

The 'Herodotus of the CNT': José Peirats and *La CNT en la revolución española*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the background to the acclaimed history of the Spanish revolution, *La CNT en la revolución española* (*The CNT in the Spanish Revolution*) that was written by José Peirats. The origins of this book can be traced back to the Spanish anarchist movement in exile in France during the immediate aftermath of World War Two. It is the study of an activist-historian, for whom historical writing constituted part of an open-ended intellectual project, a guide to action, an attempt to convince, influence and raise questions in the minds of others, all of which were integral elements of his lifelong struggle in pursuit of freedom and liberty. Peirats, one-time secretary-general of the CNT, was a former brick maker, a working class autodidact, and a product of the movement to which he devoted his life.

Key words *José Peirats*, The CNT in the Spanish Revolution, *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*, *Spanish civil war*

I am a modest writer who emerged from the fired clay of an oven.

José Peirats

José Peirats's *La CNT en la revolución española* (*The CNT in the Spanish Revolution*) is the history of one of the most original and audacious, and arguably also the most far-reaching, of all the twentieth-century revolutions. It is the history of the giddy years of political change and hope in the 1930s, when the so-called 'Generation of '36', Peirats's own generation, the generation of workers and landless labourers who found it impossible to live under the old order, who yearned for a better Spain, rebelled against the inequitable and repressive structures of 'old Spain'. It is also the