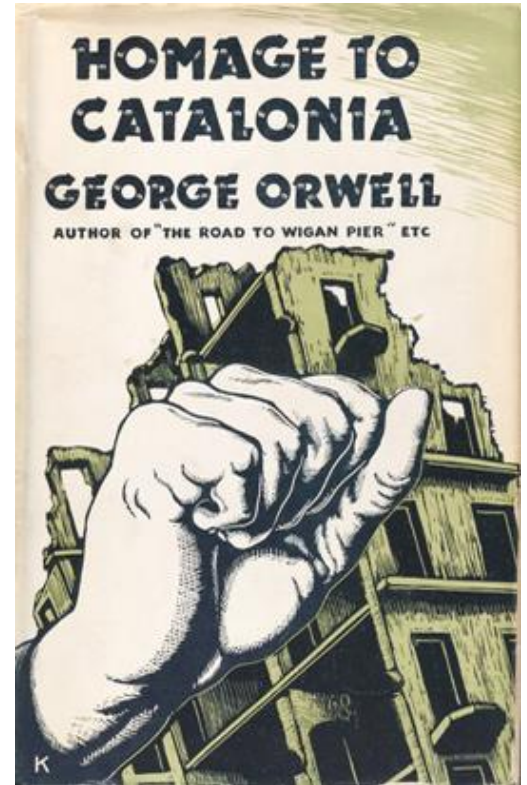


Excerpts from *Homage to Catalonia*, by George Orwell (1952), p. 58-62.

Homage to Catalonia is George Orwell's personal account of his experiences and observations in the Spanish Civil War. The first edition was published in the United Kingdom in 1938. The book was not published in the United States until February 1952, when it appeared with an influential preface by Lionel Trilling. Orwell served as a private, a corporal (cabo) and—when the informal command structure of the militia gave way to a conventional hierarchy in May 1937—as a lieutenant, on a provisional basis, in Catalonia and Aragon from December 1936 until June 1937. In June 1937 (after having been shot in the throat), the leftist political party with whose militia he served (the POUM, the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification, an anti-Stalinist communist party) was declared an illegal organisation, and Orwell was consequently forced to either flee or face imprisonment.

*Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou be like unto him.
Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.*

PROVERBS XXVI, 5-6



On the political differences between the PSUC, the POUM, and the Anarcho-sindicalists

From the point of view of political theory there were only three parties that mattered, the P.S.U.C, the P.O.U.M, and the C.N.T-F.A.I., loosely described as the Anarchists. I take the PSUC first, as being the most important; it was the party that finally triumphed, and even at this time is was visibly in the ascendant.

It is necessary to explain that when one speaks of the PSUC 'line' one really means the Communist Party 'line.' The PSUC (Partido Socialista Unificado de Cataluna) was the Socialist Party of Catalonia; it had been formed at the beginning of the war by the fusion of various Marxist parties, including the Catalan Communist Party, but it was now entirely under Communist control and was affiliated with the Third International. Elsewhere in Spain no formal unification between Socialists and Communists had taken place, but the Communist viewpoint and the right-wing Socialist viewpoint could everywhere be regarded as identical. Roughly speaking, the PSUC was the political organ of the UGT (Union General de Trabajadores), the Socialist trade unions. The membership of these unions throughout Spain now numbered about a million and a half. They contained many sections of the manual workers, but since the outbreak of war they had also been swollen by a large influx of middle-class members, for in the early 'revolutionary' days people of all kinds had found it useful to join either the UGT or the CNT. The two blocks of unions overlapped, but of the two the CNT was more definitely a working-class organization. The PSUC was therefore a party partly of the workers and partly of the small bourgeoisie – the shopkeepers, the officials, and the wealthier peasants.

The PSUC line, which was preached in the Communist and pro-Communist press throughout the world, was approximately this:

‘At present nothing matters except winning the war; without victory in the war all else is meaningless. Therefore this is not the moment to talk of pressing forward with the revolution. We can’t afford to alienate the peasants by forcing collectivization upon them, and we can’t afford to frighten away the middle classes who were fighting on our side. Above all for the sake of efficiency we must do away with revolutionary chaos. We must have a strong central government in place of local committees, and we must have a properly trained and fully militarized army under a unified command. Clinging on to fragments of workers’ control and parroting revolutionary phrases is worse than useless; it is not merely obstructive, but even counter-revolutionary, because it leads to divisions which can be used against us by the Fascists. At this stage we are not fighting for the dictatorship of the proletariat, we are fighting for parliamentary democracy. Whoever tries to turn the civil war into a social revolution is playing into the hands of the Fascists and is in effect, if not intention, a traitor.’

The POUM line differed from this on every point except, of course, the importance of winning the war. The POUM was one of those dissident Communist parties which have appeared in many countries in the last few years as a result of the opposition to Stalinism; i.e., to the change, real or apparent, in Communist policy. It was made up partly of ex-Communists and partly of an earlier party, the Workers’ and Peasants’ Bloc. Numerically it was a small party, with not much influence outside Catalonia, and chiefly important because it contained an unusually high proportion of politically conscious members.... The POUM militiamen were mostly CNT members, but the actual party members generally belonged to the UGT. It was, however, only in the CNT that the POUM had any influence. The POUM line was approximately this:

‘It is nonsense to talk of opposing Fascism by bourgeois “democracy.” Bourgeois “democracy” is only another name for capitalism, and so is Fascism; to fight against Fascism on behalf of “democracy” is to fight against one form of capitalism on behalf of the second which is liable to turn into the first at any moment. The only real alternative to Fascism is workers’ control. If you set up any less goal than this, you will either hand the victory to Franco, or, at best, let in Fascism by the back door. Meanwhile the workers must cling to every scrap of what they have won; if they yield anything to the semi-bourgeois government they can depend upon being cheated. The workers’ militias and police-forces must be preserved in their present form and every effort to “bourgeoisify” them must be resisted. If the workers do not control the armed forces, the armed forces will control the workers. The war and revolution are inseparable.’

The Anarchist viewpoint is less easily defined. In any case the loose term ‘Anarchists’ is used to cover a multitude of people of varying opinions. The huge block of unions making up the CNT, with round about two million members in all, had for its political organ the FAI., though always tinged, as perhaps most Spaniards are, with the Anarchist philosophy, were not necessarily Anarchists in the purest sense. Especially since the beginning of the war they had moved more in the direction of ordinary Socialism, because circumstances had forced them to take part in centralized administration and even to break all their principles by entering the Government. Nevertheless they differed fundamentally from the Communists in so much that, like the POUM, they aimed at workers’ control and not a parliamentary democracy. They accepted the POUM slogan: “The war and the revolution are inseparable,” though they were less dogmatic about it. Roughly speaking, the CNT-FAI stood for: (1) Direct control over industry by the workers engaged in each industry, eg. Transport, the textile factories, etc.; (2) Government by local committees and resistance to all forms of centralized authoritarianism; (3) Uncompromising hostility to the bourgeoisie and the Church. The last point, though the least precise, was the most important. The Anarchists were the opposite of the majority of so-called revolutionaries in so much that though their principles were rather vague their hatred of privilege and injustice was perfectly genuine. Philosophically, Communism and Anarchism are poles apart. Practically... the difference is mainly one of emphasis, but it is quite irreconcilable. The Communist’s emphasis is always on centralism and efficiency, the Anarchist’s on liberty and equality. Anarchism is deeply rooted in Spain and is likely to outlive Communism when the Russian influence is withdrawn. During the first two months of the war it was the Anarchists more than anyone else who had saved the situation, and much later than this the Anarchist militia, in spite of their indiscipline, were notoriously the best fighters among the purely Spanish forces. From about February

1937 onwards the Anarchists and the POUM could to some extent be lumped together. If the Anarchists, the POUM and the Left wing of the Socialists had had the sense to combine at the start and press a realistic policy, the history of the war might have been different....

So, roughly speaking, the alignment of forces was this. On the one side the CNT-FAI, the POUM, and a section of the Socialists, standing for workers' control: on the other side the Right-wing Socialists, Liberals, and Communists, standing for centralized government and a militarized army.