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Structural change, collective action, and social unrest in 1930s Spain

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Abstract

The Spanish 2nd Republic (1931-1936) witnessed one of the fastest and deepest processes of popular mobilization in interwar Europe, generating a decisive reactionary wave that brought the country to the Civil War (1936-1939). We show in the paper that both contemporary comment and part of the historiography makes generalizations about the behaviour of the working classes in the period that stress idealistic, re-distributive and even religious motives to join movements of protest. In some other cases, state repression, poverty, and deteriorating living standards have been singled out as the main determinants of participation. This paper uses collective action theory to argue that key institutional changes and structural changes in labour markets were crucial to understand a significant part of the explosive popular mobilization of the period. We argue first that, before the second Republic, temporary migrants had been the main structural limitation against the stabilization of unions and collective bargaining in agricultural labour markets and in several service and industrial sectors. We then show how several industries underwent important structural changes since the late 1910s which stabilized part of the labour force and allowed for union growth and collective bargaining. In agricultural labour markets or in markets in which unskilled temporary workers could not be excluded, unions benefitted from republican legislation restricting temporary migrations and, as a consequence, rural unions saw large gains membership and participation. Historical narratives that focus on state repression or on changes in living standards to explain collective action and social conflict in Spain before the Civil War are incomplete without a consideration of the role of structural changes in labour markets from 1914 to 1931.

Keywords: Structural change, social conflict, labour markets, Spain, Civil War, interwar Europe, migration, 2nd Republic

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“Structural change, collective action, and social unrest in 1930s Spain”

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May 2013

Abstract:

The Spanish 2nd Republic (1931-1936) witnessed one of the fastest and deepest processes of popular mobilization in interwar Europe, generating a decisive reactionary wave that brought the country to the Civil War (1936-1939). We show in the paper that both contemporary comment and part of the historiography makes generalizations about the behaviour of the working classes in the period that stress idealistic, re-distributive and even religious motives to join movements of protest. In some other cases, state repression, poverty, and deteriorating living standards have been singled out as the main determinants of participation. This paper uses collective action theory to argue that key institutional changes and structural changes in labour markets were crucial to understand a *significant part* of the explosive popular mobilization of the period. We argue first that, before the second Republic, temporary migrants had been the main structural limitation against the stabilization of unions and collective bargaining in agricultural labour markets and in several service and industrial sectors. We then show how several industries underwent important structural changes since the late 1910s which stabilized part of the labour force and allowed for union growth and collective bargaining. In agricultural labour markets or in markets in which unskilled temporary workers could not be excluded, unions benefitted from republican legislation restricting temporary migrations and, as a consequence, rural unions saw large gains membership and participation. Historical narratives that focus on state repression or on changes in living standards to explain collective action and social conflict in Spain before the Civil War are incomplete without a consideration of the role of structural changes in labour markets from 1914 to 1931.

Introduction

There is no doubt that 1930s Spain reached an unprecedented stage of social mobilization and political participation. Male universal suffrage had been in place since 1890 but electoral fraud and rigged elections were the norm for the whole Restoration (*Restauración*) period (1874-1923). Mass democracy, although with still too frequent problems of electoral manipulation and fraud, appeared however briefly during the Second Republic (1931-1936), with participation rates for the whole period (and that included female voters) between 65 and 70 per cent.¹ Although active in many areas since the mid 19th century, trade unionism and other forms of social capital only made a decisive break in the early 20th century, despite the fact that unions and their activists frequently faced the repression of the state or the employers and, as a result, only rarely became mass movements (with the exception of the period 1918-1920). In rural areas, where still the majority of population lived, movements of protest appeared occasionally where small proprietors were not the norm, especially among the landless peasants in Andalucía or the sharecroppers of Catalonia.² Repression however was much harsher than in the cities and these movements had an intense but otherwise short life. It was only in the 1930s that political participation, trade union membership, and strikes exploded in both rural and urban areas.

The extent of working class mobilization was spectacular in comparative terms, especially if we take into account the level of development. The membership of the socialist General Workers' Union (UGT) jumped from 228,500 members in December 1929 to 1,040,000 members in July 1932, a growth of 350%. The Anarcho-

¹ Linz, Montero, Ruiz, 'Elecciones'.

² Carmona and Simpson, 'Rabassa morta'.

Syndicalist National Confederation of Labour (CNT), banned during the Primo dictatorship, reached close to 800,000 workers at its peak.³ Trade union density doubled from about the previous peak of 13-14 % in 1920 to around 30 % in 1932, slightly above membership rates in Britain (25 %) or France (24%) and below the levels of Scandinavian countries (generally around 40 per cent of the gainfully employed).⁴

Another proxy to the extent of mobilization, strike intensity, was among the highest in interwar Europe. The striker rate (mean of the yearly number of strikers in a given period divided by the gainfully employed) for the whole period 1931-1935 was well above the European mean: 57 per 1000, almost doubling the rate of the second most strike prone country in the same period (Belgium). Peak striker rates in 1932 and 1933 were considerable as well in Spain in comparison to other European countries in the interwar years. The peak level of mobilization in the interwar years corresponded to the year of the General Strike in Britain (1926), with 240 strikers per 1,000 gainfully employed in 1926. Italy recorded 170 strikers per 1,000 employed in 1920, whilst Spain reached 150 per 1,000 employed in 1933. After the elections of February 1936, Spain witnessed an even more intense round of strike activity and union growth that was however cut short by the start of the civil war on the 18th July of 1936.⁵

³ Linz, Montero, Ruiz, 'Elecciones', p. 1328; Casanova, *De la calle*, p. 28.

⁴ Mann, 'Sources'. Trade union density calculated as the proportion of unionized workers in the overall working population (including agricultural workers). The Spanish density figures are mine using the Spanish population census of 1930.

⁵ Non-Spanish striker rates calculated using data on strikes and gainfully employed from Mitchell, *European statistics*.

There is no doubt that in Spain the unprecedented scale of working class mobilization alarmed the middle class commentators of the period. Some went so far as to consider that the Republic had degenerated into a political and social chaos that required an authoritarian solution. No one exemplifies better the ambivalent position of the middle class intelligentsia in the period than Gregorio Marañón, one of the leading intellectuals of the period. Initially a supporter of the 2nd Republic, he ended up justifying his support for the National uprising arguing that the Republic was dominated by the Moscow myth (“*el mito moscovita*”), referring to the proliferation of revolutionary ideals and the threat of a soviet-type revolution.⁶ Another leading intellectual of the 1930s, Salvador de Madariaga, wrote that by 1936 “the country has entered a plainly revolutionary phase. Neither life nor property were safe anywhere.”⁷

Genuinely puzzled by the extent and characteristics of working class mobilization, middle-class commentators stressed the atavistic behaviours of ordinary working class Spaniards and their lack of political sophistication. Gerald Brenan, for example, quoted the great historian of rural unions and protest in Andalucía, Juan Díaz del Moral, speaking about the “naiveté of many Andalusian anarchists”, something he said he could confirm after talking to Andalusian peasants in 1936.⁸ Similarly, George Orwell in *Homage to Catalonia* remarked that among Catalan and Aragonese workers “Christian belief was replaced to some extent by Anarchism, whose influence is widely spread and which undoubtedly has a religious tinge.”⁹ The eminent historian and anthropologist Julio Caro Baroja wrote about the “ (...) mass that overestimated its strength and thought the country was hers, with an absolute lack

⁶ Quoted in Gracia, *Resistencia*, p. 76.

⁷ Payne, *Collapse*, p. 223.

⁸ Brenan, *Spanish labyrinth*, p. 198.

⁹ Orwell, *Homage*, p. 57.

of intuition (sic).”¹⁰ Historian and literary critic Juan Marichal explained how, when he was a boy after talking to a peasant in Extremadura in 1936 or 1937, he wondered whether he was the “usual messianic Spaniard.”¹¹ The great Catalan journalist Agustí Calvet, “Gaziel”, writing in the period complained about the “furious madness of the masses” and the “myopia and insolvency of the Left.”¹²

Historians have generally been more careful in their characterization of the extent of working class mobilization during the Republic and the motives driving workers to join movements of protest. A perennial theme, however, is the increasing exasperation experienced by workers vis-à-vis the Republican state interpreted as a promising explanation of the visible increase of social conflict in the period. Manuel Tuñón de Lara stated “in April 1931 a general state of hope had been created with no base in reality, akin to a state of collective daydreaming.”¹³ These hopes, however, were not met by the government. Therefore, for instance, Paul Preston argued “the success of the right in blocking change would so exasperate the rural and urban working classes as to undermine their faith in parliamentary democracy.”¹⁴ In a similar vein, Helen Graham noted that, during the 2nd Republic that “the thwarting of popular aspirations in social change produced disillusion not only among the landless poor and unemployed of the rural south but also among worker constituencies in Spain.”¹⁵ Furthermore, in her book *The Spanish Republic at War* she wrote “worker dissatisfaction arrived quickly in metropolitan Spain –and most notably in the industrial heartland of Barcelona. For many workers, their daily experience was

¹⁰ Caro Baroja, *Los Baroja*, p. 241.

¹¹ Marichal, *Secreto*, p. 265.

¹² Quoted in Pericay, *Cuatro històries*, p. 702, p. 704.

¹³ Tuñón de Lara, *Tres claves*, p. 11.

¹⁴ Preston, *Spanish civil war*, p. 38.

¹⁵ Graham, *Introduction*, p. 14.

dominated by the *absence* (her emphasis) of palliative reform (for the Republic had *promised* it) alongside the brutality of what appeared to be a largely unreformed state apparatus in action.”¹⁶ Chris Ealham, in his comprehensive history of the evolution of the anarcho-syndicalist movement in Barcelona during the 1930s, wrote that by 1931: “the stage was set for confrontation between the CNT (National Confederation of Labour) and the authorities. Since the authorities were incapable of either promulgating reforms capable of placating grassroots demands or co-opting the most important community and working class leaders in Barcelona, they were obliged to confront the strike movement.”¹⁷ Similarly, greater participation and greater activism were caused by greater repression of the labour movement by the Republican government. One of the leading historians of Spanish Anarcho-syndicalism, Julián Casanova, for example remarked how already in 1932 “it was very difficult to bring together a ‘repressive’ Republic and a ‘proletariat’ that was losing faith in democracy.”¹⁸

Collective action

This paper uses classic collective action theory to argue that the unprecedented wave of popular mobilization that took place during the 2nd Republic did not mainly reflect the widespread currency of revolutionary ideologies, or the lack of political sophistication of workers, or the increasing tensions of the working class with an allegedly repressive Republican state. We argue instead that key changes in labour markets and in institutions to an important extent “caused” the phenomenal increase in participation in the period.

¹⁶ Graham, *Spanish Republic*, p. 35.

¹⁷ Ealham, *Class, culture and conflict*, p. 97.

¹⁸ Casanova, *De la calle*, p. 97.

Structural and institutional changes were particularly deep in rural labour markets and therefore rural workers mobilized to an unprecedented scale in the 1930s. The mobilization of the landless peasants benefitted especially the General Workers' Union (UGT). In the late 1920s, during the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, the socialist union had reached out to almost 250'000 members, albeit with very limited penetration among the rural workers.¹⁹ In the early 1930s, the union made strategically decided to mobilize the landless peasants of the centre and south of Spain (who, especially in the South, had leaned towards the anarcho-syndicalists).

No doubt, they had an outstanding success in doing so. From a total of around 1'0000'000 dues-paying members, in 1932 the union had almost 400'000 affiliated workers in agriculture and in 1933 the number was roughly 450'000.²⁰ Furthermore, the increase in strike activity crucially depended on the strikes of rural workers, most of them affiliates of the socialist union. In 1930, rural workers' strikers represented about 7 % of all strikers in Spain, but by 1932 slightly more than a third of strikers were organized by rural workers.²¹

The starting point of our theoretical argument is the definition of unions as institutions that aggregate the preferences of their members for especially working conditions and wages.²² Unions might care for other broader political objectives: more labour friendly laws, a more democratic polity, or a particular line in foreign policy (for example, support or opposition to a foreign war), but this does not alter the

¹⁹ Linz, Montero, Ruiz, 'Elecciones', p. 1138.

²⁰ Malefakis, *Agrarian reform*, p. 290; Bizcarrondo, *UGT*, p. 19.

²¹ *Anuario Estadístico de España*, years 1931, 1932-1933.

²² Freeman and Madoff, *What do unions do?*, pp. 9-10.

insight that the main task of unions is to bargain the working conditions of their members with the employers and the state.

According to the literature, the aggregation of individual preferences ends up identifying the collective preference with the preferences of the ‘average’ worker. In most cases, the ‘average’ worker generally corresponds to an experienced worker, who has invested some time in accumulating firm- and sector-specific skills.²³ These “average” preferences contrast with the preferences of the “marginal” worker, the one who leaves or stays depending on small changes in working conditions in the firm and in the outside labour market. The young, mobile only maximizes current productivity and earnings, not productivity during her whole life cycle. As a result, the ‘marginal’ worker prefers piece rates instead of time rates, does not mind to work long hours to maximize income, and has a weaker preference for a safe and healthy work environment. In contrast, workers who are fully committed to long-term employment in the sector or the firm prefer shorter hours and time rates, to protect future productivity and earnings.

In this simplified setting, there might be situations in which unions find it impossible to reconcile the preferences of very different types of workers.²⁴ This is especially the case when a significant majority of workers have short-term attachments to their jobs and the interests of mobile workers clash with the interest of more permanent workers. In this situation, the union is very unstable, low levels of membership prevail, and strikebreakers take the jobs of strikers. This problem, as we show below, was especially acute in Spain because temporary migrants, generally

²³ Freeman and Madoff, *What do unions do?*, pp. 9-10.

²⁴ Shiells, ‘Collective choice’.

with migrations shorter than a year and in general only some months in the year, were an almost perennial characteristic of Spanish labour markets until the 1960s.

The idea that social movements and unions in particular supply public goods to their members is another well-known insight of collective action.²⁵ Because the final result of collective action is a public good (i.e. everybody gets the same amount of the good irrespective of his or her individual participation), the almost inevitable outcome is that unions have low levels of membership and strikes generally fail to attract enough workers (who prefer to stay at home or occasionally cross the picket line). Traditionally, unions have sorted this free-rider problem in two ways. Unions might offer private benefits to their members (generally insurance) to attract membership.²⁶ Additionally, or alternatively, they can look for ways to make membership more or less compulsory by artificially increasing the private costs of free-riding the collective effort, for example by deterring strikebreakers with picket lines, enforcing social norms that ostracize strikebreakers, or, the strongest deterrent to free riders, restricting employment exclusively to those who belong to the union (the closed shop).

Following insights from collective action theory, our hypothesis is that one of the main drivers of the unprecedented mobilization was the severe disruption of the traditional pattern of temporary migrations that took place in the 1930s. There were several reasons for this. Firstly, the Republican state instituted legal impediments to the moves of temporary migrants. Secondly, several sectors like mining or textiles experienced structural changes in their demand for labour. Finally, a law of

²⁵ Olson, *Logic*, pp. 70-71.

²⁶ Boyer, 'Unions'; Van Leeuwen, 'Trade unions'.

employment (*ley de ocupación obrera*) handed to unions the power to control the local censuses of workers, which were used to establish who was the first to take a job. In fact, this control was very close to establish a *de facto* closed shop.

In order to proceed to defend our hypothesis, we follow the following steps. First, we discuss the existence of temporary migrations, a point already established by economic historian Javier Silvestre, and the data problems and provide evidence of conflicts between temporary and permanent (or mobile and long-term) workers in several important sectors of the Spanish economy before the 1930s.²⁷ We then argue that important legal changes like the law of municipal boundaries of 1931 (which gave absolute priority to local over non-local workers in access to jobs) radically altered the behaviour of temporary migrations, increasing the bargaining power of local workers in rural labour markets. We then discuss the main issues of contention in both urban and rural labour markets in the 1930s. Our argument to a great extent depends on detecting differences in the organization of unions and labour markets between rural and industrial sectors. Among the latter, we also discuss differences between sectors in which the competition of temporary migrants was important and skill-intensive sectors in which this competition did not exist. In our analysis, we find conflicts about who could be employed were more typical of rural labour markets or in sectors in which the entry of unskilled, temporary workers could not be effectively restricted. In skilled sectors, the control of new entrants via training periods and an earlier stabilization of the union reduced the importance of the closed shop.

²⁷ Silvestre, 'Temporary migrations'.

Temporary migrations and collective bargaining

Before the 1960s, the process of industrialization in Spain suffered from a characteristically slow structural change.²⁸ The slow pace of structural change was not caused by failures in labour markets since Spanish labour markets were apparently well integrated.²⁹ Economic historians generally agree that, with the exception of the 1920s, it was the pull factor of cities that faltered, meaning that the pattern of industrialization was too slow to attract permanent migrants from the underemployed rural population.

Although permanent migration was slow until the 1920s, Javier Silvestre (2007) uncovered the existence of an important pattern of temporary migrations and discussed its implications for the process of industrialization and labour market integration. Like in France, Spain was characterized by the persistence of temporary migrations, which depended on the seasonal pattern of labour demand in agriculture.³⁰ Contrary to a long working year in Northern Europe of about 300 days, in many areas of Spain, landless labourers or small proprietors only could work for a maximum of 180 to 200 days per year (unless they had a permanent attachment to a farm), looking for alternative employment elsewhere during the slack season.³¹ A great proportion of this temporary rural workers looked for employment opportunities in the successive harvesting seasons of cereal (Summer), vines (Autumn) and olives (Winter), but in many cases also found employment in urban sectors for some periods of time in the year –the most notorious case probably being mining- but also in textiles, services,

²⁸ Prados de la Escosura, *El progreso*.

²⁹ Simpson, 'Real wages'; Rosés and Sánchez Alonso, 'Regional wage convergence'.

³⁰ Magnac and Postel-Vinay, 'Wage competition'.

³¹ Simpson, 'Real wages'; Simpson, 'Labour markets'; Silvestre, 'Temporary migrations'.

and construction.³² Some of these migrations were quite different in terms of the length of the period spent away from home: agricultural migrations generally had spells well below a year, generally a few months or even weeks, whereas migrations to urban areas probably represented a far more prolonged period of time away from home (more on this below).

Despite the obvious interest of this phenomenon, by its very nature, unavoidable data problems make it difficult to gauge the extent of temporary migrations in Spain. Javier Silvestre (2007) is to date the best attempt to deal with the phenomenon quantitatively using the population censuses, although he openly acknowledges the limitations of the exercise.³³ Since census enumerators visited households at the end of the census year, many temporary migrations, especially those in which the migration spell was short and did not take place at the end of the year, were not visible in the census. Using the category of *transeúntes* (temporary migrants) in the population totals by each Spanish province (the main administrative unit of the Spanish state), Silvestre uncovers temporary out-migration rates of between 3.5 and 5.5 per cent of the total population.³⁴

Based on his careful calculation, Silvestre estimates the number of temporary migrants fluctuated between 690'000 to 1'000'000 workers at its peak in 1930, which would represent somewhere between 11 to 16 per cent of the gainfully employed (estimates of the gainfully employed in 1930 depending on the definition chosen

³² Silvestre, 'Temporary migrations'; Domenech, 'Labour market adjustment'; Domenech and Elu, 'Women's paid work'; Ferrer-Alós, 'Notas'; Sarasúa, 'Living home'.

³³ Silvestre, 'Temporary migrations', p. 548.

³⁴ Silvestre, 'Temporary migrations', p. 549.

cluster between 6.5 million to 7 million).³⁵ However, Silvestre's estimates need necessarily to be taken as lower bound estimates, since many intra-provincial migrations and migration spells of less than a year not taking place at the end of the year would be invisible in the censuses. Therefore the proportion of the phenomenon must have been larger than the benchmark estimates Silvestre provides.

According to collective action theory, if temporary migrations were so widespread, it must have been difficult for unions to reconcile the preferences of temporary and permanent workers. As we show below, the history of labour markets in Spain shows how, in fact, permanent workers clashed frequently with temporary migrants.

A typical example is mining. Despite the fact that large firms dug coal in Asturias (north of Spain) since the mid 19th century, the Asturian Miners' Union was not founded until 1910 and union was not recognized by employers until 1912. Since the coal mining establishments employed a combination of permanent and transitory workers, the inability to organize collective action by the coal miners of Asturias is not surprising. Firstly, there was a seasonal supply of miners who were farmers and peasants underemployed in winter (the "*obrero mixto*" in the literature).³⁶ Secondly, mines employed temporary migrants from other regions: from León, Navarra, Aragón, Biscay and especially from Galicia. There were several conflicts between the permanent and the temporary workers. This was especially the case of immigrants from Galicia. Characteristically, Adrian Shubert mentions a case of a violent clash between socialist workers and migrants from Galicia in one of the largest mining

³⁵ Population census, 1930.

³⁶ Ruiz, *Octubre 1934*; Shubert, *Hacia la Revolución*; Sierra Álvarez, *El obrero soñado*.

establishments.³⁷ Mistrust and hostility ran so deep, that as late as 1919 when the organization of workers from Galicia (*Centro Gallego*) petitioned for membership in the socialist union, the union refused. Songs of the revolutionaries of 1934 waxed lyrical about an Asturias free of the “Galician troops”, referring to the armies of temporary migrants from Galicia that found employment in the mines.³⁸ With such a fragmented labour force and with a ready source of strikebreakers, employers did not have to recognize the union until World War I, when the conditions for the demand for coal were exceptional.

The labour market in the iron ore mines of Biscay was similar. A government report published in 1904 on the working conditions of the mines in Biscay (North of Spain) noted: “one of the most remarkable characteristics of the mining population in Biscay is the division between *permanent* (“fijo”) and *temporary* (“*ambulante*”) workers.” According to the same report, about a 70 per cent of miners were employed on a temporary basis.³⁹ Most of them migrated from the provinces of Galicia and the North of Castilla to be employed for a limited number of years or during the slack season in winter.⁴⁰ For instance, one of the managers (Mr. Woolf) of the “Orconera Iron Ore Company Limited” recognised the costs of employing transient workers “who stay in our mines one, two or three years, most of them only for some months.” The *ambulante* was “reluctant to unionise because (...),” it was said, “he believes his ties with mining work are temporary.”⁴¹ Generally, union membership in the sector rarely surpassed ten per cent of the labour force. Additionally, the *ambulante* also

³⁷ Shubert, *Hacia la revolución*, p. 83.

³⁸ Shubert, *Hacia la revolución*, p. 84, footnote 18.

³⁹ Instituto de Reformas Sociales (from now on, IRS), *Minas de Vizcaya*, p. 187.

⁴⁰ A colourful depiction of the life in the mines of Vizcaya which puts emphasis on the rivalries created by the different regional origins of miners (quoting songs for example) is given in Ibárruri, *Único camino*, pp. 15-20.

⁴¹ IRS, *Minas de Vizcaya*, p. 189.

accepted barrack housing, credit in the company store, being paid by the month rather than the week, and longer hours to maximise pay.

The relationships between these “*fijos*” and “*ambulantes*” were undoubtedly tense.⁴² During strikes, strikers regularly clashed with temporary workers who did not support the strike.⁴³ The traditional demands of the Biscay mining unions had been the abolition of barrack housing and the truck system, the setting of a regular pattern of hours of work based on winter hours, and the abrogation of *tareas* (the payment on the basis of individual or group output). However, employers refused to deal with the union because they argued it did not represent all workers. In this context, working conditions were by and large determined by the preferences of the transient workers: long hours in summer, payment by the piece, and barrack housing. When government officials asked some Biscayan workers which system of payment they preferred, a group of miners answered: “This you have to ask to the *ambulantes*.”⁴⁴

Large cities with large service sectors provided good opportunities for temporary migrants. For example, French sociologist Jacques Valdour noted in 1919 that in the case of the Catalan urban centres: “les nombreux ouvriers qui arrivent des autres provinces d’Espagne s’emploient comme manoeuvres dans les diverses fabriques et usines: ils ne se fondent pas dans la population, n’en apprennent pas la langue, et généralement après six mois, un our deux ans, retournent chez eux avec quelque argent gagné.”⁴⁵ In addition, housemaids and domestic service work were a

⁴² Ibárruri, *Único camino*, p. 17.

⁴³ Fusi, *Política obrera*, p. 268.

⁴⁴ IRS, *Minas de Vizcaya*, p. 188.

⁴⁵ Valdour, *Ouvrier espagnol*, volume I, p. 78.

traditional market for young women.⁴⁶ Adolescent mobile work was also predominant among sales workers or waiters. The data provided by labour inspectors in the city of Madrid on the ages of waiters in the taverns of Madrid shows how the age distribution was skewed toward younger than average workers: about 40 per cent were younger than 18.⁴⁷ Evidence also suggests that these were “blind alley occupations”: jobs occupied by adolescents in big cities not requiring an initial set of skills and providing little on-the-job training. As a result, sales workers had flat earnings profiles as their earnings had little chances to increase after reaching twenty-five years of age. For example, in the agreements signed by the members of the Barcelona joint commission of sales workers and patrons in 1918-1919, minimum wages were stipulated to increase with each year of service for 14 to 24 years olds, but not after this age.⁴⁸

In addition, their employment package of many service workers was substantially different from the one prevailing in industry or the trades. Most sales workers were *internos*, meaning they lodged and ate at their patron’s house, generally in the same establishment. In the taverns of Madrid, this arrangement covered 90 per cent of workers and all qualitative evidence points to the fact that *internado* was the rule.⁴⁹ A 1914 government report stated that, as a rule, commercial workers were paid by the year or even had to wait until the termination of their employment at the establishment to be paid at all.⁵⁰ Moreover, because workers needed lodgings and food, the practice of the *internado* suggests that in big cities sales workers were recruited from nearby provinces and not from the city. Again in the cases of the taverns of Madrid, the labour inspectors remarked “the *interno* is very unstable and

⁴⁶ Sarasúa, ‘Living the family’; Domenech and Elu, ‘Women’s paid work’.

⁴⁷ IRS, *El descanso dominical*.

⁴⁸ Cámara Oficial, *Memoria 1920-1921*, pp. 179-183.

⁴⁹ IRS, *El descanso dominical*, p. 20.

⁵⁰ IRS, *Preparación de un proyecto*, p. 58.

changes frequently when there are no family ties with the patron,” and added “he (the *interno*) is hired from all the provinces of Spain, but preferably from these neighbouring Madrid.”⁵¹

Therefore, the sector characteristically employed workers operating a regional labour market for unskilled, adolescent work. In the case of *interno* workers, employment spells were short. This labour market offered little prospects for workers after the age of marriage. Again, the collective action problem appears with weak trade unions and in the conflict between these workers willing to invest in the improvement of working conditions in the sector and these planning to shift to other occupations or return to their towns of origin. As a result, the unions of sales workers took longer to develop fully. The Catalan CADCI (*Centre Autonomista de Dependents de Comerç i de la Indústria*), for example, did not start serious campaigns to abolish Sunday work or the *internado* until 1912 and membership only started to grow in the late 1910s.⁵²

However, it was in rural labour markets where conflicts between temporary and permanent workers became more salient. For example, in the cereal area of Andalusia, local rural workers faced competition from *forasteros*, temporary migrants from generally poorer regions (from Extremadura, Portugal or the Western Andalusian provinces).⁵³ These migrant workers preferred to maximize productivity, reduce the time it took to collect the harvest and be paid according to output, exploiting the small differences of harvest times in different towns. Employers, on the

⁵¹ IRS, *El descanso dominical*, p. 19.

⁵² Lladonosa, *Centre Autonomista*, p. 223, p. 286, chapter 5, pp. 180-225, is about the first union campaigns.

⁵³ IRS, *Información*, p. 15, p. 41.

other hand, paid piece rates that effectively dealt with the problem of monitoring workers' effort. With low labour costs, mechanization was not profitable and therefore harvesting continued to be done by human labour only.⁵⁴ In contrast, local workers had the exact opposite set of incentives. They preferred to maximize the number of days that they were employed (because the working year was so short), to be paid a time rate rather than a piece rate and to work shorter hours rather than *de sol a sol* (from sunrise to sunset); local workers were viscerally opposed to the recruitment of *forasteros*.⁵⁵

The clash of preferences between local workers and “*agosteros*” (temporary workers employed in the harvest jobs) appeared in with special intensity in the wave of strikes that swept the cereal-growing towns of Central Andalucía in 1918-1919. Despite the efforts of unions to mitigate competition of temporary migrants (*forasteros*), unions only rarely succeeded in enforcing a collective contract and banning the employment of non-locals. Juan Díaz del Moral gave detailed evidence that the use of boycotts to ostracize *forastero* workers who were not affiliated with the union became very effective only in 1919, although the practice declined thereafter.⁵⁶ Because harvest jobs were labour-intensive and required few skills, employers saw little benefit in cooperating with local workers; thus, they tended to oppose unions and continued contracting gangs of temporary workers. The abundance of cheap labour made mechanization unprofitable. Reflecting the traditional dislike for temporary migrants, the harvesters of Castro del Río, in Córdoba, drew up a

⁵⁴ Simpson, ‘Did tariffs?’, p. 82; Simpson, *Long siesta*, p. 160.

⁵⁵ Simpson, ‘Labour markets’; IRS, *Información*, p. 8, p. 15, p. 33, p. 41, p. 171.

⁵⁶ Díaz del Moral, *Historia*, p. 317, p. 333, pp. 337-338.

characteristic collective contract in 1919 that demanded above all the banning of piece rates and the preferential hiring of local workers over non-locals.⁵⁷

Early 20th century reports also give further information of clashes between temporary migrants and local workers in other rural labour markets. A survey of working conditions and contract in the rice-growing area of Valencia in 1916 argued that the local supply of workers was not enough in the harvest time during the late summer and early autumn.⁵⁸ Rice needs to be harvested quickly to minimize the risks of the potential damages caused by storms, which are frequent in the area at that time of the year.⁵⁹ Wages contracted on a daily basis and long hours were the norm. In some cases, his estimates of local needs of temporary workers in the range of 50 to 75 per cent of the total number of workers employed. Similar peaks of labour needs can also be found in fruit-picking campaigns in the same area.⁶⁰

In contrast with the previous cases, working class cohesion was strongest in cities and heavily industrialized areas of the North and North-East, where in skill-intensive sectors, workers had a long tradition of collective action with well-enforced social norms guaranteeing high participation (collective violence against strikebreakers being the most typical one). More importantly, unions' control over the process of skill-building and the subsequent slow penetration of recent migrants in skill-intensive sectors generally gave unions the upper hand in the market. There were some important exceptions to this pattern; in the construction industry or in the traditional service occupations, like waiters or shop assistants, permanent workers

⁵⁷ Díaz del Moral, *Historia*, p. 330.

⁵⁸ García Cáceres, *Cultivo arroz*, p. 10.

⁵⁹ García Cáceres, *Cultivo arroz*, p. 9.

⁶⁰ IRS, *Industria naranjera*, p. 8; Bernaldo de Quirós, *Contrato colectivo*.

faced the competition of temporary workers. Unless unions were openly repressed, urban labour markets displayed a spontaneous tendency towards the collective organization and standardization of working conditions (via collective contracts) and the more or less explicit recognition of unions.

It is easy to find many early examples of collective contracts and autonomous organization in skill-intensive sectors since the 1840s. Genís Barnosell, for example, mentions the agreements on piece rates for weaver and spinners in Barcelona in 1841 and the formalization of some collective bargaining via the first joint board of employers and workers.⁶¹ Collective contracts existed in many cities for the printing industry, barrel-making and in many artisanal jobs in the early 20th century. In the case of Barcelona, Miguel Sastre compiled several collective contracts for several groups of workers striking in the very early 20th century. Among others, only in 1903 for example he reported the very detailed local collective contracts of cartwrights, carpenters, construction workers, hatters, bakers, shoemakers, sawyers, foundry workers, printers, bookbinders, or stone cutters.⁶²

Industrial markets

In the case of labour markets in skill-intensive industrial sectors, most union mobilization in the 1930s did not depend on coercive instruments or on compulsory membership (like the closed shop). We show below how in fact entry restrictions (“*el turno*”) was not in fact a predominant demand of those sectors. However, in some industries that provided entry jobs for temporary migrants the situation was not as

⁶¹ Barnosell, *Orígens*, p. 174.

⁶² Sastre, *Huelgas de Barcelona*.

peaceful. Chris Ealham notes that one of the most common grievances of anarcho-syndicalist unions in 1931 Barcelona was the recognition of labour exchanges controlled by the anarcho-syndicalist *CNT* (National Confederation of Labour).⁶³ This type of demand was especially salient among workers in the fields of dock work and building construction, where competition from new (unskilled) entrants would have been particularly intense. Eulàlia Vega writes that one of the main demands of an early November 1930 strike by carpenters (*ramo de la madera*) in the city of València was for the organization of a labour exchange controlled by the union. She also stresses that, as this was not met by employers, it became a source of constant conflict during the 1930s in the construction sector.⁶⁴ In his detailed study of social conflicts in the building industry in Madrid between 1931 and 1934, Santos Juliá notes that rival anarcho-syndicalist and Catholic unions complained about the fact that to find a job in Madrid's construction sector, it was necessary to belong to the General Workers' Union -UGT.⁶⁵ In a similar vein, in the service sector, several measures were taken to reduce the competition in entry-level jobs. There was a general trend toward forbidding *internado*, young temporary migrants' practice of sleeping and eating in the same shop that employed them, which in fact eliminated the competition from young temporary migrants. The worker's minimum age was increased from 14 to 16. In many cases, several limitations on the employment of women were enforced.⁶⁶

Attempts to limit access to jobs in the construction industry (or among dockers) contrast with the situation in the textile industry in Catalonia, for example.

⁶³ Ealham, *Class, culture and conflict*, p. 91.

⁶⁴ Vega, *Anarquistas*, p. 42, p. 43, p. 45.

⁶⁵ Juliá, *Madrid*, p. 214, p. 231.

⁶⁶ Several collective contracts of sales workers in González Rothvoss, *Anuario*, pp. 1269-1377.

Although the anarcho-syndicalist union of the cotton textile workers explicitly campaigned for the closed shop in 1931, the issue did not seem to attract a lot of attention in the period. Electrification in the 1920s, which stabilized labour demand throughout the year, probably reconciled the preferences of workers employed in urban factories (which had a fairly constant demand for labour throughout the year) and with those in isolated, water-powered factories (which used to close down in the summer due to the summer draught and used temporary workers).⁶⁷ After massive general strikes, collective contracting for the entire Catalonian cotton textile sector had failed in 1890 and again in 1913.⁶⁸ In 1931, a new collective contract was drawn up for the so-called “Mountain” area (of water-powered company towns) that approximated working conditions to those prevalent in the urban factories. The main issues bargained for by the union in 1931 were related to the length of the working day, the distributional impact of the motherhood subsidy (since the sector was a traditional employer of women), one-week paid holidays and short time; union demands made no reference to the closed shop.⁶⁹ By stabilizing labour demand throughout the year, electrification made possible the reconciliation of the preferences of hitherto heterogenous types of workers. In the 1930s, regional collective contracting became possible in the Catalan cotton textile sector.

Similarly, in skilled sectors in which it was easy to restrict entry and in which unions were easily stabilized, union recognition appeared almost spontaneously, and

⁶⁷ Between 1913 and 1926 hydroelectric power generated multiplied by 5 from the low 1913 levels, Sudriá, ‘Energía’, p. 323, Sudriá and Bartolomé, ‘Era del carbón’, p. 89. This change was particularly fast in Catalonia, where most of the cotton textile industry was located (Sudriá and Bartolomé, ‘Era del carbón’, p. 89). By 1929, almost 80 per cent of the horsepower used by the textile industry was of hydroelectric origin, Betrán, ‘Natural resources’.

⁶⁸ Izard, *Tres Clases de Vapor*, pp. 117-118; Ferrer, *1er de Maig*, pp. 61-68; IRS, *Huelga del arte fabril*.

⁶⁹ Cabrera, *La patronal*, p. 205; Balcells, *Crisis económica*, p. 209.

collective bargaining was the natural outcome of the legalization of unions in 1930. In fact, there is very little evidence that in industrial sectors the closed shop was important, barely appearing in the mass of collective contracts signed in the period. We have collected 357 provincial and local collective contracts in industrial sectors (excluding the garment industry) using Mariano González-Rothvoss' compilation of collective contracts published in 1935. Among other things, the contracts have very detailed clauses stipulating wages for all occupations, hours of work, fringe benefits and imposing restrictions on lay offs. However, only 3% openly established the closed shop.⁷⁰

Furthermore, the evidence from employers' associations in industrial sectors does not suggest there were significant conflicts over the closed shop or the union's control over new entrants. The state sponsored labour exchanges, and local lists of employed and unemployed workers were drawn up. This undertaking was organized by the main corporatist institution of the period, the local board of conciliation, the *jurado mixto*. In many cases, collective contracts stipulated that the *jurado mixto* was to draw and organize the list, which enabled unions to control the flow of entrants into their sector and to demand membership and participation in exchange for access to jobs. About half of the collective contracts we have surveyed explicitly forced employers to contract only from the local census or labour exchange (179 out of 357), but there is little evidence that employers were overtly troubled by this. According to Mercedes Cabrera's extensive survey of employers' lobbying in the 1930s, contrary to the employers in the rural sector as we show below, the control by unions over the hiring of workers does not appear as an important issue for employers in industrial

⁷⁰ González Rothvoss, *Anuario*.

sectors. Rather, employers' associations protested against the way *jurados mixtos* were organized. As the boards contained six employer representatives and six worker representatives, most voting decisions were, in fact, decided by the vote of the president of the *jurado*, who tended to be elected by the Ministry of Labour because employers and workers almost never agreed on who was to be the president. Taking data for 1932 only, in conciliation settlements, the *jurados* favored the worker or group of workers in about 70% of the cases in the provinces of Madrid (4844 times out of 6860) and Barcelona (1535 out of 2200).⁷¹ To a great extent, employers felt that because conciliation – almost invariably favorable to workers – was imposed on them, they did not have any legal buffer against the drawing up of yet another collective contract with higher wages and shorter hours.⁷²

Coal miners in Asturias represent perhaps the most challenging example to explain with our hypothesis given the enormous qualitative and quantitative change in the nature of collective action. As we mentioned above, the *Sindicato Minero Asturiano* (SMA, Asturian Miners' Union) was not recognized by the employers until 1912, which was hardly surprising giving the predominance of seasonal workers and temporary migrants. In sharp contrast, in the 1930s, coal miners in the province of Oviedo had become without any doubt the most cohesive social movement in Spain. In October 1934, the coal miners of Asturias were to stage a full-blown 2-weeks long rebellion in which all the mining towns were seized up by the miners and the capital of the province was taken by a militia of workers. In 1932 and 1933, the province of Oviedo (Asturias) scored the highest striker rate in the country by a large margin

⁷¹ *Anuario Estadístico de España, 1932-1933*, p. 659.

⁷² Cabrera, *La patronal*, pp. 202-215; Balcells, *Crisis económica*, p. 187, p. 205. Balcells, *Crisis económica*, p. 215, footnote 29, gives a very good example of employers' complaints by reproducing a letter of the Federation of Catalan employers, led by the Fomento de Trabajo Nacional, published in *La Vanguardia* on the 20th July of 1933.

(more than 300 per 1000 workers in 1932 and 1933, probably the highest striker rate in any region in interwar Europe). Union densities stood at levels close to 70 per cent. In 1933, La Felguera (18'000 inhabitants) withstood a general strike of 9 months. There were 32 strikes in the first 9 months of 1934, three of them general strikes lasting various weeks.⁷³ For obvious reasons, their collective contract did not bother to enforce the closed shop and did not establish the obligatory use of the labour exchange.⁷⁴

Although one can argue about the impact of the decline of coal prices and the concomitant erosion of miners' working conditions and living standards, the fact is that the labour market for miners changed dramatically from 1914 to 1920, increasing the proportion of workers committed to long-term employment in mining. Large changes in the international market for coal fundamentally altered the relative wages and employment prospects of miners. In 1912, a long strike of British miners opened up new markets for the expensive and generally low quality Asturian coal and after a strike the owners were forced to recognize the Asturian Miners' Union (*Sindicato Minero Asturiano*). In 1914 and 1918, spectacular shortages in coal markets caused prices and later output to go up, along with employment and wages. Employment grew 5-fold between 1910 and 1920, from slightly fewer than 6'000 workers in Oviedo employed in mines and quarries in 1900 and 1910 to almost 30'000 in 1920.⁷⁵ In this process, real wages grew more than 50 per cent.⁷⁶ Changes in relative wages

⁷³ Shubert, *Hacia la Revolución*, p. 198.

⁷⁴ González Rothvoss, *Anuario*, "Bases del trabajo minero de Oviedo" (29th January 1932).

⁷⁵ Taking the number of workers employed in "Mines and quarries" in the province of Oviedo from the Population Censuses of 1900, 1910 and 1920. Workers employed in quarries represent a small proportion of the overall number, for example roughly 500 workers out of 5,900 in 1900.

⁷⁶ Consejo de la Minería, *Estadística Minera*, various years.

and employment prospects must have meant that the labour force became more committed to long-term employment than in the pre-war years.

After the unprecedented expansion, the prospects of the industry turned upside down in the postwar years. Uncompetitive in most foreign markets, the coal industry had now a serious problem of excess capacity. The size of the adjustment was severe: coal prices fell by around 70 per cent from the 1918 peak, around a third of jobs were lost and miners experienced large nominal wage cuts in 1921 and 1923 (which were however somehow mitigated by deflation). Rather than revolutionary, in 1920s the strategy of the union was seriously pragmatic. The immediate political objective was securing tariff protection and a privileged position in domestic markets, two objectives that were close to the interests of their employers. However, the medium- to long-run objective was the nationalization of the mines, a change in property rights that surely would not please the mine owners. In the late 1920s, the most moderate demands of miners (and also of mine owners) were met and the regime granted special privileges to coal producers like tariff protection and the compulsory consumption of coal in several sectors of the economy like the navy or railways.⁷⁷

By 1930, the coal mines of Asturias still employed about 20'000 workers. The sector had been granted several privileges but the serious problem of excess capacity remained. In the 1930s, employers tried to cut wages, but short-time and lay offs were the main source of adjustment in the sector. The industry became the most strike-prone by a large margin during the Second Republic. The pragmatic behaviour of the

⁷⁷ Coll and Sudriá, *Carbón*, pp. 173-174.

Asturian coal miners' union in the 1920s did not anticipate the revolutionary explosion of 1934, but the intensity of conflict in the early 1930s were certainly a precedent. It is beyond the aims of this article to explain the causes of the Asturias October revolution of 1934. Suffice to say for our purposes that in the 1930s Asturian miners clearly formed the most cohesive, disciplined group of workers in Spain, exemplifying the type of group described by revolution specialist Jack Goldstone when he writes:

“studies of revolution and rebellion have shown that it is often not the groups that were just beginning to enjoy institutionalized political access, but these groups that had made considerable gains in institutional power and then were suddenly excluded, or that had acquired considerable economic power and felt entitled to a greater political role, that produced the most violently or revolutionary mobilization.”⁷⁸

Rural markets:

In rural labour markets, 1931 marked a watershed. In a labour market with low barriers to entry (for example, no specialized skills were needed for harvest work) and a weak tradition of collective action, union control on entry was a priority to guarantee that workers would not have a strong incentive to contract individually and break strikes. In 1931, two legislative changes altered the functioning of rural labour markets in fundamental ways and gave unions greater control over who would get the scarce jobs available. The Law of Municipal Boundaries (*ley de términos municipales*, finally derogated in May of 1934) forbade the recruitment of transient migrants and workers from other towns if there were local unemployed workers.

⁷⁸ Goldstone, 'More Social Movements or Fewer?', p. 345.

Moreover, via the Worker Employment Law of October 1931 (*ley de ocupación obrera*), the local conciliation board organized the list of employable workers and established priority in accessing agricultural jobs. In 1933, an anti-vagrancy law (*Ley de Vagos y Maleantes*) made it ever more difficult to move around the country in search of temporary employment.

An important caveat here is that the law of municipal boundaries suffered several changes until it was finally derogated in May 1934. For example, the prefect of the province of Córdoba, in Andalucía, allowed for some mobility in the province in the olive-picking campaign in the winter of 1932 establishing three zones in which mobility was complete (a husbandry, cereal and olive-growing zone).⁷⁹ Similarly, several exceptions to the law were established in Extremadura. A decree of September 1931 allowed for a relaxation of the municipal boundary in the cases of the grape and olive harvests and this was allowed especially in these cases in which a town with a low labour to land ratio neighboured one with a higher labour to land ratio.⁸⁰ In 1932, like in Córdoba, several areas consisting of several towns were created in which mobility was allowed, and later on in 1933, full labour mobility was granted in the two provinces of Extremadura (separately).⁸¹ These changes suggest legislation was flexible enough to respond to local shortages of labour during harvest time, however they still point at a severe limitation of at least the interprovincial movements of temporary migrants.

The empirical question then is to what extent were the temporary migrations disrupted as a result of institutional changes? The population census does not help us

⁷⁹ ABC, 7th December 1932.

⁸⁰ Riesco, 'Lucha por la tierra', p. 131.

⁸¹ Riesco, 'Lucha por la tierra', p. 132.

here. The 1930 census was taken before the law was passed, and the next censuses were taken in 1940, when the law had been abrogated and independent unions were not legal. Therefore, censuses would not capture any temporary (but fundamental) break in the 1930s. In order to uncover the behaviour of temporary migrations and rural unions in the 1930s, we have to turn to the qualitative evidence. Reading the qualitative evidence is far from obvious. For example, there are thousands of towns and cities in the latifundia regions of Spain and the qualitative evidence we are presenting here mentions only some towns. Obviously, one wants to avoid biases based on prior beliefs and since we are sustaining the hypothesis that temporary migrations declined significantly in the 1930s, we will have a natural tendency to downplay cases in which temporary migrants worked instead of local workers. We will first present the most general statements we have found in the literature and newspapers about the relationships between temporary and local workers which inevitably point at the inability of temporary migrants in most regions to find jobs outside their towns of origin. Then, we will show there were several conflicts between local and temporary workers. We finally present real wage evidence showing the bargaining power of workers was high in the 1930s, as it was in the period 1918-1919.

The qualitative evidence we have on the functioning of rural labour markets suggests temporary workers had a much harder time finding employment during the peaks of labour demand. Jerome Mintz quoted the testimony of a worker in Casas Viejas (Cádiz), who speaking mainly about the situation in 1931: “When the eight-hour day came in, contract labour (meaning individual contracting) was wiped out. But some always worked by contract out of selfishness. The worker, through

ignorance or selfishness, did not respect the rights of his fellow workers.”⁸² Similarly, another of his interviewees manifested, “under the eight-hour work rule, contract labour was greatly reduced, although some landowners anxious for a rapid harvest and some workers eager for a quick profit continued to perpetuate the system.”⁸³

Despite the similar cases in which temporary workers were employed, in Andalucía, the evidence points at severe restrictions in the mobility of workers. In July 1931, an MP from Málaga wrote to a letter to the president of the Republic complaining that the province of Málaga had about 40'000 unemployed workers who could not find work in Granada or Sevilla, as they traditionall did in periods of peak labour demand.⁸⁴ In Carmona (Sevilla), as well in 1931, when sugarbeet producers told the prefect of the province they wanted to keep their specialised, *forastero* workers, the prefect answered that he could not authorise the employment of non-locals if there were local unemployed workers.⁸⁵ The prefect of Córdoba manifested local workers had absolute priority and ordered the gangs of temporary workers to go back to their towns, if needed with the help of the *Guardia Civil* (state police).⁸⁶ In June 1932, the prefect of Jaén announced some complaints about the employment of non-locals had reached him and that he was going to be inflexible with the landowners in those cases in which they were unemployed local workers.⁸⁷ In July 1932, the prefect of Salamanca said he was levying fines to several employers who were not employing local unemployed workers and were hiring *forasteros* instead.⁸⁸

⁸² Mintz, *Casas Viejas*, p. 133.

⁸³ Mintz, *Casas Viejas*, p. 132.

⁸⁴ El Sol, 15th July 1931.

⁸⁵ El Sol, 15th August 1931; La Vanguardia 23rd August 1931.

⁸⁶ ABC, Seville edition, 7th June 1931.

⁸⁷ El Sol, 3rd June 1932.

⁸⁸ La Vanguardia, 25th June 1932.

In 1933, the prefect of Cádiz jailed “several employers” who were employing Portuguese workers.⁸⁹

In Extremadura, Sergio Riesco uncovered several protests of mayors complaining to the ministry of Interior that workers could not find work in other towns. In the case of Cañaveral (Cáceres), the mayor complained about how spread unemployment was and how workers in the town could not find employment anywhere else. Riesco also reports other cases from Albalá and San Vicente de Alcántara in the same province.⁹⁰

Very significant is the testimony of a rural landowner from Castilla León (not specifying the town, nor the province) which appeared in June 1934 (during the rural workers’ general strike) in the newspaper *El Sol* arguing that in 1933 (a year of a poor harvest) the surplus of local workers had not dared to look for employment elsewhere during harvest time and that in 1934 (a year of an exceptionally good harvest) he was not confident they could get temporary migrants to harvest the wheat quickly.⁹¹ In a famous strike in the province of Salamanca in 1933, the union denounced employers did not honour the *turno* and did not employ workers from the local census of workers. The state stepped in to disband the gangs of workers contracted by employers and enforce the *turno*. A lock-out ensued, in which rural employers insisted on free contracting. The General Workers’ Union (UGT) decided to call for a general strike of rural workers in the province. Finally, an agreement was reached,

⁸⁹ *El Sol*, 20th May 1933.

⁹⁰ Riesco, ‘Lucha por la tierra’, pp. 132-135.

⁹¹ *El Sol*, 6th June 1934.

stipulating that the civil governor and the Ministry of Labour delegate of the province would draw and organize the list of eligible workers.⁹²

Similarly, Fernando del Rey reports several conflicts between locals and *forasteros* in the province of Ciudad Real, especially as *forastero* workers from other provinces were not allowed to work in the grape-picking campaign of the Valdepeñas and Manzanares areas. Similarly, he mentions how in Miguelturra (Ciudad Real), workers who generally worked in the fields of Ciudad Real remained unemployed staging a violent general strike in July 1931.⁹³

Conflicts between temporary *forasteros* and local workers abound in the 1930s. The great writer Miguel de Unamuno complained bitterly in 1932 about the level of conflict between workers in different towns, between those who were accepted into the lists of the local exchanges and those excluded and the enormous power wielded by those who made the lists.⁹⁴ These conflicts were particularly extreme during strikes during the harvest season. In July 1931, in Baena (Jaén), rural workers won a strike against the non-local workers employed in the town.⁹⁵ In the same month, workers in Utrera (Sevilla) threatened that they would go to a general strike if *forastero* workers were not evicted from the town.⁹⁶ Or a group of workers from La Rinconada (Sevilla) visited the prefect so that the conditions stipulated in the collective contract would be guaranteed, most especially the restrictions on the hiring

⁹² Cabrera, *La patronal*, pp. 156-158.

⁹³ Rey, *Paisanos en lucha*, pp. 123-125, p. 293.

⁹⁴ El Sol, 5th June 1932: “(...) En el fondo, lucha de clasificación. Quién será bracero *listado* y quién será ojeador –trabajador de ojo, *listero*.” Emphasis added.

⁹⁵ El Sol, 11th July 1931.

⁹⁶ El Sol, 18th July 1931; La Vanguardia, 18th July 1931, 29th July 1931.

of non-local workers.⁹⁷ In Casas Viejas (Cádiz), where peasants and the Civil Guard tragically clashed in 1933, local workers went on strike in May 1932 to oppose the contracting of Portuguese labourers for the harvest. In June 1932, another strike occurred because landowners did not comply with the collective contract and hired workers outside of the employment exchanges.⁹⁸ In June 1932, 1200 harvest-workers went on strike in a town in Toledo to force the employers to dismiss the non-local workers.⁹⁹ In another town in Toledo, a group of local workers entered a farm to throw out a group of about 40 non-locals. In Lebrija (Sevilla), strikers entered the cortijos to *evict* the non-local workers and the clash with the Guardia Civil left 3 workers wounded.¹⁰⁰ In Torredonjimeno (Jaén), workers complained employers were not contracting through the local exchange and the strikers forced the *forastero* workers to leave.¹⁰¹ In July 1932, in Arévalo (Ávila) local workers prevented *forasteros* to work the fields whilst on strike.¹⁰² In June 1934, workers from Linares (Jaén) shot a group of strikebreakers from Bailén and Jabalquinta (also in Jaén), seriously wounding several of them.¹⁰³ Workers from Montejo (Badajoz) were reported to enter a cortijo to expel the *forastero* workers, who had to be protected by the Guardia Civil.¹⁰⁴ In Villafranca or in Fuenteovejuna (Córdoba), the strikes of June 1934 ended with non-locals being expelled from the towns.¹⁰⁵

In light of these levels of conflict, our claim is that temporary migrations were seriously disrupted, not that they disappeared completely. The prefect of Jaén

⁹⁷ El Sol, 15th August 1931.

⁹⁸ Mintz, *Casas Viejas*, p. 166.

⁹⁹ El Sol, 23rd June 1932.

¹⁰⁰ La Vanguardia, 1st June 1932.

¹⁰¹ El Sol, 10th June 1932.

¹⁰² El Sol, 8th July 1932.

¹⁰³ ABC, 6th June 1934.

¹⁰⁴ El Sol, 9th June 1934.

¹⁰⁵ El Sol, 12th June 1934.

complained several owners were employing non-local workers for the harvest.¹⁰⁶ When the workers of Mocejón or Malpica (both in Toledo) went on strike in June 1932, there were groups of *forastero* harvesters ready to take up their jobs.¹⁰⁷ When about 200 workers working in the dam of Guadalcacín (Cádiz) went on strike, there were non-local workers ready to take up their jobs.¹⁰⁸ In Cañizo (Zamora) a worker was shot to death by the Guardia Civil, which had clashed with a group of strikers protesting against the employment of *forasteros*.¹⁰⁹ In Villanueva de San Carlos (Ciudad Real), local workers entered a *finca* to evict the temporary migrants employed there.¹¹⁰

Although locals could strike against the employment of temporary migrants, the main tool used by the rural unions to guarantee local workers got jobs first was the local census or list of workers, which also established the order in which workers would be hired, the *turno*. The surviving collective contracts we have all established the priority of local workers when there were unemployed or underemployed local workers. Mariano González-Rothvoss compiled 36 local, regional or provincial rural collective contracts for the agricultural sector, which covered a majority of rural wage labour in the years 1932-1934. Of those, a third did not contain clauses establishing the conditions to hire workers. About two thirds instead had clauses stipulating it was compulsory to hire from the local workers' exchange and the priority of local workers over non-locals (in industrial labour markets about half stipulated it was compulsive for employers to hire from the labour exchange).¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ El Sol, 3rd June 1932.

¹⁰⁷ El Sol, 1st June 1932.

¹⁰⁸ El Sol, 23rd June 1932.

¹⁰⁹ ABC, 8th July 1931.

¹¹⁰ El Sol, 18th July 1934.

¹¹¹ Own calculations from González Rothvoss, *Anuario español*.

The qualitative evidence also points at substantial changes of labour recruiting practices. Traditionally, workers were recruited by the *cortijo* overseers for the day or a particular job in the squares of towns. In the 1930s, the union now organized this service in towns as far apart as Mijas (Almería), Los Olivos (Huelva), La Solana (Ciudad Real) and Belmonte de los Caballeros (Aragón). In the case of Mijas, Ronald Fraser showed how the union organized the matching of vacancies and the list of employable workers.¹¹² Jerome Mintz mentioned the testimony of a worker in Casas Viejas arguing he joined the union because “they said if one didn’t sign with the *sindicato*, one could not get work.”¹¹³ Carmelo Lisón-Tolosana, in the case of Belmonte de los Caballeros (in Aragón), emphasized the union’s role in controlling the labour exchange and described the way in which these local exchanges worked:

“In the town the union took the following form: a tavern in the market square was used as a labour exchange, membership of which was obligatory. If a farmer needed a labourer or labourers for work in his fields, he was not allowed to deal with them directly nor could they offer their services to anyone. They had to go to the exchange, give their names, and usually to wait there in the tavern until someone wanting farmhands that day employed the man or men whose names were at the top of the list.”¹¹⁴

In *Socialists of rural Andalusia*, George A. Collier’s discusses how in 1931 the union contested the hiring of workers for municipal public works by the conservative mayor and insisted “that workers had to join the union in order to be eligible for wages paid from public funds earmarked to relieve the *crisis obrera*.”¹¹⁵

¹¹² Fraser, *In hiding*, pp. 106-107; Fraser, *Mijas*, p. 60.

¹¹³ Mintz, *Casas Viejas*, p. 164, as well p. 167, p. 173.

¹¹⁴ Lisón-Tolosana, *Belmonte de los Caballeros*, p. 46.

¹¹⁵ Collier, *Socialists*, p. 79.

The union also defined who was eligible for harvest or municipal jobs: “some of the small holders and artisans who had joined the union initially to have access to jobs found themselves defined *patronos* (employers) when they hired other workers.”¹¹⁶ Fernando del Rey shows how unions arranged for the contracting of unemployed rural workers in municipal public works schemes as a way of combating unemployment, a strategy that discriminated in favor of UGT members.¹¹⁷ If we look at the grievances of the massive general strike of June 1934, its main demands had to do with specific organization clauses but the most important was the *turno*, the order in which workers would be offered a job, always prioritizing local workers over temporary migrants. Other important demands were the banning of mechanical reapers, the drawing up of new collective contracts and the creation of local committees to enforce them.¹¹⁸

How can we finally reconcile the whole qualitative evidence? Probably the best evidence comes from looking at real wages in rural labour markets, in which it is clear unions’ control of labour markets in from 1918 to 1920 and the 1930s are associated with large real wage gains. The series used combines data on nominal wages with cost of living evidence for rural towns only. We compare this evidence with average real wages from the industrial sector (employing cost of living deflators from large cities).¹¹⁹

As figure 1 shows, rural wages were substantially eroded by inflation in the years of the World War I. This contrasts with moderate real wage declines in industry where wages were clearly “stickier”. Despite high inflation, rural unions were able to

¹¹⁶ Collier, *Socialists*, pp. 84-85.

¹¹⁷ Rey, *Paisanos en lucha*, p. 346.

¹¹⁸ Malefakis, *Agrarian reform*, pp. 335-336; Cabrera, *La Patronal*, p. 192.

¹¹⁹ Wages are taken from Maluquer de Motes and Llonch, ‘Trabajo’, p. 1220 and the cost of living indices from Maluquer de Motes ‘Consumo’, p. 1289.

increase real wages in 1918-1920, and obtain moderate nominal wage gains in 1921 and 1922, which combined with deflation increased real wages further. The 1920s, when unions were not legal, are characterized by stagnant real wages. The 1928 increase is both a small nominal wage increase of 6 per cent combined with a deflation of the cost of living of 11 per cent. In 1929 and 1930 inflation eroded real wages. It was in the 1930s that large nominal wage gains clearly outstripped moderate inflation rates. With plausibly low or zero labour productivity changes in the large latifundia regions (where mechanization advanced only slowly) and stagnant wheat prices between 1925 and 1935, those real wage gains most plausibly reflect rents captured by the unions for the local workers.¹²⁰ This in fact probably reflected a redistribution of rents away from employers and non-local workers towards the “local workers”.

INSERT FIGURE 1

Summing up: in rural labour markets, the crippling effect of temporary migrations on the growth and stabilization of unions disappeared in the 1930s. The evidence so far presented on strikes and conflicts also shows that unions made great efforts to control the access to jobs and the labour exchanges. Legislation to a great extent was enforced, although not fully enforced. By being able to restrict the mobility of temporary workers, unions were boosted by a situation that was very close to a full closed shop, which sorted out the phenomenal collective active problems that were typical in the organization of the landless workers. “Local” workers captured the rents available in harvest work, to the detriment of employers and non-local workers.

¹²⁰ Wheat prices from Barciela et al., ‘Sector agrario’, pp. 336-337.

This does not mean rural workers did not care for working conditions and employment in a labour market context in which the supply of labour clearly outstripped the demand for labour. It also does not mean their living standards were not low and their working conditions hard by any current standard. But the explosive participation we see in the 1930s certainly had to do with the existence of very strong incentives to join the union and participate in strikes, which explains the phenomenal organizational success of the socialist General Workers' Union in the 1930s, especially after 1932. In markets traditionally characterized by free entry, unions' control of labour market meant rural workers captured substantial rents.

Conclusions

What explains the gigantic increase in social unrest in 1930s Spain? Traditional explanations in the literature have focussed on the inherent unruliness of the popular masses, the unavoidable revolutionary roots of the Spanish labour movement, the effects of poverty, unemployment, and declining living standards, or the side-effects of the repression of the labour movement by the state. This paper instead argues that fundamental changes in labour markets and their institutions, especially in rural labour markets, are key to understand the explosive growth of strikes and union membership in the 1930s. First of all, by reducing the prevalence of temporary migrations, unions were able to protect themselves from strikebreakers. Moreover, via the employment exchanges, unions and permanent workers were able to rigidly control the entry of new workers into the labour market. This historical case study illuminates two aspects of collective action theory. First, it shows that unions might have trouble in reconciling the preferences of very different sets of workers. Second, it shows how unions and other collective action movements obtain large increases in

membership by making membership compulsive or by substantially increasing the costs of not-participating. Obviously, this does not diminish the fairness of the grievances put forward by Spanish unions in the 1930s, but rather it is more telling of fundamental aspects of mass social movements, especially in a context of a developing economy.

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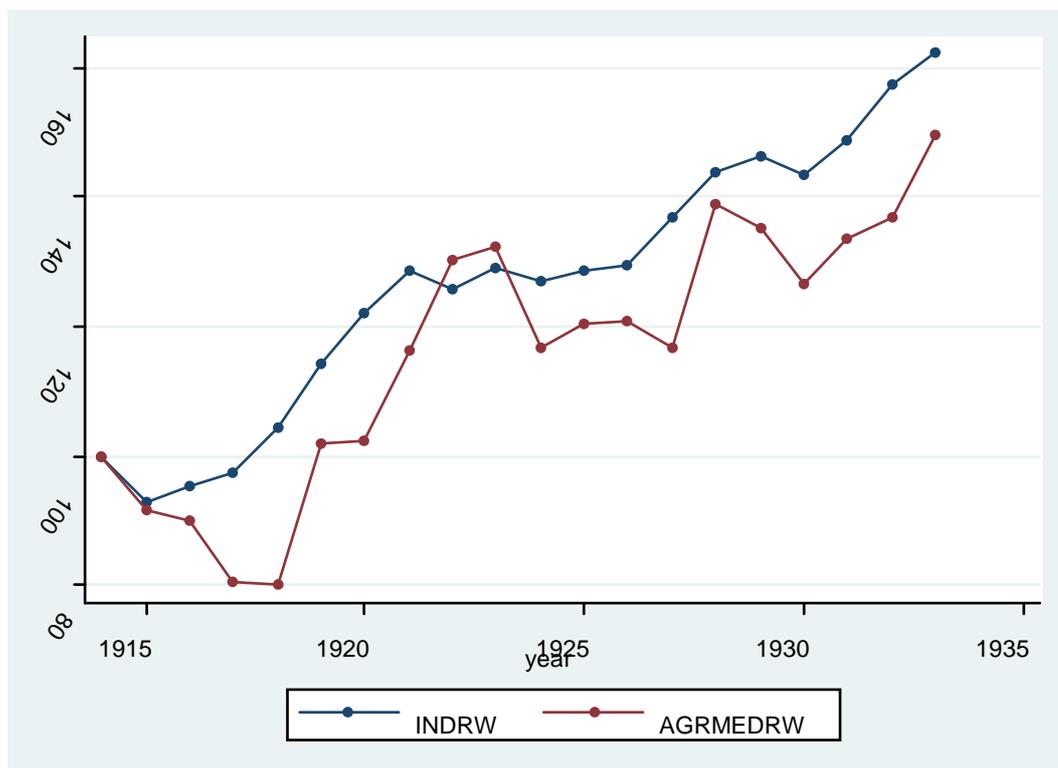
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FIGURE 1. Average real wages in industry and agriculture, 1913=100.



Source: Carreras (ed.), *Estadísticas históricas*.