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Anarchy in the UK('s most famous fortress): comradeship and cupidity in Gibraltar and neighbouring Spain, 1890–1902

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In April 1892, the Governor of the British colony of Gibraltar, General Sir Lothian Nicholson, wrote urgently to the imperial government in London to seek extra funds to expand Gibraltar's Police force. He wrote that, 'for some time it has become painfully apparent that a feeling of unrest, if not actual insubordination to authority is evidenced by a considerable portion of the civilian community of this fortress'.<sup>1</sup> In London, the request came as a surprise. 'The Rock', as the colony was known, was recognised in Whitehall for having a traditionally stable relationship between imperial authorities and the civilian population. In part, this was no doubt influenced by Gibraltar's large military garrison, but it was also conditioned by the relative economic prosperity of a territory at the junction of the world's major shipping routes. In his letter to London, Nicholson therefore struggled to explain why in Gibraltar, after decades of relative civilian quiescence, there had been at least three major workers' strikes between September 1890 and April 1892. The last of these saw two employers 'ill-treated' by a mob of pickets; the first time that violence has been associated with industrial action.<sup>2</sup>

As this article will make clear, the cause of this new militancy amongst the local working class, and more broadly the new distrust and disdain for forms of authority on the Rock, was the spread of anarchist ideology and tactics in the surrounding region of Spain, the Campo de Gibraltar. With the Rock heavily dependent upon 'the Campo' for labour and supplies, it did not take long for such ideas to spread to Gibraltar itself. Consequently, in the ten years following Nicholson's ominous despatch, the colony witnessed a flurry of industrial action, with at least twelve further major strikes and numerous smaller actions. The last of these, which lasted from March to September 1902, was styled a 'general strike' by its organisers and participants and represented the largest and longest industrial action in Gibraltar up to that point.

In the period here under review, workers in Gibraltar and the Campo cooperated effectively, experimenting not only with different forms of industrial action but also with cultural and educational initiatives, usually based upon ideas derived from Spanish anarchism. The focal point of workers' activity was an organisation referred to as the *Círculo Obrero* (literally translated as 'workers' circle', but often abbreviated by all sides simply to 'Círculo'). The term referred specifically to a building from which industrial action was debated and organised, and within which cultural and educational events were arranged for the local workers. More broadly, however, the *Círculo* represented an umbrella organisation that coordinated the activities of numerous smaller, disparate workers' unions and which propagandised on behalf of the local working class.

The *Círculo's* industrial activism and tactics in particular proved popular and effective enough to resist alternative models in Gibraltar, not least, as we shall see, a more 'constitutionalist' form of labour relations promoted during late 1898 and early 1899 by the British Social Democratic Federation (SDF). Meanwhile, in the wider Iberian context, we will see that the actions of the anarchist movement in Gibraltar and the Campo mirrored the broader tactical and strategic flexibility of anarchism in Andalucía and Spain in this period. Associations with other left-wing groups were experimented with; debates over tactics and ideology were common; and whilst anarchist unions both within and between Gibraltar and the Campo often collaborated they were also capable of holding divergent positions in relation to particular incidents of industrial unrest. Finally, the present work represents a case study of the way in which British colonial authorities and civilian elites responded to different forms of labour organisation. By the end of 1902, after a decade of advances for local labourers, Gibraltar's employers had largely broken anarchist organisations on the Rock. At the same time, local Spanish authorities

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives/Public Record Office [TNA/PRO] Colonial Office [CO] 91/398 Despatches. Despatch from the Governor of Gibraltar to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. 26 April 1892.

<sup>2</sup> Finlayson, *Gibraltar*, 289.

engineered a massacre in the neighbouring town of La Línea, which facilitated a crackdown on local activists, and subdued the anarchist movement in the Campo until the Great War.

### Negotiating the Labyrinth

To date, no study of the Rock's anarchists has been published. We locate this first study on the intersections between the historiography of the development of Spanish anarchism, particularly in Andalucía, and of labour movements in Gibraltar and the British Empire more broadly. Here we explore briefly these historiographies before going on to draw from, and actively contribute to, this body of work

Spanish anarchism has inspired a growing literature. In the nineteenth century, as capitalism began to spread across the globe, Spain, France and Russia saw the development of significant anarchist movements which competed seriously to be the dominant ideology of working-class organisation and political expression. Addressing Spanish anarchism's growth, Brenan's *The Spanish Labyrinth* remains the classic.<sup>3</sup> Operating at national level, his analysis of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism offered personal experience, local colour and a compellingly written account. Brenan's central thesis was that Spanish anarchism was a variety of millenarianism. By way of contrast, two later works, first by Kaplan and later by Esenwein offered more detailed local and regional studies, illuminating the development of anarchism in Andalucía.<sup>4</sup> Kaplan specifically rejected Brenan's millenarian thesis in regards to Spanish anarchism, and our analysis below adds support to her work by demonstrating that anarchism in Gibraltar and its surrounding hinterland formed part of a practical politics of the dispossessed.<sup>5</sup> In addition, subsequent, and helpful, detailed studies have been published in the English language, notably those of Chris Ealham and are supplemented by case studies of anarchist organisation beyond Spain.<sup>6</sup> We advance this literature not only by contributing to the broader debate on anarchism as a form of millenarianism but also by placing the case of Gibraltar into the context of wider developments in Andalusian and Spanish anarchism.

In Gibraltar's case we see anarchist ideologies and practices thrown into sharp relief by their interaction with British government institutions and British-style trade union activity. Gibraltar's imperial aspect makes for an unusual and revealing setting in which to examine the ideology and tactics of Spanish anarchism. Yet, whilst the literature on Spanish anarchism helps us to understand developments across the frontier, very little has been written about the history of labour movements in Gibraltar during the period examined here. For example, a special edition of the *Gibraltar Heritage Journal* devoted to labour movements in Gibraltar begins its chronology in the 1930s.<sup>7</sup> More broadly, Constantine's work has significantly advanced historians' understanding of Gibraltar's civil history; Stockey has emphasised the intimacy and importance of Gibraltar's relationship with neighbouring Spain in the early twentieth century; and Grocott and Stockey highlight the issue of labour movements in Gibraltar and the Campo, albeit briefly.<sup>8</sup> This article is the first, however, to address in detail Gibraltar's labour

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<sup>3</sup> Brenan, *Spanish Labyrinth*.

<sup>4</sup> Kaplan, *Anarchists of Andalusia*; Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology*.

<sup>5</sup> See also, Duncan, 'Spanish Anarchism Refracted: Theme and Image in the Millenarian and Revisionist Literature'.

<sup>6</sup> Brooks, 'Ideology, strategy, and organization'; Ealham, *Class, Culture and Conflict*; Purkiss, *Democracy, Trade Unions and Political Violence*; Schmidt & van der Walt, *Black Flame*.

<sup>7</sup> *Gibraltar Heritage Journal*, Vol. 15, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Constantine, *Community and Identity*; Grocott & Stockey, *Gibraltar: A Modern History*, 60-68, 70-74; Stockey, *Gibraltar*

history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in doing so illuminates a forgotten part of the history of the Rock's labour organisation.

Finally, we turn to the historiography of British imperialism. The role of labour in the colonies is an issue that remains sparsely investigated by comparison to the politics, military strategy and cultural productions of empire. To take a representative example, neither of the volumes dealing with the nineteenth and twentieth century in the hefty *Oxford History of the British Empire* series (volumes III and IV respectively) contains a chapter dedicated to labour organisation.<sup>9</sup> Gupta has analysed metropolitan attitudes to the empire from the perspective of the Labour Party and broader labour movement.<sup>10</sup> And Morgan has tackled the labour movement's attitude to decolonisation.<sup>11</sup> But little has been written about the links between the British labour movement and imperialism in the colonies themselves. Of that which there has been, notable is Roberts' *Labour in the Tropical Territories of the Commonwealth* but this, as the title suggests, does not cover European colonies such as Gibraltar or Malta (or the dominions such as Canada and Australia for that matter).<sup>12</sup> Because of this, works by Sek Hong Ng and Olivia Ip and Lucien van der Walt dealing with anarchist movements in Hong Kong and South Africa respectively are welcome and allow for some comparison.<sup>13</sup> By examining the links between anarchist organisations in Gibraltar and in Britain, we contribute to the history of industrial relations in the British Empire and also offer some contrasts with Van der Walt's work on the Social Democratic Federation in South Africa.

That the influence of anarchism in Gibraltar has not previously been examined by historians owes much to the fact that, as we have seen, the subject lies on the fault lines between three separate historiographies. However, there are methodological reasons for this situation too. The history of Gibraltar, and in particular its civilian history, was sparsely studied until around thirty years ago when William Jackson's *Rock of the Gibraltarians* was published.<sup>14</sup> Jackson sparked an interest in the history of Gibraltar which has received particular scholarly attention in the last ten or so years, with notable works including those addressed above. These histories were made possible by the exploitation of archival material at The National Archives in London and at the Gibraltar Government Archives. The latter has worked to collect and organise a substantial amount of material, which can now be used in order to understand the Rock's civilian history. Even so, despite the greater number of sign-posts provided by a growing historiography on Gibraltar, as well as a growing body of primary material relating to the Rock's history, studying its labour history is not without difficulties. A branch of the Transport and General Workers' Union was established in Gibraltar in 1919, but sadly none of its pre-Second World War records have survived other than correspondence sent to, and collected by, organisations such as local companies and by the colonial government. No union or labour organisation pre-dating the Great War has survived to bequeath its records. Finally, some primary sources from the Spanish side of the Gibraltar frontier survive, not least of all a short-lived run of the anarchist newspaper *La Protesta*, which was produced in the Campo from 1901-1902, as well as previously underused memoir material from local Spanish workers. Whilst much of the day-to-day can be missed by archival collections and other primary material, as Eric Hobsbawm has persuasively argued, moments of

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<sup>9</sup> Brown & Lewis, *Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. iv; Porter, *Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. iii.

<sup>10</sup> Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement*.

<sup>11</sup> Morgan, 'Imperialists at Bay', 233-254.

<sup>12</sup> Roberts *Labour in the Tropical Territories of the Commonwealth*, (Duke University Press, 1964).

<sup>13</sup> Ng & Ip, 'Dialectics of Capitalism: A Re-Visit to the Hong Kong Chinese Labor Movement and Perlman's Model'; Van der Walt, 'Anarchism and syndicalism in an African port city: the revolutionary traditions of Cape Town's multiracial working class, 1904-1931'.

<sup>14</sup> Jackson, *Rock of the Gibraltarians*.

revolutionary fervour help to shed light on the conditions people faced in their everyday lives.<sup>15</sup> Making use of thousands of documents produced in the period 1890-1902 we are, therefore, able to begin to shed first light upon labour organisation in Gibraltar and the Campo in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

### **The Development of Labour Organisation in Gibraltar and the Campo, 1890-97**

Anarchist ideas first began to take hold in Andalucía in the years after 1868.<sup>16</sup> However, it took some time for anarchism to spread to Gibraltar.<sup>17</sup> As a fortress, access to Gibraltar was regulated via a strict permit system. Those whom the colonial authorities saw as trouble-makers were liable to have their permits withdrawn. Surveillance of undesirables involved plain-clothes Police as well as military intelligence officers, who in-turn controlled a network of informants. As new and potentially ‘subversive’ political doctrines gained a footing in the region, the military authorities found it mutually beneficial to share information relating to potential agitators. Facilitating this, Gibraltar’s authorities fostered close relations with their counterparts in the Campo in this period and high society in Gibraltar and the Campo coalesced around events such as official government functions, the Royal Calpe Hunt, and, from 1890 onwards, shared use of facilities such as the Gibraltar Garrison Library.<sup>18</sup>

In the years after 1868, co-operation retarded the spread of ideologies across the frontier but could not prevent it indefinitely. By the 1880s, Andalucía as a whole became a hotbed of anarchism.<sup>19</sup> As thousands of migrant workers arrived in the Campo from all over Spain in this period – primarily to serve the needs of a growing economy in Gibraltar – so the working class populations swelled in local urban centres such as La Línea, Algeciras, San Roque and Los Barrios. The migrants’ own experiences, the increasingly chaotic and intolerable urban conditions in the Campo, and the existing foothold of anarchist ideas in the region offered an environment in which the doctrine could thrive. Following the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, and the associated growth in trade on the Rock, the number of day labourers crossing from Spain grew quickly.

From the 1880s onwards, Gibraltar’s colonial authorities and its business leaders become increasingly dependent upon the burgeoning Spanish labour pool in the Campo. Put simply, they were no longer in a position to identify, let alone exclude, every person crossing the frontier who held anarchist beliefs. It is in this context that in 1890 we start to see groups of Gibraltarian workers operating anarchist tactics, and whose demands reflected those of anarchists throughout the surrounding region of Spain. Strikes were often accompanied by violence and employers were caught unawares by the new and combative challenges they faced. For their part, the colonial authorities were sympathetic to the employers but were unprepared to assist them by outright oppression of militant labour organisations and organisers. Accordingly, this early period was the one in which anarchist tactics were most successful in Gibraltar.

In September 1890, workers in Gibraltar’s commercial dockyard came out on strike, catching their employers by surprise. By managing to bring work to an almost total stop, the strike’s organisers were able to gain significant concessions. First, the employers undertook to recognise the right of the Círculo

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<sup>15</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *On History*.

<sup>16</sup> Kaplan, *Anarchists of Andalucía*.

<sup>17</sup> The Governor’s Despatches from Gibraltar in the 1880s do not record a single labour dispute. This is not, of course, to say that there were none but it is to say that none were serious enough to merit reporting to the Colonial Office. Governor’s despatches for the 1880s can be found at: TNA/PRO, CO 91/352 - CO 91/388.

<sup>18</sup> *El Heraldo de Madrid* (Madrid), 16 November 1890.

<sup>19</sup> Kaplan, *Anarchists of Andalucía*; Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology*.

Obrero, branches of which operated in both Gibraltar and the Campo, to organise in the dockyard. Second, the employers agreed that worker's representatives would be in charge of issuing pay. Crucially, this placed the *Círculo Obrero* in a position where it could reject employers' calls to levy penalties for unsatisfactory performance against dockyard workers. This arrangement was not only a victory against perceived unjust treatment by the employers.<sup>20</sup> It also put significant control of the daily selection of workers in the hands of its representatives, something which chimed with anarchist beliefs that workers should be in control of their own labour activities

It did not take long for the dockyard employers to challenge the new arrangements. On 12 December 1890, the dockyard firms issued a collective statement in the *Gibraltar Chronicle*, the garrison's official newspaper, revoking the rights of workers' representatives to take charge of payments to employees.<sup>21</sup> They described the change as necessary to prevent the 'insubordination' which they alleged had become common since the September settlement.<sup>22</sup> A strike ensued, but the Spanish workers in the dockyard could only sustain the strike briefly, over the two days of the 15 and 16 December 1890, and were forced to return to work due to lack of funds. Gibraltarian workers were able to hold out until 19 December, however. Their return to work was achieved via a compromise: the *Círculo's* representatives were to remain as the workers' paymasters, but an employers' representative was to take part in the process too.<sup>23</sup>

That the *Círculo Obrero* was forced to accept a compromise solution to the strike underscored the potential vulnerability of anarchist forms of organising at that time. The *Círculo* did not have any strike funds, for which there were practical reasons. Throughout (and beyond) the period examined in this paper, Andalucía was an extremely poor area, even by Spanish standards. Since the *Círculo's* Spanish members were therefore unlikely to have savings, they struggled to maintain strike action for very long. Even the Gibraltarian workers, who were paid slightly more, could only manage a few days more on strike than their Spanish counterparts. In the strike of December 1890, the situation was made worse by having been out earlier in the year. This earlier action would have exhausted any reserves of food or money. Nor did the time of year, December, bode well for living off the land. Stealing from shops always remained an option (as wives of striking workers were exhorted to do in the general strike of 1902).<sup>24</sup> Another option uniquely available to both Spanish and Gibraltarian workers in this region was to profit from the truly industrial smuggling trade that had long proliferated across the Gibraltar frontier.<sup>25</sup> But there were also ideological reasons for eschewing strike funds. Anarchists feared that a strike fund would require a central bureaucracy to administer it, which would itself develop into the very same over-bearing power structures that they sought to challenge in capitalism.<sup>26</sup> Unease at 'bureaucratic' practices mirrored similar debates taking place within Spanish anarchism at the turn of

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<sup>20</sup> Gibraltar Government Archive (GGA), Despatches from Gibraltar 1901-05. Letter from the Governor to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. 8 May 1902. This document contains a brief history of labour organisation in Gibraltar, including the arrangements that arose from the strike of 1890.

<sup>21</sup> *Gibraltar Chronicle*, 13 December 1890.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> GGA, Despatches from Gibraltar 1901-05. Letter from the Governor to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. 8 May 1902. The end of the strike was significant enough to reach the Spanish national press, albeit belatedly. See *La Dinastía* (Barcelona), 27 December 1890.

<sup>24</sup> GGA, The General Strike of 1902, Occurrences During May. Police report of 6 May 1902.

<sup>25</sup> Grocott & Stockey, *Gibraltar: A Modern History*, chapter four.

<sup>26</sup> For Spain specifically Smith *Anarchism Reaction and Revolution*, p. 108; and more broadly see Ward, *Anarchism*, 41-50.

the century, where more union-focused ‘anarcho-syndicalism’ was gaining a foothold within the movement.<sup>27</sup>

In the strike of December 1890, the lack of a strike fund resulted in the *Círculo* having to make a compromise with the employers. However, such compromises were not particularly damaging to the *Círculo* because anarchists in Andalucía were happy to break such agreements whenever new circumstances hinted at the possibility of fresh concessions (in marked contrast to the philosophy of the Social Democratic Federation organiser who briefly attempted to organise the *Círculo* at the end of 1898 and beginning of 1899, as we shall see). On the employers’ part, the accommodation of December 1890 did not represent a total victory either. Whilst they had forced a compromise agreement, the employers had also discovered that *Círculo* members were literally more than happy to take the fight to commercial bosses and colonial authorities alike. During the course of the strike, four pickets had tried to intimidate strike-breakers with violence. Three of them were convicted of assault and conveyed to the prison in the Moorish Castle on 17 December 1890 to serve a sentence of two months incarceration with hard labour. On the way to the prison the convicts’ escort was stoned by an angry mob and a guard of fifty soldiers from the garrison was forced to disperse them at bayonet point.<sup>28</sup> The next day, undismayed, another group of pickets broke into the house of a dockyard foreman, Juan Sufredo, breaking windows before making a quick escape when the Police approached. On the same day, three pickets boarded a ship in the bay and attacked the captain, only to be caught and imprisoned upon their return to shore.<sup>29</sup>

Not only were employers facing violent tactics from the *Círculo*, the support of the colonial authorities had its limits. As we shall see, whilst in later years the colonial authorities and Gibraltar’s employers found themselves with common cause, at this stage the relationship was more lukewarm. True enough, at a meeting with employers on 14 December 1890 the governor had offered military protection for blackleg labour entering the dockyard.<sup>30</sup> Whilst on 15 December 1890, the Attorney General went further, giving a legal opinion that the military could be placed under the orders of the civilian police force and, with a JP present and after the riot act had been duly read, could be authorised to fire upon riotous crowds.<sup>31</sup> However, the Colonial Office dismissed this latter proposal on the grounds that there was a conflict of interest at work because a number of civilian JPs were either employers in the dockyard or else family or close friends of the employers. (Nevertheless, unarmed soldiers were, in later years, co-opted as special constables in time of need). Subsequently, in 1891, when the Chief of Police requested that assistance be offered to companies whose operations were disrupted by strike action, Gibraltar’s Colonial Secretary refused and promised only to act in cases of public disorder.<sup>32</sup> To be sure, outright revolution would have been met with bloody repression from Gibraltar’s garrison. But in the day-to-day operation of industrial relations, the colonial authorities were not keen to micro-manage economic affairs.

In the months after the December 1890 strike, the employers determined not to be caught unprepared for any future strike action. To this end, they began to source workers far away from anarchist Andalucía, primarily from Galicia in the North West of Spain. These ‘*gallego*’ workers were housed in old hulks in the bay of Gibraltar. The colonial authorities would not issue permits for the *gallego* workers to go ashore, and so supplies of food, water, and accommodation were provided exclusively

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<sup>27</sup> Ealham, *Class, Culture and Conflict*, 35.

<sup>28</sup> *Gibraltar Chronicle*, 18 December 1890.

<sup>29</sup> TNA/PRO, CO 91/391, Despatches. Recent Coalheaver’s Strike. 27 December 1890.

<sup>30</sup> GGA, Attorney-General’s Opinions, Book 16-17, 1890-91. Opinion of 26 December 1890.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> GGA, Strikes 1890-92. Letter of the Chief of Police to the Colonial Secretary. 2 April 1891.

by the employers. A petition from dockyard workers to the governor, protesting at the importation of these labourers, met with no sympathy.<sup>33</sup> The Attorney General who, after all, had advocated using armed troops on striking workers, gave an official opinion stating that keeping the *gallegos* off-shore was not illegal. Taking a view of political economy that was in-keeping with Gibraltar's free port status, and of which Adam Smith would have been proud, he added that restricting the dockyard employers' rights to import labour would give the workers a monopoly on labour that would be 'entirely subversive of the ordinary principles of commercial economy'.<sup>34</sup> On the advice of his Attorney General, the governor therefore refused to intercede on behalf of the *Círculo*.

In the years following 1891, a number of strikes in Gibraltar reflected broader concerns, tactics, and developments in the anarchist movement in surrounding Andalucía. A dockyard coalheavers' strike of March 1892 attempted to force the employers to abandon the use of *gallego* workers. The strike gained common currency throughout the commercial dockyard, which was brought to a halt.<sup>35</sup> Whilst the strike was not general throughout Gibraltar, indeed it did not even affect the Admiralty portion of the dockyard, when it spread to workers other than the commercial coalheavers the *Círculo* quickly styled it a general strike. This chimed with the heart-felt anarchist belief, current in 1890s Andalucía, that revolution was but a general strike away.<sup>36</sup> As a result, the term 'general strike' had a reverential aspect to it that tended towards its overuse. As was becoming usual, during the March 1892 strike, the fight was once again both literally and directly taken to the employers. The offices of a small coal bunkering firm, Messrs A. Mateos, were attacked, whilst Lewis Imossi, a member of one of Gibraltar's larger bunkering firms and from a wealthy merchant family, was attacked in the street by a group of pickets.<sup>37</sup> The owners of the hulks in which the *gallegos* were housed received threatening letters and Police escorts were issued to them when out-and-about in town. Activists were becoming more organised and audacious in their tactics, and gained wider support amongst the community too. As we have seen, it was at this time that Nicholson, who had been governor since early 1891, made his request for additional funds to expand the colony's police force. Nicholson was even forced to receive a deputation at The Convent, Gibraltar's Government House, when a prominent merchant, William Sallust-Smith, wrote a note to the governor asking, somewhat dramatically, 'are our goods and chattels safe?'.<sup>38</sup>

In October 1893, Gibraltar's bakers went on strike in the hope of forcing all of Gibraltar's employers to cease the importation of workers from outside the region. In typical anarchist language, they denounced the 'capitalist ogres' who they characterised as 'exploiters without conscience', determined to see workers drop 'lifeless through fatigue produced by excess of work' as a result of their 'thirst for gold...which never satiates'.<sup>39</sup> Bakers' strikes in Andalucía were reasonably common, but were nonetheless a cause for great concern. The Andalucían and Gibraltarian diet relied heavily on bread and any shortage was alarming. In Spain, a bakers' strike would normally have been met with military force. Ironically, in Gibraltar the employers were able to maintain bread supplies through use of the same *gallego* labour that the bakers were protesting against. This gave the colonial authorities enough time to revoke the work permits of the striking workers and arrange for their subsequent expulsion from Gibraltar.<sup>40</sup> The swift resolution of the dispute rendered sadly premature the exclamation of one striking

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<sup>33</sup> GGA, Attorney-General's Opinions, Book 16-17, 1890-91. Opinion of 17 March 1891.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Gibraltar Directory*, 1892.

<sup>36</sup> Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology*; Kaplan, *Anarchists of Andalucía*.

<sup>37</sup> Finlayson, *Gibraltar*, 289.

<sup>38</sup> GGA, Strikes 1890-92. Letter of William Sallust-Smith to the Governor. 31 March 1892.

<sup>39</sup> GGA, Strike Files. Leaflet issued by the Baker's Union. 21 October 1893.

<sup>40</sup> Finlayson, *Gibraltar*, 289.



baker that ‘death is preferable to the loss of dignity: by preserving this latter, victory will be attained in a few days’.<sup>41</sup>

By the end of 1893, an uneasy truce had emerged between the colonial authorities, employers and the *Círculo*. The employers could not totally break the hold that the *Círculo* had won over matters of pay and representation of workers, but likewise the *Círculo* could not dislodge the *gallegos* in the bay, which gave the employers a crucial reserve army of labour during any strike action. To reflect this impasse, the tactics of the *Círculo* changed. Rather than direct conflict via strikes, intimidation and assault of over-zealous officials, the main aims of the movement became the publication of incendiary leaflets and newspapers (and their smuggling into Gibraltar where their production was heavily restricted), and the expansion of the *Círculo*’s activities into numerous trades.<sup>42</sup>

In terms of organisation, the development of the anarchist movement in Gibraltar and the surrounding Campo was a piece-meal process. There was no central bureaucracy or party discipline amongst the movement and this makes it hard to pin-point exactly when and how the movement coalesced into the substantial body which, in 1902, mounted a prolonged and hard-fought general strike. Certainly by the end of 1897, there existed in Gibraltar and La Línea one branch respectively of the ‘*Círculo Obrero*’, through which political and industrial action was organised. In both cases, the organisation was accommodated in a building also known as the *Círculo Obrero* (though on the Gibraltar side the anglicised ‘workers’ circle’ was sometimes used to describe the organisation and the name ‘workers’ centre’ to identify the building).<sup>43</sup> In smaller Andalusian towns and villages, the local anarchist group would organise all of the trades in the area.<sup>44</sup> By contrast, as anarchism developed in urban settings such as Gibraltar and La Línea, the *Círculo*, as a place, provided a base of operations, and an umbrella organisation which worked to draw together workers in different trades. Industry-specific unions, such as the coalheavers, bakers, dockyard porters and so forth, could act independently and use their own tactics and ideas in individual disputes. But when circumstances required it, the *Círculo* would attempt to coordinate activity on both sides of the frontier, calling upon workers in the disparate trades to support each other; a form of ‘organised reciprocity’ that would become a common feature of the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT) after 1910.<sup>45</sup>

It should also be stressed that the *Círculo*, both as movement and as place, fostered a range of support activities for workers and their families. Most publicised and effective were attempts to create educational centres for the local working classes, which included, in addition to the schooling of hundreds of local children, the creation of libraries, visiting speakers, theatrical productions, and even night classes in French and Spanish.<sup>46</sup> The *Círculo* was also ready to organise relief funds for workers striking elsewhere.<sup>47</sup> The apparent flexibility and success of the *Círculo* model of organisation led to its proliferation throughout the Campo in the first years of the twentieth century. Indeed, its potential for recruiting and influencing the local working classes guaranteed the enmity of the local Spanish authorities, as well as local civilian and religious elites. Under the Law of Associations in force in Spain under the Restoration Monarchy, groups wishing to found political organisations of any kind were

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<sup>41</sup> GGA, Coalheavers’ Strikes 1898 & 1900-01. Leaflet issued by the baker’s section of the *Círculo*. 21 October 1893.

<sup>42</sup> GGA, Coalheavers’ Strikes 1898 & 1900-01 (which contains some notes for the years prior to 1898); and Finlayson, *Gibraltar*, 285-304.

<sup>43</sup> Quelch, *Old-Fashioned Socialist*.

<sup>44</sup> Esenwien, *Anarchists of Andalucía*; Kaplan, *Anarchist Ideology*.

<sup>45</sup> Ealham, *Class, Culture and Conflict*, 35.

<sup>46</sup> *La Protesta* (La Línea), 25 July 1901, 31 July 1901, 26 September 1901, 5 December 1901, 26 December 1901.

<sup>47</sup> *La Protesta* (La Línea), 25 July 1901.

forced to apply for legal recognition from the local civilian authority, in this case the Governor of Cádiz. Rather than ban the organisation outright, it was far easier simply to delay the legal permission to found a *Círculo*, as happened in Los Barrios and San Roque respectively in July 1901.<sup>48</sup> In the case of the former, *La Protesta* commented sarcastically:

‘It is a shame that while there is no impediment for us going to the tavern, or to the bullfights or to church - on the contrary, it is encouraged that we bend to these places where we can only stupefy ourselves – barriers are raised to dignify or to make cultured men of ourselves. Rest assured that if attempting to create a Catholic club or a drinking establishment, or build a bullring, or install a religious community... not only one, but twenty permits would be obtained.’<sup>49</sup>

As the number of anarchist organisations and sympathisers grew amongst the population in Gibraltar and the Campo, in 1898 a mixture of happenstance and the *Círculo*’s curiosity about international labour organisations brought a British-style trade union to the Rock in the form of the Social Democratic Federation.

### **Anarcho-Syndicalism Meets the Social Democratic Federation, 1898-99**

As had many local anarchist groups in Spain, towards the end of the 1890s the Gibraltar and La Línea *Círculos* were looking to make connections with political and labour organisations throughout Spain and beyond. In 1896, both *Círculos* appealed to the principal Spanish socialist party, the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), for assistance in organising their local campaigns. The PSOE responded, suggesting that as notable Spanish agitators could be excluded easily from Gibraltar, the *Círculos* both there and in the Campo should look to a British socialist organisation for assistance. This was not an unwelcome suggestion on the Gibraltar side of the frontier. Despite its anarchist sympathies, the Gibraltar *Círculo* had within it a notable interest in socialist politics. This inclined its members to seek inspiration from British trade unionism as well as from the writings of key anarchists such as Bakunin. And it was not just the Gibraltarian workers who found much to admire in British trade unionism. Some in the anarchist movement in Andalucía, as its newspapers demonstrate, had a strangely over-inflated sense of the radical and revolutionary nature of British trade unions, which was born of ignorance of the realities of British organised labour. *La Protesta*, for example, proudly declared in September 1901 that a ‘revolutionary general strike’ had broken out in Grimsby.<sup>50</sup> In part this flirtation with, and admiration of, British-style trade union organisation reflected the existence of a degree of pluralism within the anarchist movement in the Campo. But in part it reflected not only the rejection of the *Círculos* by the PSOE but also the very firm anarchist belief in picking up, and discarding, tactics and ideas as and when the moment seemed appropriate.

In 1897, the Gibraltar *Círculo* affiliated to the SDF but for almost a year this made no practical difference to the *Círculo*’s operation. It took both a crisis in the governance of the *Círculo*, to which

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<sup>48</sup> A peculiar feature of recent Spanish historiography is the attempt of right-wing historians to emphasize the ‘democratic’ credentials of the Restoration System and contrast it with the supposed lack of freedom of expression and association in the Second Republic of 1931-1939, generally regarded by historians as Spain’s first genuine democracy. Symptomatic is Payne, *Collapse of the Spanish Second Republic*, 7. A more nuanced collective appraisal of the Restoration Monarchy is Romero-Salvado & Smith (eds.), *The Agony of Spanish Liberalism*. *La Protesta* (La Línea), 11 July 1901, 25 July 1901,

<sup>49</sup> *La Protesta* (La Línea), 11 July 1901.

<sup>50</sup> *La Protesta* (La Línea), 26 September 1901.

we will turn shortly, combined with enthusiasm for a change in the industrial relations scene in Gibraltar on the part of employers, to bring British ideas of labour organisation to Gibraltar. By 1898, employers were desperate to dislodge anarchism from the Rock. Such desperation was not surprising. In a strike of May 1898, employers were once again attacked. The strike began as a protest at the actions of the Algeciras Ferry Company which had increased its fines for fare-dodging on the ferry between Algeciras and Gibraltar to 2500 pesetas.<sup>51</sup> For workers who did not live in La Linea, but rather in Algeciras, the ferry was the only real way to get to work in Gibraltar. As a result, a good deal of stowing away took place and the increased fines threatened to end the viability of this tactic. There was a feeling amongst the workforce that being charged to travel to work was an affront. Given that the ferry was owned by one of the companies that employed dockyard workers, the grievance seemed multiplied. On 3 May 1898 two of the ferry company's managers, Imossi and Meikerland, were attacked, whilst another, Joseph Gaggero, was set-upon in the street the following day and 'violently struck, knocked down and kicked'.<sup>52</sup>

It is unlikely that the timing of the strike – the days immediately following May Day – was a coincidence, nor that on 9 May workers bolted onto the dispute a demand for their pay to be issued in sterling. The Spanish-American War, which began in April 1898, had served to cripple the Spanish economy and devalue the peseta. (Indeed, it was probably this that had led the ferry company to increase the fines for stowaways in the first place.) Payment in sterling would, therefore, have been a significant advantage for the workers, though not so good a deal for the employers. In the end, a compromise was reached through the informal arbitration of Gibraltar's governor who successfully proposed that pay be given half in sterling and half in pesetas, though the fines for stowaways remained in force. Such arbitration was in marked contrast to the 1891 strike over imported *gallego* workers when the Colonial Secretary had, having been approached by the Círculo, refused to arbitrate the dispute, arguing that it was purely a matter between workers and employers.<sup>53</sup>

It was not just the problems caused by the Spanish-American War that prompted the additional demand to be paid in sterling. Indeed, it was an accepted anarchist tactic to add demands onto a dispute, especially if the dispute appeared to be near a resolution. Ostensibly this was because the workers' representatives wanted to see if they could extract further concessions. In reality, however, the levying of additional demands was often undertaken with a hopeful eye that their rejection would lead to an opportunity to denounce the employers and persuade workers in other occupations into joining a general and revolutionary strike. That is to say, even minor disputes could be fashioned into an ascendant curve of labour mobilisation in preparation for the final, and inevitable, assault on capitalism itself. In the end, the arbitrated agreement of May 1898 stopped short of this goal. But it nevertheless represented a success of sorts for the anarchists: the colonial authorities had, in arbitrating the dispute, given the Círculo *de facto* recognition.

This tentative victory signalled that, for their part, the employers were prepared to compromise with the Círculo, albeit within the mechanisms for negotiation afforded by the colonial authorities. And for a time this alone would have promoted some kind of tri-partite understanding, though one which both capital and labour would be willing to break if circumstances changed. Moreover, 1898 saw unfamiliar, and worrying, signs of an internal contretemps between workers on either side of the frontier, which perhaps prompted a temporary period of accommodation with the employers. As the year went on, it

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<sup>51</sup> GGA, Strike Files, Coalheavers' Strike. Record of a meeting of labourers with the Governor. 9 May 1898.

<sup>52</sup> GGA, Strike Files, Coalheavers' Strike. Chief of Police to the Colonial Secretary. 4 May 1898.

<sup>53</sup> GGA, Strikes 1890-92. Letter from Coalheavers' section of the Círculo to the Colonial Secretary and reply. 8 May 1891.

became obvious that the local full-time organiser of the coalheavers' section was in the process of embezzling portions of the workers' wages which, as we have seen, were paid out by workers' representatives. The organiser was dismissed but the La Línea workers were wary of appointing another Gibraltarian, whilst the Gibraltarian workers were unhappy at the idea of appointing a Spaniard. The branches jointly decided to use their links with the SDF and appealed to them to send an organiser to the Rock. In October 1898, a man called Lorenzo Quelch set out to Gibraltar by boat and found himself in a very different industrial relations landscape to that which he had become accustomed.<sup>54</sup>

It should not be assumed that affiliation to the SDF had radically altered the style or behaviour of the anarchist *Círculo*. As Quelch himself put it in his memoirs, 'the union itself was not at all like a Trade Union as we know it in England'.<sup>55</sup> Accordingly, Quelch set about trying to reform the coalheavers' practices in relation to industrial relations. A set of agreements was established between employers and the union and these agreements were, uncharacteristically, kept to. Such arrangements delighted ship captains and coal merchants alike. Quelch recalled one captain informing him that prior to the new agreement he had been unable to get his ship fuelled without a strike occurring at some point in proceedings.<sup>56</sup> Quelch 'told him that was the result of ordered agreements instead of the anarchist conduct of the business' by his predecessor.<sup>57</sup> These 'ordered agreements' suited the employers so greatly that they were dismayed to learn in April 1899 that Quelch had decided to return to Britain immediately. In response, the employers pleaded with Quelch to stay and even offered to pay his salary on behalf of the union; he declined.

The SDF affiliation remained, but the coalheavers' union of the *Círculo* did not request another organiser from Britain be sent. No doubt old habits die hard, and nearly ten years of anarchist organisation and tactics in Gibraltar (and thirty in the surrounding region) was unlikely to give way to British-style trade union organisation in as short a period as six months; the brevity of Quelch's stay suggests that he too had come to realise this. Notwithstanding this, the reality was that the employers had gained much more from the brief flirtation with British-style trade union activity than the *Círculo* had. No significant gains were made in late 1898 or early 1899, in sharp contrast, as we have seen, with the period from 1890. Moreover, the economic situation had begun to change in Gibraltar from 1895 onwards. Previously, Gibraltar had been a modest port of call for ships travelling either via the Suez Canal or else south, to the Cape, or west to the West Indies, albeit one whose fortunes had fared better from the opening of Suez in 1869. Nevertheless, compared to Malta, facilities for the Royal Navy at Gibraltar were limited, as were possibilities for further expansion of naval and commercial activity.

To address the limited dock capacity at Gibraltar, beginning in 1895 and continuing until 1906, the British government invested close to six million pounds in the Gibraltar dockyard to transform it into a state-of-the-art facility that could do everything other than actually build warships. The venture was enormously labour-intensive; requiring 2,000 men in the first two years and rising to 5,000 thereafter.<sup>58</sup> Add to this Gibraltar's usual labour requirements and in some years, the number of workers crossing the frontier each day reached as high as 15,000.<sup>59</sup> In strengthening the hand of local labour, the dockyard project thus guaranteed further opportunities to demand concessions from employers, and perhaps even,

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<sup>54</sup> Quelch, *Old-Fashioned Socialist*; note that this episode does not make the official history of the SDF. See Crick, *Social Democratic Federation*.

<sup>55</sup> Quelch, *Old-Fashioned Socialist*, 53.

<sup>56</sup> Quelch, *Old-Fashioned Socialist*, 59.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Grocott & Stockey, *Gibraltar A Modern History*, 58.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

so the *Círculo* fancied, put enough strain on the economic system to force it to collapse through the general strike.

### **Agitating for the General Strike, 1899-1901**

By 1899 the anarchist tradition in Gibraltar and the Campo had been strong enough to reject the call for moderation issued by Quelch. Elsewhere in Andalucía, anarchists were pressing home the advantages offered by the Spanish-American War. The war deepened the poverty that existed in the region, and as Kaplan argues, it was the sheer gap between the working class and the landed aristocracy and urban elite which fuelled anarchism, and harsh daily experiences that underpinned it.<sup>60</sup> Typical of this mentality was the following coruscating attack during the Spanish national elections of 1901 upon the wealthy Larios family, whose commercial and social standing rode high on both sides of the frontier:

‘these exploiters of the working class, these bloodsuckers of the workers, thinking to take part [in the elections] with the sole object of placing their chums in the house of rackets, so as to bleed the suffering people with greater impunity, and to carry gold to their already overflowing chests... What can you expect from those who in their holdings, made and maintained by the blood of the people, whom they give a miserable wage of 5 or 6 reales, obliging them to work from the rising of the sun until the darkness of night makes work impossible... where not even the modesty of women is respected, where the innocent children have to work from an early age, and when any worker complains, the infamous whip of the foreman smacks them in the face...’<sup>61</sup>

Consequently after 1898 throughout Andalucía, including the Campo, anarchists seized opportunities to apply pressure upon their employers. In Gibraltar the circumstances for doing so were now particularly favourable.

On 15 July 1899, only three months after Quelch’s departure, workers in a quarry on the eastern side of the Rock went on strike. According to the *Gibraltar Chronicle*, the workers’ claim – that they were on strike in protest at being denied water by their employers – was simply a ruse.<sup>62</sup> The *Círculo* did much to validate the claim when on 18 July 1899 they issued additional demands for an end to piece work and for a pay increase. The former demand was a common theme of anarchist strikes in Andalucía. Much like the campaign of September 1890 for workers to control the distribution of their own pay, the demand was practical, and reflected a deep-seated resentment of what anarchists considered the most denigrating system of payment. In this strike, within a few days only 500 of the 2,700 men employed in the quarry were at work. On 19 July 1899, seven workers from the quarry and two men from the *Círculo*’s committee visited the employers, who offered unlimited drinking water to the men whilst at work. The offer was accepted, and the men returned to work. But by this stage, the strike had also spread into the dockyard. There two blacklegs were attacked by pickets on 22 July 1899, and the subsequent dockyard strike did not end fully until 31 July 1899.<sup>63</sup>

Local anarchists were now moving to raise their own profile through the establishment of newspaper presses. On the one hand, they aimed to attract recruits from among the labourers flocking to the area in search of work on the Rock. On the other, they sought to increase pressure on the Gibraltar authorities

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<sup>60</sup> Kaplan, *Anarchists of Andalucía*.

<sup>61</sup> *La Protesta* (La Línea), 7 November 1901.

<sup>62</sup> *Gibraltar Chronicle*. 15 July 1899.

<sup>63</sup> *Gibraltar Chronicle*. 31 July 1899.

and local employers by highlighting their growing strength, offering positive coverage of workers' initiatives (both industrial and cultural), and occasionally offering direct or indirect threats towards individuals. Unsurprisingly, such publications were often suppressed by a mixture of legislation and raids by authorities on both sides of the frontier. The weekly anarchist newspaper *La Protesta*, for example, faced 'problems with printing' from its inception in July 1901. Its report of 'difficulties' in the final edition of 29 March 1902, and gloomy prediction that the newspaper would soon be closed down, proved to be accurate.<sup>64</sup>

In the first months of the new century, agitation increased in Gibraltar and the Campo. A mechanics' strike of May to June 1900 lasted seven weeks before it could be ended through the use of imported labour. Later in the year, a threatened coalheavers' strike of November 1900 was held-over the employers until January 1901.<sup>65</sup> In all of April, June, and August 1901 there were strikes amongst quarry workers, whilst a blacksmiths' strike of December 1901 lasted until January 1902.<sup>66</sup> The *Círculo* worked hard to encourage sympathy strikes. Construction workers in Algeciras contributed generously to aid striking workers in Los Barrios, before themselves going on strike to reduce the nine-hour day in September, an action which they later won.<sup>67</sup> Gibraltar workers followed up with their own collection for those 'convalescing' in Los Barrios after the strike.<sup>68</sup> *La Protesta* gleefully reported further successes against local employers in the months to come. On 21 October 1901, after eleven weeks, 'complete victory' was reported for unskilled labourers, plumbers and carpenters in Gibraltar who had been striking to head-off proposals to increase the working day to ten hours. First reports had the workers' hours confirmed at eight, with a pay rise of 10 reales per week, the expulsion of 'scab' workers and an employers' guarantee not to employ non-unionised labourers to boot. The success was attributed to the 'unity of comrades of La Línea, comrades of Gibraltar'.<sup>69</sup> It was quickly pointed out, however, that only two employers in Gibraltar had signed up to these demands.<sup>70</sup> The *Círculo* cautioned against triumphalism, claiming that 'partial triumphs' of individual strikes should not distract attention from the long-term goal of 'total and definitive emancipation... the abolition of private property with all its consequences, State, religion, militarism, magistrates... a great work, larger than the massive Rock that we have in our view.'<sup>71</sup>

Further successes were in the offing. Workers at the wood factories of Levy and Bland respectively who 'were working a trivial 13 or 13 ½ hours a day in summer' were reported as having obtained from Levy a nine-hour day and pay on Saturdays without working, and from Bland an eight-hour day, after a strike of just two days. They were undoubtedly helped by the *Círculo* encouraging coalheavers to 'discuss' the idea of not loading boats carrying the goods of these two companies until the strike was settled.<sup>72</sup> On 28 November 1901, it was reported that locksmiths working for Haynes, Carboni and Durante respectively had achieved an eight-hour day. In the following fortnight, quarrymen working for Mr Nacamiento received the same, while workers in the 'Macias operation' achieved a nine-hour day.<sup>73</sup> At the time, even the nine-hour day would have been considered an advance for such labourers.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *La Protesta* (La Línea), 11 July 1901, 29 March 1902.

<sup>65</sup> GGA, Strike Files. Summary of Strikes 1898-1902, undated though most likely produced in 1902.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *La Protesta* (La Línea), 5 September 1901, 12 September 1901.

<sup>68</sup> *La Protesta* (La Línea), 19 September 1901.

<sup>69</sup> *La Protesta* (La Línea), 21 October 1901.

<sup>70</sup> *La Protesta* (La Línea), 31 September 1901.

<sup>71</sup> *La Protesta* (La Línea), 14 November 1901.

<sup>72</sup> *La Protesta* (La Línea), 21 November 1901.

<sup>73</sup> *La Protesta* (La Línea), 5 December 1901, 12 December 1901.

<sup>74</sup> In 1922, for example, many shop workers in Gibraltar were working 66 hours per week. TNA/PRO CO 91/480. Draft Shop Hours Ordinance 1922, Governor's Despatches (Gibraltar). As late as 1949, most Spaniards

The achievement for some workers of ‘los tres ochos’ (the three eights) – eight hours for work, for sleep and for leisure – was remarkable.<sup>75</sup>

The blacksmith’s strike of December 1901, already mentioned above, was joined by a strike of tobacco workers at the end of the month. So serious was this latter action that the Spanish Military Governor of the Campo, General Francisco Obregón, went personally to the frontier to oversee the peaceful transit of workers who were breaking the strike. Obregón and the Mayor of La Línea committed themselves to arbitrating the dispute between the Círculo and George Russo, a Gibraltarian tobacco merchant, but the latter was ‘intransigent’.<sup>76</sup> *La Protesta* claimed that Gibraltar’s tobacco merchants had recently raised prices locally by 15%, while in Britain they had been raised by just 5%. They also bemoaned the quality of Gibraltar’s tobacco products as ‘filled with tripe, or something like it... a composition of scraps of paper...from which tree we know not, old rags and other materials equally repugnant and disgusting.’<sup>77</sup> As the strike spread to the Haynes and Diaz tobacconists, the newspaper could not help but point out that Diaz had at first encouraged Russo’s labourers to strike, since it had briefly allowed him to make vast profits at a competitor’s expense.<sup>78</sup> It should be borne in mind, of course, that in addition to the sizeable consumption of tobacco from Gibraltar by Spanish workers, there were even greater profits to be derived from the enormous contraband trade across the frontier each day.

The proliferation of strike activity, the ease with which the Círculo could promote sympathy strikes, and the lingering threat of violence towards employers and blacklegs, unsurprisingly began to panic Gibraltar’s entrepreneurial community. Even the colonial authorities became jittery, not least of all because this escalation of anarchist activity coincided with the climax of the Boer War of 1899-1902; a period when it was considered imperative to keep naval bases and staging posts like Gibraltar in full working order.

### **The General Strike of 1902**

By April 1902, employers on the Rock had decided that the Círculo’s power over labour needed to be broken and in the first instance did so by targeting the coalheavers’, by far the largest, section of the Círculo with a lockout. With an eye to future disputes and in order for employers to co-ordinate their efforts across businesses and industries they formed the Gibraltar Employers’ Federation (GEF), comprised of virtually all of the Rock’s major firms. Space precludes an extensive examination of the strike, for which there is prodigious source material, but here we trace some of the action’s key themes.

On 4 April 1902, the GEF issued a statement detailing that: they would no-longer pay workers via union representatives; they no-longer recognised the right of the Círculo to organise the workers in the dockyard; and that in future, in order to gain work, labourers would need an employer-issued tag which would only be given to those in an official employer’s union.<sup>79</sup> Later in the strike, such prescriptions would be applied to other concerns overseen by the GEF. Meanwhile, the employers quickly took steps to import hundreds of Moroccan strikebreakers in anticipation of the coalheavers’ response (the hulks

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employed by private firms in Gibraltar averaged 48 hours over 5 ½ days. TNA/PRO CO 91/544/8. Foreign Office memo to Spanish Embassy (Madrid), 3 March 1949.

<sup>75</sup> Ealham, *Class, Culture and Conflict*, 35.

<sup>76</sup> *El Imparcial* (Madrid), 15 January 1902.

<sup>77</sup> *La Protesta* (La Línea), 15 February 1902.

<sup>78</sup> *La Protesta* (La Línea), 8 February 1902.

<sup>79</sup> GGA, Despatches from Gibraltar, 1901-05. 12 April 1902.

used to house *gallegos* in previous strikes had been removed to accommodate the dockyard expansion).<sup>80</sup>

The battle lines were drawn very quickly. Almost immediately, in response the GEF's new policies, between 1,000 and 1,500 men in the dockyard came out on strike.<sup>81</sup> On 18 April, a public meeting was called which brought together *Círculo* representatives from twelve different unions in Gibraltar as speakers. Around 1,000 people attended and it was resolved that those not involved in the dockyard strike should lend support where possible to those who were. For their part, a deputation of women present at the meeting resolved to write to the Governor complaining about the poverty caused by the strike. The letter requested assistance from public funds for the families of striking workers.<sup>82</sup> This request was a fairly common tactic in anarchist circles (and known as 'the impossible demand'); the authorities were extremely unlikely to grant such concessions, allowing the movement to point to the seemingly indifferent attitude of those in positions of power to the suffering of women and children. A subsequent meeting of 29 April 1902 passed a resolution that the strike would continue for two further months if necessary.<sup>83</sup>

Throughout April and May 1902, a number of acts of intimidation of, and attacks upon, blacklegs and employers took place. In April, these seem to have focused largely on the intimidation of blackleg labour. For example, at five-thirty in the morning of 25 April 1902 three blacklegs called John Azzopardi, Juan Garcia, and Antonio Martinez, travelling south from the town to work, past Rosia Bay, and onto the dockyard passed the admiralty transport driver's depot. The admiralty workers were not involved in the strike, but clearly five of them were sympathetic – when they saw Azzopardi and his co-workers approach they took shelter behind a wall and began to rain forth rocks on the men. Later in the day, as the three returned from work, the same five men repeated the act, this time adding in for good measure insults such as 'hijos de la grande puta' [sic] (translated by the Chief of Police as 'children of a notorious whore').<sup>84</sup> On 29 April 1902, a meeting of the *Círculo* was addressed by one speaker who exhorted the strikers to violence against employers and blacklegs.<sup>85</sup> The next day this instruction was acted upon and Azzopardi and his colleagues were subject to similar attacks, this time with Azzopardi sustaining 'a lump on his head'.<sup>86</sup> On 1 May another blackleg emerging from his house at Rosia Bay was confronted by pickets, and a man who was painting a roof nearby made the best of his vantage point to send forth rocks in the blackleg's direction as he tried to elude the pickets.<sup>87</sup>

In May, the attacks began to focus on the employers. The change of focus could well have been caused by the employers who underscored their unwillingness to compromise in a letter to the governor issued on 1 May 1902, timed, perhaps, to deflate the May Day celebrations.<sup>88</sup> They outlined that whilst they had managed to keep a minimal service running in the dockyard during April, they were no-longer prepared to do so and advised the governor that commercial ships would have to find supplies of coal elsewhere. On 2 May 1902 by way of response, Arthur Capurro, the secretary to the GEF's committee

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<sup>80</sup> *Correspondencia de España* (Madrid), 8 April 1902; *Heraldo de Madrid* (Madrid), 14 April 1902.

<sup>81</sup> GGA, The General Strike of 1902, Occurrences During May. Letter of the Governor to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. 12 April 1902. It is worth noting that it was in the Gibraltar authority's interests to give a conservative figure on the number of striking workers.

<sup>82</sup> GGA, Strike Files No. 23. Police Report of 18 April 1902.

<sup>83</sup> GGA, Strike Files No. 23. Police Report of 30 April 1902.

<sup>84</sup> GGA, Strike Files, Police Reports. 25 April 1902.

<sup>85</sup> GGA, Special File 32. Police Report. 29 April 1902.

<sup>86</sup> GGA, Strike Files, Police Reports. 30 April 1902. See also, GGA Strike Files 1902. Testimony of John Azzopardi, Juan Garcia, and Antonio Martinez. 1 May 1902.

<sup>87</sup> GGA, Strike Files 23. Police Report. 2 May 1902.

<sup>88</sup> GGA, Strike Files. Letter from Alexander Mosley of the GEF to the Governor. 1 May 1902.



and a merchant himself, was treated to the increasingly common act of being assaulted by striking workers throwing rocks. However, Capurro was armed with a revolver and fired upon his assailants dispersing, but not injuring, them.<sup>89</sup> There were other attacks. Protest letters, leaflets, and public meetings continued. At one meeting a speaker denounced the employers and shouted that he would 'eat the liver of Gaggero', a prominent merchant.<sup>90</sup> At the end of the month, following an attack on a foreman of the firm Matteo's and Sons, the GEF wrote to the governor complaining pointedly that the number of assaults on foremen and employers was higher than would be expected in a similar dispute in Britain.<sup>91</sup>

The colonial authorities were not indifferent to the strike, but there was not much that they could do about it. Where the strike in the commercial dockyard affected the admiralty dockyard, troops were used to keep Royal Navy ships supplied. The *Círculo's* communications throughout April to the end of May 1902 characterise the colonial authorities as being wholly sympathetic to the employers. There is some truth in this in the sense that as a colonial state the government had objectives surrounding law and order which benefitted the employers more than the workers. The police force was allowed to call upon unarmed troops to act as special constables, and when attacks on foremen and employers began, escorts were offered where necessary.<sup>92</sup> By the same token, Capurro's armed retaliation to the rock-throwing pickets was not punished by the judiciary. Yet, the governor did also make attempts to bring the strike to an end by compromise and met both with the employers and the *Círculo* to achieve this end. However, the governor was thwarted in his efforts by the GEF. The latter realised that the *de facto* recognition of the *Círculo* in the settlement of the 1898 strike had been an error. They refused to reach any compromise with the *Círculo*, and instead insisted that the men come back to work without an agreement being reached, but with the new rates of pay being confirmed and issued publically. In response, the *Círculo* attempted to keep the men on strike. It was able to do so because of the governor's failure to obtain an employers' amnesty for workers who had been on strike; the GEF insisted upon its right to employ whomsoever it pleased whilst the *Círculo* made reinstatement a pre-condition of a return to work.

As there was no trade or labour association legislation in Gibraltar, the government did not legally recognise either the GEF or *Círculo* as official bodies and lacked any legislative instruments to impose a settlement upon them. Yet times were increasingly hard for those on strike as money and resources became scarce. Tactics became increasingly desperate, and the governor began to receive reports that strike-breakers were being 'escorted' to the *Círculo's* premises only to emerge with a newfound sense of support for the action. By the same token, on 20 June pickets eventually managed to corner Capurro, beating him violently in the street.<sup>93</sup>

Were it not for a tactical error on the part of the GEF, the strike would probably have fizzled out in the first half of June 1902. However, in mid-June, Gibraltar's master bakers, who were members of the GEF, decided to impose the rule prohibiting membership of the *Círculo* on their journeymen bakers.<sup>94</sup> At this stage, around 1,300 coalheavers were still on strike. Realising that if the new rules were applied

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<sup>89</sup> GGA, Strike Files 23. Police Report. 2 May 1902.

<sup>90</sup> GGA, The General Strike of 1902, Occurrences During May. Police report 23 May 1902.

<sup>91</sup> GGA, Strike Files 23. Letter from the Coal Merchants section of the GEF to the Governor. 31 May 1902.

<sup>92</sup> GGA, The General Strike of 1902, Occurrences During May. And files for June-September. Police reports give daily figures of the number of employers who had to be escorted, the route taken to their place of work etc.; GGA, The General Strike of 1902, Occurrences During May. Letter from the Governor to the Secretary of State to the Colonies. 12 April 1902. Reports the initial draft of 24 troops into the Special Constabulary.

<sup>93</sup> GGA, Special File 32, Police Report. 20 June 1902.

<sup>94</sup> GGA, Strike Files 23. Letter from the journeymen bakers of Gibraltar to the Governor. 22 June 1902.

to their industry the Círculo-affiliated journeymen bakers' union would fold, on 23 June 1902, 53 of the Rock's 100 journeymen bakers came out on strike and were joined by their colleagues in La Línea. Despite their small number, we have seen that bakers were essential to the economy, and their produce crucial for the diet of Gibraltar and the surrounding region. The master bakers on the Rock wrote to the governor to inform him that they could not get fresh bakers for two weeks. Meanwhile, they were unable to supply the garrison with bread.<sup>95</sup> Likewise, fearing shortages in the Campo, the military authorities there prevented the export of bread across the frontier, putting further pressure upon Gibraltar's authorities and master bakers. Nevertheless, after two months without wages the coalheavers' position was becoming desperate, and we must see the bakers' strike as very much a last-ditch attempt by the Círculo to pressure the GEF into a negotiated settlement.

The collapse of the general strike of 1902 seems to have been accompanied by its most dramatic scenes. On 26 June, a journeyman baker in La Línea addressed a public meeting. When he made an impassioned speech for the declaration of a republic, the para-military (and fiercely monarchist) Guardia Civil moved in to arrest him only to be attacked by the crowd.<sup>96</sup> In Gibraltar, the colonial authorities, fearing civil unrest, began to issue bread from military rations. But the panic that accompanied the shortage required that, at the points where bread was handed out, detachments of soldiers be deployed to bolster the police presence. A frenzy of protest-letter writing began, with the Labour MP Keir Hardie, the SDF and the Círculo itself all writing to the Secretary of State for the Colonies complaining about, as they saw it, the siding of the colonial authorities with the employers.<sup>97</sup> Questions were asked in Parliament, and the governor was required to write a number of firm despatches to the Secretary of State for the Colonies justifying the deployment of troops and the issuing of bread to the population. Taking advantage of the furore a number of Círculo representatives travelled to London to meet with sympathetic parties and take their case to Parliament and Whitehall. Upon their return, on 7 August they were met in the bay by several small boats carrying the red flag as their ensign and delivered to a public meeting at the Theatre Royal.<sup>98</sup> But the numbers present at the meeting betrayed the fact that the return to work was underway – the 700 people present were a far cry from the near 1,500 who had begun the strike and even those numbers were bolstered by the bakers who had joined only recently.<sup>99</sup> Realising that the possibility of mass action gaining a victory was waning, the Círculo held a public meeting and called for workers to take a targeted approach in confronting employers with violence. However, despite the drama, the strike had actually fizzled out.

By August 1902, the strikes going on all around Andalucía were coming to an end. For agricultural labourers, that is to say the majority in a predominantly rural economy such as Andalucía's, it was perhaps logical to begin strike action at the time of crop planting in the spring. By now, however, most strikes in the region had lasted for several months, and poverty took its toll on people's resolve. Much of the year's money was to be made at harvest time, which was, by August, in full swing. If people did not earn in the months from July to September, there would be little possibility of fresh coin until March or April of the next year. The Gibraltar economy fostered a relatively more industrial and urban setting on the Rock and in the Campo, but here too the sheer duration of industrial action left striking workers desperate. This time the Círculo had failed to overcome the Rock's employers, who had been prepared to throw all of their resources into breaking the anarchists' direction of local labour. For their part, the

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<sup>95</sup> GGA, Strike Files 23. Letter from the master bakers of Gibraltar to the Governor. 25 June 1902.

<sup>96</sup> GGA, Strike Files 23. Police Report. 26 June 1902.

<sup>97</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates (Commons). 25 June 1902.

<sup>98</sup> GGA, Despatches from Gibraltar. 7 August 1902.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, and annexed Police Report of 7 August 1902.

colonial authorities were impressed with neither side, though they were pleased that the dispute had ended.

Anarchism's hold over Gibraltarian workers would be broken for some time. To some extent, even before the general strike of 1902, fault lines had begun to appear between the *Círculo* and occasional 'socialist' groupings beginning to emerge on the Rock. On more than one occasion in 1901, *La Protesta* had criticised the 'Jesuits' in Gibraltar who were advocating a more reformist approach to labour relations, even at a time, as we have noted, that anarchist tactics seemed to be working so effectively.<sup>100</sup> In all likelihood, the GEF's attempt to create an employer-recognised union was facilitated by the birth of such groups, and corresponds fully to their attempt to co-opt Quelch three years earlier.

Defeated in Gibraltar, the movement was to suffer an even worse fate in the Campo. For some months, the local Spanish authorities had been receiving reinforcements of infantry, cavalry and Civil Guard units.<sup>101</sup> On 9 October 1902, when the *Círculo* in La Línea called a mass meeting at the town's bullring, the Mayor, Juan Fariñas, refused permission.<sup>102</sup> Undeterred, thousands of Spanish workers headed to the neighbourhood known as 'Las Pedreras' for their meeting. They were met by a detachment of Civil Guard, who fired warning shots, only to be answered by members of the crowd throwing stones and anything else to hand. In the chaotic scenes that followed, several workers broke away to attempt an attack upon the house of Fariñas, only to find there a detachment of infantry lying in wait. The infantrymen fired into the workers. In total that day, at least five workers were killed and many more wounded; on the side of 'order', one official and several Civil Guards suffered cuts. The Campo authorities closed down the *Círculo* in La Línea; for good measure fining members of the organising committee 75 pesetas each for not keeping accurate financial records, in accordance with the Law of Associations.<sup>103</sup> At the time, despite the defeat of the 1902 general strike in Gibraltar, estimates of the *Círculo*'s membership ranged from 4000-8000, with the *Círculo* building offering schooling for at least 400 children in the Campo. Several Spanish newspapers suggested that this bloody denouement of anarchist activism in the region was conducted at the instigation of 'foreign elements' from Gibraltar.<sup>104</sup> Given the close friendships and professional cooperation of military authorities and business leaders on both sides of the frontier in this period, it was not an entirely fantastical theory.

Black-listed workers in Gibraltar and La Línea moved away from the Rock and its Campo but they found little work elsewhere. The 1900s and the early 1910s were times of repression of anarchists in Spain, and of still greater economic hardship. Tens of thousands emigrated to South America, ironically paying over their hard-earned fares to Gibraltar-based merchants who controlled the emigration route.

## Conclusion

It has been argued that the relationship between Gibraltar and its Campo was much more open and fluid, prior to 1954, than the relationship which has characterised interactions across the frontier in the last

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<sup>100</sup> *La Protesta* (La Línea), 11 July 1901, 26 December 1901.

<sup>101</sup> *El Imparcial* (Madrid), 15 January 1902; *La Protesta* (La Línea), 8 March 1902.

<sup>102</sup> Unless otherwise stated, this event, which entered local folklore in the Campo as 'El Suceso de Las Pedreras' (The Incident at Las Pedreras), is reconstructed here largely from the memoirs of La Línea resident and historian Ricardo Sánchez Cabeza-Earle, *La Línea*, 131-134. See also the collection of primary materials produced online at <http://lalineeenblancoynegro.blogspot.com.ar/2012/08/el-suceso-de-las-pedreras-traves-de-la.html> [Accessed: 13 March 2015].

<sup>103</sup> *El Heraldo de Madrid* (Madrid), 10 October 1902.

<sup>104</sup> See for example *El País* (Madrid), 12 October 1902; *El Imparcial* (Madrid), 13 October 1902; *La Correspondencia de España* (Madrid), 13 October 1902.

sixty years or so.<sup>105</sup> We have demonstrated here that in terms of labour organisation and ideology a close relationship between Gibraltar and the Campo existed for decades before the First World War. Indeed, Gibraltar owed its first taste of trade union activity and working-class political mobilisation not to British forms of organisation, but to anarchist ideas imported from Spain. It is also clear that anarchism as practiced, and experimented with, in Gibraltar and the Campo reflected broader developments in the history of anarchism in surrounding Andalucía. Unusually, anarchism in Gibraltar and the surrounding area also had links to non-anarchist organisations in the UK. The *Círculo* was able to draw upon these links for strength, whilst at the same time not abandoning its anarchist principles.

For their part, the colonial authorities in Gibraltar grew more inclined to negotiate with workers in Gibraltar, particularly when disruption to the working of the dockyard began to impinge on imperial defence. Nevertheless, such an attitude did not stretch to the employers on the Rock. Employers had enjoyed a comfortable life prior to 1890, and found themselves in the years thereafter under constant threat of physical violence and of the disruption of their businesses. Ultimately, they felt forced to provoke a strike and break the power of the *Círculo* in Gibraltar. The *Círculo*'s lengthy prosecution of the general strike in 1902 was a tactic based upon wider beliefs about the utility of a general strike as a revolutionary harbinger. But in truth, the dramatic impact of the strike was not wide-ranging enough and employers could afford to close their businesses for longer than workers could go without wages.

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<sup>105</sup> Stockey, *Gibraltar*.

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