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The Confederation's Internal and External Crisis

Federica Montseny

18 September 1931

A series of events have occurred between the publication of my article "A Circular and its Consequences" and the present. In the first place, a group of militants—which the bourgeois press, Macià, and Companys describe as the "sensible part" of the Confederation—published a manifesto. Second, there was the strike in Barcelona, which Governor Anguera de Sojo, a creature of Maura, caused with his unspeakable attitude toward the prisoners. Third, there is the editorial in *Solidaridad Obrera*, which is a historic document that will make its author blush some day, if he still has any virility and shame. These events have unfolded in the modest space of ten or twelve days, dizzying events that indicate the intensity our times. All of this has resulted in the beginning of a violent campaign against all well-known FAI members and the start of the disarticulation of the Confederation, a process that some hope will make the anarchists—those terrible "extremists"—into "responsibles," when it is actually the "responsibles" who have caused the political actions of the Barcelona leaders and their attitude toward anarchist opinion in the CNT.

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Durruti in the Spanish Revolution by Abel Paz.
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We must now speak of these same events in relation to the authorities, the bourgeoisie, and public opinion in general, all of whom gaze at and applaud the struggle between the CNT's left and rightwing, between those inclined to make the Confederation an appendage of the Generalitat and the Esquerra Republicana, and those who represent the Confederation's libertarian spirit, who aren't the FAI, the gentlemen politicians, or union functionaries, but the "real Confederation." It is the spirit that spoke at the Madrid Congress, articulated by all the delegates from the counties, towns, and unions. It is the authentic Confederation, that of the workers who labor, that of the men who believe, who feel, who struggle, who sacrifice, who die when necessary, who have never lived nor will live from liberalism or union professionalism. This internal crisis occurs at a time when we need unity most, during these grave and dangerous moments. This divisionist crisis has undermined the Barcelona proletariat twice already and renders us defenseless against the public powers and the fishers in the rough seas of communism. It is an internal crisis, a process of decomposition, in which some have succumbed to the political disease, in a workers' movement so strong and dynamic that it has intoxicated those put in the lead by circumstance.

We saw it coming long ago, as we now see the series of consequences that the National Committee circular, as well as its poor response to the Barcelona strike, will trigger. The events in Barcelona, the killings at the doorstep of Police Headquarters, the Governor's intransigence and insanity, when he didn't find the entire proletariat on combat footing in an unanimous protest (a protest that could have been made, responding to the masses); all of this gives ample space to the oppressive acts of the Republican authorities, who defend capitalist interests and are embodied in Maura, that despot and future dictator. This, after the tragedy of Andalusia, the repression that the Andalusian peasants are suffering, who did not hear an echo of protest or solidarity from the rest of Spain; all this eliminates any opposition to and hesitation in the govern-

ment, which self-confidently believes that it isn't facing a worthy opponent. Finally, the compromises that labor leaders have made with Maura, hoping to facilitate the approval of the famous Catalan Autonomy Statute; all of this ends the outline of our panorama. When Catalonia is self-governing, the government will have a tolerant policy towards the CNT's "good boys," but it will "tighten the screws"—Company's phrase—on the FAI, on the famous "extremists," on those qualified as extremists because they are not ready to let the Confederation be in Barcelona what the UGT is in Madrid.

And in relation to the Republican and Catalan governments, the Catalanized CNT, with its National Committee installed for life here, will feign ignorance of the rest of Spain, as it feigned ignorance of the strikes in Sevilla and Zaragoza, which were fought out with more honor and intelligence than one finds around here. The Spanish proletariat will be easy to control, as the persecution of anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists divides it, breaks it up, reduces it to sporadic rebellions, undermines its capacity for collective action, and bleeds it of its most active elements, bravery, and spiritual dynamism. It will be easy for the dog trainer that is the Interior Ministry to manage. Each meeting will be a scandal, each strike an embarrassing display of cowardice and incoherence; each day the consummation of a new shame for us and the imposition of a new governmental iniquity. The Republic, consolidated and organized; the Republic, shamelessly at the service of the bourgeoisie; the Republic, managed by the bullying hand imposed on all the ministers and the entire sheep-like Parliament; the Republic, the social-democracy, the owner and master of Spain, obstructing, as I said in my first article written after April 14, the social and political evolution of Iberia!

And here, in the oasis of the Catalan autonomy, in the paradise that Macià's good faith promises—assuming he's capable of good faith—there is a Confederation that has been converted into the

“fourth hand” on the new Consell de Cent de Catalunya;¹ a domesticated Confederation, governmentalized, with a olive branch policy of “harmony” between capital and labor; a labor confederation in the English style. It will be a worker-democracy, manufactured in Barcelona but for export everywhere, to be used by the humanitarian governments underpinning totally worm-eaten, bourgeois orders. With respect to the FAI, to the frightening, terrible FAI; which that herd of ambitious idiots see personified in two men that, if nothing else, at least aren’t cowards; with respect to the FAI as envisioned by the donkeys of Mirador... Oh, people, citizens, brothers of the Iberian people! They will tighten the screws on everyone, even the last volunteer at Soli! There will be a harsh turn from Maura and Companys, not to mention the ineffable Lluhí i Vallescá and poor Mr. Macià!... They have turned the FAI into a mythological monster—a minotaur or dragon—against which neither Theseus nor Saint George are useful...

¹ Translator’s note: literally, the “Council of One Hundred,” which was formed in 1274 and provided for self-government in Barcelona.