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Women in the Anarchist Action Groups

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The hard period of *pistolerismo* was between 1917 and 1923, the time of Martínez Anido, the time of the legalisation of extrajudicial murders through the infamous *Ley de Fugas*, the time of state terrorism with Bravo Portillo's gang and later with the *Sindicatos Libres*. Violence and state terrorism cost the lives of more than 500 libertarian militants. For its part, anarchism responded with the same weapons, the creation of so-called affinity or action groups made up of a small number of militants, to avoid betrayals which they were unable to prevent, who responded with the same violence. It is estimated that there were more than 150 victims of these groups, including Prime Minister Dato, the author of the *Ley de Fugas*, and Cardinal Soldevila. There were many affinity groups made up of anonymous militants, many of whom gave their lives for the cause, while others have become anonymous. After the fall of Martínez Anido, these groups were gradually diluted, but they did not disappear completely, and until the coup d'état of 1936 they revolved around the FAI.

One of the most famous action groups was *Los Solidarios*, created at the end of the *pistolerismo* period and formed by a batch of new militants. There are many doubts about the origin of this group; some sources speak of the union of the Zaragoza group *Los Justicieros* with the Barcelona group *El Crisol*. Other sources say that *El Crisol* was founded by five *Justicieros*, who had fled the situation in Zaragoza. Among the *Justicieros* were names such as Rafael Torres Escartín, Buenaventura Durruti, Gregorio Suberviola and Juliana López Mainar. Be that as it may, in August 1922, in Domingo Ascaso's house in Calle de San Jerónimo, the group *Los Solidarios* was formed by Francisco Ascaso, Juan García Oliver, Aurelio Fernández Sánchez, Ricardo Sanz García, Alfonso Miguel Martorell, Marcelino del Campo, Miguel García Vivancos, Gregorio Martínez Garzón, Gregorio Suberviola Baigorri, Eusebio Brau, Buenaventura Durruti, Antonio Ortiz Ramírez and Rafael Torres Escartín. But there were also women, Ricardo Sanz in his biography adds four names: the *Justiciera* Juliana López Mainar and Ramona Berni, María Luisa Tejedor and Josefa Not. In the continuation of the group in the Second Republic under the name *Nosotros*, Ricardo again includes these four militants. Other sources include María Rius in *Los Solidarios*, bringing the number to five. But both the media of the time and current historiography have silenced the role of women in action or affinity groups. In the specific case of *Las Solidarias*, there is practically no data or information on these militants; there is still much to be researched and it is essential to recover their memory. References about them are very scarce and sometimes they are due to their sentimental relationship with their companions, also members of *Los Solidarios*, which minimises the role of these women. Another way of making them invisible is by limiting their role to mere points of support or transport, something, as we are going to see, which was very far from reality.

This is a brief sketch of these women libertarians and fighters:

Perhaps the most significant for her work was the Zaragozaan Juliana López Mainar, a member of the Zaragozaan group of *Los*

Justicieros, she participated very actively. Juliana was well known for her libertarian activism. In the centre of Zaragoza, in calle Alcober 5, she had a guesthouse that served as a refuge for anarchists who were persecuted by the authorities. She was a housewife and is known to have had a relationship with the anarchist Luis Riera, who in the future would be the partner of María Ascaso, Francisco's sister.

Her first recorded action was in February 1921, when she travelled to Andalusia to try to broaden the bases of her movement in those lands; Durruti travelled with her. Another of her first actions was to transport to Zaragoza part of the loot from a robbery organised by *Los Justicieros* in which the paymaster of an important metallurgical company based in Eibar was the victim. With this money they bought a batch of a hundred 'Star' brand pistols in an arms factory in Eibar itself; the remaining money was divided into two equal parts which were sent to Bilbao and Zaragoza. It arrived in the latter city hidden in Juliana's clothes.

The attack on Cardinal Soldevila by *Los Solidarios* would have serious repercussions. Rafael Escartín stayed at her guesthouse a few days before the attack, while Francisco Ascaso stayed at his mother's house. On the day of the attack, both met at the guesthouse to prepare for the attack, leaving Alcober Street armed and ready. After the attack, both Juliana and her family were the focus of the police investigation and the guesthouse was searched. She was sentenced to six years in prison for complicity in the attack.

In 1933 she was located in Barcelona, where, together with the rest of *Los Solidarios*, now under the name *Nosotros*, she prepared the January insurrection. After the dictatorship, she lived in her neighbourhood of Almozara, running a small business; everyone in the neighbourhood knew about her militant past.

Another of the group's most active militants was María Rius, who, from the age of 18, was already a member of the CNT with membership card no. 1 of the Garment Workers' Union. Alongside her trade union work, she was involved in various social activities,

such as supporting and helping the prisoners of her organisation. She often helped to hide fugitives and organise escapes, for which she was arrested in 1924; explosives and weapons were found at her home and she was sentenced to eight years in prison. María Rius went back to work aiding fugitives, and in the face of police suspicions she had to go into exile in France. After the fall of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, she returned to Catalonia and joined the Women's Pro-Amnesty Committee in Barcelona. On 14 April 1931 she was among the group that stormed the women's prison. On 19 July, María Rius took her place in the street fight, as did many of her people. When the war began, she fought on the Aragon front. In March 1937 she joined the Hilario Zamora column, stationed in Sástago, and took part in the capture of the town of Quinto and the Carnero hill. At the end of the war, in 1939, she fled to France and it is not known when she died.

Another member of *Las Solidarias* was María Luisa Tejedor, a dressmaker by profession. In December 1926 she was arrested in Bilbao after Doval's repression in Gijón and sent to Madrid, where she was accused of having organised the Puente de Vallecas plot to kill King Alfonso XIII. She was imprisoned until 1928 and continued to collaborate with the group, but five years later, in 1933, she was sentenced to three years in prison, probably for taking an active part in one of the libertarian insurrections that took place that year.

Ramona Berni y Toldrá, of peasant origins, was also in the ranks of the group. In the 1910s she moved to Barcelona, where she worked as a weaver and joined the Fabric and Textiles Union of the CNT. Together with her friend Pepita Not, in 1923 she became a *Solidaria*, carrying out liaison and communication tasks. She was briefly arrested by the police on 28 February 1924 after the assassination of the *Solidario* leader Gregorio Suberviola. During the years of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, the group was greatly reduced; according to Ricardo, only he himself, Alfonso Miguel, Ramona and Pepita remained at liberty. Between the four of them,

they were responsible for various actions, such as the attempt to move the weapons acquired in Eibar to Barcelona.

After the proclamation of the Republic, Ramona continued her trade union activity, speaking at events and rallies and collaborating with *Nosotros*. Her last public appearance was at a rally at the Kursaal in Manresa in 1938. At the end of the Civil War she went into exile, perhaps in France, although there is no record of her having been in any of the French concentration camps. The date of her death is unknown.

One of the best known was Josefa Not, better known as Pepita Not, perhaps because she was a companion of Ricardo Sanz. She belonged to a family of humble peasants. In 1918 she met Ricardo and from the creation of *Los Solidarios* she formed part of the group, in which she acted as a courier carrying mail, money and weapons to militants in Asturias, the Basque Country, Aragon and Catalonia. During the Republic she took part in prisoner support groups with Rosario Dolcet Martín and Libertad Ródenas Domínguez. She died as a result of complications during the birth of her daughter, Violeta, in June 1938.