

Summary

ORAL HISTORY AND THE EXPERIENCE OF POLITICS

4

Dora Schwarzstein, in memoriam

Edda Lía Crespo

16

Memorializing effervescence

Dora Schwarzstein

17

Seven crucial points concerning reunification
of Germany

Alexander von Plato

25

The radicalization of oral history

José Carlos Sebe Bom Meihy

31

ARCHIVES AND PROJECTS

42

Archives and projects

ORAL SOURCES AT THE HISTORICAL ARCHIVES OF COMISIONES OBRERAS IN ANDALUCIA. AN EXPERIENCE

Eloísa Baena Luque*

The leadership of *Comisiones Obreras* decided in 1989 to bring together all documents issued by the organization during the underground period, 1940s to 1970s. They also considered collecting the personal experiences of leaders at that time. The scarcity of written documentation reaffirmed our interest in oral memory as a means to recover what, under the conditions of illegality, had not been put in writing. As we began to know more about the origins of the Workers' Committees in Andalusia, we realized how valuable oral sources were for knowing about the family and social context of the interviewees, which was the context in which the Workers' Committees emerged.

We modeled our work on the project developed by Javier Tébar and Cristina Borderías (see

* Historical Archives of the Workers' Committees of Andalusia, Spain.

"Working-class Biographies" in this issue) since our aims coincided. Today, the Historical Archives of the Workers' Committees of Andalusia holds 60 biographies of activists who were either founding leaders of the Committees or members of the Spanish Communist Party in the 1950s. Most of the interviews were done in and around Seville, where the Archives is located, because we could not cover the extensive territory of Andalusia. However, we are making an effort to reach out to other areas and interview trade unionists belonging to Workers' Committees or to other underground labor and political organizations during the period of *franquismo*.

Some of our methodological proposals:

- a) In the course of our interviews we have observed that when questions are direct and close to the interviewee's experience, the information is richer.
- b) The interviewer needs to do previous extensive research on all aspects surrounding the interviewee's experience.
- c) To enhance our knowledge of social contexts we have to plan on blocks of interviews with people from the same location or company.
- d) We need several interviews with different workers from one company, so we may know better the origins of the Workers' Committees.

e) To have a wider view of each company or production sector, we need to interview several generations.

For preservation, use and publication

Preservation and use posed a different kind of problem: how to establish easy access to specific information, given the length and richness of information in each interview. Since the Archives is short of funds, we opted to index rather than transcribe the interviews. Together with an information company, Cibernoc, we developed a project to digitalize oral interviews and create user-friendly software for thematic searches and audio links. The program achieved both better preservation and easy consultation.

ORAL SOURCES COLLECTION FOR THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF ASTURIAS

Jairo Fernández*

From June 2002 to date, the Comisiones Obreras de Asturias has worked, together with the University of Oviedo, on a project to obtain and preserve oral sources relating to the social and cultural reality of popular classes, popular social movements and the evolution of the labor movement as concrete expression of political and trade union militancy in Asturias. This collection of oral sources will have a heuristic value not found in other sources for the study of social collectivities on the

* Fundación Juan Muñiz Zapico, Workers' Committees of Asturias, Spain.

margins of dominant streams of communication as these groups left few written traces that could be stored in conventional archives.

The point of departure required outlining the vast range of possible thematic fields which center on the project topic. The chosen approach springs from conceiving oral testimonies as a research technique that allows the integration within the diachronic perspective of history the different approaches found in other social sciences such as anthropology and sociology. We thus focus on a great variety of issues, such as working and living conditions, social attitudes, political perceptions, gender differences, immigration, labor conflicts and activism.

This integrated perspective has informed our choice to work with life histories as the best instruments and basic outlines for each documentary unit. We have no doubts concerning this choice, given the richness of information to be had and the universal applicability of this form.

In this beginning phase of our work, which will end in December 2003, we have confronted problems and shortcomings that go beyond the framework of mere management and conservation of collections.

The selection of representative profiles presented two problems. Briefly, one concerns the difficulty of drawing profiles adequate to the study of a multiplicity of phenomena; the other, the scarcity of living informants who fit into preconceived categories. It has been necessary, for instance, when selecting interviewees, to take into account not only membership in some party, union or association but also whether they belonged to an internal alignment. Further, it has not been at all easy to find activists who belonged to certain tendencies, as is the case of anarchists with a long tradition in Asturias.

The methodological integration of perspectives arising in different social sciences presents serious difficulties, given the assorted set of interests and the need to balance them in a comprehensive guide for interviewing.

Another problem concerns the intention to follow thematic units during the interviews: family, work career, labor relations, militancy and so

on. It has been necessary to introduce modifications and adapt to the nature of testimonies given by very old individuals. In these cases, the Civil War looms as a traumatic experience of huge magnitude, meaning a rupture at all levels and making it advisable to treat the set of thematic blocks both before and after the breakout of the war.

THE HISTORY OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES
IN SPAIN