Amor y Rabia
Beyond the IWA
An Interview with the CNT's International Secretary
January 4, 2017

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Contents

count on close collaboration from us and from all of the organizations that get involved in this project.

Discretely, almost silently, something is happening which will have serious consequences for the future of the international Anarchist movement: the reorganization of anarcho-syndicalism on a global scope, at the initiative of the CNT. Following the agreements of its XI Congress in 2015, the CNT – together with the German FAU and the Italian USI – has organized an international conference of anarcho-syndicalist and revolutionary unions (November 26–27, Bilbao). To understand the goals of this conference, we have interviewed people from the working group of the CNT's International Secretary, in a conversation which aims to go to the root of the question, without dogmatism or mythology.

The Bilbao Conference and a disastrous communication policy

AMOR Y RABIA: For those of us who've been members for decades, the CNT's decision to re-launch the IWA [International Workers Association] came as a surprise. The way they decided to do it was even more surprising: we assume that it was impossible to change the IWA through coming to an agreement, but instead of leaving and trying to create a new organization, the CNT called for a "refoundation of the IWA" outside of the normal organizational channels. The change in the CNT's international strategy was agreed on at the XI Congress, but for almost a year nobody heard anything, the information was conspicuous by its absence. This silence contrasts enormously with the activity of the IWA Secretary, which has used the internet to accuse the CNT, the FAU, and the USI (90% of the IWA's membership) of being "splitters", while it did not inform these groups of where the IWA would hold its next Congress in December… What is the cause of this communication policy, bordering on extreme secrecy and which would make any conspiracy nut drool? Why did things happen this way, giving

arguments to the IWA Secretary to act against organizations which form the immense majority of the IWA's membership?

CNT International Secretary: Maybe this is because we are the target for the entire activity of the IWA Secretary and a few sections, and this makes it easy for them to spend a lot of energy on us. On the contrary, in the CNT we have resisted getting into a dynamic of losing time responding to trolls on internet forums, preferring to take our own project forward. In fact, we have put a lot of hard work into carrying out the agreements reached at the XI Congress regarding the IWA and internationalism: contacting unions in other countries, taking part in Congresses of allied unions such as the USI and the FAU (among others), as well as an intense collaboration with those two organizations in this work.

We've realized that it's not worth taking time away from the CNT's numerous constructive activities to muddy ourselves by responding to accusations which most of the time have no purpose other than creating enough noise that people lose perspective on what is happening, and logic takes a back seat. We don't have time for this now, but there are a ton of things over the past few years that have been surrounded by lies, coming from a determined attitude on the part of some IWA sections as well as the Secretary. In fact, many of the IWA's problems come from this attitude of keeping watch over other sections. This attitude has allowed some Sections which don't have any real activity of their own to keep up an entirely digital existence, based on slandering the positive developments of other sections which are active in workplace struggles.

Now that we've gotten to this moment, and we've seen the effect on social networks when these lies are repeated thousands of times with the goal of making them true, it's possible that our discretion has been one of the several errors we've made on this issue. Fellow workers from several countries have told us as much. We're aware of this and perhaps it was more

daily life couldn't be more different. We have to stop gazing at our own navels, in an attitude that we learned from the colonialist accents of our own exploiters.

I believe that if we start with cordial understanding and some minimum bases for living together in an organization, we can undertake some very fruitful work here, and I don't have the slightest doubt that we'll be able to integrate organizations of workers in Africa, Asia, and the Americas with whom we have much more in common than it might seem. We are sure that the first successes here will help to build a consciousness about how to tackle the following projects in countries which, in their level of economic development or of repression, have much more in common with each other than they might with the reality of Europe. The lack of real, dynamic activity in this and other fields is exactly what has led us to break with the current drift. We hope that in time we'll be able to demonstrate that things should be done differently in order to attract those who are organized as workers in other countries to our principles, tactics, and aims, or to develop projects whose aim will be the creation of organizations that might become new sections.

However, we have to be conscious of our own size and our resources. We've already said that anarcho-syndicalism on a world scale is in a worrisome state and that it must be revitalized. The CNT, with all that it has, and despite being the largest anarcho-syndicalist organization in the world (that we know of) is infinitely smaller than we would like. That is to say, it doesn't make sense to ask whether the CNT is ready to finance the international activity of other developing sections. To put the debate in these terms is unfair. What we can do is put effort into creating a climate of solidarity and comradeliness in international work, so that all of the organizations that we relate with feel like we have their backs, and so that they can all contribute as much as possible to the growth and recuperation of anarcho-syndicalism as a thriving movement on a world scale. We are convinced that for this, they can definitely

anarcho-syndicalist ones. Nigeria, South Africa, Nepal and Bangladesh are some examples of lost opportunities.[7]

On top of eurocentrism we have to add a certain Islamophobia, conscious or not. Despite the appearance for the first time of anarchist groups in the Arab world (Tunisia, Egypt) during the so-called "*Arab Spring*", and the growing interest in anarchist ideas in Turkey, interest in the IWA in these countries is conspicuous by its absence. And the same is true with propaganda in other non-Western languages, such as Arabic, Chinese, or Hindi, mother tongues for the majority of the world's population. Beyond big words, an international organization implies much more than just the solidarity with local struggles that the agreements from the XI CNT Congress speak of.

If an international organization wants to have a real existence, it has to be capable of bringing in groups from countries with very different social and economic structures. What approach do the CNT/USI/FAU, who pull together about 90% of the international membership of anarcho-syndicalist organizations, to attract or work with union organizations from the countries of the so-called "*third world*", which are the majority of the world's population? Is the CNT ready to support (and finance) a dynamic activity on the part of a new international?

CNT International Secretary: It's true that we have lost opportunities for expansion for the international outside of Europe during this period of self-destruction of the international. We have to make sure we don't repeat these mistakes in the living organization which we hope results from this whole process. In Nigeria contact was lost, but I remember the case of Bangladesh and the doubts that arose around the forms of functioning that we have in Europe. What we're missing is a labor of empathy with the situations in countries like that, whose

[7] These are countries where unions have approached the IWA over the last 20 years or so. The National Garment Workers Federation in Bangladesh have also maintained contact with the IWW over the years.

important than we thought. Nevertheless, we want to emphasize that we are betting on the importance of struggles in the real world, of union struggles on the shop floor and not on discussion forums or social networks. In summary, this isn't the spot to debate the impact of the Internet on the recent development of anarchist or revolutionary unionist movements, but it should be enough to say that, many times, there is a supposed purism that only subsists on the crystal ball formed by the digital world, with neither existence nor relevance in the real world.

Occasionally, this is compared with the split that formed the CGT, but we reject that completely.[1] In that case there were elements of dissonance with our ideas – there's nothing like that here. That is to say, CGT bet on a model that renounced anarcho-syndicalism altogether, but now we're dealing with a situation of paralysis that prevents the practical development of a truly anarcho-syndicalist model of implementation and growth on the international level. The problem isn't from ideological differences, but from attitude and frame of mind. The sad thing is that this situation has escalated, thanks precisely to the attitude of keeping watch over other sections which we discussed earlier, as well as the Secretary meddling about in other sections' internal affairs, until we reached the breaking point that we're at.

The Name of the IWA

AMOR Y RABIA: The agreement from the CNT's XI Congress spoke of the "re-foundation of an international for anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary unionism" and of a

[1] The CNT suffered two splits in 1979 and 1983 which eventually became the CGT. The main issue was over participation in state-sponsored works councils, and state and employer subsidies tied to the councils. [This and all other footnotes are by the translator.]

"new IWA", as well as preparing "a series of conferences and contacts with those sections of the IWA interested in a process of re-foundation of the International."[2] Nevertheless, the call for the Bilbao Conference ends with a "Long Live the IWA!", despite the clear intention of abandoning that organization and creating a new one. Since the XI Congress described the IWA as inoperative, where does this fetishism for initials come from? Wouldn't it have been better to begin from scratch, with a new name, instead of dragging out a long process of confrontation? Would the loss of its "family name" [apellido] carry legal consequences for the CNT, or just sentimental ones?

CNT International Secretary: That could be the case, but it's something that still hasn't been decided on and will have to be cleared up at the Congress which should be called in 2017. Gestures aren't always the best representation of what the members want. Some people think of the initials as a mere fetish that we can easily do without, while others see them as a symbol of historic internationalism which should not be forsaken just because a handful of people in some European countries have decided to take unjust advantage of some cracks in the rules to impose their destructive will. We say destructive because it seems that for them, building our alternative and fighting against capitalism, churches and states is much more unpleasant than what they are doing.

Of course, whether we keep the IWA initials, or provide ourselves with some others, this will have nothing to do with any possible legal consequence. Our initials and our identity are assured, apart from whether or not we are tied to the IWA. But as you said in the question, the Congress agreement is not definitive in this sense and therefore this is an open question

[2] I translate "sindicalismo revolucionario" as "revolutionary unionism" as this is a better English rendering than "revolutionary syndicalism". However, "anarcosindicalismo" remains "anarcho-syndicalism."

fact, it's a proposal that's been brought up by other unions and which the CNT will dedicate time to discussing and taking a position on. If it helps to smooth out some ruffled feathers, and to avoid a culture of division over who will be "the chosen one", as we see in France with up to 5 unions which claim anarcho-syndicalist heritage – then it would be welcome. Although it still hasn't been formally brought up within the CNT, it's a proposal which some of the organizations interested in the process want to bring up, and which will have to be debated.

In any case, this brings us back to the last response, where we spoke of the risks in the process. There are many open questions which will have to be closed in order to be able to draw up an associative pact that works for all of the participating organizations, beginning with the proposals about membership, and which succeeds in capturing all of the aspects that we spoke about before. For this, we need time, effort, good will, and the right answers. We hope that we can pull it off.

Eurocentrism and Islamophobia?

AMOR Y RABIA: For an international organization, projecting its activities and ideas throughout the world is fundamental. In this sense, the IWA has been a complete failure, with an undeniably Eurocentric character. Throughout recent decades, the IWA has been incapable of offering a space for the real union organizations from the countries of the so-called "*third world*" which have approached it, while it has had no problem at all bringing in groups from Western countries without any real workplace presence, or which, in some cases, were really just pure anarchist groups rather than

nationalist, or even religious? Is it possible that there would be two sections in the same country, for example IWW and CNT? Where is the limit?

CNT International Secretary: I don't think that by using the term "revolutionary unionism", we're giving up on the international that arises from this process identifying with anarcho-syndicalism. It's possible that this term has been used in the past by totally erratic people as you describe, or to deliberately confuse people, but I also remember that the British once asked to be able to use another term such as this because "anarcho-syndicalism" sounds like an STD in their language, they told us, more than a revolutionary movement inspired by anarchism. There was not much debate on the topic.

I believe that even more than the specific term which we adopt, we should be clear about our ideas, and, as we said before, what are the limits that we set to make sure that we progress without confusion towards a truly free society, without getting bogged down on the way. There's been a lot of talk about salaried staff in organizations like this, and in general we reject them. It's another things to use lawyers, or professionals when we are renovating our offices or doing technical installations, etc., when we have not been able to cover these kinds of work through volunteer labor from members.

None of the organizations which are trying to re-launch the international have any kind of paid staff. Similarly, we are sure that in the Congress which will be called, they will write up limits that no nationalist or religious organizations would be able to meet to be accepted. Not because we're elitist, but because those ideas run against the same internationalism and anarchist vision of society which we have to construct through this tool.

We also imagine that there might be a discussion about the possibility of two or more sections existing in one country. In

which the CNT membership will decide at a plenary meeting and which will really take shape at the re-foundation Congress, because we also have to take into account the opinions of the other organizations which are participating in the process.

The pro-split section of the IWA

AMOR Y RABIA: The CNT's decision to reevaluate its international strategy, and to call for the international meeting in Bilbao, have had consequences: First the immediate call for a "*National conference of branches for the re-structuring of the CNT-AIT (June 25–26)*" and then of their "*CNT-AIT Congress*" in Benissa on November 5–6. Currently, after various de-federations (voluntary as well as expulsions), there are anarcho-syndicalist groups across the peninsula who are critical of the CNT's current course, especially in Galicia, Murcia, and Levante. It seems like the recent "*Congress*" in Benissa is something like an attempt at unification by various branches who've been expelled or left the CNT voluntarily, in order to create a new organization that could be recognized as the new Spanish section of the IWA.

This means that fighting for the restructuring of international anarcho-syndicalism risks turning into a new fight over initials. On top of this, the decision to re-found the IWA was made by a slight majority, and there are branches in the CNT who do not agree with it, such as Granada, Puerto Real (no longer in CNT), Oviedo, and Tarragona (these are on the point of de-federating themselves after not paying for months), to name a few. Puerto Real, without going any further, held a meeting on November 10 called "*In defense of the IWA*". What would the reaction be to a new conflict over initials? Is there a danger of a new internal rupture in the CNT over the issue of the IWA?

CNT International Secretary: We have to put all of those affirmations in context before we can respond to the final questions. None of the branches that you mentioned (of those who remain in the CNT) went to the Zaragoza Congress or even sent positions, so their disagreement doesn't carry as much weight as the branches who did participate and voted against [the international strategy], and that vote hasn't meant that they're leaving or anything like that. On top of that, we need to point out that both the majority and the dissenting opinions that came out of the international commission at the XI Congress only differed on one question – when to begin this whole process of "re-founding the IWA".

It's funny, a few years ago a document was circulated with that exact name ("In defense of the IWA"). The authors were looking for people to join them, but they only succeeded in making fools of themselves. Among the arguments for why the CNT was destroying itself was the rumor that Noam Chomsky (among others) was one of the intellectual leaders responsible for our "reformist" drift. Anecdotes aside, we are speaking of a very small number of people in a few locations who are good at speaking bombastically. Nothing more. They aren't based in workplace struggles, or broader social struggles. They're based in virtual struggles, because they're tied to their computer screens. If anyone tries to take our initials, we won't threaten them – we'll give them an overwhelming response, as we did with the CGT in its day.

For a while now, these groups – lacking any breakthroughs in workplace struggles of their own – have been trying to play a false ideological purism as their trump card to criticize the developments in the anarcho-syndicalist model that the CNT has planted in recent years. It's not hard to imagine that their membership will shrink as time passes. Lacking any substance of their own, they're making a play for IWA recognition to ensure their own survival, since their ability to act is very limited and they know that time is not on their side. The Benissa meet-

while struggling against an unjust social and economic system, until we overturn that system in a revolutionary process that won't be led by any form of elites.

Limits

AMOR Y RABIA: Fighting against something is always easier than fighting for something. Creating something new requires an enormous amount of energy, which will doubtless be the case for the project of creating a new International of revolutionary unions. Until now, and despite limiting itself to the anarcho-syndicalist movement, the IWA which the CNT, USI, and FAU were active in was incapable of stopping the internal struggles of various sections (today there are 4 French CNT's), establishing a satisfactory relationship with sympathetic but microscopic groups which have no real presence in their own countries, or establishing a clear boundary between anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism. To abandon the more or less clear terrain of "anarcho-syndicalism" for that of "revolutionary unionism" implies substituting a word with a precise meaning for one which is used by vary different organizations, from the IWW – which is an international organization in its own right – to the Italian "pure syndicalist" groups that followed Sorel's ideas on violence and ended up supporting Mussolini.

The "*Open invitation to the international conference of anarcho-syndicalist and revolutionary unionist organizations, Bilbao 26–27 November 2016*" only listed a few requirements for becoming a part of the new International: Not having a vertical decision-making structure, not receiving state financing, not supporting political parties, and having more than 100 members. Does this mean that the CNT is in fact giving up on trying to form a purely anarcho-syndicalist international organization? What about, for example, union organizations with salaried staff? Or organizations that might be apolitical,

proaches (rejecting the state, avoiding institutional participation, direct action, mutual aid, etcetera). This is how we should look at the changes in focus that the CNT has applied to its workplace organizing in recent years. Some people don't see a difference between questions of form and content, and they like to say the new strategic focus in our workplace organizing is a betrayal of principles, but this is completely wrong. On the contrary, it's an effort to provide anarcho-syndicalism – and anarchist ideas by extension – with a present and future relevance that it has lacked in recent decades.

Of course, this doesn't mean that we've figured it all out, nor that it's going to be simple. We have to recognize that the current situation is very bad, and that overcoming it will require extraordinary effort. It's significant that the IWA until now has not had a section in a country such as the US, with more than 300 million inhabitants (there was something symbolic more than 15 years ago which disappeared). So, the important thing isn't a card with some initials (a question of form), but to provide it with meaning, with value, with concrete projects. The IWA is not a Platonic idea which exists perfectly somewhere, safe from the harm which we might do to it, as some people think. Anyone who is satisfied by the mere fact of "belonging" is fooling themselves, and in that case we can probably speak of posturing. It's striking that many of those who are focusing on the Anselmo Lorenzo Foundation have never dropped in to give a hand, and that many of those who are tearing out their hair over the IWA never took on tasks or constructive proposals inside it, nor did they ever go to any of its meetings.[6] The International will be what we make of it, all of us who are dedicated to working constructively inside it

[6] Named after "the grandfather of Spanish anarchism" (in Murray Bookchin's words), the Anselmo Lorenzo Foundation is a publishing house tied to the CNT, which also maintains the union's extensive historical archives. They recently opened a space in Madrid and apparently they have been a target for criticism by the small number of IWA loyalists.

ing should really be interpreted in the light of that bet on their part. It's not hard to imagine that they've had to hold their supposed Congress in two parts.

Faced by a lack of concrete proposals, and by the imminence of the IWA Congress in Warsaw, they held a parody of a meeting whose only purpose was to have a skeleton of an organization to show the IWA, though it lacks any substance beyond a few high-falutin' declarations about the supposed reformist drift of the CNT. We've been hearing this for years, and it hasn't turned into anything yet. After the expulsion of the CNT from the IWA at the Warsaw Congress, this is the new Spanish section of the IWA – an organization that is still under construction, without statutes, rules, or anything else. There's no question that it's a sad end for the IWA.

This development isn't particularly important for the CNT, since there's no real meat to it. However, it is relevant to understand how the IWA has arrived at its present situation. For a while now, the attitude of the current IWA secretary and of some of the sections (above all, KRAS in Russia) has been to cheer on and encourage the formation of this paper split. It's not for nothing that the KRAS has sent several statements supporting this development, while the IWA secretary has kept in touch directly with the de-federated groups in Levante, who are behind the Benissa meeting, even sending their documents to the rest of the IWA through the mailing list. This is all while the CNT was still the Spanish section of the IWA. This meddling in the internal affairs of a section is a flagrant violation of the most basic agreements that form an association. In the light of this, any call to respect agreements lacks any foundation or authenticity, especially when the IWA has the decision making process that we've already discussed. Keeping this in mind, we shouldn't be surprised that the IWA has come to the point of a total internal breakdown.

Relations with the IWA

AMOR Y RABIA: Whatever might happen in the future, it's clear that the CNT, the FAU, and the USI have crossed the Rubicon, and the IWA's breakdown is a fact. One fairly likely future scenario is that the Solidarity Federation (SolFed) in Britain will become the most important section of the IWA while the weight of decision making will move to Eastern Europe, where there are a lot of sections with the right to vote at the Congresses but without even the smallest social influence.

One example of the situation which the IWA will have to face in the future is how to finance the secretary's activities, which currently cost 1,000 euros per year in photocopies alone. The ZSP, the Polish section currently in charge of the secretariat, pays only 100 euros per year despite being the largest section in Eastern Europe. The loss of the CNT alone means that the IWA will lose an income of 30,000 euros per year. The loss of 90% of its current membership will turn the IWA into an organization that is completely inoperative, merely testimonial, lacking any source of financing for its propaganda and international activities.

This situation will doubtless cause growing tensions between the SolFed, marginalized from decision making but carrying the burden of financing the remains of the IWA, and the rest of the sections. It's even possible to imagine that SolFed or another section might reconsider their international strategy, for which it's crucial to maintain a line of communication for the future. Unfortunately, because of the CNT/CGT split, it's easy to imagine that the current conflict will lead to a complete break of relations. Have there been any discussions about how the new international which the CNT, FAU, and USI are trying to start will relate to the current IWA? Will there be an effort to maintain contact with the IWA secretary or the other sections?

process of conglomeration, creating more multinationals at the expense of small and medium capitalism. We've had a bunch of conflicts where our sections have been able to count on the solidarity of workers beyond their borders, where their company or a company in the same group is established internationally. The new ease of communication, transport, and movement for capital (at the same time that restrictions against the movement of people are being hardened) has allowed many more capitalists to realize that the entire world is their playground. So it makes even more sense to organize internationally, not less.

The analysis of the historic process which you make – despite any possible clarifications that could be made, or a couple of errors – is essentially correct. The one-two punch of Fascism and Bolshevism led to a hard defeat of anarchist or libertarian ideas (not just anarcho-syndicalism) on the world scale during the '20s and '30s, so that after WW2 it was impossible to recover the previous strength. The "rebirths" from time to time of anarchist ideas and the anarcho-syndicalist project (Paris 1968, Spain after 1975, the UK in 1977, globally beginning in 1999, etcetera) have only complicated the situation, given the conditions in which they occurred. Nevertheless, we find ourselves in an opportune moment, when the changes in political culture over recent decades have put anarchist ideas in general back into the spotlight.

Thirty years ago, many people assumed that the Leninist-style democratic centralism was a natural and unquestionable form of organization. Now they prefer general assemblies and consensus. Of course, there's a lot to say about this, and this isn't the right outlet, but we do want to stress that we consider anarchist ideas, and the anarcho-syndicalist model, as tools of the future, not relics of the past. This does pose a serious challenge for anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists. We have to figure out how to adapt our strategies to the current situation, without renouncing one bit of our central and distinctive ap-

real influence that remained in the IWA was the Swedish SAC.[5] In practical terms, anarcho-syndicalism disappeared after the defeat of the CNT in the Spanish Civil War/Revolution and the decision of the SAC to move towards reformism after the Second World War. This is how, after the SAC's exit, the IWA ended up as just the last name of the CNT in French exile, and its insignificance is made clear by the total lack of interest in its past. Today, the only well-documented history of the IWA is "*The Unknown International*", by Vadim Damier, two volumes of 1600 pages (Vol 1: 1918–1930, Vol 2: 1930–1939). It's symptomatic that it was written and published in Russia, a country where the IWA has never had even a minimal influence, and that nobody has taken on translating this into a language which the majority of the IWA can read.

The collapse of Communism and the Franco dictatorship allowed the CNT to revive itself, and the IWA with it. Sections which merit the name have popped up, but we've never successfully developed a truly international activity. The weakness of the new sections, and their "infantile disorders" which resulted from the contradictions inherent in trying to put 1930's theory into practice in countries where neoliberalism ruled, quickly gave place to splits in Spain, France, and Italy. This turned the revived IWA into a cricket cage, incapable of offering a real perspective to any organizations that showed interest. Keeping all of this in mind, does anarcho-syndicalism still make sense on an international scale? Is it a real movement, or just a fossil from a bygone age? Is belonging to the IWA – or the very idea of international action itself – anything more than mere posturing?

CNT International Secretary: From our point of view, it makes complete sense. In recent years we've seen an increasing

[5] "*Dictablanda*" is a pun on "*dictadura*" (*dura* = hard; *blanda* = weak) and is used to describe Miguel Primo de Rivera's unstable dictatorship from 1923–1930, which ended with the abolition of the Monarchy and the establishment of the Second Spanish Republic.

CNT International Secretary: It's not that decision making will shift to the East – it's that that's been the reality already for several years, which has brought us to this point. Of course, the ball is in SolFed's court now. They'll have to decide whether they'll put up with what we've been putting up with. But with the situation we've come to, we suspect that the attitude of the Polish secretariat, or of whoever substitutes them in the same line, will be to veto any possible relation by a section of their international (if it survives) with ours. In principle, we don't have any problem working together with a union in another country to win a fight that affects both of us in the field of workplace struggles or state repression. Of course, we can't lose sight of the fact that our enemies aren't other workers, even if we have big disagreements with them – our enemies are the capitalists and their bureaucratic lackeys.

In any case, the real risk threatening the IWA in the short term has more to do with its internal drift than with the financing. Thanks to the payments that the expelled sections put in over many years, the International is in a pretty good financial state. But without any real world activity, the illusion of purism can only be kept up by living in a permanent witch hunt. That's why organizations of any stripe that bet on this purism end up devouring themselves. In this sense, returning to the question, the obvious objective of the supposed purists will be SolFed. After all, by deciding not to set itself up as a union, all of its members hold a double membership in the official majority unions, ending up as representatives of these unions in their workplaces. (This says a lot, by the way, about the motives of the supposed purists, who have preferred to ignore this fact and focus on a conflict with the CNT, basing themselves on fictional accusations.) We can hazard a guess that the witch hunt won't take long to focus on aspects such as this, which could make it very uncomfortable for SF to stay in the IWA after all.

Risk of failure

AMOR Y RABIA: The CNT's decision, to propose a reorganization of international anarcho-syndicalism, is a response to a series of endless conflicts inside the IWA. The agreement from the XI Congress itself states that the re-foundation of the IWA is being carried out because the IWA "*is inoperative*" and thanks to its "*important internal crisis, which led to the expulsion of the German section, the FAU*". This is an irony of history, since the expulsion of the FAU is partly a result of the CNT's own initiatives, in particular those of García Rúa, the former secretary of the CNT and the IWA, as we've explained in a broad article in the previous issue of Prisma [and published in translation on Lifelong Wobbly].

However, instead of calling on reason, you're making a clean break to make up for past errors. In fact, the CNT agreement seems more like a reaction to deal with a problem than an action to carry anarcho-syndicalism forward. The IWA's paralysis grew out of the lack of agreement on the diverse strategies which the CNT, FAU, and USI adopted to develop an anarcho-syndicalist strategy for workplace organizing which would be adapted to their respective environments. These debates provoked conflicts among the various sections and have caused the current destabilization of the IWA, by accepting that sections without any real existence should have a decisive weight over the direction of the organization.

Therefore, the organizational change that's currently in process puts an end to a decision making process that deformed reality by relying on a diminutive minority of the organization, but it doesn't change the root problem: the necessity to balance between independence of the various sections on the one hand, and their obligation to respect the principles, tactics, and aims

development of the sections, we believe that then there will be a real basis for thinking of international strategies that aren't pure pie in the sky. In the CNT – and I believe in the other sections – nobody is thinking of abandoning the process that we are immersed in, in order to stick to just occasional support for local struggles. That wouldn't make any sense. It's another thing to be able to read the international situation correctly and, with the correct analysis, carry out successful actions. We'll see what we're capable of.

The extinction of anarcho-syndicalism?

AMOR Y RABIA: A glance at the past shows that the IWA only existed as a real organization during the inter-war period (1922–1930), when it had strong and active sections, and an international activity. The creation of the IWA could be classified as a swan song for the international anarcho-syndicalist movement, since it collapsed shortly after it was founded. Fascism's rise to power in Italy ended the USI, just as Salazar's coup ended the Portuguese CGT, which up to that point was the main union in the country.[4] Internal struggles put an end to the Argentine FORA, which reached a point of having two daily newspapers, the rise of Bolshevism destroyed French anarcho-syndicalism, and the flood of new members into the German FAUD after WW1 was followed by the sudden and fatal collapse once the economic situation stabilized, in the mid-1920s.

The illegalization of the CNT during the "soft dictatorship" [Dictablanda] of Primo de Rivera allowed the CNT to preserve itself like a mammoth in Siberian ice, making its resurrection in 1930/31 possible, but by this point the only organization with

[4] The Italian USI had hundreds of thousands of members prior to Benito Mussolini's fascist coup in 1922. The Portuguese military coup of 1926 gradually led to the corporatist state of Antonio Salazar, which lasted until the Carnation Revolution of 1974.

The CNT's goals with the new IWA

AMOR Y RABIA: The CNT's agreement from the XI Congress makes it very clear that for the CNT, the anarcho-syndicalist movement "*must base itself on local work (...) International solidarity arises as an extension of this work.*" This can be seen as a clear position against the typical problem of the groups that form part of an organization when it's time to mark out the specific areas of coordination to make sure that nobody's local activities are affected. But it could also be understood as saying that international action is secondary, ignoring the complexity that is implied by coordinating our work at an international level, something very different from local activities.

As such, it would continue the attitude that is part of the problem, which in the past led to tolerating the current system of decision making in the IWA [International Workers Association], while sections without any real existence were accepted and given the same rights in decision-making as the sections with a real existence, which ended up as a minority. At the same time, the agreement from the XI Congress speaks of creating "*an International of revolutionary unionism"*, a description which is both broad and diffuse in its definition. Does the CNT have a strategic vision of international action? Or does it just have a tactical vision, centered in supporting local activities?

CNT International Secretary: We believe that the declaration about "the local" comes in relation to the miniscule groups in some countries, which, before they have a strategy to plant themselves and grow as an IWA Section in their country, come to integrate themselves into the structure, attracted by the initials, by a sense of belonging, or whatever it is. We believe that this false preoccupation with the international when there is no local cement is what contributes to them acting more like political control groups than like sections of the same International. If we achieve even a minimally acceptable local

that are laid out in the federal pact of the new organization.[3] Have the CNT, FAU, and USI discussed this as a part of defining how to reorganize international anarcho-syndicalism? What consequences could come if you fail to create a new International?

CNT International Secretary: Of course, we have to recognize that the step we took was clearly a reaction to the strangulation of the sections with the vast majority of the membership – but it also follows a strategy for developing anarcho-syndicalism on an international scale. We arrived at a moment when it was clear that the reality of the international made it impossible to carry out the necessary promotion of an anarchist vision for how to combat exploitation, and the first step to relaunch anarcho-syndicalism on a global scale was to break with the interita that we had put up with for years, many times based on nothing but myths. The near-exclusive focus on controlling from a distance, and the constant sermons from a handful of sections, made it impossible to create the right climate for bringing the discussion back to the growing need for international solidarity and of the challenges that the working class deals with on a global scale, when we are once again hearing the old siren songs of fascism.

Although it's come up in this interview, I believe that it isn't always clear enough, that the sections in Russia or Slovakia, paying dues for less than 10 members, each have the same representation in the international as the Spanish CNT with the approximately 5000 members that we have. They've been in that situation for 20 years, and it's not justified by the size of the country, or by their size relative to the population, or because of repression, or because of the local anarchist traditions (as they've tried to use for justification at points). It's all

[3] It is common for revolutionary unions in other countries to have a document of "Principles, tactics, and aims" which is updated at each Congress to reflect their living strategy.

because of the attitude of the old beards who clutch on to the initials of the IWA in those countries. With the position shared in six countries with similar realities, they've had the majority for decision making in their hands. Their realities contrast with those that have always been part of the outlook of the USI, the FAU, and the CNT which has more members than all of the other sections combined. To put it another way: we're talking about a situation where sections with 20 times the combined membership of the sections of 6 countries, some of them in smaller countries but one in a country spanning two continents – those larger sections are subjected to the decisions, the control, and the threats of the smaller ones.

With regard to the principles, tactics, and aims, I think that people have much more respects for the agreements that they accept than it might seem at first. The issue here comes when you realize that what seemed like a serious organization is nothing more than a bad joke, and you're the butt of it. There have been many offenses against the agreements, to the point where we can consider the current secretary and some of the sections to have broken the formational pact awhile ago. As has already been said, and without going too far astray – there are sections which, even before the CNT was expelled from the IWA, were already publicly recognizing other groups as the Spanish IWA section. We could probably follow this chain of irregularities backwards, until we found ourselves at the period when García Rúa, as the secretary, was warning of parallel internationals with the SAC and the CGT, which never came to anything, and the way that this climate was taken advantage of to mount attacks against the FAU and the USI.

In this sense, it's true that the current internal situation of the IWA derives in large part from the errors that the CNT made many years ago. It's also true that, given the situation which we found ourselves in at that moment, it's understandable that those kind of errors could be made. To be clear, the CNT has changed its focus, from a strategy that was defensive

and closed in on itself, without any project beyond denouncing the prevailing union model, to the current strategy, where we are facing a stage of growth and openings, with our own effective union model. This explains a good part of why the CNT needed a different kind of international coordination, which could not be found in the current IWA. What I'm trying to say with all of that is that when we keep people in mind, when we respect them, when we create working conditions together and focus our efforts on the real enemy, looking outwards more than inwards, conflicts about internal norms tend to be minor or even disappear.

The consequences if we fail won't be very serious, because we are starting from scratch. That is to say, the international *de facto* doesn't even exist. If we contrast it with the societies we live in, the influence or even the existence of the IWA disappears, unless we read certain internet forums. If we ever want to be taken seriously as something real and useful for the defense of the international working classes interests, we have to try to escape from the trap that we've found ourselves in, and this is exactly what we are doing, without any fear of failure. The current situation is the failure.

However, it's obviously not so simple to sketch out an international organization which would avoid all of the past errors, while functioning well and without friction. It will require a lot of work and good will. At the end of the day, it's going to come down to whether the participating organizations know how to give it a practical content, based on common projects, which will ensure a real solidarity. This is how we'll take the debate from formal and organizational issues to practical ones, where it's much less likely that bitter conflicts will arise, even if there will of course be differences. But, because we want to do this right, the CNT, USI, and FAU have decided to take it slow and not get into senseless competitions with anybody else. There is a risk, no doubt, of repeating past mistakes, but there's also a strong desire to avoid those mistakes.