

Manuel Pérez Fernández – Spanish cabinet-maker and anarchist

At the beginning of September 1951 Manuel Pérez Fernández was mentioned to me and I was given his address. He was living in an elderly block in Rio de Janeiro's Rua dos Inválidos with his third wife and the two daughters he had had by his second wife, the latter having died in France.

The next day I climbed the wooden stairs to the first floor (seven metres above street level) and on reaching it felt as if I had stepped into one of those old "republics" (collective apartments), there were so many people there chattering away in a mixture of Portuguese, Spanish and French.

They were all busy dispatching the anarchist newspaper *Ação Direta*: some making up parcels, others affixing labels and addresses and some commenting on publications received from abroad.

Young, shy and a newcomer, I hesitated in the face of all this activity and then one of the people there, stepping forward with a smile as if we were long-time acquaintances, asked me: *Who are you looking for?*

Manuel Pérez Fernández – I said.

I'm Manuel Pérez – he answered amiably.

I then discovered that the people all around him were Portuguese, Brazilian, Spanish, French and Bulgarian and every one of them an anarchist.

From then on I dropped by that old block on a weekly basis, helping out with cultural, ideological and solidarity activities. I never visited Comrade Pérez's House (as it was called) without finding some anarchist delivering or collecting publications, bringing news or picking up information about the movement in Brazil, in Spain or the wider world! Others dropped by looking for help in finding work, a place to stay and/or for some cash for food until they could get settled in Brazil.

Manuel Pérez lived poorly and lost one of his daughters to TB there and his third wife died years later after she had had a breast removed.

But for as long as he was able to keep the old place in the Rua dos Inválidos going, Pérez was forever receiving anarchists and affording them whatever assistance he could.

I did hear somebody once refer to his place as the Anarchist Consulate, and with some reason, I must admit!

Over our years together, I learned that Manuel Pérez Fernández was born in Spain on 10 August 1887 and came to Brazil as a child.

He was schooled in Rio de Janeiro, took Brazilian citizenship and a Brazilian voter's card, did his compulsory military service and became a public official. He trained as a cabinet-maker and joined the class struggle, becoming an anarchist.

Together with Nicanor Rodrigues, José María Pereira and others, he set up the Cabinet-makers' Centre, becoming its president. In 1918 he managed to launch the Cabinet-makers' Centre and the Cabinet-makers' Union, going on to form the Rio de Janeiro Cabinet-makers' And Locksmith Workers' Alliance and was elected its general secretary.

In Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo the social question was top of the agenda. The workers declared strikes with considerable impact across the country.

1917 saw the outbreak in Sao Paulo of an insurrectionary general strike with the people erecting street barricades, Anarchists were in the forefront of these protests.

In 1918 Rio de Janeiro was on a war footing during the insurrectionary general strike when workers tried to raid the São Cristóvão army depot.

Manuel Pérez – and his fellow tradesmen – made up the army tackling the exploiters and the State.

Epitácio Pessoa's government panicked and hundreds upon hundreds of workers, most of them anarchists, were rounded up. Some were deported and the foreign-born ones were expelled from Brazil without the benefit of trial.

Way back then, a law passed by the Brazilian congress forbade the expulsion of workers married to Brazilian wives or with Brazilian-born offspring.

Manuel Pérez Fernández was married and he also had a child. Even so, he was arrested and expelled in 1919 together with Manuel Perdigão, Manuel Gonçalves, Everardo Dias, José Carlos, Albano dos Santos, Antonio da Silva Massarelos, Alexandre Azevedo, Manoel Ferreira, Antonio Costa, Anibal Paulo Monteiro, Joaquim Alvarez, Antonio Pérez, João Jose Rodrigues, Manoel Pérez, Antonio Prieto, Manuel Gama, Abílio Cabral, Alberto de Castro, Adolfo Alonso, José Cid, Rafael Lopez and Francisco Pereira. Like Pérez, Manuel Perdigão had arrived in Santos

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as a boy; the others had been born in Spain or Portugal or Italy. They all left family behind in Brazil.

Manuel Pérez and his comrades “stowed away” in the holds of the cargo vessel ‘Benevente’. He reached Vigo on the night of 29 November 1919. Handed over to the Spanish police, he spent 15 days in the provincial prison in the city. He was then relocated to the Modelo prison in Madrid, Cell No 136. Finally he was taken to ‘El Populo’, a former monastery converted for use as Andalusia’s provincial prison. And then on 6 January 1920, he was released.

In prison he lived alongside and befriended a number of anarchists. One of them gave him the address of the rationalist school at 49, Calle Enladrillada which was run by José Sánchez Rosa (murdered in Seville in early August 1936). He found lodgings in the home of Manuel Carrera and the very next day sought out the cabinet-makers’ union in Seville. In September 1920 he was rearrested while taking part in a meeting and with seven comrades was bound in pairs and banished from the area on foot. Freed in 1922 by order of the mayor of Cabezas Rubias, he made his way back to Seville and addressed a meeting in the Duque Theatre alongside Salvador Seguí and other anarchists.

With Felipe Alaiz and others he helped reorganise the CNT, made speeches and was arrested again, this time in the home of Dr Pedro Vallina, the founder of the ‘Vida’ Sanatorium.

At the beginning of 1924, with his second wife, his daughter Aurora and Ignacio Cobeña, he quit Seville under a banishment order. And arrived in Lisbon in April. He sought out Manuel da Silva, the then general secretary of the Portuguese CGT, whose acquaintance he had made in ‘El Populo’ in Seville.

In the Portuguese capital, Manuel Pérez Fernández received a warm welcome and moved into the headquarters of the Lisbon Cabinet-makers’ Union where his daughter Carmen was born. Carmen was delivered on the night of 25 June 1925 by Dr Pedro Vallina who was also in Lisbon, having likewise been banished with his family. At the point of delivery the Portuguese police raided the union hall, hoping to capture anarchists. Startled by the scene before them, the police scuttled away, leaving Carmen to be born in peace.

In Lisbon he found José Romero Ortega working on the anarcho-syndicalist newspaper *A Batalha* as a type-setter; he, like Pérez, had been expelled from Brazil, having been, like Pérez, born in Spain. José Romero went back when the Portuguese dictatorship was established in 1926, dying in Rio de Janeiro at the age of nearly 90. He was part of the team that was dispatching *Ação Directa* from Pérez’s home, the first time I dropped in.

In the Portuguese capital, Pérez joined the ‘O Semeador’ anarchist group alongside Adriano Botelho, José Carlos de Souza, Manuel Joaquim de Souza and other Portuguese militants.

In October 1925 he travelled to France with Pedro Vallina and there met with Nestor Makhno, Peter Arshinov, Jean Grave, Sébastien Faure, Charles Malato, Pierre Besnard, Ranko, Armando Borghi, Virgilia D’Andrea and Christiaan Cornelissen. In 1926 he took part in the Marseilles congress, joining with the Portuguese militant Manuel Joaquim de Sousa to table a motion calling for the establishment of a body to unify the anarchist movement in Spain and Portugal – to be more specific, the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI).

Following a change of government, Pérez returned to Spain with his three daughters, one born in Spain, one in Portugal and the youngest in France. His partner had died in exile.

In 1929 while working on the construction of the Cuban pavilion for the Exposition in Seville, chance brought Manuel Pérez Fernández into contact with Dr Paulo Vidal, Brazil’s commissar-general at the exposition. They had met before in the editorial offices of the *Jornal do Brasil* newspaper shortly before Manuel had been expelled by the Rio de Janeiro police.

At the invitation of this Brazilian journalist, Manuel found work as a carpenter on the Brazilian stand and when that finished – given that Manuel’s knowledge of the languages of both countries and of Brazilian ways and customs – he took charge of the News, Press and Propaganda Agency, whereupon he was recommended by Dr Paulo Vidal to register his daughters at the Brazilian consulate in Seville as Brazilian nationals.

The Exposition moved on from Spain to Antwerp and Pérez was invited to travel with the Brazilians. He agreed, but the Spanish police tried to thwart his plans and Brazil’s ambassador in Madrid asserted his rights as a Brazilian national. Pérez took his family along. Come the end of the exposition in Belgium, the Brazilian government offered him free passage and an entry visa, but Pérez declined the offer, opting instead to use the free passage to return to Spain, arriving in San Sebastián in February 1931, after a two month stopover in Paris.

In June 1932 he left for the Canaries. Passing through Vitoria, he met up with Isaac Puente, José Alvarez and others of like mind.

His activities in the Canaries were intense and he was made director of the weekly paper *En Marcha* in Santa Cruz de Tenerife.

He was part of the board of *Cultura Obrera* in Palma, Majorca and when the fascist revolt came he

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escaped via Barcelona. In that city he was the director Of *Ruta*, the mouthpiece of the Catalan regional youth organisation.

He took part in a number of plenums and congresses before and during the revolution. Having missed a sailing in the immediate wake of Franco's victory, he finished up a prisoner and was taken to the Los Almendros concentration camp in early April 1939.

Pérez recalled that at that point how, at the urging of Dr Paulo Vidal, he had registered his whole family as Brazilian nationals in 1929, in Seville. To save his own and his family's lives, he had no hesitation in producing those identity papers and tipped off the Brazilian consulate in Cadiz about their plight. Within days the representative of the country that had expelled him back in 1919 demanded of Franco that Manuel Pérez be allowed to return to Brazil. He was monitored throughout a deportation hearing by the Brazilian consulate and finally, in July 1941, Manuel Pérez Fernández and family arrived in Rio de Janeiro. It could be argued that the Spanish anarchist had been "born again" ...

Once he had recovered from his ordeal, Pérez started afresh, with José Oiticica, José Romero, P. Ferreira da Silva and other anarchist militants. He died on 16 June 1964 after asking the veteran anarchist Diamantino Augusto who was visiting him in the nursing home where he was living: "How are the comrades?"

He left written memoirs behind. The present writer received a copy from his very own hands and regards this unpublished work as being of enormous historical value.

Source: Edgar Rodrigues *Os Companheiros*, 4 (Editora Insular, Florianopolis 1997) pp. 54-59

Another text, *Manuel Pérez Fernández, FAI founder and CNT organiser* by Agustín Guillamón from: *Balance. Cuadernos de historia* No 36 (November 2011) is on our website.

Credit

This issue of *KSL : Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library* put together in January 2012 by the Kate Sharpley Library collective. Thanks to all our friends, subscribers, donors, readers, translators and other helpers for your support in 2011.

Keep an eye on our website for extra articles and biographies and reviews. *The Iron Column : militant anarchism in the Spanish Civil War* by Abel Paz has arrived in the UK, Friends will get their copy with this issue.

Odessa Anarchists Appeal to the city's Underworld (1919)

Thieves and robbers!

The soviet of the Odessa Anarchist Federation has a request and a warning for you. We look upon you as the product of the accursed conditions of the regimen of exploitation and violence created by the bourgeoisie and which are still with us thanks to gangsters in the hire of the White Guard officers and their foreign bayonets.

If the bourgeoisie should suffer from your activities, too bad for it. It is reaping what it sowed and it is no part of our task to look to its protection.

In the new communist society and in the fight to create it, in which we call upon the Russian proletariat and the proletariat worldwide to play their part, everything will belong to us all, there will be no private property, no rich and no poor and so there will be no call for thievery and robbery.

In our struggle against capitalism and the powers-that-be, a struggle under way for some years now, the finest and bravest sons of our class, the disinherited and exploited have placed their heads in the hangman's noose and stepped up on to the scaffold and now line up against the wall. In the name of the blessed liberation of the workers, and for the sake of our comrades who have fallen and are falling to the executioner in the full flower of their strength and health, the soviet of the Anarchist Federation calls upon all to desist immediately from the disgraceful misdeeds carried out among you lately and for an end to abuse of the memory of revolutionary heroes and for an end to demanding money in the name of anarchists.

At the same time, the Anarchist Federation's soviet has a word of warning for those who hold nothing sacred any more, those who ignore the appeals of workers and revolutionaries and whosoever may persist in extorting funds in the name of anarchism whereas we regard them as parasites and bourgeois with but one preoccupation, how to line their pockets even more. We give them final warning that if it can be shown that they have misused our name, they will be shot down on the spot, by us.

Odessa Anarchist Federation

Published in Shtyrbul, AA *Anarkhistskoe dvizhenie v period krizisa Rossiiskoi tsivilizatsii (konets XIX - 1-ia chetvert XX vv.) [The Anarchist Movement on Russian Civilisation's Time of Crisis (from the late 19th century to the first quarter of the 20th), Omsk, State Pedagogical University, 1998, p. 49.]*

Josep Maria Aloma

JOSEP MARIA ALOMA

Ramon Graus i Alomà, interviewed by *cnt* newspaper following publication of his book about Tarragona CNT veteran Josep Maria Alomà, *Una utopia, una esperança. La historia de Josep Alomà*

Q. Who was this Josep Alomà?

A. Not the sort of person to go unnoticed. He stood out physically (being imposingly tall and athletic and, in his later years, his having impeccably combed white hair). Alomà was one of those people about whom everybody agrees that they radiate life and an itch to shake things up.

Q. How did he first come to know about libertarianism?

A. Through his older brother Pau and from intimate knowledge of the circumstances in which their father died. And from meeting up later with people like Ascaso while he was doing his military service in Zaragoza: that was crucial too.

Q. He was very well known in Tarragona as a militant, but wasn't he an outstanding sportsman as well?

A. He was into athletics, football, swimming, Greco-Roman wrestling. This was a spin-off from the anarchists' notion of a rounded education, a notion he imbibed from the classical sources.

Q. His brothers were activists too, so much so that when it comes to telling stories about them, there is a bit of confusion as to precisely which of them was involved.

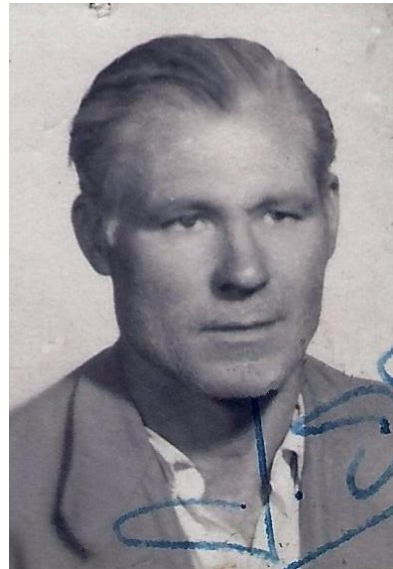
A. In actual fact they made up a team and the Alomà brothers were very popular on account of their daring and commitment. . All three were up to their necks in social struggles against injustice and for emancipation.

Q. How did the CNT stand in Tarragona at the time of the fascist revolt?

A. Unlike Barcelona, where the CNT was overwhelmingly in the majority, in Tarragona city it was the UGT that had the most members. This was in part due to the structures of local society, the slightness of industrialisation and the support the UGT had received during the Primo de Rivera dictatorship. However, the CNT was strong in construction, the railways, the docks and particularly strong among the peasantry and the miners in provincial Tarragona.

Q. What part did Josep Alomà play when the time came to protect the region's artistic inheritance from his position as head of Tarragona Corporation's Department of Culture?

A. His involvement went deeper than merely being vice-chair of the Cultural Works Confiscation Committee. He surrounded himself with a very good



technical team with people such as Ignasi Mallol, Joan Rebull or Pere Batlle. It should be pointed out that he faced down the mob and saved Tarragona cathedral from being torched and its artistic treasures from being destroyed. [It was also through his efforts that the Cistercian monasteries in Poblet and Santes Creus were spared looting and arson].

Q. What other duties and activities did he get involved in during the Civil War and the Revolution?

A. He served as cultural member on the Tarragona Antifascist Committee and later headed the Department of Culture and was first deputy to the mayor, promoting access to culture for working class people by means of scientific and social movie-screenings, revolutionary plays, opera and classical music concerts, adult education, drawing workers into sports and then there were the activities at the Ateneo Libertario where he was chairman. As director of the *Diari de Tarragona* (the CNT-FAI mouthpiece) he encouraged and defended revolutionary gains made in the realms of work, culture, politics and education ... And was the Tarragona delegate of the New Unified School Council (CENU), in which capacity he managed to provide a humanistic, cross-class, liberating education system for upwards of 2,000 street kids. The setting up of the CENU was one of the main accomplishments of the revolution and this was due largely to pressures from anarchists like Joan Puig Elias or Josep Alomà himself.

Q. And Josep served in the trenches too. Where was he posted?

A. First he fought for a month in Villarrobledo and later in Baza (Granada), where they made him company commissar and head of propaganda with the Army of the South, attached to the Andalusian Staff.

Q. Where was he come the end of the war?

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A. Right where the war finished up: in the docks in Alicante. Weeks before then, his friend Dr Félix Martí Ibañez had suggested to him that, given the way the Stalinists had betrayed the revolution and how the war was a dead duck, he should move to the United States. But Josep refused out of loyalty to his family and comrades. After surviving the Francoist concentration camps for nine months, he was then transferred back to Tarragona.

Q. What happened to him once he was in the hands of the fascist courts?

A. Even though dozens of right-wingers and priests [among the priests whose lives he saved were Fathers Ritort, Esteve, Parera and Batlle] came forward with evidence of how he had saved their lives, the regime's judges sentenced him to death for "military rebellion". Only relentless lobbying of the Francoist upper echelons by his wife – she even managed to secure an audience with Army Minister Enrique Varela – got that sentence was commuted to 30 years' imprisonment. His brother Pau had been sentenced to death and shot in 1940 and another brother, Jaume, had died in jail in 1942, both having been convicted of "military rebellion." [Josep Alomà himself died on 9 May 1993].

Q. And what was life like for him after he was released?

A. Given that they had killed his two brothers and that his own eldest daughter had died during his time in prison and that the regime had seized everything he owned and that Alomà and his wife, being victimised politically, were unable to ply their trades as teachers and that he was banished from Catalonia, [Alomà was banished from his native Catalonia and was only able to return there in the 1960s] well ... It was work, work, work, basically as a clerk of works in the building trade and raising kids. And just surviving a regime that made life impossible for him.

Q. And was he active during Francoism?

A. He was active in a clandestine sense, within the trade union organisation (CNT) as well as inside the FAI. Under constant surveillance, he headed up social ventures, such as the time when he chaired the Social Centre in Entrevías in Madrid.

Q. What part did he play during the Transition in relaunching the CNT in Tarragona?

A. Josep Maria Alomà's role was crucial in refloating the union. Off his own bat he sought out suitable premises, refurbished them, bought furniture and set up a library made up mostly of the books he himself donated and, for many a year, he covered the rent on the premises. And his efforts at recruitment and spreading the anarchist ideal were never-ending ... Talks, book launches, university symposia...

Q. You are his grandson. How do you remember him?

A. I have countless memories to choose from since he lived with us. He taught us to read and write and how to play chess and regaled us with stories from his youth ... Many a time he told me about his days in prison. Using saturated newspapers they made paper maché chessmen so they could play chess, that being one of the few outlets the inmates of the Castillo de Pilatos had. Later I found out that the newspapers used were the Nazi-fascist publication *Redención*.

Q. The title of your book is: A Utopia, A Hope. To what are you referring there?

A. Alomà was the embodiment of those who refuse to fatally resign themselves to this world's radically unfair and arbitrary ways and who fight cynicism, opportunism and mediocrity with an eye to working a profound change in the certain knowledge that without Hope there can be no movement towards Utopia.

cnt, No 371, October 2010 [Material inside square brackets from different sources]

New publication:

Free Society : A German exile in revolutionary Spain by Werner Droescher, Introduction by Farrell Cleary

Werner Droescher was an exile from Nazi Germany who in 1936 found himself pitched into the dramatic social reconstruction of the Spanish Revolution. Droescher, with his companion Greville Teixidor, joined the revolutionary militias on the Aragon front. Later they carried out solidarity work for the Spanish anarchists from London, before returning to Spain to work with refugee children.

This extract from his autobiography, *Odyssey of a teacher*, gives a first hand account of the anarchist attempt to build a free society. The introduction by Farrell Cleary shows the impact of this experience, and Droescher's influence on the Anarchist movement in New Zealand where he first settled in 1940.

Contents

Werner Droescher, "The Spanish Civil War and the Anarchists"

Werner Droescher, "The Aragon Front"

Anonymous "Spanish Anarchists Made Ideas Work"

A Kate Sharpley Library co-publication with the Aotearoa Workers' Solidarity Movement

<http://awsm.org.nz/>

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Irish Anarchist History

Interview with Alan MacSimóin of the Irish Anarchist History Archive

Q: Can you give us a brief description of the project, say what the idea behind it is and how it started?

A couple of us were talking last year about how our history should be preserved, and decided that our contribution would be making available an online archive of magazines, pamphlets, papers and books from and about anarchist organisations in Ireland, from their early beginnings in the 1880s through to today. If we don't record our own history, who will?

We hope it will be a useful contribution towards developing a history of anarchism in Ireland, and will be a help to those researching our movement's politics and activities. We also hope that it will help interested people to understand the various tendencies and currents within Irish anarchism. Additionally, it provides an opportunity to consider how the same themes recur again and again and how both problems and solutions may have been already identified and arrived at.

We started by collecting together the material we already possessed, got a wordpress blog, and went online last October.

Q: I've noticed you've tried to provide background information about the magazines you've put up, the groups that produced them, and what they're discussing. Presumably you're as keen to share the knowledge you have as well as merely show the documents?

There is a big difference between a magazine with 100 readers and one with 10,000, or one that published two or three issues and one that published for twenty or thirty years. Circulation and lifespan can give us some idea of how popular or influential a paper was. So, we try to give that sort of background information where we can be sure that our information is accurate.

We provide pdfs of the original material rather than just the text of articles, as the physical look of a publication can give an added sense of the times.

It's not a 'one way street' where readers just read. We encourage our readers to use the 'leave a comment' facility to add more information, share memories or talk about the politics of the publications we post.

Q: If someone was thinking of doing something similar, what advice would you give them?

Anyone with access to a scanner and a PC can do it. What is important is that any information given is accurate and not just guesswork or hearsay.

There are all sorts of possibilities, for instance you could aim for a collection of material by and about anarchists in your town, your union, your college, or in a particular struggle.

Q: Can you briefly tell us how you do it?

It's not difficult. We learnt how to do the technical stuff within a few days, mainly by trial and error. The scanner we use is a cheap home model we picked up in Tesco and the basic blog is free. There are just two of us at present and we spend a couple of hours a week doing it.

Now that we have been up and running for a few months readers have started to send us pdfs of almost forgotten material they had put away in attics and under beds. This week we even received one from a comrade in Australia.

Q: What resolution are you scanning at? And are you saving images as jpegs, or scanning straight to pdf?

We scan straight to pdf at a resolution of 300ppi (pixels per inch). However if anyone has advice on a method that maintains image clarity but uses less memory we'll welcome it. We are not technical wizards, so keep any suggestions very simple.

Q: You have lots of periodicals waiting to scan, and you've also put up some ephemera. How long do you think it will take, and what further plans do you have for the project?

Yes, we have lots of material to scan and post, including complete and almost complete runs of *Workers Solidarity*, *Red & Black Revolution*, *Irish Anarchist Review*, *Anarchist News*, *Outta Control*, *RAG*, *Black Star*, *Antrim Alternative*, *Ainriail* (both the Belfast and Frontline Collective versions), *Black Rag*, *Anarcho-Communist*, *Resistance* (all three versions), *Organise!*, *Solidarity Bulletin*, *No Masters*, *Working Class Resistance*. Also pamphlets, leaflets, stickers and more.

We are also tracking down very early stuff like the interview with Kropotkin in the *Freeman's Journal* (the main daily newspaper of the day) in 1887, and the Irish language translation of at least one of his books in the same period.

It's an endless project as one interesting find often leads to another, and our movement keeps producing new publications. Also the mainstream press over years has had news reports and letters, ranging from the good to the stupid to the downright dishonest, and that continues. Just recently the *Irish Examiner* described one Workers Solidarity Movement person as a member of the Irish parliament!

<http://irishanarchisthistory.wordpress.com/>

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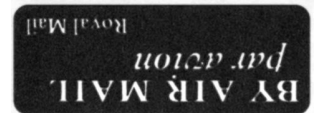
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