G. The May 1937 Events
(Thematic Correspondence to Chapter Ten)

Political disagreements that had existed since the beginning of the war among the different Catalan political forces brought about an armed confrontation in Barcelona at the beginning of May 1937. On one side were the CNT-FAI and the POUM, and on the other were the PSUC, the Esquerra, and the Generalitat. In the chronicle offered here, published by the Generalitat’s Department of the Presidency, we can read the official version of the events of 3, 4 and 5 May 1937.

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(From Crònica diària, 3, 4 and 5 May 1937)

3 May 1937

At midday, following government orders, the General Commissioner of Public Order (Police Chief) and his agents presented themselves in the building of the Telefónica on the Plaça de Catalunya to give the delegate appointed by the Government his charge.

The forces who accompanied the Commissioner were fired upon from several places inside the Telefónica.

In the late afternoon, after several discussions between the delegate of the Interior Minister and those resisting the orders to comply with the government’s demands, those resisting abandoned the building, which was subsequently occupied by the forces of Public Order.
This incident led to a series of lamentable episodes that occurred in several parts of the city. Numerous groups of armed people moved through Barcelona’s streets, especially in the neighbourhoods and adjacent towns. In some places, barricades were constructed. At around 5:30 in the afternoon, shops, offices, and stores closed, giving the impression of a general strike.

Following orders from the Ministry of Internal Security, the following message was sent out over the radio in the early evening:

‘The Minister of Internal Security is pleased to announce that the incidents in the Plaça de Catalunya concerning the orderly intervention at the Telefónica have been resolved’.

The organisations CNT-FAI made the following public announcement:

“From the regional committees of the CNT and the FAI to all members in Catalonia:

Comrades: This afternoon an incident occurred in Barcelona in front of the Telefónica. The regional committees intervened immediately and took steps to resolve the incident, retiring all of the forces mobilised due to the incident so that the committees in charge can resolve the issue definitively.

These committees responsible for resolving the crisis recommend that all members and membership bodies pay close attention to this message and listen exclusively to the instructions and agreements coming from these committees.

The secretary, on behalf of the regional committee of the CNT.

The secretary, on behalf of the regional committee of the FAI.”

As a consequence of the incidents and the anxiety they caused in the street, the Palace of the Generalitat took adequate security measures.

4 May 1937

Several lamentable episodes that occurred towards evening yesterday, Monday, when it seemed that, with the resolution of the incident at the Telefónica, calm was returning, caused a complete shutdown of the city.

All public transportation stopped. The closure of stores, warehouses, shops and offices was absolute. Newspapers are not being published. The only work that was being done was in the factories of the war industry. Distribution of food was handled as usual and water, gas and electricity services continued as well.

Apart from ambulances and cars for doctors, the only automobiles that moved about were occupied by the police, committee members, and members of trade union organisations.

Throughout the entire day in different parts of Barcelona, gunfire was exchanged between armed groups and the police as well as between countrymen. In many parts of the city, barricades were constructed.