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STATE CORPORATISM AND DEMOCRATIC INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN SPAIN 1926-1935. A REAPPRAISAL*

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Abstract

In this paper we explore the development of Spanish industrial relations institutions in the late 1920s and early 1930s. This period witnessed a change from a semifascist dictatorship towards a democratic regime as well as from economic growth to a deep economic recession. In spite of these changes we evidence remarkable continuity in the corporatist industrial relations institutions created in the last years of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship. The analysis of collective bargaining practices in two regions with different trade union history and industrial configuration shows how the experience of Comités Paritarios (Joint Committees) initiated in 1926 had long lasting institutional effects. This goes against the views expressed by some authors as well as an extended wisdom according to which state corporatism is necessarily rhetorical and accounts to little more than a mechanism to disarm the labour movement. Based on historiographic analysis and a previously unexploited source we provide further support to the view that Primo de Rivera contributed to the modernization of labour relations in Spain. Collective bargaining increased significantly during this period and the joint committees system was an institutional innovation that persisted, with minor changes, during the Second Republic (1931-1936).

European countries experienced increasing social tensions since the early 1920s as a consequence of a growing and increasingly organized labour class. In a period of rapid economic growth and deepening industrialization, workers’ demands for both individual and collective rights augmented steadily. Moreover, the immediate years after the First World War witnessed the incorporation of labour in all combatant countries as well as at international level -through the creation of ILO- in what Colin Crouch¹ calls ‘new tripartite capitalism’. This process augmented the expectations of workers and labour movements that took advantage of the anxiety caused by the Russian revolution.

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Governments all around Europe reacted by means of establishing corporatist-type institutions in order to cope with the social question. Even though the political regime, party in power and configuration of the trade union movement were all important determinants of these differences, common to all these responses were attempts at providing an institutional framework to accommodate and institutionalize the labour conflict or, as put by some authors, to domesticate it. As a consequence, a thickening of the industrial relations collective rights edifice occurred which set the foundations for the consolidation of tripartite management of industrial conflict.

Spain was no exception to the above trends. Since the mid 1910s, political turmoil and industrial conflict had generated unprecedented levels of social and political instability. As a consequence of this, a military coup in 1923 established a military dictatorship led by Miguel Primo de Rivera. One of the main policy goals of the fascist-type Primo de Rivera dictatorship was to reduce the high levels of industrial and social conflict that had characterised Spanish labour relations in the late 1910s and early 1920s. In order to do this, he adopted a ‘steak and carrot’ strategy: he used repression and coercion against the revolutionary anarchist trade union (CNT, Confederación Nacional del Trabajo) but allowed the reformist /moderate socialist trade union (UGT, Unión General de Trabajadores) to maintain its organisation and membership. More importantly, Primo’s labour minister established a corporatist institutional framework for managing industrial relations (OCN, Organización Corporativa Nacional-National Corporatist Organization) whose central piece were the so-called comités paritarios (joint committees). The main objective of these institutions formed by representatives of labour unions and employers was to solve labour disputes and facilitate the negotiation of comprehensive agreements.

The true nature and impact of this system is still controversial: were workers’ representatives really free in the joint committees in order to defend workers' interests? Did the new system facilitate the peaceful resolution of collective labour conflicts? Were comprehensive agreements really effective? How must be labelled UGT's collaboration: treachery or service to workers? Which was the impact and meaning of these institutions for the development of industrial relations in Spain? Historians hold very different views about this issue, but most of them support their argumentations relying almost exclusively on qualitatively data like the discourses, reports and speeches of UGT's officials and government members, which provides an incomplete and biased interpretation of facts. In this paper we explore the development of Spanish industrial relations institutions in the late 1920s and early 1930s. This period witnessed a change from a semifascist dictatorship towards a democratic regime as well as from economic growth to a deep economic recession. In spite of these changes we evidence remarkable continuity in the corporatist industrial relations institutions created in the last years of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship. The analysis of collective bargaining practices in two regions with different trade union history and industrial configuration shows how the experience of Comités Paritarios (Joint Committees) initiated in 1926 had long lasting
institutional effects. This goes against the views expressed by some authors as well as an extended wisdom according to which state corporatism is necessarily rhetorical and accounts to little more than a mechanism to disarm the labour movement. Based on historiographic analysis and a previously unexploited source we provide further support to the view that Primo de Rivera contributed to the modernization of labour relations in Spain. Collective bargaining increased significantly during this period and the joint committees system was an institutional innovation that persisted, with minor changes, during the Second Republic (1931-1936).

The analysis is developed in four sections. Section I critically reviews the existing interpretations of the industrial relations institutions created in Spain in 1926 at the light of the literature on corporatism. More specifically, this section shows how some scholars have misinterpreted the real meaning and impact of industrial relations institutions created in 1926 simply because they were created under a state corporatist framework. Section II and III then go into the analysis of comprehensive agreements in two Spanish regions for the period 1926-35. The cases exhibit variance both in the industrial and economic configuration as well as on the trade union map hence allowing us to assess the impact of these variables for the effectiveness of the collective bargaining institutions created in the last years of the dictatorship. Section IV concludes by means of assessing the evidence laid out in section II and III at the light of the question about institutional persistence in industrial relations institutions.

**Section I: Industrial Relations in the Interwar Period in Spain**

**Between state and social (neo) corporatism**

From an historical perspective, corporatism has to be interpreted as a via media response to the social challenges posed by an increasingly strong and organized labour force. The ascend of Communism as a social model to accommodate as well as to accelerate economic and political change, caused increasing concern amongst business interests and right-wing politicians around Western Europe. However, it was becoming increasingly clear how pure repression of the labour movement or the concession of a minimum floor of labour rights within a liberal framework didn’t constitute real alternatives to the social question that European societies faced as a consequence of accelerating industrialization. A via media inspired in some of the principles of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church gradually developed a third way consisting in the incorporation of the more moderate factions of trade unions into the state apparatus together with employer organisations.

The underlying motivation to this was the idea that endowing representatives of labour and employers with a public role, would automatically lead to cooperation amongst them in order to reach a common good. In other words, particularistic objectives /
motivations and conflict would pass to occupy a secondary role, as the new configuration of interest representation would gradually transform into cooperation around some common goals.

However, in order to achieve this was necessary for the state to adopt an active role in industrial relations. First of all, because the government had to provide a set of rules which could bind the behaviour of social partners in order to behave in a socially responsible way. This had a reflection in the development of labour market regulations and more importantly, the construction of an industrial relations institutional edifice. Secondly, because this involvement was not limited to the provision of certain rules, but required the incorporation of labour and capital into the state machinery in order to guarantee a responsible behaviour. This later aspect became a key aspect of totalitarian right-wing regimes of the inter-war period as they suited well their objectives to achieve social peace.

As we will see below with more detail, these ideas were developed in Spain by the regimes of Primo de Rivera in the 1920s and later on, Franco since 1939. Even though both were inspired by ideas from catholic social doctrine and had Mussolini’s Italy as a model, there were remarkable differences between the two. More precisely, Primo’s corporatism did not mean outright prohibition of free trade unions and the establishment of vertical ones. Rather, the 1920’s dictatorship opened some spaces for the participation of free trade unions in the system. More specifically, the ideological architects of Primo’s corporatist industrial relations were convinced that the prohibition of any form of union activity would endanger the system itself. As we will see below, the underlying issue here was that of legitimacy as a pre-condition for any corporatist system to be effective.

The problems of legitimacy and compliance

For a corporatist system to work effectively, it is necessary to have interest organizations capable of controlling their rank-and-file and implement the terms of agreements. In the words of Crouch\(^2\), corporatism requires actors with articulated organisational structures. In a pure state corporatist system, this results from the incorporation of workers into the system and the prohibition of free trade unionism. Within the authoritarian regimes that adopted state corporatist ideas and institutions in the interwar period, the Spanish experience under Primo de Rivera exhibited some peculiarities. The most important one in line with the above points, is that the corporatist institution OCN (Organización Corporativa Nacional) established in 1926 opened up some spaces to the participation of free moderate trade unions into the

\(^2\) Crouch (1993).
system. The underlying motivation for this was to provide some legitimacy to the system and by extension reduce opposition and conflict. Moreover, it was also expected that by allowing the strongest trade union to participate, the system would automatically benefit from its organisational structure and would work more effectively.

However, as the analysis of developments in the province of Biscay shows, the relationship between these variables is not always linear. As a matter of fact, in the case of Biscay we observed how the legitimacy enjoyed by the OCN thanks to the support and collaboration of UGT was outweighed by the compliance problems that ensued. The favourable treatment given by the dictatorship to UGT in the political and industrial relations spheres triggered strong criticisms from the excluded (anarcho-sindicalists, communists) or less favoured trade unions as was the case of SOV (Solidaridad de Obreros Vascos) in the province of Biscay. This translated in the form of opposition or non-adherence to the work of Comités.

**Historiographical survey about industrial relations in the Primo de Rivera Dictatorship and Second Republic**

Primo de Rivera followed a ‘steak and carrot’ policy with the labour movement: the repression against anarchist and communist was led by Martínez Anido –vice-president and home minister-, while Labour Minister Eduard Aunós led the conciliatory policy with the socialists. The cornerstone of the social policy developed under Primo de Rivera was the industrial relations system and more specifically, a joint committees system (Comités Paritarios) where freely elected employers and workers’ representatives negotiated collective labour agreements and tried to solve disputes. Some scholars have argued that Aunós’ policy was not really effective. Particularly, critics argue that the establishment of comités paritarios –joint committees- was very limited in number and embraced very few sectors and workers. Soto Carmona compares the small figures of committees and agreements under Primo with the larger figures of jurados mixtos under the left-wing government of the Second Republic. Moreover, the integration of the Institute of Social Reforms, a think tank that promoted reforms, into the Ministry of Labour would be also a proof that this conciliatory policy with workers would have been, after all, nothing more but propaganda. Primo’s Dictatorship would have performed, in this field, as a fascist regime, corporatism being only a rhetoric for blocking working class action and the institutions created having little or no impact for industrial relations under the Republican years.

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5 Palacio Morena (2004).
However, other authors give more credibility to Primo’s labour policy. Shlomo Ben-Ami believes that this was different from a fascist labour policy in three key aspects: some spaces for trade union freedom, strengthening of a Socialist trade union instead of banning it, and a generally pro-worker attitude in the activity of joint committees. Contrary to the Italian case, where employers and workers were compulsory integrated in the same official vertical trade union, in Spain there were several (moderate) trade unions that competed in free elections. Moreover, the right to strike was maintained.

Although anarchists and communists unions were outlawed, the socialist trade union (UGT, Unión General de Trabajadores) was not only legal but openly favoured and supported by the regime’s policies and institutions. The rules of the game in the industrial relations field suited perfectly with UGT’s orientation and organisation. Thus not only CNT, the second most important trade union at that time, was out of the system, but the majority system for electing members and representatives of workers in the Comités Paritarios marginalised Catholic and other moderate free unions, despite these both groups were closer to the government. Aunós believed that a majority system strengthened the workers’ negotiation power and, therefore, made the joint committees system more effective in defending workers’ interests whilst legitimising the industrial relations system created in the dictatorship. Whereas in Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and later on Francoist Spain all left-wing unions were eliminated and prosecuted, the socialist union was an essential element of the system under Primo. José Luis Gómez-Navarro underlines that Italian Fascism gave a prominent role to the State and, therefore, those who called themselves representatives of the Nation, the fascists, controlled through the State the corporative organisation. On the contrary, Primo’s corporatism gave some room for civil society, either trade unions or employers’ associations, being the role of the State less invasive, and the system more pluralistic and democratic. This notwithstanding, the underlying idea behind the corporatist system of Primo’s industrial relations was state administrative intervention in the industrial relations sphere and the incorporation of the three actors into an institution like OCN.

As pointed out above, this leaves us with the impression of an industrial relations system which was an hybrid between a state authoritarian corporatist system and a social neo-corporatist system. Apart from wondering about the impact and implications of this system, another important question is why did a right-wing dictatorship follow this labour policy and a socialist trade union support it? Did the employers associations

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6 Ben-Ami (1983), ch. 8. The first and third characteristics were stressed by Aunós himself some years later [Aunós (1944), p. 64]. See also Aunós (1964).
8 The so called “Sindicatos Libres” (Free Unions) had been created by Martínez Anido when he was civil governor in Barcelona in the early twenties. About this contradictory policy, see Gómez-Navarro (1991), p. 452.
like it? Several authors have answered these questions and, by doing so, they have given credibility to Primo’s social and industrial relations policy.

Anthony McIvor gives an interesting explanation of Aunós’ overture to the left. His thesis is that the International Labour Organisation influenced very deeply Spanish Labour Policy under Primo. When Aunós integrated the Institute of Social Reforms into the Ministry of Labour he surrounded himself with reformist officials coming from there. He believed in the necessity of a consensual solution by arbitration to the social conflict and used ILO’s influence to enforce his position within Primo’s regime.

The ILO, an organisation contemplated in the Versalles Treaty, was led by a French moderate socialist, Albert Thomas, who was very influential among trade unions that belonged to this organisation such as the UGT. In fact, the ILO’s representative in Spain was Antoni Fabra Ribas, a member of the UGT executive and Largo Caballero’s advisor. A good relation with the ILO was a very valuable asset for Primo’s regime because it provided the so needed international legitimacy. Aunós cleverly used this need for enforcing his political agenda within the Spanish cabinet and, at the same time, Thomas influenced Aunós in his collaboration with the UGT and in the joint committees system implemented since November 1926. In fact, this was much closer to the Belgian system -and the ILO philosophy- than to the fascist Italian one. Thomas’ support to Primo’s labour policy proved it was not fake but, at the same time, this support was an alibi for repression against anarchists and communists.

Santos Juliá explains very well UGT’s attitude during Primo’s Dictatorship. After the failure of the revolutionary strike in 1917, the socialists became very suspicious of the republicans as well as anarchists. Moreover, the end of the cooperation with CNT in 1920 and the communist split-off made the socialists to withdraw into themselves. The Socialist Party weakened and pushed by circumstances, the UGT adopted a more ‘accidentalist’ approach in relation with government and other trade unions: no matter the political regime, the Union had to defend workers’ interests, grow and be stronger. Largo embraced an evolutionist and organicist view of the road to proletariat revolution understood as a day-to-day task whose success would critically depend on the strength of the trade union. The main UGT’s goal was to strengthen the organisation using also political action with the final aim of improving workers’ conditions and became the only trade union in Spain. The revolution would arrive when the working class would be ready, well organised and powerful.

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10 McIvor (1982).
11 In fact, he became Largo’s right-hand man in the Ministry of Labour during the Second Republic. See also Gómez-Navarro (1991), pp. 399-400.
12 McIvor (1982), pp. 46-47.
Therefore the UGT accepted Primo’s offer to participate in a corporatist structure of industrial relations. It was a tailor-made suit for the socialist trade union\footnote{Juliá (1996), ch. 4 and Juliá (1982).}. Besides, as we have shown before, the rules of the game were especially suitable for the UGT. An authoritarian regime opened the door of the State to the organised working class, a door that had never been opened before by the Liberal State\footnote{Juliá (1996), p. 137.} in Spain. A trade union that believed that gradual organic strengthening would lead eventually to socialism had necessarily to cross this door. Largo’s writings of this period defended wisely this option\footnote{Largo (2003 )} and, even if it can be labelled as opportunistic, it is the best proof that Aunós overture to the working class was sincere.

A large majority within UGT backed Largo’s policy of collaboration. In fact, this was very successful for the trade union. Its influence was very high in the joint committees during Dictatorship and its membership expanded, especially after Primo’s resigned. At the eve of the proclamation of the Republic, UGT was stronger than at the beginning of Dictatorship, while it had not lost appeal among workers. Largo’s cleverness enabled the socialist union to obtain the benefits from collaboration and, at the same time, avoid its risks\footnote{Ben-Ami (1978), ch. 3.}. Therefore, in the last months of the Monarchy, UGT was the strongest political organisation in Spain. Because of his “accidentalist” view, Largo backed republican conspiracies in order to preserve the corporatist structure and, after the Republic was proclaimed, he became Minister of Labour for strengthening it and improving workers’ conditions\footnote{Juliá (1996), ch. 4 and Juliá (1982).}.

To sum up, the collaboration of a Socialist trade union and the fact that this collaboration strengthened this union is the best proof that the system was a real improvement for the working class. Had this collaboration been conceived as an opportunistic behaviour by the UGT, this trade union and the Socialist Party would have not played a prominent role under the democratic political regime of the Second Republic. Moreover, the acrimonious reaction by employers organisations to the joint committees system is another evidence of its truthfulness. As Ben-Ami has shown, labour policy created strong resentment among employers’ organisations, especially when joint committees began to work. Together with the Catholic and Conservative press, they led a campaign for the elimination or, at least, the reform of the joint committees. They complained of socialist hegemony as well as the fact that the committees usually decided in favour of workers, being the government representative usually on the workers’ side. They asked for changing the electoral system in order to break UGT’s monopoly, but Aunós defended UGT’s hegemony as the best way to manage social conflict and avoid revolution. Business circles felt betrayed and, together

\begin{itemize}
\item Juliá (1996), ch. 4 and Juliá (1982).
\item Juliá (1996), p. 137.
\item Largo (2003 ) collected writings.
\item Ben-Ami (1978), ch. 5.
\item Juliá (1996), ch. 4 and Juliá (1987).
\end{itemize}
with their disenchantment of economic policy, they gradually began to give up their support for Primo.20

Although sceptical scholars on Primo’s labour policy underline its small output in contrast with the Republican jurados mixtos, the continuity of this institution under a democratic regime is the best prove of its authenticity. Santos Juliá stresses that Largo Caballero, as Minister of Labour of the Republic, changed the name of the joint committees -jurados mixtos instead of comités paritarios- but the system was essentially the same. However, now the political environment was much more in favour of workers’ demands, being the regulation of the labour market in farming the most important change. The only comparison made until now of bases de trabajo – comprehensive agreements- between the Dictatorship and the Republic shows that they were not very different, although the latter were slightly more favourable for the workers.21

In Juliá’s view, Largo put into practice from the Minister of Labour the next step of the policy he pursued from the corporatist structure during Dictatorship: the gradual conquest of the State by the organised working class.22 Similarly, the anarchists were also consistent with their old opposite policy: to reject any involvement in state collective bargaining institutions. Largo’s step forward eventually caused a reaction by businessmen against socialist participation in the government and, among other factors, it provoked the break down of the republican-socialist coalition in the last months of 1933. After the electoral defeat of the Left in November 1933, in Juliá’s opinion, UGT rose against the Republic when Right-wing government threatened its previous organic conquests. Showing its ‘accidentalism’, the same reason that led UGT to collaborate with a dictatorship and support a bourgeois democracy – the achievement of corporatist power by the organised labour movement- now led it to the revolution.23

Most of the juridical analysis on CP and JM, either by contemporaries or later, agree with Santos Juliá in underlying the continuity of the system. The big break was, instead, in July 1935, when the right-wing government enacted Salmón Law trying to modify the system in favor of employers.24

Section II: Industrial Relations in the Metalworking Industry of Biscay

The Basque Country and in particular the province of Biscay experienced a rapid process of industrialization in the last 25 years of XIXth century. Relying on rich

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21 The comparison is made for iron, steel industry and metallurgy in Almería province [Martínez Gómez (2007), pp. 262-265].
24 Montero Aroca (1975) and Comes (1937).
natural resources and more specifically large deposits of iron, this process consisted in a remarkable expansion of the metalworking industry. Thus by 1929 there were 28,836 employees in the metalworking sector in Biscay. Almost 75% were employed in large establishments with more than 1,000 employees and the remaining in small and medium-sized undertakings. The most important company in the metalworking sector was Altos Hornos de Vizcaya that employed 8,508 workers in 1929 in several establishments.

Before moving to the analysis of labour agreements signed in the metalworking sector in the period 1926-1935, there are two general aspects which are worth mentioning in order to understand industrial relations developments. The first regards the different patterns of modernization that occurred in the Basque Country and that also could be identified within the province of Biscay to some extent. Whilst industrialization in the province of Biscay relied upon the development of large metalworking undertakings that required a large inflow of non-bask immigrant workers, in the neighboring province of Guipuzcoa industrialization was based on the consolidation of a network of small and medium-sized companies linked to metalworking sector. What is even more important, this large-scale process added to the small metalworking companies already established in the province of Biscay which in a context of increasing demand could survive to the competition of newly established large companies. Not only were the accompanying processes of social modernization different in the two provinces\textsuperscript{25}, but the labour movement also evolved along different patterns. Hence, in the province of Guipuzcoa the dominant trade union was the nationalist SOV (Solidaridad de Obreros Vascos, Solidarity of Basque Workers), a catholic trade union with a moderate stance and a well developed assitentialist system\textsuperscript{26}. By contrast, the dominant form of unionization in the province of Alava was to the socialist trade union UGT. This notwithstanding, the above cleavage could also be observed within the province of Biscay as we will see below with more detail. The implications of these differences will be first of all, the inter-union conflict between UGT and SOV. This conflict had also a reflection in the development of Comités Paritarios as will be explained later.

The second general aspect deals with the policy context where industrialization happened and that has important implications for understanding the effect of the 1929 crisis on the metalworking industry of Biscay. More specifically, this industry experienced a spectacular growth during the 1920s thanks to the economic policy of Primo’s dictatorship consisting in the establishment of an autarchic system following Law 9 July 1926\textsuperscript{27}. Moreover, the ambitious plan of public works and development of infrastructures developed during the dictatorship provided further momentum to the expansion of this industry. This contributed to expand a view among unions’ rank-and-

\textsuperscript{25} Castells et al. (1990).
\textsuperscript{26} Velasco (2008)
\textsuperscript{27} Espina (2000)
file that the crisis was exogenous and little could be done to fight against its consequences except for state-led counter-cyclical policies aimed at mitigating the effects of the crisis on the territory.

Trade union landscape and the configuration of Comités Paritarios (1926-1930)

As pointed out earlier, one of the characteristics of the province of Biscay when it comes to the trade union landscape was the dominance of the socialist trade union UGT since the 1890s in the mines and since 1913 in metalworking industry.\(^{28}\) The rapid extension since the late 1910s of the anarcho-sindicalist CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo) in regions like Catalonia or Andalusia did not happen in the Basque Country and more specifically Biscay. Several explanations have been provided in the literature to account for this. First and foremost, the CNT took a long time to establish a formal organization in Biscay compared to the long tradition enjoyed by UGT in that same region. Extreme left anarchist and syndicalist factions formed part of the Socialist trade union until 1910. However, the most important attempts to establish the anarchist CNT in the Basque country occurred after the 1917 general strike.\(^{29}\) The anarchists accused UGT of having provoked the defeat of the strike as they didn’t share their willingness to use violence in order to force the establishment of a republic. This episode gave the definitive push for anarchist and syndicalist factions to abandon UGT and push for an alternative whilst asking the national CNT organization to support their efforts to expand in Biscay. Moreover, the Restauración governments preceding Primo’s dictatorship also put in place a deliberate policy to hinder the extension and consolidation of CNT in this region.\(^{30}\) Finally, aware of the risks for its position in the Basque Country, UGT also made an effort to incorporate and neutralize part of the most revolutionary workers into the trade union. The failure of CNT to consolidate an alternative to UGT left the trade union landscape in the Basque Country generally, and Biscay more specifically, dominated by two moderate trade unions. Hence, the alternative to the dominant position of UGT came from another moderate trade union rooted in small firms called Solidaridad de Obreros Vascos (SOV).

Both UGT and SOV shared a similar moderate stance towards the role played by trade unions in industrial relations in Biscay. According to this, industrial conflict was conceived as a last resort mechanism which should be used only when other mechanisms including social dialogue had been exhausted in negotiations with employers. A priori, this similar ideological stance seemed to fit well with the principles guiding the OCN and industrial relations from 1926 on. However, in practice a strong rivalry developed between the two trade unions. SOV criticized the favoritism showed

\(^{28}\) Fusi (1975) and Castells (1993).
\(^{29}\) Velasco (2008).
\(^{30}\) Velasco (2008)
by the Regimen towards UGT which allowed this trade union to strengthen its position in Biscay.

The competition between the two trade unions did not occur within firms but between them. Hence, whilst SOV was dominant in the small metalworking undertakings, UGT was much stronger in large industrial companies. This situation had a reflection on the establishment of Comités Paritarios for the metalworking sector in the province of Biscay as two inter-local Comités were created. The Comité Paritario of the first zone corresponded to the part of Biscay with a predominance of small establishments and hence a strong position of SOV. By contrast, the Comité Paritario of zone 2 consisted mostly of large firms where UGT was the dominant trade union.

Notwithstanding both SOV and UGT shared a moderate view about industrial relations’, their different ideological streams (catholic the first and socialist the second) were different. This had a reflection on the terms negotiated in the labour agreements by the Comité Paritario in zone 1 (where SOV was dominant) and those of Comité in zone 2 (where UGT was dominant). Take for instance the regulation of holidays. Whilst the regulation agreed by the Comité of the first zone made an explicit mention of the religious character of the non-working days, the Comité of the second zone included days off which had a non-religious motivation like now May 1st and January 1st 31.

Even though some authors have described industrial relations in the province of Biscay as being relatively homogenous and having very distinctive characteristics compared to industrial relations in the neighboring province of Guipuzcoa, the development and consolidation during the dictatorship of two different Comités Paritarios challenges this perspective32. As will be explained later with more detail, the strong inter-union competition and conflict that characterized industrial relations in the metalworking sector in Biscay was one of the main reasons for the so-called failure of Comités Paritarios in this province. However, in the next section we argue that judging by the terms of agreements negotiated as well as the functioning of industrial relations in the Republican period, the Comités exerted a significant impact in the development of labour relations in Biscay.

From Comités Paritarios to Jurados Mixtos: Continuities and Changes

In order to shed some light into the impact that different institutions operating under very different economic and political conditions had on the regulation of working

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31 Boletín Oficial de la Provincia de Vizcaya, num …., [fecha....], Folio…., número 2066, Comité Paritario Interlocal de Siderurgia, Metalurgia y Derivados de Vizcaya (2ª zona), Acuerdo del Pleno de 29 de Abril de 1929;
32 Castells et al. (1990).
conditions and conflict resolution, we have collected evidence about the number and terms of comprehensive agreements negotiated in the province of Biscay for the metalworking sector. These agreements reached in the context of Comités Paritarios (1926-1931) or Jurados Mixtos (1932-1935) were published in the Boletín Oficial de la Provincia de Vizcaya after having being agreed by the Comité Paritario or Jurado Mixto and approved by the OCN or Ministry of Labour respectively.

A list of the agreements signed between 1926-1935 for the metalworking industry in the province of Biscay as well as a short summary of main contents is provided in table 1. As already noted, there were two inter-local Comités for the metalworking industry of Biscay that were created in November 1928, i.e., two years after the OCN law was enacted. As pointed out by Otaegui33 this already shows the administrative difficulties encountered by trade unions and employers in order to establish the Comités in spite of UGT’s dominant position. As a matter of fact, many authors have criticized the institution of “Comités Paritarios” and in general all the institutional edifice of the OCN created by the dictatorship due to an excessive bureaucratization and slowness. Similar problems can be detected when analyzing the development of “Jurados Mixtos”. Hence, even though the Bases de Trabajo for the Metalworking industry were agreed among trade unions and employers in the context of the Jurado Mixto by August 1933, the definitive approval by the Ministry of Labour was delayed until July 1936 after the final draft was agreed in August 1934.

This suggests that the pervasiveness of state intervention in industrial relations through the OCN during the dictatorship, persisted during the Republic. As a matter of fact, most authors agree that one of the key principles underlying the OCN, i.e., state interference in the social question, remained a trait of government’s approach towards industrial relations from 1932 onwards. The way in which Comités and Jurados worked seems to confirm this view as agreements reached within these two institutions required approval by OCN in the former and the Ministry of Labour in the later case. This process could be delayed for months and this became one of the criticisms made by employers to the system. In other words, collective autonomy of workers’ representatives and employers in regulating working conditions was very limited not to say inexistent in both cases. However, whilst in the case of Comités Paritarios this was in line with the authoritarian character of the political system, state interventionism in the case of the República was less obvious.

It is also important to note that under the system of Comités Paritarios no comprehensive agreement (Bases de Trabajo) was reached. Instead, the activity of Comités consisted in the fragmented and piecemeal regulation of aspects like now minimum wages, compensation for overtime work, holidays, health and safety at work

33 Otaegui (1986).
etc. The first comprehensive, systematic and detailed regulation came out in 1933. However, when one looks at the terms of this agreement and compares with regulations issued under the CP, we find no remarkable difference in aspects like now remuneration of employees, working time, etc. Note also that different Bases were negotiated for workers belonging to different skill categories (see table 1). Even though there is no information in this respect, no evidence has been found of terms negotiated under CP to vary across categories.

The main problem facing the Comités Paritarios as a public law institution aimed at promoting consensus in industrial relations was not—as it has been very often argued—the opposition of employers to state interference in their right to unilaterally regulate working conditions of employees. Provided the high levels of conflict registered in the early 1920s, it is reasonable to think that many employers welcomed a system whose main aim was precisely to tackle conflict and promote negotiated solutions to industrial disputes. The boycott to the Comités system that has been reported in many studies as evidence of employer resistance was not accordingly motivated primarily by their rejection of the principles underlying the Comités Paritarios, but by the difficulties of trade unions to implement the agreements reached. Inter-union conflict between UGT and SOV in alliance with communist and anarchists, became an insurmountable problem as it made virtually impossible for workers’ representatives to guarantee compliance with decisions taken in the CP. The problem of compliance became as a consequence a major obstacle for the effectiveness of CP. In this vein, the legitimacy deficit that for SOV characterized the CP and more generally industrial relations in the metalworking sector of Biscay during the Primo dictatorship, transformed into a compliance problem.
Table 1: Agreements for the Metalworking industry of Biscay, 1926-1935

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Signing Institution</th>
<th>Geographical Coverage</th>
<th>Main Terms of the Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V-1929</td>
<td>CP</td>
<td>2nd Zone, Biscay</td>
<td>Regulation of Earnings and holidays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII-1929</td>
<td>CP</td>
<td>1st Zone, Biscay</td>
<td>Regulation of Earnings and holidays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XI-1929</td>
<td>CP</td>
<td>2nd Zone, Biscay</td>
<td>Minimum Wages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-1930</td>
<td>CP</td>
<td>2nd Zone, Biscay</td>
<td>Health and Safety at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XI-1930</td>
<td>CP</td>
<td>1st Zone, Biscay</td>
<td>Several aspects related to the compensation of overtime work and night work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Establishes one year validity of terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-1932</td>
<td>JM</td>
<td>1st Zone, Biscay</td>
<td>Several aspects related to the compensation of skilled workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX-1932</td>
<td>JM</td>
<td>Biscay</td>
<td>Holidays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-1933</td>
<td>JM</td>
<td>Biscay</td>
<td>Holidays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII-1933</td>
<td>JM</td>
<td>Biscay</td>
<td>Bases de Trabajo: Comprehensive sectoral agreement for the province of Biscay that rules out what is contained in previous agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Definition of categories and earnings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX-1933</td>
<td>JM</td>
<td>Biscay</td>
<td>Jurado Mixto de Delineantes y Maestros de taller y fábricas sidero-metalúrgicas, relativas al personal técnico de talleres e industrias metalúrgicas y siderúrgicas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Bases de Trabajo for high skilled workers in the metalmechanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XII-1933</td>
<td>JM</td>
<td>Biscay</td>
<td>Jurado Mixto de Ayudantes de Ingenieros, Delineantes y Maestros de Taller de minas y fábricas sidero-metalúrgicas, relativas a los jefes de talleres, maestros y encargados</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XII-1933</td>
<td>JM</td>
<td>Biscay</td>
<td>- Abolishes all the clauses related to…recuperación de jornadas de trabajo por festivos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII-1934</td>
<td>JM</td>
<td>Biscay</td>
<td>- Definitive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In this vein, the 1930 conflict in the metalworking establishments of La Iberia and La Vizcaya, inspired by communist and anarcho-sindicalist workers as well as by communist factions within UGT, shows very clearly the problems faced by UGT in order to achieve compliance with the terms of agreements. The conflict could only be finished once UGT decided to purge its organization from communist elements34. However, this strategy was not enough to bring workers back into work and three days

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34 La Vanguardia miércoles 19 Septiembre 1930, p.19
later, employers abandoned the Comités Paritarios of the first and second zone arguing that the attitude of some factions of workers rendered useless this institution. In spite of the attempts by employers to find negotiated solutions to the conflict, the impossibility of trade unions to achieve compliance of the agreements contributed to the persistence of the conflict. UGT accused the nationalist trade union SOV as well as the communists and anarcho-sindicalists to impede a cease of the conflict. By contrast, these unions argued that UGT had no legitimacy to negotiate on their behalf.

The 1930 episode was not just a conflict around substantive working conditions in a context of crisis, but it has to be understood as an attack from both communist and anarcho-sindicalist trade unions together with SOV to the system of Comités Paritarios. It is in some sense paradigmatic of the problems affecting the working of Comités Paritarios in so far as it was caused by the opposition of all non-UGT trade unions to the dominant position of the Socialist organization. The situation changed dramatically with the advent of the Republic. The conflict that characterized relations between UGT and SOV turned into collaboration or at least peaceful coexistence of both trade unions in the Jurados. This change in SOV was caused first of all by the opportunities that political change opened in the field of industrial relations. Moreover, in a context of increasing unemployment and worker discontent, the moderate ideology of SOV led this trade union to adopt a negotiating attitude with UGT and employers.

Hence, whilst inter-union conflicts characterized industrial relations in the metalworking sector of Biscay in the period of dictatorship, the period of Jurados Mixtos were characterized by important intra-union conflicts. Whilst the former were caused by legitimacy problems and triggered non-compliance, the later, as the case of UGT and SOV show, led to disenchantment within rank-and-file then followed by a radicalization.

The reason for this radicalization of rank-and-file attitudes within the moderate trade unions has to be found in the essential continuity that existed between Comités and Jurados. Strong state involvement that limited spaces for collective autonomy, together with worsening economic conditions led to a rapid increase of critical voices within UGT and SOV demanding a more direct involvement of workers in the negotiation of working conditions. Moreover, criticisms were also directed to the moderate policy of both trade unions which tried to avoid the recourse to industrial conflict. The impact of the 1929 economic crisis was particularly strong in the province of Biscay due to its exposure to international markets. However, the effects of the crisis for the metalworking sector were mediated by the context surrounding the development of this

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35 ABC, 23 de Septiembre de 1930; La Vanguardia, martes 23 de Septiembre 1930
36 ABC martes 28 de Octubre, p.43
37 ABC jueves 30 Octubre 1930
industry, i.e., a mostly inward-looking and domestic demand based production which suffered from remarkable budget cuts in public works and more specifically railways. By 1932, there were 5889 unemployed workers in the metalworking industry and approximately 7000 more working on short time schemes\(^3\). In spite of this, industrial conflict remained at relatively low levels compared to the upsurge registered in other sectors of the same province (…). The reason for this has to be found precisely in the dominant position of moderate trade unions like UGT and SOV in the metalworking industry. These trade unions did not only consider conflict as a last resort mechanism, but they also internalized a view on the crisis according to which there was little domestic national or local actors could do in order to face the effects of crisis in the metalworking sector. However, it was necessary to find public support for mitigating the social and industrial effects of the crisis. In this sense, the compromise of UGT and the socialists with the left-wing government, which they belonged, is essential for understanding this moderate attitude. Things began to change when the right took government at the end of 1933\(^4\).

Overall, the case of Biscay shows several things. First and most important, the analysis of labor agreements and other evidence in two periods characterized by radical changes in the political context, economic conditions and industrial relations institutions, throws many elements of continuity between the two periods analyzed here. This continuity was to a large extent due to the dominance exerted by the Socialist UGT in the trade union landscape since the early 1910s and that was particularly strong in the Metalworking sector of Biscay.

**Section III: The Catalan case**
The Catalan case is interesting in this analysis at least for two reasons: Catalonia was the main industrial region in Spain, specially Barcelona province, and it was the main stronghold of anarcho-syndicalism. This second fact conditioned the success of the corporatist structure of labour relation in this region, either under Dictatorship or under Second Republic. Being anarchist ideology strongly against the State, corporatism was completely unacceptable for CNT, that could not agree that labour relations were managed through *comités paritarios* or *jurados mixtos*, bodies that were linked to the administrative structure of the State and whose presidents were nominated by the Government.

CNT was strongly repressed under Dictatorship since Primo’s ‘steak and carrot’ labour policy targeted revolutionary trade unions. Therefore it is not surprising that anarcho-syndicalists became marginalised in the new system, although a CNT leader -Ángel Pestaña- was in favour of participating in *comités paritarios*. However, when the

\(^3\) Miralles (1998).
\(^4\) Díaz Freire (1990) and San Feliciano (1990).
Second Republic was born, CNT became legal, democratic and civil rights were recognised and comités were renamed as jurados mixtos, CNT denied again any legitimacy to the system and refused to joint it. Here we find a new element of continuity between the two different political periods: Primo’s labour policy could be blamed for closing the door to anarchists, but when the Republic opened it, they did not enter anyway. So the corporatist system of industrial relations suffered from the same weakness during its lifespan: the CNT absence. In fact, fighting for workers’ interests and rights outside or inside the system became the main battlefield between CNT and UGT during the first Republican years.

Confronting the Biscay and Barcelona cases is very fruitful because of the opposite trade unions balance of powers. If moderate and reformists trade unions were very strong in Biscay, as we have just seen before, in Barcelona they were very weak, being CNT the strong player. UGT did not succeed traditionally in Catalonia, and it did not increase its presence very much during Primo’s regime, being Sindicatos Libres (Free Unions) which most benefited by CNT proscription. On the other hand, in Catalonia there was no equivalent to the nationalist trade union SOV, thus the side of corporatist were rather empty. When the anarcho-syndicalism became legal again recovered quickly its strength and conditioned the dynamics of social conflict in Catalonia. While in Biscay, in spite of the crisis, there were not many strikes during the period 1931-33 because of the compromise of socialists with the left-wing government, and the industrial relations were managed through CP and JM, in Catalonia CNT began a big wave of strikes, trying to improve workers’ conditions through the huge mobilization that came with the Republican euphoria and not through the corporatist structure inherited from Primo. Thus where UGT was the dominant trade union labour relations were managed through joint committees and there were few strikes, whereas in CNT’s realm the corporatist structure did not work very well and the level of conflict was high.

In relation to conflict, several factors explain the CNT’s fighting spirit during this period. First of all, CNT had not a compromise with the left-wing government. While the socialists were in office and UGT leader, Largo Caballero, was Minister of Labour, anarcho-syndicalism was against the State and it had not a twin party. Although CNT supported Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC, the left-wing Catalan nationalist party who leaded the Catalan autonomous government) and most of its affiliates voted for it, there was not an organic link neither a compromise. Secondly, as we have seen before, CNT did not believe in the corporatist system for managing industrial relations but in ‘direct action’, namely, negotiation between workers and employers without any government involvement. In this negotiation method strikes played a pivotal role. Being out of law and repressed under Primo, the anarcho-syndicalists came back with strength and took advantage of the wide civil and political rights framework of the Republic. Thirdly, although strikes were a tool for improving workers’ conditions, for many anarcho-syndicalists were the way to revolution as well, and they saw the Republican
euphoria as the best opportunity for defeating definitively capitalism and the State. However, this radical strategy provoked an internal conflict, a split and eventually a weakening of the trade union. Finally, some of the strikes were consequence of the inter-unions conflict, specially acute in a period of rising unemployment because each trade union tried to guarantee its affiliates’ jobs.41

The aspect that most interested us in this paper is the consequence of CNT behaviour in the CP and JM performance. Many authors say that this system did not succeed in Catalonia because of the weakness of reformist and moderate trade unions. Although, Gómez-Navarro says that under Primo the system was developed because Free Unions grew very much –and sometimes, thanks to former anarchist workers,42- , Albert Balcells and Eulàlia Vega underline that during the Republic CNT’s strength bypassed the joint committees system through direct action43.

Trying to quantify the failure or success of the corporatist system of labour relations in Catalonia it is very difficult. We have to resign ourselves with some scant data and many qualitative evidence. At the end of September 1931, just when CP were going to be renamed as JM, an UGT internal source evaluated the number of workers which were affected by comprehensive agreements from CP. This is probably the best picture of the real impact of the system, because more important than number of agreements was the number of workers under these agreements. This point in time is not when the system was at its maximum, since we know that many comprehensive agreements were signed in 1932 and 1933, but it is a good test for evaluating relative success. Table 2 gives the share of active population that was affected by comprehensive agreements from CP in the provinces of Barcelona, Madrid and Biscay. It shows clearly the relative failure of the system in Barcelona.

41 This was the case of the conflict in Barcelona harbour, where UGT had some strength [Vega (2004), pp. 185-9].
Table 2

Number of workers under comprehensive agreements
(30/09/1931)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Workers affected</th>
<th>Active population</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barcelona</td>
<td>147,343</td>
<td>828,141</td>
<td>17.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madrid</td>
<td>326,045</td>
<td>504,461</td>
<td>64.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biscay</td>
<td>59,836</td>
<td>178,617</td>
<td>33.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Aisa and Arbeloa (1975) and Martínez-Galarraga

If we test the other joint committees’ function, conflict resolution, during the years 1932, 1933 and 1934 –thus when JM were in place- the relative performance was quite similar (Table 3). This means that in Madrid and Biscay labour conflicts were solved through the corporatist system, while in Barcelona most of them were managed outside it. JM and strikes were substitutes, alternative ways, of managing social conflict. Choosing one or other way depended on trade unions panorama in each province; in those areas controlled by UGT (and SOV) the corporatist system succeeded, while in those areas under CNT control did not (Table 4).

Table 3

Number of demands in *jurados mixtos*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Demands 1932-34</th>
<th>yearly average per 1.000 actives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barcelona</td>
<td>26,625</td>
<td>10.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madrid</td>
<td>61,861</td>
<td>40.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biscay</td>
<td>10,949</td>
<td>20.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Montero Aroca (1976) and Martínez-Galarraga.

Table 4

Trade unions' affiliates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UGT 1928-31</th>
<th>SOV 1931</th>
<th>% active pop.</th>
<th>CNT 1931</th>
<th>% active pop.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barcelona</td>
<td>8,483</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td></td>
<td>285,237</td>
<td>34.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madrid</td>
<td>142,345</td>
<td>28.22</td>
<td></td>
<td>5,474</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biscay</td>
<td>14,507</td>
<td>15.07*</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,902</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* UGT+SOV

Source: Silvestre (2003), Diaz Freire (1990) and Martínez-Galarraga.
The corporatist system had an urban bias, being more important in industry and services than in agriculture. Therefore, although Barcelona province appears clearly below Biscay and Madrid, probably its relative position in the whole Spanish context was not so extreme. Moreover, when we analyse things more carefully they look more complex. Pere Gabriel has underlined that under Primo CP in Barcelona had some success in hotels, chemicals, entertainment, graphic industries and commerce\(^4\)\(^4\), and the system continued to expand under Second Republic. One way to evaluate the success of the system by sectors in Barcelona province is crossing the *Censo electoral social* –social electoral census- by the end of 1933 with the data on workers by sector from population census in 1930. The first source includes those trade unions –and the number of its affiliates- that were involved in the corporatist system. Thus, in Table 5 we can see the share of workers that had right to vote to JM representatives, since only those affiliated in trade unions involved in the system could vote. This is a good proxy of the corporatist system prevalence by sectors.

\(^4\)\(^4\) Gabriel (1990) p. 58.
Table 5

Workers involved in jurados mixtos. Barcelona province, 1933

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Trade Unions</th>
<th>Workers Involved</th>
<th>% of Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>2,006</td>
<td>4.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forestry and agriculture</td>
<td>1,979</td>
<td>100,791</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mines and quarries</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>4,864</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food industry</td>
<td>1,252</td>
<td>34,324</td>
<td>3.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemicals</td>
<td>1,176</td>
<td>18,261</td>
<td>6.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic industries</td>
<td>2,038</td>
<td>2,493</td>
<td>81.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textile</td>
<td>6,841</td>
<td>160,682</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>2,760</td>
<td>31,045</td>
<td>8.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word</td>
<td>1,404</td>
<td>38,890</td>
<td>3.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalworking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on metals</td>
<td>855</td>
<td>34,775</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building industry</td>
<td>4,044</td>
<td>50,458</td>
<td>8.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other industries</td>
<td>12,105</td>
<td>120,368</td>
<td>10.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transports</td>
<td>8,563</td>
<td>30,669</td>
<td>27.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>11,428</td>
<td>51,157</td>
<td>22.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54,764</td>
<td>680,783</td>
<td>8.04*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*metalworking not included

Source: Censo de Barcelona (1930) i Censo electoral social (1933).

Data shows that the system had a big vacuum in core industrial sectors, where CNT was specially strong, while in services the system was more successful. Textile sector was specially important in Catalonia (more than 40% of factory workers) and the absence of comprehensive agreements signed through CP and JM was clamorous. In April 1934, when the system was probably at its zenith, only one comprehensive agreement was in force, for a very small and locally concentrated sector, ribbons in Manresa, and some regulations of a broader sector, finishing45. A careful look at Boletín Oficial de la Provincia de Barcelona (1926-1933) and Butlletí Oficial de la Generalitat de Catalunya (1933-1934) confirms this view: the most important economic sector in Catalonia was almost completely absent of the corporatist structures of industrial relations.

However, this does not meant that no negotiations existed between workers and employers in the textile sector. In fact, several comprehensive agreements that embraced huge numbers of workers were signed by CNT and employers during the period 1931-3446. The big difference was that CNT did not accept the corporatist channel because it was linked to the State. ‘Direct action’ did not only include strikes but also talks and compromises, but outside de JM. Sometimes anarcho-syndicalists

45 González-Rothvoss (1934), p. 203.
46 Vega (2004), pp. 195-203 and 226-239.)
accepted the authorities’ intervention – civil governor, Catalan ‘minister’ of labour or major- when a conflict was blocked, and even they accepted to participate in *jurados mixtos circunstanciales* -circumstantial joint committees-, *ad hoc* committees for solving a strike. In fact, in 1932, at least 5 circumstantial joint committees in the Catalan textile industry were created for solving strikes that affected more than 58,000 workers: in knitwear industry in Mataró (14,000 workers) and Igualada (4,000); textile in Terrassa (20,000), Sabadell (20,000) and Pobla de Lillet (500), being all workers’ representatives CNT members. What they did never accept was the involvement in permanent structures linked to the State.

In fact, the internal dynamics of CNT conditioned very much the social conflict in Catalonia during the Republican years. At the beginning of the new regime, Catalan government behaved as a CNT ally in conflicts, meanwhile Spanish government supported UGT. Later on, because of CNT radicalisation under FAI influence and its subsequent split off, Catalan government turned against CNT and supported former CNT unions, the moderate *trentistas*, and its allies. Although *trentistas* were also against corporatist system, they were inclined towards reaching agreements for improving labour conditions. This *entente*, that in some way looked like that between left-wing Republican government and UGT in 1931-33, tried to manage labour relations in a non-revolutionary way, making compatible workers’ conditions improvement with the stability of the democratic political system, but always outside the corporatist structures built by Primo and the socialists. This process was interrupted by the repression that followed the October 1934 Revolution, that in Catalonia was leaded by Catalan government and not by CNT.

**Section IV: Concluding Remarks**

*Institutionalization of an Industrial Relations System and Institutional Continuity in the II Republic*

One of the most important legacies of Primo’s dictatorship consisted in its attempt to institutionalize an industrial relations system based on a strong state corporatist ideology. Even though many authors have paid little attention to the analysis of industrial relations in this period as they consider it too short and some kind of interruption in the normal development of industrial relations, an in-depth analysis of the 1926-1935 period shows very important continuities.

- First of all, the 1926 Law meant the establishment for the first time in the history of industrial relations in Spain of formal institutions to channel relationships

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47 Archivo del Ministerio de Trabajo, doc. ent. 11/08/1933.
between workers and their representatives and employers. Under a different name and with some differences, the essence of this system remained unchanged during the Second Republic, until 1935.

- Secondly, there is a strong continuity when one looks at the role played by the state in industrial relations. The state corporatist character of industrial relations under the Dictatorship meant a strong involvement of the state as a third actor in the system. As a matter of fact, this continues being one of the distinguishing characteristics of industrial relations in Spain.

- In those regions where the correlation of forces was favorable to the consolidation of the industrial relations system established in 1926, the deterioration in economic conditions as a result of the economic crisis did not trigger an increase in conflict. In this regard, one of the basic aims of the Comités Paritarios also shared by the Jurados Mixtos was accomplished. This was certainly the case in the province of Biscay.

- On the contrary, in those regions where the dominant trade union was against this system, either under Dictatorship or under Democracy, the system did not succeed. This was the case of Catalonia.
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