

Revolutionary Gymnastics

Juan García Oliver's Response to the Manifesto of the Thirty

Eduardo de Guzmán

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Juan García Oliver gave a lecture at a union hall in the El Clot district to an exclusively worker audience on the parallels between Socrates and Christ's lives. He was extremely eloquent and expounded original ideas as he shared his knowledge of the Socratic philosophy with the workers. And if the speaker is admirable—this young man who gave himself an exceptional education in hours robbed from sleep and during long years spent in prison—the same can be said of the audience. Silently, thoughtfully, the listeners strained to grasp the full depth of the orator's words, whose meaning was complex despite their apparent simplicity.

We talked after he finished his lecture. García Oliver is one of the most outstanding men of the FAI and the fiercest opponent—conscious, serene, and revolutionary—of the men who signed the infamous August manifesto. García speaks logically, dispassionately, and advances his ideas after a moment of reflection.

The differences between the manifesto's signers and the FAI

“It's difficult for those who don't live in our circles to understand why they're attacking the FAI. The manifesto's signers are angry at us because the anarchist groups have shaken off their tutelage. But the battle isn't really from today. It began in 1923 when the anarchists saw that Pestaña, Peiró, and the majority of the men who signed the document were unable to confront the difficult times that Spain was going through, in which there was a tangible possibility of a military coup. We even argued at a Congress that there would be a coup within three months and, regrettably, our fears were confirmed.

“That, the poor leadership of the transportation strike, and their clear inability to deal with the problem of terrorism prompted the anarchists to rebel. We didn't do so to divide the CNT, but to get the organization to give a revolutionary solution to Spain's problems.

“The anarchists didn't distance themselves from the Confederation at the time—we've always been its most active element—but from men like Pestaña, Peiró, etc., who had a disproportionate influence over the organization.

“The same thing is happening today. Two months ago, Pestaña and Peiró looked at the Republican reality in Spain and concluded that Parliament is an effective tool for social change; the anarchists, on the other hand, knew that the dictatorship fell not because of pressure from political parties, but because the Spanish economy had stretched to its limit. We disagreed with them and asserted that social problems can only be resolved by a revolutionary movement that transforms the economy while also destroying bourgeois political institutions.”

Revolution is not a question of preparation, but of will

“Without setting a date, we advocate revolution and don't worry about whether or not we're prepared to make it. We know that revolution is not a matter of preparation but of will; of wanting it.

“We don’t disregard revolutionary preparation, but simply consign it to secondary importance. After the experience of Mussolini in Italy and Hitler in Germany, it’s clear that preparing for and advocating the revolution also propels the fascists into action.

“Revolutionaries previously assumed that the revolution would triumph by necessity when it’s time for the people to make it, whether or not the opposing elements in the dominant regime want it. We could accept that theory before the fascist victory in Italy, because until then the bourgeoisie believed that the democratic state was its last refuge. But after Mussolini’s coup, capitalists are now convinced that when the democratic state fails they can still find the necessary forces to overthrow liberalism and crush the revolutionary movement.”

The FAI, revolutionary ferment

“The signers of the manifesto say that the FAI wants to make a Marxist revolution, but unfortunately they’re confusing the revolutionary technique—which is the same for all those who intend to rebel—with anarchism and Marxism’s very different principles. At present, the FAI represents the revolutionary ferment; the element of social decomposition that our country needs in order to make the revolution.

“Ideologically, the FAI embraces anarchism and aspires to the realization of libertarian communism. As such, if a new regime is installed in Spain after the revolution that is similar to the one in Russia or the dictatorial syndicalism advocated by Peiró, Arin, and Piñón, then the FAI would immediately begin fighting against that order, not to destroy it in a reactionary sense but to push it to go further in order to implant libertarian communism.”

The dictatorship of the proletariat sterilizes the revolution

He is quiet for a moment. I ask a question. García reflects, and then replies calmly but firmly:

“We don’t like to make judgments about what may or may not be possible in the future. Indeed, those who use hypotheses to establish dictatorial theories only reveal their own ideological confusion.”

“All revolutions are violent. But the dictatorship of the proletariat, as understood by the Communists and the syndicalist signers of the manifesto, has nothing to do with the violence of the revolution as such. In essence, they want to make violence into a practical form of government. Their dictatorship naturally and necessarily creates classes and privileges. And, given that the revolution has been made to destroy those privileges and classes, the effort would be in vain and it would be necessary to begin again. The dictatorship of the proletariat sterilizes the revolution. It’s a waste of time and energy.

“The FAI does not want to imitate the Russian Revolution. We want to make a real revolution; the violent event that frees people from their burdens and sets authentic

social values aloft. That's why we don't prejudge Spain's revolutionary future. But if we were to do so, we would have to affirm that libertarian communism is possible here. Certainly our people are at least potentially anarchist, in the cases when they lack the ideology.

"Furthermore, we can't forget that Spain and Russia are located at Europe's two extremes. And not only are there geographic differences between the two countries; there are psychological differences as well. We want to prove this by making a revolution that doesn't resemble Russia's in the slightest."

The signers of the manifesto do not believe in the revolution

García Oliver becomes pensive again and, after reflecting briefly, says:

"Those who put their names on the manifesto never believed in the Spanish revolution. They participated in revolutionary propaganda in the distant past but their fictions have been shattered today, now that the hour of truth has arrived.

"The signers of the manifesto see that they've been overwhelmed by events and declare their faith in the revolution, but they absurdly postpone the event to two or more years in the future, as if that were possible with the current crisis of the economy. Furthermore, in two years the revolution would be unnecessary for the workers: between Maura, Galarza, and hunger not a single worker will still be alive. Or, if there is one, he will be oppressed by a military dictatorship—whether it's monarchical or Republican—that will necessarily arise, given the failure of the Spanish Parliament."

The CNT does not need to waste time preparing anything

Then what course of action should the Confederation take?

"The CNT doesn't need to waste time and prepare the two aspects of the revolution: destructive first and later constructive. The CNT is the only solid thing in Spain, a country in which everything is pulverized. It is a national reality that all the politicians combined can't overcome. The CNT should not postpone the social revolution for any reason, because everything that can be prepared is already prepared. No one would suppose that the factories will function completely immediately after the revolution, just as no one would imagine that the peasants will work the plows with their feet.

"Workers will have to do the same thing after the revolution as they did before it. In essence, a revolution implies a new concept of morality, or making morality itself effective. After the revolution, the workers must have the freedom to live according to their needs and society will satisfy those needs according to its economic capacities.

"No preparation is necessary for this. The only thing required is that today's revolutionaries defend the working class sincerely and don't try to become little tyrants under the pretense of a more or less proletarian dictatorship."

García Oliver becomes quiet. An unwavering faith in victory shines in his eyes, and also the belief that it is already near.

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