

Vicente Monclus Guallar, Spanish Libertarian victimised in the USSR

Kate Sharpley Library

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Abiego, in the foothills of Barbastro, a CNT stronghold, was represented at the CNT's congress in Zaragoza in May 1936 by the 80-member Abiego CNT Union, part of the powerful Barbastro comarcal (county) organisation. Also represented there were nearby villages such as Castellazuelo (70 members), Pozan del Vero (47), Costean (320 and Naval (13) which also sent delegates to the congress, whilst attendance proved impossible for the comrades from Salas Altas. The Abiego CNT also contributed volunteer militians to man the frontlines and was the driving force behind the collectivisation in the town, the collective being headed by Ramon Sanz Almudevar who as arrested on the Guadalajara front at the end of the civil war and jailed for 4 years before leaving for exile in France in 1948; his brother Manuel, a former volunteer with the Barbastro militias who had seen action on the Huesca and Teruel fronts before being forced to flee by the communists and enlisting in Alcu-bierre with the 26th 'Durruti' Division was already living there. Manuel served as company commissar and was wounded in Tresp before fleeing to France where he was interned in the Bourg-Madame and Le Vernet concentration camps from which he escaped to join the resistance (in the Pointe Grave maquis). Another promoter of the collective was Santiago Guallar, a refugee since February 1939, who died in 1990 in exile in France at the age of 86. The fascists came down hard on Abiego: 9 residents were investigated by the Aragon Political Accountability Court, among them the CNT's Manuel Salas Duran (delegate of the collective's cafe and cooperative) and Mariano Jordan Ballabriga, both of whom became fugitives, and Julian Bierge Claver. Upwards of 60 Abiego residents passed through the jail in Huesca, including 6 women and at least 8 Abiego residents were jailed, then shot: Joaquin Monclus Guallar (Vicente's brother) on 30-8-1936 in Huesca, five people (Santiago Baron Tornil 10-11-1939, Martin Bull Arilla and Jose Naya Allue on 27-3-1940, Melchor Oliveros Baron on 31-10-1940 and Agustin Nasarre Gros on 13-7-1943) in Barbastro, and Vicente Arin Panzano on 23-6-1944 and Justo Panzano Encuentro on 14-3-1945, in Zaragoza. They were all young men, farmers, shepherds and shearers and most likely members of the CNT and the collective.

Vicente Monclus Guallar: his only crime? Thinking for himself.

Vicente was born in Abiego (Huesca province) and spent 18 years living in the USSR, 16 years and 51 one days of that in prisons and labour camps. His was not an isolated case for he suffered the foulest slavery alongside 50 million people from a range of nationalities under soviet butchers who displayed a placard over the camp entrance: "With a mailed fist we shall lead humanity to happiness."

Vicente, a libertarian, volunteered for front line service with some other Abiego residents and fought in the Huesca, Zaragoza and Levante sectors. In 1938 he entered the air force training school in La Ribera (Murcia), one of 250 trainees: after political questioning by Russian agents, some 60 of the students were awarded bursaries by the republican government under Negrin and Alvarez del Vayo (puppets of the Kremlin) and travelled up to Rouen (France) to board the 'Coperacia'. That was the beginning of his *via dolorosa*, for they were banned from going ashore. When they reached Leningrad the police searched their luggage, seizing banned books and their passports and they were shipped as prisoners all the way to Kizobabad [presumably Kirovabad] (Azerbaijan) by train - a journey of 4500 kilometers. At the air force school, they were inducted as Red Army soldiers and after six months locked up, they were informed that the war in Spain was over. In June 1939, they were tricked into believing that their wish to leave for France or Mexico was about to be granted and five of the group agreed to act as spies for the Russians. The others had a visit from Carton from the Spanish Communist Party politburo (a Popular Front deputy) who urged them enter the service of the USSR, telling him that he regarded everybody not in the Party as a traitor. They were moved to the Comintern's political school in Moscow where they were harangued by Enrique Lister. A further 15 of the group then entered the service of the USSR. The remaining 40 were then informed of the signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact and the subsequent invasion of Poland and with the outbreak of World War Two, their desire to leave evaporated. They were expelled from the school and taken to Monimo where they were greeted, beneath a placard reading "All power to Jose Diaz and Santiago Carrillo", by Arturo Petrel, the former communist deputy for Granada, by Cabo Giorla, former governor of Murcia (both politburo members) and by Balaguer (leader of the Spanish communists in Russia during the 1950s). When the group refused to be talked into the service of the USSR rather than the Spanish Republic, threats and bullying were used and following a visit from Santiago Castro (another politburo member) acting for Jose Diaz and Dolores Ibarruri 'La Pasionaria', they were given the ultimatum of entering the service of the USSR or being deemed traitors to the Spanish people. Two of the group of 40 pilots, Rafael Estrella and Lloret (both Valencians) were 'sleepers' and so on 25-1-1940, the group was denounced by a secret tribunal made up of their 'visitors' and 8 of the pilots, including Vicente Monclus, were removed to the prison in Butiskaya [Butyrskaya] where they were virtually buried alive in that among Spanish communists in Russia there was a wall of silence. For years relatives lobbied from France through the Red Cross, sending hundreds of letters and telegrammes to the Russian authorities and the Spanish CP, but none was answered. The rest then vanished into the slave labour camps (they were inmates in Kasafia in 1943). After eight months of torture, they were sentenced to 8 years' penal servitude, accused of being Trotskyists and fifth

columnists, and in September 1940 they were sent to work on the construction of the Vorkuta railway in the Arctic. They were dying off. Together with Juan Salas from Barcelona and Jose Jirones from Reus, Vicente escaped and for three months subsisted in the forests until, recaptured, he was the only one left. During the world war the numbers of slave labourers were swollen by the influx of inhabitants from Besarabia, Romania, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine and Poland. In September 1941, Vicente was sent to a death camp where a female doctor took him under her wing and rescued him on account of his being a Spaniard. In 1942 he worked felling trees and in the coalmines and, his weight now down to 37 kilos, he collapsed and was sent to another death camp where he survived thanks to the help of doctor inmates sympathetic to the Spanish republican cause. From 1944 he was working in a vulcanisation plant until, on 29-1-1948, after 8 awful years in the Arctic and as the sole survivor of the 38-strong team of Spanish pilots, he was pardoned and banished to Samarkand (Uzbekistan). During his latter years as a prisoner he bumped into 18 year old Ramon Hernandez, a 'war baby' from Gijon who had been sentenced to penal servitude; he discovered that Valentin Gonzalez 'El Campesino', was being held in Butiskaya [Butyrskaya] and he was able to chat with deported Russian pilots and sailors, survivors from the ship 'Juventudes' which had called to Spain, and with lots of International Brigaders - Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, Germans and Italians - who had been dispatched to Russia by Red Aid right after crossing into France, only to face trial with thousands of Red Army troops captured by the Nazis who, when freed by the Allies in 1945, found themselves being deported and exterminated in the forests and mines in Siberia. Vicente spent two hungry, wretched years in the Caucasian republic, was thwarted in his bid to escape to Iran in January 1950 and was brought back to Moscow... and pardoned. He was watched day and night. Andres Guanter, another soviet spy originally from Valencia, tailed him and on 20-4-1950 Vicente was held by the Justice Ministry in the notorious Lubyanka where he was stripped and beaten and denied sleep for six days before being jailed in Sukhanovska where, after 34 days of torture, he signed a phony confession to being a spy, with 246 pages of charges listed against him. Sent back to Butiskaya [Butyrskaya] again on 2-1-1951, he was sentenced to 10 years' penal servitude in a 'secret location' where he served a further five years locked up with 300 other inmates, including academics and teachers from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Austria and Hungary. It was there that he ran into the Spaniards Francisco Ramon Molina and Juan Blasco Cobo who had been given 10 years for spying, simply for having applied for permission to leave to go to Mexico and having written a letter to the republican government-in-exile. In April 1955, he was taken to Lefortovo prison where he met a batch of German POWS awaiting repatriation. Which was how his friend Heinz Kregts came to make the requisite overtures to get in touch with Vicente's family through the Red Cross, whereupon the family, discovering

that he was still alive, lobbied on his behalf. On 6-1-1956 Vicente was moved to the Lubyanka; his sentence was overturned and he was pronounced innocent after 16 years and 51 days as a prisoner of the USSR. Reunited with his family in France, he has left us a book - 10 Años en la URSS (Editorial Claridad, Buenos Aires 1959) - an impressive indictment of Stalinist rule in the USSR and of the complicity of the Spanish CP and its (these days feted) leadership in such genocide, comparable only to Nazism.

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