhood became politically charged”: AMA and ML were instruments in broadening the focus of women's attention from family to nation. While images of Stakhanovite heroines of production (ironically a very male iconic reference) were used to exhort women war workers to greater efforts, these images and goals were also able to be internalized via women's traditional perception of their role of self-sacrifice for the family. Indeed, as the author indicates, much of the work done by women in textile and clothing workshops continued to be unpaid – in spite of government decrees to the contrary – until the very end of the war.

There is an evident parallel between the way women's unpaid labour offered vital support to the crisis-ridden economy of the Republic at war and the way their charitable or black-economy labour sustained the equally crisis-ridden economy of autarkic Francoism in the 1940s. Another even more striking continuity is the front-line position occupied by women of the working and middling classes (particularly urban ones) in that other war for daily survival. The 1940s would constitute the continuation of the war against the Republican population (and specifically the working classes) by other, economic means. In the sufferings of daily life both women and men would learn the real meaning of their political and military defeat. But we still need to ask how the continuities in working women's experience across the war and post-war shaped their particular understanding of defeat.

In such a splendid, thought-provoking volume, it may seem churlish to point to minor difficulties. But with a view to any new edition and for the benefit of the general reader, it would be useful if the title (or at least a prefatory statement) could explicitly indicate that the study is about women in Republican Spain. For the specialist reader too it would have been useful to provide a critical apparatus that permits the tracing of a precise archival or library location for all primary material cited in the references.

The volume co-authored by Drs Shubert and Esenwein is a textbook rather than a monograph, but one which is explicit about its aim to present new research perspectives. This is a laudable intention, but to attempt such a task in textbook form before we have a new academic synthesis of the civil war period (for rebel or Republican zones, but particularly the latter) means the authors labour here against the odds. They split their task chronologically, Adrian Shubert covering the pre-war context (1931–1936) and George Esenwein the war. Dr Shubert provides a useful analytical summary of the social and political tensions which stressed Spain's parliamentary fabric. They were the product of the Spanish right's mobilization of several popular constituencies against the Republic's structural reforms, in particular its religious settlement. This mobilization was amply resourced by elite groups. But the centre-left's failure here cannot be explained exclusively in terms of the superior material resources of the conservative opposi-

tion. What we still lack is an analysis which explains the broader political and strategic failure of republicans and socialists to meet the great challenge of the 1930s: encadrando the newly mobilizing masses.

The crux of this problem for the republican-socialist coalition of 1931–1933 was that while the more extreme parts of its religious reforms alienated the rural middling classes, its commitment to *laissez-faire* economics also alienated significant sectors of its only other potential social base: the urban working classes. As the most recent social history has demonstrated, for the urban poor the coming of the Republic scarcely alleviated their daily battle for survival, while certain pieces of legislation made them feel victimized – most notoriously, the Law for the Defence of the Republic and anti-vagrancy measures. This is the context which explains the continuing influence of the most radical currents in the anarcho-syndicalist organization, the CNT, about which Dr Shubert provides some useful pointers. However, this reviewer was disappointed not to find a more systematic analysis, given the dearth of reliable recent material in English on the CNT. In particular, it would have been useful to emphasize both its acute organizational fragmentation and the crucial, widening rift in the movement by 1931 between radical libertarians and the reformist union/proto-parliamentary wing. For it was these factors more than the hostility of other political forces which brought about the CNT's eclipse during the civil war.

Nor is this lack really compensated for by Dr Esenwein's text on the war period, since he largely ignores the CNT's structural and ideological crises. Nor, indeed, does he examine those affecting either republicanism or the socialist movement. In the main what we get is a conventional "top-down" political history. While this is rather sketchy on the rebel zone, it is most questionable of all in its portrayal of the Republic at war. Dr Esenwein begins by pointing out that the civil war released accumulated rivalries and tensions across the Spanish left. Yet he promptly forgets this in his own analysis where most things are explained in terms of the Spanish Communist Party's monolithic political agenda and this, in turn, largely in terms of the Soviet Union's. Esenwein's line here closely follows the rather dated one ceaselessly elaborated by Burnett Bolloten. And like the latter Esenwein can sustain his case only because he ignores both the complex, fragmented and divisive history of the Spanish left prior to the war and the imperatives which this war (under conditions of embargo) placed upon the Republic.

Not the least of these imperatives, as Mary Nash's study illustrates, was massive popular mobilization on both the military and home fronts. And the Spanish Communist Party's ability here (channelling the previously unorganized, in particular among the middling classes) is one of the most important reasons for its prominence in the wartime Republic. But Esenwein makes no attempt at a systematic analysis of the PCE's membership and function in their appropriate Spanish context. Indeed most of his analysis lacks this grounding. For example, the consolidation of the liberal democratic Popular Front coalition as opposed to a radical anti-capitalist option as the axis of the war effort was not primarily the result of Soviet influence but of the balance of social forces *inside* Republican Spain. (It is simply misleading to suggest that social opposition to collectivization in rural Catalonia and the Levante was confined to "pockets of resistance".) And in a text published in 1995 it is scarcely adequate to offer as the sole explanation for the Barcelona May Days of 1937 a political narrative which was already showing its age a decade ago. To focus exclusively on the sectarian aspect of the May conflict

("stalinist communists versus anarchists") is to miss the substantial point of what each represented in the wider historical picture. The confrontation which exploded in Barcelona saw sectors of the urban poor, at the sharp end of wartime shortages and food price rises, being mobilized by radical, middle-level CNT cadres against the reconstructed power of the state – in the direct form of the police. The fact that many members of the police force now belonged to the Catalan Communist Party (PSUC) (whereas those with previous political affiliations had tended to have clientelistic connections to the establishment parties (pre-1931) or to the more conservative of the republican formations) is hardly surprising in a wartime emergency where the communist parties offered by far the most robust defence of bourgeois order in the zone. May 1937 was then, in its origins, an episode in the multifaceted social war between the liberal state and the dispossessed which had been waged for decades in Spain. Continuities such as this which broaden our historical understanding can only be made visible through the wide-angled lens of comparative social history. This is now fortunately in increasing use in civil war studies, although the decontextualizing zoom lens of Cold War times is still to be found distorting the picture.

*Helen Graham*

**LOCKMAN, ZACHARY.** *Comrades and Enemies. Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906–1948.* University of California Press, Berkeley [etc.] 1996. xvi, 440 pp. \$60.00; £48.00. (Paper: \$25.00; £19.95.)

Zachary Lockman's perceptive, meticulously-researched and well-written study of the interactions among Arab and Jewish workers and workers' organizations during British rule over Palestine is long overdue. Since the beginning of research of the history of modern Palestine, and the evolution of the national conflict between Arabs and Jews, only a few scholars paid attention to the social bases of politics. To this day the social history of Palestine and of the Arab and Jewish communities is still in its initial stages. We know much more about Palestine's Christian, Muslim and Jewish political elites than about urban society, the rank-and-file, women and the experiences of class, gender and race. The paucity of research and of scientific discussion of workers' lives has always been the most problematic because of the centrality of workers to the social, political and cultural processes besetting modern Palestine. Lockman's book is thus a real historiographical breakthrough: both for beginning to fill in these lacuna, and for his theoretical and methodological approach. The book focuses on a system of relations between Jewish and Arab workers within the context of an evolving national struggle. But instead of focusing on one workers' national community, a natural tendency of both Israeli and Palestinian historians and sociologists, Lockman approaches his topic from an integrated perspective and treats the working classes by freely crossing the national divide. This approach, underlined by the basic assumption of the existence of a workers' experience which was not only a national one, has much to commend to it as it allows a challenge to a nationally subjective world-view.

The theoretical starting-point of the book is a ten-year-old historiographic tradition established by writers such as Gershon Shafir and Michael Shalev. According