

# **Wildcat Spain encounters democracy, 1976-1978**

**A manuscript found in Vitoria**

Los Incontrolados

1978

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# HOW FRANCOISM BECAME DEMOCRATIC

*'When legality is sufficient to save society then, by all means deploy legality; when it's not enough then dictatorship'*

(Donoso Cortes, in a speech, 4th January 1849)

Comrades,

Modern history has reminded the Spanish bourgeoisie of the alternative formulated over a century ago by Donoso Cortes<sup>1</sup>: when dictatorship is not enough to guarantee its control over society, then democracy. From the moment when dictatorship no longer serves them, democracy must be revived to forestall revolution.

The ever-deepening social crisis and the wildcat advance of a proletarian solution have displaced the real centre of gravity from those who would like to represent it. So much so, that in the circles of power everything is seen to be in disorder and each strata of the hierarchy has been left floating. In order to negotiate with the opposition bureaucrats, those in power have decided to contradict their own legality - a legacy of the times when they could dispense with such appearances - but which today they must organise as quickly as possible. The francoists, who for so long humiliated the proletariat by their triumph, are now forced to humiliate themselves in order that the proletariat doesn't triumph. And the bureaucrats of the opposition, in order to create confidence in the new democracy, have also had to pursue their own legality, show their faces, ally themselves with the workers, humble themselves before them in order to be accepted, or at least not rejected outright. In the last year, during the course of the democratic stabilisation of Spanish capitalism, the party of order - whether francoist or opposition - has seemed as incoherent as that order itself, founded as it is on a comic mixture of unreal laws and unlawful realities. But this has not stopped them from being profoundly united in practice, through a repressive division of labour - some within and others outside of the working class - against the growing autonomous movement.

If we consider the recent past honestly we can quickly understand the immediate future, which faces us. Given the wave of strikes in the winter of 1976, the various factions of the disintegrating regime and the uniting opposition were hastily forced to jointly save the capitalist order whose future was in dispute. When the counter-revolutionary past collapses over everywhere where it had sealed its unity on the corpses of the revolutionaries of 1936 - there is where its putrefying evolution best demonstrates the truth of its being. Their real unity is split into its basic elements, each one getting a new face-lift and their apparent divisions are dissolved in their unity against the enemy. When francoism became democratic, everything paraded in front of the proletariat (unionism, anarchism, Stalinism, francoism) had to be simultaneously opposed. The quite evident unreality of this political democracy, senile from birth, when it tries to market the various varieties of government policy from which the citizen will have to choose, consists in the fact that the

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<sup>1</sup> Juan Donoso Cortes (1809-53), Carlist sympathiser who tried to make Carlism more sophisticated by re-orientating it towards modern problems. (Translator's note.)

margin for social manoeuvring of those leaders and aspiring leaders is so small that enormous difficulties would rain down on them if it presented as plausible these half tones in a pseudo-election. Thus the francoists and opposition, wanting to be taken for great historic renovators, appear, without being able to disguise themselves, as a sordid collection of traders, thieves and shady dealers feverishly manoeuvring in an atmosphere of demagoguery and wretchedness.

What ten years ago would have been taken as a show of force by a section of the Spanish bourgeoisie, demonstrating that it was capable of destroying its terrorist past and ruling without a state of emergency, today merely demonstrates its weakness and fears, when it should be preparing its repressive future. 'The great embrace of the great Spanish family' as Franco used to say, and 'national reconciliation' as Carrillo<sup>2</sup> said, unite in their common counter-revolutionary truth; and as such embraces usually have pimps behind them one of them, Tierno Galvan<sup>3</sup> illustrates the meaning of this cordiality: 'The government has presented an intelligent programme. A political agreement with the opposition could diminish the social and economic protests which run the risk of being transformed into a revolt against the institutional form of the State', ending up with a call for a 'united front of all democratic parties and the regime in order to save it.' (Declaration of 12th August 1976.)

It will not be the first time, nor the last, that the dominant power seeks its salvation by the organisation of elections to give itself the breathing space to come out of 'one of the greatest social and political crises of the 20th century'. If it is true that 'crises are not resolved except by spectacular leaps forward', this great leap forward in the spectacle could not be assured, by holding elections, without a profound general falsification of social relations. Aside from the under-development of the techniques of lying in information and culture, shortly to be remedied (witness the large number of jobs created in this sector), they also lack the very roots of social falsification, given the poor working class representation. The attempt to create unions has failed, not from a lack of interest by the government or the bosses, but because of the negative response of the workers. At the beginning of this year the sum total of those affiliated to the CC.OO, UGT, CNT, USO, STV<sup>4</sup> - in shreds after the proletarian offensive - was less than 200,000 from which a large number of students and cadres must be discounted. It is laughable that the ruined CNS was abandoned because it was no longer useful and what could have been of use - the opposition unions - were of no consequence because they had no support.

Thus, comrades, a form of counter-revolution is dying of old age and is trying to rejuvenate itself by a late democratic renovation. It is, as old Hegel might have put it today, as if in the grey twilight of this reign of shadows the motley politician could do no more than paint grey on grey.

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Comrades,

When the situation after the death of Franco cried out to the capitalists 'make your play', the workers answering with their strikes said 'not any more'. By enthroning Juan Carlos, the neo-francoists still believed that they could at their bidding and under the conditions laid down by them accord a place in the democracy, to the bureaucrats of the opposition. From the beginning,

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<sup>2</sup> Santiago Carrillo, general secretary of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE).(TN)

<sup>3</sup> Tierno Galvan, leader of the Popular Socialist Party, now fused with the PSOE, the Socialist Workers Party, the main second Internationalist party (TN).

<sup>4</sup> See Glossary for organisational abbreviations at the very end of these documents on the assembly led strikes in Spain in the 1970s.

however, they had to accept the help the opposition could not but otherwise proffer them, an assistance which they provided effectively and which was the determinant cause in liquidating the most important strike movement since the civil war.

Since the first Government of the Monarchy<sup>5</sup>, some 100,000 workers, principally in Madrid, Catalonia and the Basque Country have been on strike. The movement spread and at the same time became more radical. With its practice of assemblies and the formation of flying pickets, it surpassed all organisations and endangered the legalism of the bureaucrats. By January, strikes were taking place all over Spain. But it was in Madrid where the autonomous movement of the workers fought its first great battle involving 320,000 workers, principally in the building and metal working industries. The minister for union affairs called for a cease-fire to which the USO, CC.OO and UGT agreed, saying, 'it's neither a question of retarding nor of radicalising the strikes but of finding a negotiable solution.' The principal liquidators of the strikes were to be the Stalinists who while unable to control them, could at least block them. They were the first to accept the promises of the bosses, the bosses the first to renege on them, and the Stalinists, in turn, the first to accept this reneging. Ariza<sup>6</sup> himself, dismissed from Perkins,<sup>7</sup> called on his work-mates to 'continue working normally', which illustrates in caricature the impotence of the CC.OO, and the consciousness of such impotency in utilising the strike as a support for Stalinist politics. In managing to smash the most important strike - Standard Electric<sup>8</sup> - with false information, cheating at the polls, underhand agreements and unrepresentative delegates and everything else that the Stalinists long experience in manipulation and the art of lying had taught them, they succeeded in breaking and demoralising the strike front. First came the big engineering firms, then the smaller ones, then all of the others on strike. The government militarised the post, Renfe<sup>9</sup> and the metro: dismissals, sanctions, arrests and threats did the rest.

Following the principle, sustained with every trick in the book, of an 'ordered retreat so as to regroup at a later date', one by one the strikes collapsed in El Bajo Llobregat, in Malaga, in Valladolid, Barcelona, Tarragona, Elda, Allicante. . . the strikes that continued, like Laforsa in Bajo Llobregat, the three Michelin factories, Roca in Gava, Vers Hutchinson and Terpel in Madrid, remained isolated and doomed to collapse from exhaustion. And in Vitoria, where the strikers' assembly movement had come to the point beyond which only revolution lies, where all recuperation was disarmed and bullets alone could stop it, the guns of the police spouted democracy's last word while the moralising lamentations of the opposition provided harmony. All the defenders of the bourgeois order with their tear-soaked handkerchiefs had been saved for the day.

The battle that started in Madrid and ended in Vitoria the first collision of the proletariat with an opposition henceforth in tow to francoism. The sharing out of repressive tasks was settled and the police completed what the lies and manoeuvres of the bureaucrats could not. Camacho speaking about 'strike mania' opportunely recalls Jesus Hernandez<sup>10</sup> commenting on the 'mania for seizing and collectivising'. In Madrid and in the rest of Spain the return to work was a very

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<sup>5</sup> See Glossary

<sup>6</sup> Government of the Monarchy. See Glossary

<sup>7</sup> Perkins: diesel engine factory in Madrid.

<sup>8</sup> Standard Electric: multinational telephone company in Madrid.

<sup>9</sup> Renfe: Spanish state railway system.

<sup>10</sup> Jesus Fernandez: Communist party member in the government of Largo Caballero, later wrote a book, which exposed the machinations of himself and the CP in Spain during the Civil War . (TN)

costly victory for the battered opposition, they paid dearly to keep their union dyke standing. As a result, the Stalinists had to abandon their project of taking over the CNS vertical union 'with all the lifts in working order', because it was really 'out of order', and a useless vehicle for all concerned. Having to resort to the base to recuperate the assemblies, the Stalinists had to renounce assuming from above the monopoly of workers representation. Forced to go along with the UGT and USO, whose liquidationist capacity was appreciably less, they joined in the negotiations with government and the bosses. Although they recuperated the parallel unionism of the committees formed in each company and the negotiating committees set up from above and outside of the assemblies, it didn't help them. But this parallel unionism, obliged to go through the assemblies, could not last for very long when the latter ceased to function. And when the assemblies were in ascension the lies of parallel unionism had to triumph completely if it did not want to lose in one assembly everything achieved in the rest. The assemblies of strikers, however imperfect their control over the struggle, contain the possibility of total autonomy in making and carrying out decisions and have to suppress all external representation. In conclusion, the sad role that the politico-union opposition played throughout the present historical period was that of supporting the government no matter what, even to its own detriment, without ever being able to guarantee peace.

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Comrades,

Going into action is to war what payment is to commerce. The battle of Vitoria on 3rd March 1976 was that moment of truth when all protagonists of the social war had to appear as they really were. Without leaders, the workers threw themselves so courageously into the struggle that bosses and bureaucrats alike were dumbfounded by this unmentionable autonomy. Some of them hoped, without real conviction, that the movement would recognise the mediation of the vertical unions whose 'representatives' had been forced to resign by the workers. Without expecting that the intervention of their unionism would be of much use, they now limited themselves to preventing their stronghold - the Michelin factory<sup>11</sup> - from joining the strike. In two months of autonomous organisation of struggle (through daily factory assemblies, and twice-weekly joint assemblies which could not take decisions which had not been previously approved of in the factory assemblies) the workers had united the sufficient practical conditions of its conscious offensive. By adopting as fundamental principles, beyond any possible discussion, 'All power to the assemblies of the working class' and 'Everything within the assembly, nothing outside it', they took the initiative that could lead to the revolution that must leave nothing exterior to it. But the workers saw the assemblies solely as a better means of defence, and did not recognise the extent of their challenge to the existing society and so dissimulated their self-organisation.

Nevertheless what the workers ignored, the state already knew and even more so the union bureaucracy struggling to form itself. Within a movement which carries all the workers in a factory forward, un-masking those who speak in their name and stifling their manipulations, it is enough that they impose direct control in the general assembly. The workers then appropriate as a new need, the need for communication, and so 'what in the beginning appeared as a means changes into an end in itself, direct communication which overcomes the defensive struggle against representations and abolishes the conditions of separation which had made representation necessary. Consequently, all responsible unionists could say that they agreed with

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<sup>11</sup> Michelin: tyre factory based in Vitoria.



the ends pursued but not with the means employed. In fact the requirements of the struggle led the workers irresistibly to cease making demands, to take what they needed. This process had to be interrupted at its most advanced point: Vitoria had become too exemplary in respect of what the proletariat could achieve without parties and unions at the moment in which the promise to give into their demands was seen as the answer to all their needs. On the 3rd of March, the strike was general throughout the city, and the demonstrations in the capital saw barricades go up for the first time accompanied by the first violent confrontations in which the police used guns. The peaceful illusions of the originators disappeared. The police fell back awaiting reinforcements. Provisional masters of the streets, the workers contented themselves with reinforcing the system of barricades and what is worse were so naive as to meet, as if nothing had happened, at the pre-arranged assembly in the church of Saint Francis. Letting the police know about the meeting was like having the foresight to do their job for them. Anyone who doesn't like to ideologically sanctify what was still the weakness of the autonomous movement must say that it was the unconsciousness of the workers, above all else, which delivered them into the hands of their enemy, in the worst possible conditions. They assembled in the church to listen yet again to the legalistic placebos of the choirmasters, who insisted that the police would not enter 'because the authorities would not permit it'. The workers missed their chance of retreating voluntarily despite a valiant attempt at a diversion by those outside. The police were therefore able to regain the initiative, which the workers had granted them. Choosing to reach a verdict through a show of force, the state, wagering that the workers would not be able to organise their answer or their arms, took the risk of putting an end to the first spontaneous form of the proletarian offensive, of violently imposing the consciousness of what was at stake. Francoism took such a risk because it had calculated it hand in hand with the opposition: the union/ political bureaucracy which let the repression begin and end without calling a national strike, although for the first time in its life it risked being listened to and followed, if not actually preceded (as was the case with various local general strikes, as in Pamplona). The desperate violence after the shooting in Vitoria demonstrated that the workers' determination, though unorganised and unaided, had not been annihilated. But the rage behind the destructive actions only expressed more clearly the rage at not having done it more effectively before. The only possible way of surpassing the struggle was by turning the riot into an insurrection, which meant calling for revolution throughout Spain (the state was perfectly conscious of this and hurriedly cut off all telephone communications with the outside); But the proletariat had not progressed as far as that. Not having envisaged the need for self-defence, all communication amongst themselves was completely disorganised by the repression. Guns had to speak before the assemblies would quieten down. Silence reigned in Vitoria. The workers' committee from the Forjas Alavesas factory wrote in its analysis of the struggle 'There is no better way of resolving the conflict than by dismantling one of its parts. We have returned to work without achieving everything we wanted. Firstly we were bound to do so because of machine-gun fire. And secondly, if we consider the assembly as our most fundamental weapon, we have been disarmed.' ('Thoughts on the Forjas Alavesas strike'.) Each time the state takes the initiative with a frontal attack, it obliges the workers to transform their own particular method of waging war into that of the state's. And in order to dominate this method before being dominated by it - as during the civil war- in order to use it without reproducing it, something, which the working class has to do, many more Vitorias are necessary.

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Comrades,

The first government of the monarchy died in Vitoria. Its birth was not due to the general agreement amongst the pretenders to Franco's reign but to the negotiation of the then president Arias<sup>12</sup> with the most astute first-comers and opportunistic impostors. Those francoists who were not included in the government and who were not prepared to accept it, formed their own separate parties, entrenching themselves in their division of power and its Institutions, following the share-out that took place after Franco's death. If they could not direct the government from the separate party positions, they at least could contain it. To transform the francoist institutions smoothly, to successfully modernise the state or reflate the economy, the government had to reorganise francoism as the government party by replacing its worn parts and gaining the collaboration of the opposition, ceding some responsibility to it without putting it back in the apparatus. It had to win new friends from outside as well as to prevent old enemies from retaliating from within.

Fraga<sup>13</sup>, seemingly the strongest man at the time, did what political dwarfs do on great occasions - he stumbled and fell. He fabricated by means of ministerial appointments the pretence of a persona party wanting to impose his conditions on everyone by separate negotiations with each, But he lacked the strength to gain the time necessary to impose himself and the astuteness to utilise it. The strike movement had brought up all its subversive reality while the government vacillated from one day to the next. At the end of March 1976 the official organ of officious democracy, *Cambio 16* wrote: 'after Vitoria everything is possible', earnestly hoping for a new government that could come to an agreement with the opposition in order to 'obtain a truce in the streets and in the factories'. Fraga, on detaining Camacho and others, shamefully sought excuses instead of remedies, reproaching the opposition for not having managed to hold reality at bay, as if the latter hadn't had to pursue it, in order not to lose the possibility of controlling it. Trying to buy the opposition on credit it offered no room for manoeuvre, because he knew that they would work for free when everything hung in the balance due to the strike movement. And so he remained alone in his headquarters in between the francoists united against him to preserve their State and the opposition joined together in the democratic co-ordination prepared to negotiate this salvation with anyone who cared to listen to them and was prepared to occupy the 'power vacuum' that the imminent fall of the government would leave. The demobilisation of the Vitoria Solidarity movement and also of the first of May was the last unpaid job of the opposition, which allowed the Arias government to survive for a few more weeks. Similarly it was the final stab in the back to the strike movement that lost the final opportunity of re-uniting and returning to the attack. The initial failure of the government of Fraga and Arias marked the end of the authoritarian illusions of francoism. In future it would have to take democracy seriously. As the new president of the government, Suarez,<sup>14</sup> later declared: 'On the one hand there is a very active, very intelligent opposition, which does not have experience of government, on the other hand there are government officials who do not have the least notion of what the function

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<sup>12</sup> Arias Navarro: President of the first government after Franco's death. (TN)

<sup>13</sup> Fraga Iribarne: leader of the extreme right wing Popular Alliance, ex-Minister for Information and Tourism under Franco as well as Ambassador to Britain. Some members of FRAP (a Spanish Maoist party) attended a wining and dining given by Fraga in the Spanish Embassy in London when Franco died. They considered Fraga a representative of progressive forces in Spain. (TN)

<sup>14</sup> Adolfo Suarez: leader of the UDC, the prime minister after the 1976 elections and engineer of the unity of the centre parties. (TN)

of the parties is all about. It's a question of getting them working together-everything depends on that' (Cambio 16, 6th '12th September 1976).

Because of the uncontrolled violence of the workers, democracy lost its first battle even before it came into existence. In future it would have to reform its rearguard forces, sacrificing all the dangerous and vulnerable positions that the former system of defence had bequeathed to it. Every battle lost is a weakening, disintegrating factor. The most urgent need was to collect its forces together in order to gather newfound strength and confidence. This could only come from amongst the forces least affected in the combat, from among the democratic organisations of the opposition that Spanish capital was learning to appreciate in some measure as its strategic reserve. But as Clausewitz had demonstrated, 'Just as reserve tactics are recommendable so the idea of retaining as a reserve strategy, forces that are already prepared, is contrary to common sense. The reason is because battles decide the outlook of the war and so the employment of reserve tactics precedes any decision, whilst reserve strategies follow it.' And in fact this last card that capitalism wanted to keep up its sleeve had to be played at the opening of the game. Between the workers and the state (i.e. the police and military forces of law and order) there existed only a fragile buffer of politico-union bureaucracies to take the first shock of the workers' offensive. So, in reality the politico-union bureaucracy, all its outposts exposed on open ground and to the repressive forces of the state, constituted rather the reserve tactics whose employment would decide the outcome of the battle. The police assassinations throughout the 'bloody week' were carried out at the very time when the bureaucracy, extremely skilled after two months of manoeuvring and lying was going to be blasted itself. To get the workers to agree to the moderate positions of the opposition it was necessary to frighten them.

On 13th March 1976 that weekly magazine of unadulterated Stalinism Triunfo<sup>15</sup>, wrote: 'Undoubtedly the working class also pick up some lessons from these events. The first is that recourse to violence in addition to being ethically wrong is politically wrong also because it plays into the hands of reaction. All those that take upon themselves the possibility of influencing a working class, deprived of a party, deprived of unions, its complaints continually disregarded, must do so in the sense of recommending calm and quietness. If strikes, demonstrations or meetings turn into riots the working class has everything to lose by it'. Resorting to intimidation during the following week was one of the means used most by the bureaucrats to end the strikes. The bosses profited the most from the victory of the pseudo-clandestine unions over the strikes; firstly by standing firm over the dismissals and sanctions, then introducing specific legislation against strike pickets, and finally by later securing the suspension of article 35 of the labour Relations Law which allowed the bosses the right to sack workers without paying redundancy money. The unions allowed these three things to pass uncontested. Finally, the bosses abandoned the CNS doting on those unionists disposed to an early dialogue with the workers unions whose capacities for falsifying, dividing and ruling had to quickly reach its climax to confront the next inevitable movement of the masses. They needed leaders 'that are as capable of calling a stoppage as of ordering a return to work' (Ribera Rovira, president of the Barcelona Chamber of Commerce), and

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<sup>15</sup> Triunfo: glossy weekly with pronounced CP sympathies. To a degree that is absent in Cambio 16 it recalls the 'past glories' of the workers' movement Spain in practically every issue even going so far as to show some affection for its old enemy the re-awakened CNT whose repressive function vis-à-vis the autonomous movement Triunfo doubtless welcomed. Also hailed the return of Jose Pierats, the anarchist ideologist, (though every revolutionary is an ideologist at sometime or another), whose book Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution is nevertheless one of the most intelligent and readable of the 1936'39 uprising. (TN)

there are special recommendations: if the Catalan boss Duran Farrell was a worker, according to him, 'he would be in the Comisiones Obreras'. For their part, the unions would not have any difficulty in convincing the capitalists of their good intentions, although they would have a much tougher job in passing off their tricks on the working class. 'For 25,000 pesetas inscription fees, heads of personnel and managers of more than 100 companies were able to see and hear in the flesh union leaders from the 'illegal' CC.OO, USO and UGT. They all insisted on a dialogue: 'the workers do not go on strike for pleasure'; 'the workers do not want companies to founder'; 'class struggle does not exclude dialogue rather it presupposes it'. None of them wanted to frighten the managers off, one of whom present even exclaimed: 'What a shame that the workers in the factories do not think in the same way as those in this room' (Cambio 16, 24th to 30th May 1976). But wanting to be of help is not enough! To be of use it is necessary to close ranks and avoid surprises like Vitoria and the appearance on the scene of 'unknown' revolutionary formations swamping union bureaucracies. In the big cities co-ordinating bodies (like the COS in Madrid) were formed, ready to occupy the gap the CNS never filled, while the Stalinists gave up trying to transform the CNS into an inter-sindical such as the PC succeeded in doing in Portugal; the groupuscules of every shade entered en masse into the several central unions.

The government and the opposition exchanged mutual bows and went off together to prepare the counter attack. The second neo-francoist government came to power on a programme of continuing this same democratic progression on a social terrain dangerously exposed to the view of the ascendant assembly movement, although it had only occupied the terrain partially, and now sought new means and allies. 'The workers have taken the factory as the field of operations' - J. Garrigues Walker <sup>16</sup> and it is from this exclusive concentration on their direct terrain of unification that people like Garrigues Walker shall have to divert them.

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Comrades,

In Spain, we can say that, concentrated in time, all the present dilemmas of the possessing classes of the world are to be found. The property owning classes, discussing how to administer their failure and how best to make it profitable again by strengthening the state either cloaking it with 'the energy crisis' or 'the economic crisis' are neither able to save the economy nor be saved by it. Faced with the crisis of the economy, it is a matter here in Spain, as everywhere else, of persuading workers, through the intermediaries of unions and parties that the economy is a natural alienation that requires being administered in the best possible way, and not an historical alienation that must be overcome as soon as possible. But as the development of the crisis of the economy is accelerated at this moment in Spain by a particular economic crisis whose consequences are increased by an absence of union control, the difficulties in getting the masses to respond to the dramatised austerity, are considerably greater. Similarly the limited time in which to embark on 'a new model of development', basis of agreement of all moderates, is still more marked. Before all else, the Spanish economy requires a new 'stabilisation plan'. Loans from international capital will be necessary, but more urgently, the search for the conditions of profitability amongst the proletariat. Each strike becomes more and more the state's business the longer it is prolonged, obliging the state to intervene and so raising the question of self-defence. The opposition proposes political democracy as the remedy, which means allowing it to become

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<sup>16</sup> Garrigues Walker: big capitalist of Catalunya, related to the right wing catholic Opus Dei.- Ex minister of Franco.

part of the government, not only in respecting the economy as it has done up to now but to rescue it through a social contract. Consequently it desisted attacking the economy, provided it was given the opportunity to defend it. But such sophisms did not deceive the government who knew, watching the opposition do all it could against the mobilisation and radicalisation of workers, that if the opposition was unable to do more it was because it couldn't. So the second government of the monarchy allowed the opposition to delude itself with the promise of some electoral crumbs, while it devoted itself to the controlled adaptation of the state institutions. And it is not because of some supposed betrayal by the opposition that neo-francoism has stabilised itself. Firstly, because the opposition was in no position to prevent it, and secondly because it did not want anything more than what it was finally given. However, it would have liked to have created the appearance of having won concessions after a great struggle, but had to give up this hope. It spoke about a republic, then of a more democratic king, then of a representative government of national unity, then of some ministry and finally settled for being allowed to stand at the elections. One cannot fail to see that because of the action taken by the Suarez government and the passivity of the opposition, the regime had effected an orderly retreat with the minimum of losses. And managing to keep control of the political situation, it has retained the possibility of returning to take over the entire social terrain. Cleverly combining tolerance in relation to details, and repression where essential, the government maintained contact with the proletariat that was pressuring it, thus preventing the proletarian movement from accelerating and returning to a lawless turmoil that would have forced the government to make some quite important sacrifices because of the consequent internal disintegration. Contrast the unexpected firmness of the Suarez-Guitierrez Mellado<sup>17</sup> government with the confused cowardice of the opposition, whose prudence was the best part of its courage and its obscure bargaining the clearest instance of its prudence. By political calculation, it was sufficient for the government to simply negotiate separately with its principal components for them to deflate the bluff of the 'democratic co-ordination'. Each part feared losing or at least missing some minor advantage if it continued to associate with the others and the rivalry that resulted from this disparity inevitably divided them. But even without this, the democratic co-ordination had ceased in fact to exist from the moment when the government acknowledged the favours of the Stalinists who were endorsed with the opening of the dialogue with Suarez. The exclusion of all the superfluous parties - the Maoists, the small incidental groups like that of Treviziano and the Carlists<sup>18</sup> - cost nothing but was nevertheless a relief for them. The remodelled opposition therefore presented themselves in a more respected fashion with a new 'negotiating committee' which, along with the government, prepared the liquidation of the October strikes, and so dissipating their final dreams of glory, recalling, nostalgically, 'how beautiful it all was to be a democrat under Franco'.

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<sup>17</sup> Guitierrez Mellado: Minister of Defence in the Suarez government. General in the Armed Forces and vice-president of the government. (TN)

<sup>18</sup> Carlists: their ideology was initially a crude amalgam of religious obscurantism and rural localism enshrined in the *fueros* (laws) of Navarra, the Basque country, inland Catalunya and lower Aragon. In 1937 Franco forcibly merged carlism with the Falange. From the mid 1960s on, the movement made a new appeal to frustrated youth and regionalists. It advocated 'popular monarchy' but was cut short by Franco's tutoring of Juan Carlos as the future King of Spain. (TN)

Comrades,

The revolutionary proletariat exists and the long series of exemplary strikes in autumn 1976 in the Basque country, in Barcelona, in Sabadell, Tenerife, Valencia, Madrid, Leon, Gava etc proves it. The proletariat, neither resting nor allowing anyone else to rest caused the government to change its tactics, which now had to be less concerned about itself and more about the opposition. Although its own position was not strengthened it had to make sure the opposition was not weakened either, leaving the social terrain open to revolution. We may ask ourselves if the government, faced with violence in the streets and factories was pessimistic about its future, or had the impression of a diffuse pre-insurrectional chaos, or if it simply smelt something smouldering? What is certain is that be it one, the other, or all of them, the government acted rapidly, giving the go-ahead to the unions and the parties, organising its own party and setting a date for elections.

The provocations of the extreme right provided the alibi, which justified making what previously was a tactical agreement into an official one. The final bloody events of February allowed the opposition to openly proclaim its support for the government and to secretly demand from it a promise not to abandon it, given the waves of anti-union strikes that would not be long in coming.

Francoism definitely had now become completely democratic and the opposition completely francoist, with their democracy closing the door to the revolution. It's up to the proletariat to wrench it open.

# THE REVOLUTION DOES NOT DRAW ITS POETRY FROM THE PAST

'We knew that, henceforth the committees responsible to the CNT, could do nothing other than put obstacles in the way of the proletarian advance. We are the friends of Durutti, and strong enough to depose for reasons of incompetence and cowardice these individuals who have betrayed the working class. At the time when we had no enemies in front of us, they handed over power to Companys, the police, the reactionary governor of Valencia and secretary of defence, General Pozas. Betrayal is really something.'

(Manifesto of 'Friends of Durutti', 8th May 1937)

Comrades,

The working class taking up the struggle, once again, was nothing like the same class that had impetuously hurled itself into the strikes of the previous year. The guns of the police and manoeuvres of the bureaucrats made them understand what the concessions obtained really meant. The greatest achievement of the assembly movement is the movement itself. The freedom taken by the workers in starting to unite and organise themselves without intermediaries, is the one thing that could neither be granted by the regime nor demanded by its leaders, because today traditional Spanish society is besieged and is falling apart. The assembly movement is the lived freedom of anti-hierarchical dialogue, the realisation of authentic democracy. It is where the revolution feels most at home and where its enemies feel like intruders, now not only denuded but denounced by their ideological jargon. Here, all practical problems take form and can be resolved. In the organisation of strike pickets it was a question of autonomy arming itself in dissolving the elected assembly committees where the manipulators wanted to place their representatives it was now a question of not supplying new weapons to the enemy. But the most threatening thing for the bureaucrats are not these initiatives but the fact that the workers, once they get together to take command of the movement, feel themselves naturally propelled to carry them out in practice and, later on, by experimentation and further practice to correct and supercede them.

There is nothing that the bureaucrats undermine more, nothing that they persist in combating and destroying with such bloodthirstiness than direct communication. Despite all their praise as representatives, the bureaucrats could never hope to stabilise the situation while free discussion - that discussion which made dialecticians of the workers - existed.

Frequently in history, especially at the beginning of a new epoch, the mass movement is judged by those who represent it, or at least pretend to have done so in the past. This generally is valid for the self-image that a nascent revolution has of its aims, its language, and its references to the past and to the imaginary genealogy in which it wants to guarantee its truth. The francoist counter-revolution, in prohibiting both access to the revolutionary past and its critical re-appropriation, has been the best ally of those bureaucrats who helped expropriate its memory in the autho-

rised versions of those who make the myths. This is the reason why the anti-fascist falsehood, run mainly by the Stalinists, had been able to dominate the scene for such a long time. It is better to die on one's feet than live on one's knees and it is better still to survive in Prague or in Moscow making capital out of martyrs and carrying on the trade in corpses. Eventually - with the decomposition of anti-fascist ideology followed by an attitude of surprise - the enlightened technique of rewritten false histories had to redeem from the shadow, other more suitable ruins, which undoubtedly would excite admiration. One was anarchism, disinterred everywhere as an anti historical and tranquilising explanation of the modern contestation of the state, and reduced to the eternal belief in the return of revolt. It was the one which for obvious reasons was most suitable in Spain than anywhere else since it had once been a massive reality here, the local ideological form of the general alienation of the old workers' movement that in other places originated from Marxism. The revolution draws its poetry from the future from where it has to learn to re-invent its justifications and impose them: its partisans have no need to defend anything of the illusory and boring paradise of petrified memories. Given that they are present, without any need of justification, they must choose to forget those obsessive references and, refresh the historical memory. Those starting to make history again have no reason to learn it and besides whom could they learn it from? They shall learn the truth of what happened in history only by struggling against what opposes them. In so doing all that was previously true shall return in a tangible form and capable of verification. The revolution then can serenely separate itself from the past.

It is not a question of the revolutionary critique giving currency to a new version of the past, but of showing how the real movement extricates itself from the past; not only of explaining what leads up to the present revolutionary situation but of demonstrating what, in the present situation, explains the previous process giving it its revolutionary direction. Such a critique has to regard as an enemy everyone that positively evaluates 'the constructive work' of the revolutionary anarchists of 1936. They cannot be considered constructors other than in the extent of their impotence and failure to destroy the criteria, which allows their achievements to be appreciated on the terrain of economic rationality, justifying self-management by counting the number of kilos of oranges and rice produced on the collectives. The 'phantoms of 1937' return to besiege democracy 40 years after. But the leader's nightmare should never become the dream of revolutionaries: if one dreams it is because one is asleep. Today's proletarians will have to be much worse than the insurrectionaries of May 1937 who really knew how to act without their masters knowing how to retaliate. Modern subversion cannot begin until it has liquidated all the superstitions of the past.

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Comrades,

Within the Spanish economy in crisis, the only expanding sector (albeit chaotically), leading to a considerable increase in the number of jobs available, is that of the politico/union bureaucracy. And amidst this growing frenzy of basic training courses, provided to the new recruits, less representatives of the workers than travelling salesmen for their beloved union and democracy, it is necessary to comment on the resuscitated CNT, both because of its present misery and the greatness of the past that it tries to inherit. Without mentioning the genetic arguments



in the manner of Santillan<sup>1</sup> ('In Spain there is a nearly racial tendency towards anarchism'), the importance of anarchism in the former Spanish workers' movement has been either abusively attributed to anecdotes (for example because Fanelli, the first emissary of the International in Spain was a Bakunist) or interpreted tendentiously by a sub-Marxist sociology (the importance of the agrarian proletariat and industrial workers of recent peasant origin). A more historical analysis cannot forget that the revolutionary movement of the proletariat is determined by its origins in the socio-economic framework of each country, by whatever has been the formal mode of appearance of the bourgeoisie. It is both the organisational and programmatic legacy with which the proletariat begins to fight and the terrain, conditioning its struggle, on which it fights. Thus, the importance of politics in the organised workers' movement of each country is exactly proportional to the degree to which the national bourgeoisie has appropriated the state and achieved political domination. Now no one should be surprised if in Spain the proletariat was not side-tracked by politics while the bourgeoisie came in the side door through their compromise with the landed aristocracy. The Marxist position, identifying the proletariat and the bourgeoisie from the point of view of the revolutionary seizure of power was not only a general strategic illusion in Spain, but a particular tactical error that totally failed to understand the meaning of the initial battles; an incomprehension that was later aggravated by the sordid necessities of the anti-Bakunin polemics. But what some understood was only ignored by others. If the scientific ideology based on the conception of a universally applicable linear scheme achieved its bureaucratic truth with the Stalinist 'theory of stages', the ideology of liberty had, for its part, to fully reveal its hidden authoritarianism, when all the questions, which it had inhibited, were formulated in practice by the revolution. So historical justice destined the question of organisational mediation that always was the rotten apple in the anarchist barrel, to represent its negative decomposition, a process of putrefaction that ended on 6th November 1936 with the peremptory affirmation of Solidaridad Obrera: 'As of yesterday the proletariat of the CNT is collaborating in the governing of Spain'. The revolutionary immediacy that anarchism had always guaranteed and promised encountered its unforeseen realisation in this sudden governmental metamorphosis of the proletariat. But if history, through what the anarchist masses attempted in spite of their leaders, has already criticised the worst side of anarchism, it is today necessary to criticise its better side - the same actions of the masses who, applying the anarchist programme (such as was formulated in the final Congress of Zaragossa<sup>2</sup> -the best representation of the separate coherence of ideology) showed its limitations and verified its insufficiencies. The collectivisation experiment intending to rid itself of a poor economy, as well as money, could only proceed slowly with its anti-economic programme in the agricultural sector and only as 'Libertarian communism in one village'. In the factories the union bureaucracy far from taking control of the organisation of production, discovered through the 'war effort' the way forward to its integration into the state thus forestalling collectivisation. What contemporary self-management finds there in the way of precursor and innovator, on the same level as any Titoist self-management, is that it has no revolutionary future, and not even

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<sup>1</sup> Diego Abas de Santillan (1897-), historian of the Spanish and Latin-American anarchist and anarcho-sindicalist labour movements. One of the founders of FAI in 1927, after the outbreak of the Civil War, Santillan became Minister of the Economy in the Generalitat (government) of Catalunya. Returned from exile in 1976. (TN)

<sup>2</sup> 10th May, 1936, CNT met in Zaragossa. Stressed collectivisation of industry, expropriation without indemnity of all landed property larger than 50 hectares, a restructuring of the country on the basis of a confederation of autonomous communes. Largo Caballero described it as a 'transcendent event'! 884 delegates voted for a 'revolutionary alliance' with the UGT - only 12 were opposed. (TN)

a counter-revolutionary one. What are judged past utopias, in keeping with the inevitable anarchistic nostalgia for the golden age - confusing the practical movement with its Kropotkinite ideologies, is on the contrary, the bearer of an authentic negative grandeur whose meaning one must know how to interpret. Anarchism wanted to suppress the economy but one cannot suppress the economy without realising it. The illusion of suppressing the economy that is not at the same time its realisation is not now supported by any movement that combats existing conditions, but is propagated solely in the form of an antiseptic, pedagogic moralising by an idiotic ecological reformism. And the CNT, resurrected alongside the present proletarian movement as the jack-of-all-trades unions for the lumpen-bourgeoisie in search of ideological certainties, is the historical dustbin, collecting naturally the ecologists and their problems of waste. Anarchism wanted to suppress the economy without realising it; Marxism wanted to realise the economy without suppressing it, to realise the proletariat as the greatest productive force, albeit economic. And of course, neither of these two unilateral positions could crown their enterprise with any success, although each at the moment of truth had to do the contrary of what it intended. In the anarchist collectives the monetary abstraction was formally combated while at the same time it was generalised everywhere as the concrete content of activity - so in this way life tended to be converted into an 'economic problem'. At the same time the totalitarian identification of bureaucratic power with the proletariat, that is, the terrorist dictatorship of an ideology that wanted to rationalise the economy, abandoned all economic problems to the police, going as far as dementedly scorning the prime necessities of economic rationality. Today the modern revolution, through the struggles where the project begins to be unified, shows us that the suppression and the realisation of the economy are inseparable aspects of the same supercession of the economy.

The assembly movement today, by overcoming its first spontaneous forms, is faced with the task that had arrested previous revolutionary attempts; the need not merely to occupy but also transform the social space in which separation reigns naturally over hierarchy and non-communication. If the revolution takes up from where it left off, it is not because of some mystic fatality. It is because the previous limitation that it had encountered now confronts it as an obstacle to the formulation and organisation of this same conscious project. Where previously it was its own incapacity, today it is the power of the enemy: one which has converted its territory, by a kind of inverted scorched earth policy, into something nearly impossible to re-appropriate. So then Bakunin's famous formula 'the desire for destruction is a creative passion' is no longer the expression of a subjective truth but the accurate formulation of an objective need to install over the ruins of passivity the only operational base from which the power of the assemblies can recognise itself and pass to the offensive. This need to construct the terrain of autonomy where the circulation of commodities ceases and mankind begins to encounter each other had begun to be gratified on the 3rd of March in Vitoria with vandalism and barricades and was summarily expressed in the interruption of traffic on the Madrid/Irun motorway and in the main access routes to the city. In the social war the proletariat does not only have information problems respecting its enemy's positions but also in regard to its own. As everything exists to prevent these problems from being resolved, it is necessary to destroy everything that exists. The present movement scorned politics but it had to learn to overcome politics. It was not enough to simply disregard it. Although the proletariat imagined it could ignore the state, it in turn, had not been ignored by the state. And although there hardly remained any illusions concerning the 'democratic' unionism being planned for it, the proletariat shall just have to take charge totally of autonomous relations if the walls of the factory are not to be the final

ramparts of the old world. In the neighbourhood assemblies, which spread everywhere, the tendency to reject exploitation in the whole of everyday life advanced steadily, and from there developed the critique of wage labour. The assemblies, since then have become a channel for all Christian Stalinists fishing in the murky waters of sordid survival (neighbourhood associations) with the ridiculous slogan of 'democratic Town Halls'. However, they have also generalised the thirst for dialogue and the experience of self-defence. At the same time as the form of the assembly was adopted, in all areas where it corresponded to a total necessity, it was recuperated as a caricature without content in all other areas where it was necessary to appear real i.e. in student and progressive substitute milieus or those of the politico/cultural spectacle, and were either very boring or very stupid. These shady 'bazaars' where cowardice and submission celebrated its redemption, with its liturgy and intecessors, were by no means the principal expression, nor even a weak echo, of real and free communication. This project of discussion, unlike those which the workers assemblies gave rise to, was content with a freedom of speech that accepted the fact that they were powerless to do anything or finally say anything. Here they wanted to discuss everything but ended up discussing nothing. If the workers assemblies only wanted to discuss what they were doing, and if eventually everything was discussed, that was because it was necessary to do everything possible, even if it only meant continuing to talk, to stop the bureaucratic monopoly of expression from being re-established. To combat this confusionist interference, the assembly movement only needs to draw its theory from its practise and forbid all else as a socially obnoxious noise. Forcing all its enemies to accept its existence and feign support for its terms was its first victory. The race to recuperate and the 'scrum' in which each managed to put the boot in, exhausted the assemblies enemies without any of them succeeding, as they say, to capitalise on the gold of autonomy: the latter changed into carbon when they attempted to mint it with their ideological money. In the usurious race for external representations inflation ate into everything that was a false autonomy. Ectoplasmic mini-bureaucracies sprang up and died during the course of a strike, acquiring their existence at the cost of their inconsistency, and then paying the price by disappearing. It even went so far as the Stalinists of the CC.OO throwing a little councilism into their unionism and some assemblyism into their manoeuvrings. Throughout a busy year the Stalinists had composed a veritable encyclopaedia on the manipulative use of the proletariat, which cried out for a single practical conclusion. In order for their positions in the assemblies to win the revolutionary workers must not be paralysed by democratic formalism. By opposing the despicable behaviour of the Stalinists, their leftist rivals were able to obtain, in proportion to their denunciation, some ephemeral successes, but only so long as they contented themselves with that; their influence receded once they attempted to profit from it. Their tail-ending opportunism had wanted to create the impression of moving from victory to victory, but to be a Lenin it was not enough to shout 'all power to the assemblies', it is not enough to acknowledge a changing reality, one must in addition, in trying to control and direct it, be acknowledged by it. The final misadventures of decomposed Leninism were very well illustrated in the comical confusion of the only leftist group (Los Plataformas anti-capitalistas) that continued to keep afloat in the backwash of the movement in Vitoria.

They had to support the dissolution of the representative Committees against the Stalinists to preserve their assembly image while at the same time hold onto the base of its mythical mass

organisation (OCA)<sup>3</sup> which of all the representative committees in the congress of representatives would not relinquish taking power. Meanwhile when the beginning of generalised violence after 3rd March had put an end to their margin of recuperating manoeuvre, these anti-capitalist had modestly attached themselves to the democratic version of the events and the most Christian pacifism: 'There was not any confrontation in Vitoria between police and demonstrators. What actually happened was a brutal attack against the respect owed to a holy place and against the human person'. (Manifesto of the representative committee read by Naves 6th March 1976).

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Comrades,

The revolution is not a matter of diverting the enemy but of destroying it. The proletariat do not require justifications because they do not have to convince anyone. They seek their own satisfaction and are not motivated to satisfy that of others. If the proletariat cannot assume its historical *raison d'être* it cannot hope to win. Once more, the necessary and sufficient definition of the modern council is the realisation of its minimum tasks, which are neither more nor less than the practical and definitive liquidation of all the problems that class society is incapable of resolving. Anything else is the prattle of impotence or the diversions of manipulators. No juridical formalism can guarantee to the workers organised in councils the right to exercise total democracy. Only greatness will make them great while wretchedness will make them wretched. The practice of the assemblies makes everything possible but assures nothing. The only theory of the councils of ex-workers that it is necessary to develop is the theory of their war against all that does not belong to them and against everything inside the class that prevents them from being the unique power, beginning with what they have inherited from the past, thus limiting their appropriation. In this war everything is very simple but even the simplest thing becomes difficult. No one has the experience of the growing and practical problems and the time necessary to acquire it could suffice to lose everything. The proletariat arms itself by disarming the enemy and re-appropriating any backlash against it. But if it was merely a matter of a single spontaneous coup d'état and if, in short, the enemy found itself, even before it had to fight, placed in conditions that rendered the task of combating the revolution a hopeless one, then it would be very easy to make history and revolution would be a kind of idyll, the limit of the spontaneous offensive of the workers is always the organised defence against the enemy which obliges them to organise in accordance with its means and capacities. The real way to wage the social war, i.e. freely adapting it to the specific needs by every means available, has for too long passed as a subject which doesn't fit into this theory, and which only depends on its momentary spontaneous improvisation. For most of the time these problems just come up as something extra and as anonymous memories or accounts because the protagonists deceive themselves by mistaking reality as some ideal. We know that such illusions have reigned, to a large extent, amongst the anarchists, especially in its unionist form ideas purporting to resolve the problem of revolutionary re-appropriation and under the form of a militarised organisation external to the class - which intends to resolve it with a definitive putsch. The techniques of the social war include techniques obligatory in all wars but it is never reduced to the latter if the revolution, with the militarisation that it presupposes, does not reduce itself to a conventional war. As one militiaman said during the civil war: 'We shall not

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<sup>3</sup> See Glossary. Organizion de Clase Anticapitalista.(TN)

win like this'. In conclusion Spain must remember that it is the classic country of the guerrilla and it will have to invent superior forms of guerrilla activity in accord with a modern revolution. Comrades,

What we have experienced has only been the mild beginning of something that will happen in the future and which will continue for some time. For the new revolutionary movement spontaneously springing up from the soil of a modernised Spanish society, it is above all a question of organising and coherently unifying the basis of the project of subverting class society. The critique that makes no concessions to the still-not-overcome deficiencies of the proletariat must accept its share in the present isolation of the workers. Linking its fortune to radical proletarian acts and to their future it must begin with the ideological illusions it has of itself, of its struggles, about those that speak in its name and of its predominantly defensive tactics, criticising without making any concessions, the present attempts at capitalist adaptation that will soon become widespread after the inevitable deception following the elections. At a time when all the traffickers (of dead ideas) 'come out of hiding', and rush to take a place in the political and cultural spectacle, this critique shall find its means of existence in the new clandestinity of real life where, without any official expression, new practices and gestures of rejection are traced out. In this way the ground is being prepared - far beyond any transitory illusions - upon which all those already feeling the need for truth and searching for the means to impose it are going to encounter each other. In the front ranks the language of critical autonomy will be found - without which the revolution cannot comprehend itself nor name its enemies without ideological mediation. 'It is essential to finish with the anti-intellectualism and workerist tradition that has weighed down the Spanish revolutionary movement for so long. The rejection of theoretical activity, justified by the more or less concealed ideology of the absence of ideas - which today returns in the form of an unspecified unionism serving workerist intellectuals and intellectual workerists - is so much more criminal. What has to be done is to achieve the consciousness of what has to be done so that the weapons of criticism accompany the criticism of weapons.

Even more immediately dangerous are the bureaucrats of the unions and the parties who have had to tolerate workers' democracy in return for being tolerated by them without even building up their unionism. They know they will have to crush, under the penalty of being annihilated themselves, all autonomous forms. The counter attack against isolated revolutionaries has already commenced with calumnies, threats, accusations and isolated counter-revolutionary violence. Henceforth it is no longer a question of the bureaucrats abandoning radical workers to repression but of handing them over and reducing them to silence by whatever means available. Self-defence against all police and officers of law and order, whatever shade of colour they may profess is the order of the day. As the verdict of the barricades of May 1937 put it: 'Up to now the revolution has not done anything more than transform Stalinism and its allies. Today it is a question of destroying them'.

Comrades,

The weapons that serve as the defence of the workers in so far as they are wage labourers will be the last weapons in the defence of wage labour. The proletariat, separating from everything that is at one with the old world and passing to the offensive with its method of specific war, must manage its own autonomy: the fight for victory needs the weapons of victory.

20th April 1977

# WHAT THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT 'LOS INCONTROLADOS'

After forty years of triumphant counter-revolution, the same fears find the same words. During the Civil War, the government coalition (composed of the bourgeoisie, republicans, socialists, Stalinists and CNTists) that destroyed the revolution to lose the war, used to call *incontrolados* all those proletarians who, fighting all internal and external enemies, would not obey anyone other than themselves right up to the end. And now when the revolution returns to be the order of the day, the same accusation is hurled by all the supporters of the old world against those whose excesses inconveniently jeopardise the peaceful reorganisation of their exploitation.

Those who insult the proletariat like this show; rather, by the simple fact that they still have the opportunity and means to do so, how much moderation there still remains in the proletariat. The proletariat certainly has no reason to defend itself against such an accusation. It must recognise it as the enemy's truth which is also its own, that is the truth of the social war in which the explosion of proletarian negativity is increasingly more uncontrollable and which will only end with the destruction of all external control and the abolition of 'everything that exists independently of individuals' i.e. communism.

As for us, additional *incontrolados*, we do not appear in front of the present movement saying: 'Here's the truth - on your knees' as do all the other authoritarian ideologists on the lookout for some reality to manipulate. We only show what the struggle is and why it must acquire a thoroughgoing consciousness of this struggle. By doing this we do not belittle ourselves by concealing our project, which is no more than that of all the other *incontrolados*, who must possess it consciously in order to possess it in reality. The organisation of 'the community of proletarian revolutionaries that places beneath its control all the conditions of its own existence' does not do so under the form of any kind of 'workers control' in which the most up-to-date state servants dream of interesting the workers, in the production of its own misery. It does so for the purposes of the insurrectionary realisation of communism, the abolition of commodities, of wage labour and of the state.

# **FROM THE TIME WHEN REVOLUTIONARIES WERE CORRECT**

*Workers for Proletarian Autonomy and Social Revolution*

## **REFLECTIONS ON AND LESSONS OF THE STRIKE IN THE SHOE INDUSTRY (22nd AUGUST UNTIL 3rd SEPTEMBER 1977) AND ON THE ASSEMBLY MOVEMENT IN THE PROVINCE OF ALICANTE**

The strike called by the assembly movement in the shoe industry, mainly in Alicante, was one of the most important struggles waged by the Spanish working class against capital after the strikes at Vitoria and at Roca in Gava.

As negotiations for anew social contract between the bosses, the government and the unions proceeded, the shoe factory workers decided to take on all the defenders of bourgeois order, spoiling the best laid plans of the vote-peddlers of the region, the local bosses and their trade union stooges. As the expression has it, if the shoe fits wear it. The entire Spanish proletariat was depending on this strike, which was carried out only through the wishes of the workers meeting in permanent assemblies, without the tutelage of parties or unions. Economic solidarity came from everywhere.

## **A BRIEF HISTORY: HOW A SETBACK CAN BECOME A VICTORY WHEN THE WORKERS EXPECT NOTHING FROM THE PARTIES AND TAKE THEIR AFFAIRS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS**

The shoe-manufacturing industry and its service industries installed in the towns around the valley of Vinpolo was founded on the super-exploitation of its workers, many of them emigrants. Even today the exploitation of apprentice and female labour, cottage labour and other forms of lump-labour are frequent and regulate the level of employment whatever the state of the industry. But despite the great fortunes accumulated over long years of impunity and corrupt local bosses, a new proletariat has grown up, a high percentage of them energetic and combative youth who have neither been corrupted by misery nor apparent prosperity, who are difficult to delude and impossible to manage.

After the big strike of February 1976 the workers knew exactly what they could expect from management, police and the parties. The result was one worker murdered and various wounded

by the cops in Elda and Elche. A class, its consciousness awakened, learned in a brutal way that the gap between capital and labour was far too wide to hide the fact that a local strike, which was beginning to spread, could call the entire system of exploitation into question. Thousands of proletarians simultaneously discovered the intolerable nature of their social existence and the inevitability of a period of struggle.

The then existing parties (the PCE and the tiny MCE -today in decline) in following the directions of their national chiefs to stay within a legal framework, found that their attempts to avoid the struggle and to negotiate until forced to act by the workers, put them into a position of total weakness, more interested in containing rather than pushing through the workers' demands. The result was that the workers, disarmed and unorganised, took a fierce beating, after which the Comisiones Obreras (through a phantom 'co-ordinating committee' which no-one had elected) advised them to return to work. But in so doing, the parties and their trade-union equivalents lost face forever. The workers' spontaneous will to fight was a thousand times greater than theirs and the consciousness which grew out of this struggle was neither political nor trade-unionist; it was a direct revolutionary consciousness. All that remained was to organise this spontaneity. The workers found their own solution to the problem of the organisation of the struggle; creating a movement of assemblies which was based on themselves and only on themselves. Hundreds of assemblies began to discuss and formulate all the demands which, over the years, they had been unable to make due to the fraud of the unions, and which had been left to rot until the time came to work out a set of demands for the negotiating of a collective wage agreement in September.

## **ALL POWER TO THE ASSEMBLIES**

The reaction to the political sell-out of the strike in February as well as the murder of Teofilo del Valle was tremendous. During this month the 'United Workers Front' was born which, like all re-groupments led by independent trade unionists, would deny the real reason why it was created. In September it was to constitute itself as a 'co-ordinating committee for trade union unity' along with the UGT, CC.OO and USO, thereby placing its opportunism on the other side. The UGT split from it in January upholding the boss's proposal of state negotiation of the agreement with the result that the 'co-ordinating committee' soon after dissolved. But the alliance between these professional independents of Elda, the CC.OO and the Christianity of the USO was to be maintained right up to the strike. It was partly due to this that these delegates, as also those of the CC.OO, came away less hated in Elda at the end of the strike than in other parts. These confused origins of the assembly movement gave it the image of being manipulated by the CC.OO - thus explaining the initial hostility of the local CNT group to the movement and to the strike - an image which dissipated when the movement expanded, making all the trade-marks, alliances and pretensions seem banal.

In October 1976, the first assemblies took place in the factories of Elda, Petrel and Monovar and by January in all the remaining shoe-manufacturing towns. After these, factory representatives were elected and on 4th May the first general assembly took place in Elda (3000 participants). The assembly movement was born here.

The fact that the unions were absent from the struggles - the so-called 'union vacuum' - helped the development of factory and regional assemblies, electing representatives, which were actively supported by thousands of companies. The assembly of representatives and the general assembly



were the next step in the formation of the assembly movement and would make it a rough summer for all its enemies. What held the movement together without membership cards, rubber stamps, lawyers, bureaucrats, specialists in negotiation, professional leaders? It was a pure and simple solidarity born in similar interests, similar aims and the same animosities. Even the regional magazine *La Verdad* (The Truth) repeated the same lies about the class struggle and could not but admit that 'for the first time in recent decades a workers' movement with a strong autonomous and independent character has grown up, able to overcome the dual circumstances of political transition and the trade union vacuum which exists all over the country. . . ' the assembly movement is already historical because it has made history. It has conquered areas of freedom which very few could have imagined possible some months ago. Its force has been the number of workers who agree with the idea of a 'pure workerism' without relying on political disguises or mortgaging trademarks. The most powerful bosses in the country are forced to recognise the assembly movement as the only valid spokesman to negotiate the shoe contract. The force of the street was able to do more than the glory (sic) of the banners" (*La Verdad*, 25th August 1977).

And *Cambio 16* (19th '25th September) was to dish up this local recipe to those in power: 'Why has an assembly movement of this kind grown up?' they asked. 'The weakness of the trade unions has been determinant in this process as well as a strong feeling of unity amongst the workers.'

## **THE TRADE UNION REACTION ACCOMODATES OR OPPOSES THE UNITY OF THE ASSEMBLIES ACCORDING TO THE POWER WHICH IT BELIEVES IT POSSESSES**

To the extent the assembly movement consolidated its position the unions began to organise against it. This soon became clear. In the eyes of unions, workers' struggles are limited to being the tailend of a labour dispatch, the workers themselves only serving as consultants or fund-raisers. With such a view of things they only managed to recruit the scum of the factory. It was plain to see that they were full of those workers who were afraid, passive, ignorant, blacklegs and verticalists, white collar workers and bureaucrats.

The assembly movement, by June, had definitely consolidated its position. By the end of July it was recognised by all the trade union federations which, as groups, had infiltrated it ' with the exception of the UGT. After the elections which gave some sort of victory to the PSOE, the membership of the UGT had increased with the support and blessing of the bosses, and according to its own figures, could count on 10,000 members in its hide and shoe industries organisation , thus making it the largest and the most important when negotiations started. The CC. OO refused to accept the role of the UGT as sole negotiator but since it couldn't break or overtake the assembly movement decided that all it could do was to go along with it and try to take it over from within. Thus the union federation which is historically least known for its love of assemblies became their full-blooded protagonists. The FICE (the bosses' organisation within the shoe industry), refusing to recognise the negotiating committee of the assembly movement, supported the UGT. The workers rejected the proposals made by the UGT. The assembly movement, as well as the general assembly of 16th of August, unanimously decided to go on strike, starting legally on the 24th in Elda and on the 22nd in Elche. The UGT condemned the movement and was in turn condemned. The base refused to obey the officials and it became so discredited that it had to shut up completely during the strike, only breaking silence to protest about its own marginalisation

and in their communiques and press to condemn the general assemblies and the pickets. In the end it proposed to the other union federations that it should negotiate alone. In recent struggles in the Basque country and Asturias the UGT has attempted a similar use of yellow unions and management tactics. It had never been so shameful to belong to a trade union as to belong to the UGT at this time. On 22nd August, the day that the strike started in Elche after an assembly of 15,000 people, the management were begrudgingly forced to accept the assembly movement, with the UGT as onlookers. Along with the Elda delegates they worked out a contract in seven points - the so-called Madrid Compromise - in an attempt to isolate the Elche workers. But in Elche the police attacked the workers meeting in an assembly and a battle ensued in which fifteen workers were injured, one of them seriously, as well as three policemen. On the 24th, the Elda assembly (12,000) and the Amansa assembly (more than 3000) overwhelmingly proclaimed their support for the strike. After them came Villena, Sax, Petrel, Manovar and Aspe. Pickets were sent to all the factories to ensure that the agreements of the assemblies were adhered to. From the first day, the workers - more than 70,000 - maintained a permanent assembly, morning and evening, meeting in football or sports arenas and this was decisive in keeping people informed, in maintaining direct discussion, morale and unity: It ridiculed a whole series of anti-proletarian activities whose wretched impotency was limited to the outer walls of the assemblies.

## **THE NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE COULD LEAD THE STRIKE ONLY BECAUSE THE CONFIDENCE WHICH THE WORKERS PLACED IN IT WAS GREATER THAN ITS RADICALITY**

The negotiating committee was never merely a committee of 10 or a committee of 20, or a bureaucratic committee in which the unions could stifle or sell out the strikes called by the assemblies. It was made up of temporary and revocable delegates, elected by a movement without leaders. Its different capacities to wage particular struggles only represented the unequal development of the assembly movement in the different shoe industry zones in Spain.

Certain delegates from Elda, the weak point of the strike, only wanted to strike as a last resort. They had to accept the wishes of the assemblies because in the end they were no more than emissaries. These men were moderates, skilled in being cautious, and this along with a lack of courage made them far too flexible in the negotiations. They wavered as to the action to be taken, they could easily capitulate if the assembly hadn't controlled them, were incapable of coming to a decision and taking fast action, were more inclined to negotiate than struggle and were overwhelmed at the weight of being representatives of an energetic and conscious mass. Afraid of being overtaken they never stopped calling for calm and serenity. They were able to delay the strike by accepting that the agreement be national and not regional, 'discussing the form it should take within the assemblies' as they themselves put it, but in the end they were forced to accept a strike which the majority of them thought to be inopportune. They concentrated everything into the negotiations and had meetings with all the shifts; parliamentary delegates, mayors, labour delegates, the Governor etc. and ended up running along behind the bosses. The bosses on the contrary, from the smallest to the largest, opted for a unified action, were hard and intransigent, unwilling to negotiate in the event of a strike - a completely logical attitude if we consider that they were defending their interests, diametrically opposed to those of the workers.

The CC.OO saw that the will of the mass was irresistible. They thought that a little bit of strike action would calm their spirits and reinforce its own position over the UGT and help get workers' votes for the PCE in the forthcoming municipal elections. However, given its alliance with the bourgeoisie and the government and being faithful to parliamentary cretinism they had to cool off the strike, slow it down as much as possible so as to avoid a total break-down in the negotiations. Given their position, as assembly members who were never really such, the CC.OO behaved in the most demagogical and inconsistent manner. Ten days later they showed their true colours. At first their support for the delegates of Elda was cautious. . . 'the true representatives to negotiate with the bosses' (Vinpolo Obrero No.3, regional publication of the CC.OO). But then, on the day before the strike started in Elda, it put out a communique signed by 'Representatives of the assembly movement, the general secretary of the CC.OO and the executive committee of USO' which was despicable and plainly recuperative. It said, 'repression would not in any way resolve the conflict but would only tend to radicalise it and thus create a climate of tension which would benefit nobody'. The radicalisation of the strike was what they feared most and the CC.OO confirmed this by quickly opposing the developing radicalism of the assemblies. In any case this CC.OO attempt to falsely pass themselves off as representatives - poorly covered up by the USO - signing an agreement on behalf of certain delegates who had not been authorised by the assembly was of little consequence given that the workers went ahead on their own. The communique was really directed towards the management in an attempt to increase their own self-esteem. When the management called in the federations in order to end the conflict the CC.OO immediately accepted. In the end, CC.OO, USO and SU and other less important organisations formed a 'support committee' in an attempt to recuperate the strike. This was a complete failure but it did manage to impede active solidarity in other industrial sectors.

## **A STRIKE IS A PARTICULAR BATTLE IN A SOCIAL WAR WHICH THE PROLETARIAT WAGES AGAINST CAPITALISM: HOW ALL STRUGGLES HAVE THE AIM OF CAUSING THE GREATEST POSSIBLE DAMAGE TO THE ENEMY WITH A VIEW TO DESTROYING IT AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE**

On the 26th, a factory in Murcia joined the strike, then another in Albaterra and yet another in Salinas. Many factories sent solidarity communique's and money for the resistance funds. The assembly delegates visited all the strike towns where the assembly movement had spread like wildfire. The bosses proceeded with the closure of the factories and dismissals while the negotiating committee reduced its list of demands to five: 30 days holidays, two extra months wages, 5000 pesetas increase all round on the principle of equal work, equal status and equal wages, 100% wages in the case of illness and a 40 hour week.

On the following day the management continued their offensive. The FICE ordered the suspension of wages and banking arrangements as long as the strike lasted, intending to involve all management and the banks. It called for the intervention of the government and began organising camouflaged blackleg labour, something, which was discovered and stopped by the pickets. Meanwhile certain local government officials led a second ill-conceived attempt to end the strike. The press sided openly with the management and condemned the presence of unemployed and

other workers in the assemblies, proposing - as FICE and UGT had done - factory assemblies and secret voting instead of general assemblies and the show of hands as the workers had adopted. Their letter columns were filled with sad letters from small bosses.

On the 29th, the workers assemblies of Arnedo (Lagrono) and Yecla (Murcia) joined the strike. In Baleares, Val d'Uxo (Castillon) and Cocentaina notices of strike action were posted. The resistance funds grew and a strike economy was created; a real discovery on the part of the strikers that this constituted the future means of abolishing storekeepers and middlemen. They began to buy from co-operatives and agricultural workers and received help in kind. They gave out credit vouchers and saw to it that no one spent this money on superfluous articles or in the bars, in accordance with the decisions of the assemblies. The assembly movement published 7500 copies of an information bulletin daily during the strike.

On the same day the PCE shed crocodile tears for the small manufacturers. . . 'we have no interest in seeing small enterprises going under . . . we finish by asking for a certain sense of responsibility and a willingness for dialogue' (declarations of the local committee of Elche on the 29th). And the Stalinist deputy for Alicante, Pilar Brabo (I) old before her time, told the press that the strike would end forthwith.

The assembly movement preferred to answer the bosses: 'The management has launched a new offensive against us, trying to divide us and using secret ballots within the factories for this end. Faced with these manoeuvres we cannot allow ourselves to be so easily fooled, we must make it clear that the secret ballot is anti-worker and anti-democratic for the working class' (daily bulletin of 30th August). The assemblies of the strikers set out a list of demands and when, on the 30th, they unanimously reaffirmed their intention of continuing the strike, panic spread throughout the bourgeoisie and the unions. The parliamentary deputies prattled on impotently and offered themselves as intermediaries, only to be turned down. The PSOE through the mouthpiece of the idiotic Garcia Miralles, a last minute socialist and an opportunist from way back, called on the trade union federations to intervene and condemned the pickets; It is worth noting that the strike pickets had a function of human regeneration since they stopped some workers from selling themselves cheaply and betraying their class. The bourgeoisie was doubtful about sending the police into the assemblies, afraid of bringing them out onto the streets and thus provoking a chain of solidarity strikes. They used the unions and parties while these, their pawns, became irritable and piqued.. 'these intransigents have set up barricades. . .the maximalist positions are absolutely undemocratic.. . . the dogmatism of reason is a cruel dialectic' wrote the comical newspaper La Verdad (The Truth) on 28th July 1977. The desire of the workers to totally control their own affairs and to refuse to be anyone's pawns was anathema to the bourgeoisie. The less comical Informations put it: 'the problem is that the continuation of the assembly system denotes a lack of representation of the union federations which have been unable to get anything like a majority of members amongst the workers in this sector. Precisely because of this the delegations which the unions send to the negotiations with the management have no real mandates and they must on these assemblies. . . and with hundreds of participants no negotiation is possible either on union ground or any other ground' (30th August 1977).

The middle classes were frightened... They could be heard on the daily radio and TV news programmes and on some street corners. All the hypocrisy and stupidity, which is referred to as public opinion was heard, all the cowardice and mediocrity of an entire epoch, the fear and baseness of the most conservative and reactionary section of society, the small and medium sized businessmen, the thousand faces of exploitation, the philistinism and hypocrisy of the petite

bourgeoisie, their hatred for the proletariat. The middle classes cushioned the bosses. The bosses tried to direct the pressure of the workers against the middle classes and the middle classes, through their political parties (PSOE and PCE) and the unions they ran, in turn buttressed the pressure of the workers.

On the 31st, the PCE held a regional meeting where they condemned the 'maximalism' of certain representatives of the assemblies and their set of demands, thereby deciding to end the strike. Bonilla, secretary of FICE, called on the government and the trade unions to intervene. On the following day the CC.OO put out a call to return to work, a call, which was voted out by the assembly of Elche. In the assembly at Elda a PCE militant proposed a secret ballot in the factory. The administration decided to make it obligatory.

1. Pilar Brabo is a notorious CP member - trendy, vicious and nauseating. (TN)

## **THE END OF A STRUGGLE IS NOTHING MORE THAN THE BEGINNING OF ANOTHER MORE DECISIVE ONE**

The 3rd of September was crucial. The assembly movement was at a crossroads and despite the fact that a delegate from Elche told the workers that 'any decision which you take is not a defeat', it was clear that the choice was either accepting arbitration and putting the contract back 6 months or continuing the strike with all the consequences which this has 'facing the police and calling for a general strike. This round was crucial and the PCE threw itself into a frenzy. The UGT could always recuperate their lost ground through the votes of the scared and scab workers, which all the hardening of attitudes in such a strike could not help, but produce. The moderate base of the now frightened CC.OO shifted their ground to that of the more coherent UGT, while other more active unions had displaced them on the left. This time the CC.OO came out completely against the strike. In a new communique distributed in the assemblies, on the streets and in the factories it put forward the most reactionary arguments, even those which a week before it had attacked. Thus it is that those who acquire their influence by shady deals cannot maintain their influence without them. A later note from the local PCE committee of Elche was made public by the press and contained all the cynicism and usual justifications of those who wanted the strike to end because it threatened their interests. 'A responsible workers' party cannot permit that the workers be used as cannon fodder etc. etc.' Certainly they had lost a certain esteem in the eyes of the bosses because of 'the irresponsible attitude of extremist groups and unions who, using the feelings of the workers, tried to distort the strike. In the last assembly they had even come to the point of calling for a general strike in support of the shoe factory workers'.

Certain members of the negotiating committee feared a violent strike and could not face giving up the last hope for peace. While the workers were fighting, they were trying to negotiate. At the moment of greatest tension during the strike the delegates lost themselves in infighting in order to avoid a motion. The assemblies were more radical than they were. The bosses knew it and accused them of being excitable and of not controlling the assemblies, when it should have been the assemblies, which controlled the delegates. No one could deny the impulsive and subversive character of the strike or separate it from a revolutionary situation or give it a methodical or strictly limited character of an ordinary and domesticated strike called by the trade union federations. The revolutionary energy could not be bottled up.

On the 3rd, Bonilla, the secretary of FICE, and Roque Miralles, the delegate from Elda, privately decided to advise those they represented to surrender and negotiate.

On the 5th, at the Elda assembly, Roque proposed a secret ballot and the return to work on the basis of Bonilla's promises. Since you can never be as scurrilous as the real scoundrels, Roque was fooled and fell into ridicule while Bonilla made no effort to put what he had said into effect. But Roque's intervention was decisive in breaking the strike at Elda. They voted and a majority at Elda decided to return to work. The same happened in Monovar, Petrel, Sax and Villena. In Elche and Aspe the majority decided to continue the strike. The bosses opened up the factories and promised that there would be no reprisals. The general assemblies of Elda and Elche, given the results of the voting, were noisy and the speeches of the CC.OO were heckled. In Elche they were booed and thrown out of the assembly. Piles of CC.OO and UGT membership cards were torn up. The assembly at Elche decided to backup the decision of Elda in solidarity, since at the beginning of the strike the reverse had occurred. On the following day Yecla and Almansa returned: The day after that it was the turn of Arnedo. Only one company in Elche, 'Clan SA' decided to continue the strike alone due to particular demands they were making, although they were supported by the assembly movement resistance funds.

## **REFLECTIONS AND CONSEQUENCES OF A STRIKE: TO UNMASK THE UNIONS IS TO DESTROY THEM**

An exemplary strike ended in a surprising way. But the workers didn't return to work defeated. Right from the first day many a company director complained about the slow pace of work. 'For miserable wages, miserable work' said a delegate from Elche. The confrontation had not been avoided it had merely been appeased. The return to work was a victory, which the bosses didn't know how to use. The assembly movement remained intact.

In the future the workers must mount pickets against the sabotage of the parties and their affiliates, the unions, so that autonomy does not arm its enemies. Just as they must use censorship against the press which publishes distorted and anti-worker information, paralysing bourgeois information with a print workers' strike if necessary. It should be considered that there is no press, which is not party to the reaction, and no party, which is not reactionary.

The weight of the negotiating committee delegates was too great. Defeat came from not calling the moderate delegates into question in the assemblies. Their prestige was negative and the exclusive attention, which they gave to the negotiations within the assemblies, gave them - and not the majority within the assembly - a crucial importance at the end of the strike, an importance that they didn't fail to use. The assembly should have recalled them when the management refused to negotiate.

The strike showed the stupidities of the parliamentarians and the union chiefs. It is impossible that the working class is so stupid, cowardly, corrupt and mediocre as their 'representatives'. This is the best proof that they are usurpers and only represent the interest of socially decadent classes.

The strike also answered the question of whose interests the unions serve. They serve for nothing other than to create disunity and break strikes. They introduced themselves into the various committees to sabotage the strike, were disunited and overtaken, claiming to represent 20% of the shoe industry workers, but ended up controlling no one, not even their own members.

The union bureaucrats, to their horror, already imagined the parties losing the middle class vote and their organisation in ruins, the government closing the doors on them as they divided out the spoils of the old CNS. The smaller federations followed the old tactic of denouncing the manoeuvres of the larger ones in order to capitalise on their disrepute. But they were far too successful. If their attacks on the UGT and the CC.OO were taken seriously and even with a certain relish within the assemblies they could not gain anything from it other than their own weakness since every time they mentioned the word 'union' they were jeered at.

The parties lost a large portion of their power of illusion. The very support of their political existence, the bourgeois illusions of the workers, was undermined. Their images only collapsed 40 years after they had renounced taking power and along with their unions are reduced to a purely conservative role. The development of the unions follows a pact between the government and the parties in order to substitute the inefficiency of the old vertical unions. The old unions from before the monarchy already worked within the CNS. The development of trade union power allowed a stabilisation of capitalism, substituting class struggle by a certain form of the exploitation of labour power. Without the stabilising and narcotic power of the unions the rule of capital would be incomplete. The unions know only the laws of the market and their business is as owners of workers. They are a part of the power, which determines the conditions of the workers. Union membership is the bureaucratic baptism of blackleg labour. For capital it is easier to impose its conditions by union agreements than by government decrees. Reformists, through and through, they are the best supports of the management which has also become reformist and democratic. They are not so much degenerated workers' organisations as mechanisms to integrate the proletariat into the exploitative system. They put halters on the will to workers' emancipation. Because of this, every revolt, every authentic strike is first of all directed against them.

The assembly movement is an example. It is the true representative of the proletariat because it is proletarian. Its very existence is already a victory, which its enemies cannot forgive. The extent of the assembly movement, which runs throughout Spain forces the unions, allied with the government to embark on a rapid counter-offensive that clearly shows up their natural function as guardians of the capitalist order. Union strategy has one aim: to demolish the strikes called by the assemblies, finish with assembly delegates which would be substituted by company union committees elected within the companies, finish with direct democracy within the assemblies and substitute it by the bureaucratic dictatorship of the unions. They don't try to hide this conspiracy, dozens of meetings between the bosses, the government and the unions have been held with just this objective. In this specific case they won six months of arbitration in order to organise the counter-strike.

Up to now the assemblies have only marginalised the unions. Today it is necessary to destroy them. The autonomy and emancipation of the proletariat depend on it.

That which was the assembly movement is not the revolution but it is revolutionary. The assembly movement is the first workers' council of the second Spanish revolution. Despite what other previous forms the modern workers' movement has taken, forms which had to dissolve themselves in the strike in order to avoid being recuperated by unions or parallel groups (e.g. the representative committees in Vitoria) the assembly movement should be permanent and insoluble precisely because it cannot be recuperated. It must have the enormous ambition of not permitting anything into it, which is not itself. It must proclaim the unconfessable demand of

wanting everything. Its enemies already know that there is no security in this suspicious peace if not in war.

The proletariat must see that in this world all other classes are superfluous. To speak of revolution when everyone else is speaking of democracy, and not to be frightened by the economic catastrophes of bourgeois life. When capitalist survival ends, real life begins. The assembly movement is the negation of present society. And it should know that its tune creates the basis of a radically new social organisation as well as the means to achieve it.

*Down with class society.*

*Down with unions and parties.*

*Long live the social revolution*

*Long live the assembly movement*

20th September 1977



# COMMENTARIES AROUND WILDCAT SPAIN IN THE RUN UP TO THE SECOND REVOLUTION

## CHAPTER ONE: THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STATE OF CLASSES IN SPAIN AT THE HOUR OF FRANCOISM'S RELIEF

*'There is nothing more improbable, more impossible, more fantastic than a revolution one hour before it breaks out; there is nothing more simple, more natural, more obvious than a revolution when it has waged its first battle and gained its first victory.'*

- Rosa Luxemburg. Der Kampf; 7th April 1917.

It is somewhat trite these days to say that the general crisis, which Spain is experiencing, is because of the democratic evolution of francoism. It is the same crisis facing every country of the world, bourgeois or bureaucratic, which is exacerbated, for instance in Portugal, Greece or Poland - by a long period of stagnation resulting from its counter-revolution, as well as the accelerated breakdown of the dominant political forms. We shall not, therefore, be examining the formation of a new society but rather the senile Iberian rebirth of a society which is everywhere in the process of dying. Francoism was the extreme defence of the Spanish bourgeoisie threatened by proletarian revolution, a triumphant counter-revolution that, through a state of siege, provided the first urgent, rationalisation of Spanish capitalist society; thereby saving it by incorporating the State under its wing. But when it became the most costly form of maintaining it, it was forced to leave the stage-for the benefit of stronger and more rational forms of the same order.

The preponderance of catholic technocrats<sup>1</sup> in the State headed an industrial growth, which took advantage of the expanding world market in the 1960s (and therefore of the investment of foreign capital), as well as tourism, eliminating the excessive labour force in the rural areas. Agrarian production lost its weight in the national economy and the rural bourgeoisie lost out politically to financial capital. But the greater the successes of the industrialisation programme of the francoist technocrats the greater was the historic failure of the Spanish bourgeoisie necessarily contained within it. In accumulating capital the bourgeoisie accumulated the proletariat and created its own negation on a far greater scale than in the past - that very past which it was trying to renounce.

The wages policy of the dictatorship reached its zenith in the 1970s when the workers' movement had attained an important degree of radicalism and was abandoning the legalist reformism in which the Stalinists and Christians had tried to encase it. This was especially true given the

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<sup>1</sup> A reference to certain Opus Dei technocrats who played an important role in the francoist government after 1958; Lopez Rodo (Economy), Lopez Bravo (Industry and foreign Affairs), Espinosa sanmartin (Housing), Villar Palasi (Education) amongst others. (TN)

recuperation of the primitive and limited forms of struggle-the Comisiones Obrera, which arose spontaneously as irregular strike committees during the Asturian and Basque strikes of 1962-4. At the same time, the energy crisis was proclaimed, bringing industrial expansion based on the refining of low priced crude oil to an end; a formula, which has been in decline since the end of classical colonialism. The increase in the cost of oil and raw materials provoked such economic and financial chaos that every State was forced to upon economic protectionism in order to avoid modern economic anarchy. Francoist society, paralysed by the attempt to balance the proliferation of bourgeois private interest groups, and by an overblown State bureaucracy (the result of francoist management of power) was on the road to bankruptcy. Francoism was falling with the peseta. Having installed itself by virtue of arms it was going to explode by virtue of money. Merely a few months of decline was enough to annul 35 years of victory.

The energy crisis, nevertheless, was only a partial manifestation of a crisis with far greater consequences: the economic crisis. Visible through the advance of individual and collective proletarian sabotage of the commodity and labour, the economic crisis acted as a gigantic anonymous force for the decolonisation of everyday life. Whether by absenteeism, stealing from supermarkets, defying management, consciously vandalising its own products, negativity towards consumerism, etc., and above all with wildcat strikes, the proletariat criminally appeared as the historical class, affirming its desires to bury this world while continuing to work within it.

Ever since the 1969 building strike in Granada, francoism had to contend with serious, violent and extensive strikes which had destroyed its system of union representation. On the other hand, illegality impeded the opposition unions. As an organised mass movement, no union movement existed before 1976. There were big strikes, but the unions only existed as embryonic forms within the official francoist union structure (CNS). For the workers the only choice was between State unions or wildcat strikes. The longer this situation lasted the more difficult moderate union activity became. It favoured forms of autonomous and radical struggle such as assemblies, revocable delegates, strike committees, independent committees, even if these failed to overcome the ambiguous frontier between direct democracy and party recuperation.

If francoism, weak and irresolute, uncertain as to whether it would live or die, reminds us of Maura's<sup>2</sup> maxim 'either we have to change from above or they shall give us a revolution from below' - it is because it was condemned by its decline and not inspired by its vitality. If francoism had always presented itself as the reaction that had won, now it had to present itself as the cheapest and surest remedy for all the ills it had produced and as the only force capable of liberating society from itself. Democracy appeared, In this way, as a reason of state, and as a political reconstitution of the bourgeois order directed by the francoist state which, through some area of agreement between francoism and the opposition, managed to prop up bourgeois society and make the proletariat an obedient, amorphous mass, chained by its new unions to the economic imperatives of the bourgeoisie.

After Franco, the false confrontation between fascism and anti- fascism disappeared from the scene like the lie it always was, and the social question blossomed like an old truth. The opposition, even before reconciling itself with its old enemy, had to confront a new one. The working class, in the streets and the factories, was occupying the terrain, which the retreat of the dominant power had left open; the terrain of politics and unionism, to a large extent void of parties

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<sup>2</sup> Antonoi Maura: A conservative statesman, prime minister of the first Monarchist government of Adolfo X111 from 1906-1909

and unions. Throughout 1976, the spectacle of unions offering their services at the gates of factories on strike was frequent. From the beginning of the strike movement in January 1976, the workers through the practice of direct democracy managed to formulate particularly subversive demands such as management recognition of assembly delegates and general assemblies as the sole negotiating organ. Or as in the general strike in Madrid, they demanded the joint negotiation of all the sectors on strike, thorough the election of a general strike committee. When the unions were finally able to organise they found themselves facing workers already educated in the self-organisation of their struggles, convening assemblies, electing delegates and forming pickets.

The politico-union bureaucracy faced a particular difficulty: it had to cease to oppose francoism in order to substantiate its power by developing its organisations. This occurred at the same moment at which in other capitalist countries this self-same bureaucracy was already engaged in decisive struggle against the revolutionary proletariat. In these countries the political illusions of the politico-union bureaucracy had been superceded by the consciousness of the workers. In Spain, where the political poverty of francoism, with its decomposing but refurbished institutions, coincided with the new political poverty of an opposition offering nothing essentially different (a consequence of Spain's economic integration into world capitalism), the modern opposition between the workers' bureaucracy and the proletariat now exists. The Spanish workers' bureaucracy, like the bourgeoisie, thus found itself in opposition to the proletariat even before it constituted or organised itself as such. It has drawn up barricades without smashing what was in front of them, appearing puny without even the pretence of being heroic and has continued its fight to be recognised as such by capital although it is not now recognised by labour.

The historic weakness of the political opposition to francoism is due to its double rejection by the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, to its role as mediator in the class struggle. So it had to wait for the revolt of the social layers that capitalism spawns one by one from below, frustrated by illusory ambitions: those intellectuals, students, priests, professionals of all classes and all the remnants of the middle classes. The anti-francoist opposition has been the political sediment of all these layers and the general representation of their mediocrity. Even in the middle of 1976, the opposition only counted with one real party (the Stalinists) alongside the rotten remains of another, the social democrats, plus the Maoist offerings scraped from the bottom of the barrel - all the others were small circles gathered around right wing individuals, mainly ex-francoists.<sup>3</sup> They were unable to represent any general interest, only a reserve of old backstairs whores whose hunger to occupy official positions was proportional to the duration of their covetousness.

The opposition was launched onto the scene - with perhaps the exception of the Stalinists - not through their own efforts, but through a peaceful transaction with the Suarez government. As no one other than the government had opened the way to them they had nothing to defend other than their own interests. In their eyes the negotiated institutions were nothing more than a facade to hide their own interests and their corresponding political forms. Translated into constitutional language this meant the preservation of bourgeois forms of government with fascist vertebrae intact. The opposition had scarcely been called to the palace when it stopped talking about an

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<sup>3</sup> Groups such as the Christian democrats led by Ruiz Gimenez (ex-minister of Education under Franco), Joaquim Garrigues (industrialist); Antonio Fontan (ex-director of the daily Madrid); Fraga Iribarne (ex-minister of Information and Tourism and ex-ambassador to England); left wing falangists like Cantarero del Castillo, right wingers like Utrera Molina (general secretary of the movement) or Bias Pinar (the leader of the neo-fascist group, New Force) etc. etc. (TN)

agreed rupture, and began speaking clearly about negotiation, dissolving all its united forms (regional committees, democratic co-ordination, the assembly of Catalunya), which were now seen as impediments to it. For the Stalinists, their entry into the Cortes<sup>4</sup> was dependent on the inability of the social democrats to destroy the organised autonomy of the proletariat. They were the plebeian detachment of the bourgeoisie. The greater their service to the bourgeoisie the more valuable was their party and union in the latter's eyes. They gave as much service as they could and for much of the time they were absolutely essential since it was impossible to break a strike without them.

But when the workers' struggle is primarily repressed by the unions and parties this is the preliminary sign of a second and more profound proletarian assault against class society. Considering how in Spain the unions are organised to obstruct the strike movement, the union question can only be considered by the workers as a false question and as a new edition of the old vertical unions. At one fell swoop the Spanish workers' movement will recover the past, which the last 35 years of francoist unionism had kept from it. Finishing with Hispanic particularism in this way it will prove to us that history does not create laws of exception.

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## CHAPTER TWO: THE WORKERS' ASSEMBLIES AS NEGATION AND AS PRELUDE

*Frondosa: Who killed the commander?*

Mengo: Fuenteovejuna did.

Frondosa: It is just that you receive honours. But tell me, my loved one who killed the commander?

Laurencia: It was Fuenteovejuna, my kind sir.

Frondosa: Who killed him?

Laurencia: My, but you astonish me, Fuenteovejuna did.

- Lope de Vega: Fuenteovejuna<sup>5</sup>

The actions that sparked off a movement involving hundreds of thousands of workers transformed everyday life to such an extent that things could no longer remain stationary. Once the battle has been joined, either the movement advances by extending the struggle throughout the working class, formulating the movement's precise objectives, or it has to retreat. The strike movement of January-March 1976 was confronted with the alternative of either making a new leap forward or beginning to withdraw. Divided because of the action of the Stalinist cadres who impeded the formation of radical organs of struggle as much as possible and who, when they were unable to do so, isolated or sabotaged them, the strike movement was forced into a disorderly retreat. When the unions called on the strikers to resume work they did so without any effective

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<sup>4</sup> The Cortes: the parliaments of the medieval Spanish Kingdoms and the modern national legislative assembly in Madrid.

<sup>5</sup> In Lope de Vega's play Fuenteovejuna an entire village assumes responsibility before the King for the slaying its overlord and wins Fuenteovejuna's exoneration. (TN)

guarantees against sanctions and dismissals. There were beautiful exceptions, however, giving place to exemplary actions like the attack by the workers of Terpel in Madrid on the tribunal, which was busy annulling their case. The bourgeoisie, courted continually by the parties, was able to determine every move of the unions, having them break the movement, factory by factory, the whole thing terminating with the promise of some apparent concessions, or a promise not to take reprisals. The PCE had tried to give the movement a bourgeois, democratic character by asking the bourgeoisie for support in order to press for joint negotiations with the moribund government of Arias and Fraga. Casting petitioning aside, the PCE decided to put an end to the strike movement and thanks to an intelligent use of the forces at their disposal were able to reduce it to a series of juxtaposed strikes, smashing them one by one. When faced with the totality of these strikes, the correlation of forces did not favour the PCE as initially its manoeuvring ability affected less than 10% of the masses in struggle. All these methodical violations of the assembly agreements, with which the Stalinists in particular distinguished themselves, constituted their strongest weapon against the workers dispersed in their own assemblies, unable to conceive in days what only took minutes to carry out.

The Stalinists and the rest of the opposition in general sought to give to the State all kinds of guarantees of its good intentions. Whilst the workers wanted to settle accounts, the opposition only wanted to find a niche for itself. All confrontations with the bourgeoisie, all class struggle, had put the parties and unions in conflict with the radicalised workers. To the extent that they went beyond the parties and unions, they had to confront the riot police. These two truths were amply confirmed throughout the year. We can count the deaths from the latter. From the former we can see how the opposition wagered the years of hunger for the daily bread on the small relief offered by the government. By not preoccupying themselves with organising the defence of the assemblies and separating their movement completely from the parties and the unions, the workers did not grant the assemblies the importance that they in fact possessed. The consequences were decisive in the defeat of all subsequent struggles.

One immediate result of the first strike movement was the loss of Stalinist supremacy, tired out from trying to represent the invisibility of the proletariat, and the consolidation of the central social democratic unions, which had been insignificant until then. The Comisiones Obreras had to abandon their project of one single union through their take-over of the CNS and co-ordinated itself with the UGT and the USO in the COS in order 'to achieve a unity of action amongst the organisations which compose it', i.e. by attempting to unite the workers behind the unions. Faced with the perspective that the workers might take the movement that was about to be unleashed in autumn into their own hands, the unions made unity of action their battle cry. Trade union unity is inversely proportional to the isolation of the workers. The assemblies, breaking this isolation, pushed the unions into uniting against them, knowing full well the watchword of Vitoria all power to the assemblies signified 'no power at all to the unions'.

Without a doubt, the highest point of class struggle in modern Spain that is of international importance, is the workers' assembly movement composed of authentic, modern workers' councils. If the parties, through the aid of the unions, manage to get greater control over the workers, the workers, by means of the assemblies, find it easier to express their autonomy.

Instead of waiting for favours conferred on them by the government, the working masses availed themselves of the only means that really leads to their emancipation: the struggle against capital. And the only means encounters its only form, in strikers' assemblies, concentrating all the functions of decision and their execution, federating by means of delegates responsible to the

base, revocable at all times. The strike assemblies, which have continued non-stop since the beginning of 1976, were not merely banal controversial unions concerned with tile ins and outs of wage negotiations. Nor did they give support to the diplomatic contrivances of unions at those moments of high social tension. Rather they are the natural response of workers to the state of violence, which has characterised their relations with capital, the root of the crisis that the Spanish bourgeoisie suffers from. They are the first response of a generalised struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The strikers' assemblies have not been an isolated act but a moment of class struggle, which is still far from finished. They liberated the living social forces of the modern revolution and inaugurated a period of the direct activity of workers in which the confrontation with the unions and the police is only the accompanying music. The strikers' assemblies exhibit typical revolutionary characteristics, which for the time being cannot crystallise into a revolution; rather they are a prior phase before the real insurrectional strikes. They are not an artificial product of a deliberate tactic but a historic phenomenon of class struggle. The law of the assembly movement does not reside in the strikes themselves, nor in their technical peculiarities, but in their relation to the social forces of revolution. Strike assemblies are the form that the revolutionary struggle adopts in the actual historic moment. Any disequilibrium of class divisions or of the situation of the counter-revolution immediately influences the actions taken by the assemblies. In various ways. Nevertheless, action is never contained; it merely takes other forms, changing its direction, aims and effects. It is the living pulse of the revolution and its most powerful motor.

The workers' assemblies, as they appear today, are not an ingenious method invented to reinforce proletarian struggle, rather, they represent the very movement of the class and the form in which the Spanish proletarian struggle manifests itself in the course of its second revolution. The consciousness of the workers is equal to the practical organisation of the assemblies, which is inseparable from the coherent intervention of the working class in history. In them the proletariat destroys the notion of vanguard leaders external to the class, realising that any part of their own power left in the hands of party and union representatives only helps to reinforce capitalism. The secret, then, of this century's revolution is revealed. All external representation and specialisation of power is exposed as the class enemy. It is now clear that the revolution must leave nothing exterior to itself and that its emancipation proceeds through the destruction of parties and unions.

### **CHAPTER THREE - THE WIDESPREAD USE OF THE FORCES OF LAW AND ORDER AND THE DISCLOSURE OF THE REAL VALUE DURING THE FIRST AUTUMN**

*'In this country the people are always with the party most ready for action'*

- Letter, J. Mesa to Engels, 10th March 1873.

When Suarez came to power on 15th June 1977, the State trembled as much from the overtures of the proletariat as from the intrigues of the discontented francoist factions. To be saved, he had to be a saviour. If we examine the conditions of class struggle we see that victory frequently goes to the class which, when conditions are against it, knows how to protect itself, and then, when conditions are more favourable, knows how to take full advantage of the enemy. The bourgeoisie

achieved the former in the autumn of 1976 and the latter in the autumn of 1977. They authorised Suarez to protect them from the blows, which the workers rained down on them. Really, however, he was unable to protect them; this task was to be carried out by the parties and unions, which had set up the COS, exactly for this purpose. The opposition, wanting to behave as though it was one, was willing to serve to the full. Suarez, picking up the threads from all sides, could choose the most useful combination of police and union action to conjure up a victory over the workers and so acquire that little extra fame needed for the magic of his future role.

The success of the unions in recuperating the negotiating committees elected in the previous strike movement and in removing them from the assemblies, had led the unions to believe that they were capable of isolating all the workers in their respective factories; of formulating in the name of the workers the union's own demands and getting the workers to accept their agreements with the government. But it's not so easy to get away with the same game twice, and in such a brief space of time. When an official of the CC.OO arrived at Leon intending to strengthen the local Stalinists by sabotaging the building workers' strike, the strikers expelled him from the assembly without giving it a further thought. Then it was the turn of the police and the politics of repression, which though sometimes had put a brake on the movement, managed to precipitate it here. In September, a number of long and hard assembly-led strikes broke out in which workers battled persistently with the police. These included the general strike in Tenerife and Euzkadi, the national strike in the post office, the metal workers' strike in Sabadell, the building workers' strike in Leon, Coruna, Burgos, Palencia and Valladolid etc. In Euzkadi the killing of a worker provoked a strike of 60,000 workers who ignored the call of the unions to return to work. In Vizcaya, after a series of huge assemblies, an extremely significant form of organised anti-unionism came into existence: the unified co-ordination of factory assemblies, formed with revocable delegates and representing 120,000 workers. The massive participation in strikes and demonstrations, all of which the unions and parties condemned, shows the extent to which they had no control over the unfolding power of the workers. In Madrid, a new killing raised the tension to such a level that the parties and unions found themselves obliged to call a day of strike action, adhered to by 300,000 workers. It was called as an attempt to reduce the impact and so minimise the general upheaval that the Basque country was under-going. The fear of the bureaucrats was turning to panic.

Only wanting the capitulation of the workers they met instead with their rebellion. They had wanted a proletariat that would merely discuss ways to be obedient and not ways to go on the offensive. Not realising that they were swimming against the stream, their explanation employed the same dead language as washed-up fashionable authors use. 'The workers' movement and the democratic forces will have to gauge exactly the forms and the timing of a response. Its success will largely depend on whether we move on to a resolutely pacific phase of the crisis which we've been experiencing for some years or whether we slide into uncontrollable situations which will be tragic for everyone' (Triunfo, 16th October 1976).

But it was unable to remedy this tragedy by using the farce of a military coup. The workers would not be forced into supporting the democratic farce by reducing their struggles to symbolic actions. Reacting to this situation, returning blow for blow, ready for everything, the workers threw all their weight against the bourgeoisie and the State. In Viscaya, on 11th October 1976, the first big strike, the construction workers' strike, run completely by assemblies, began. The workers set up a solid network of daily assemblies: excavation assemblies, site assemblies (with 15,000 to 20,000 present) where agreements were debated which were then put to the general

assembly, the motor of the strike. The co-ordinating committee of delegates received their authority only from these general assemblies, as did the alternative committee, the management committee, the pickets, the resistance fund and the editing of a strike bulletin, it was the first time that the unions were clearly acknowledged as the enemies of the workers and, accordingly, were stopped from speaking, prohibited from distributing propaganda in the assemblies, and from displaying their symbols, and were even stopped from collecting money for the strike fund. 'Everything is dealt with by building workers and signed by them', the workers had decided in their first assembly. The bosses were ready to give in provided that the COS or the STV were accepted as mediators; in the end they had to surrender unconditionally just so that the strike would end. The press amply took up the expressed hatred of the union bureaucrats for the strikers. As a prelude to their attitude towards other assembly-led strikes, the bureaucrats accused the assemblies of being manipulated, whilst the police carried out their job. This brand of ideological authoritarianism, which screams manipulation at any free discussion or politicisation not controlled by the unions, brings to mind the old days of Stalinist provocation. This type of interpretation - as had happened before at Kronstadt or May 1937 - would shortly be followed up by repression: the police finishing in the streets what the unions had started in the factories.

The unions noted the profound impression, which the struggle had created amongst the workers. As a result, humiliated in various strikes, its authority starting to flounder in districts formerly under union control, the prestige of the union Buddhas - liberally cultivated with all the demagoguery of martyrs - finally collapsed. The effects of the long epoch of francoist reaction, then marvellously suited to re-establishing these discredited charlatans as incarnations of the popular will, had now been used to the point of exhaustion. The atmosphere in the big cities was becoming increasingly charged. Then the COS called for a day of strike action on 12 November 1976. Government and union bureaucrats, wanting to terminate the October strike movement and the continuing tension, organised a massive 'therapy day'... 'Peacefully and responsibly we are going to legally ask for permission to hold demonstrations, we are going to speak with the military and ecclesiastical authorities so that they understand our plan and so that they do not see it as a subversive manoeuvre'. (B. Vacas, head of the CC.OO in Valencia). . . 'We are ready for a strike provided that it does not last longer than 24 hours and are willing to explain to the employers the political labour motivation of the strike action.' (E. Barban, Asturian leader of the UGT speaking to *Cambio* 16 number 257, 8 November 1976.) By not frightening anyone other than themselves, the bureaucrats were endeavouring to find their main reason for existing, by organising the defeat of the workers everywhere so as to save their own skins.

The Stalinists, particularly, distinguished themselves in action: 'At the same time the atmosphere amongst the Madrid workers was becoming steadily more charged' the authorities should not forget that. The EMT strike was brought forward 12 days from the general 24 hour convocation launched by the COS 'important sectors of the metal industry and others could have come out in solidarity with EMT unleashing a strike wave of massive proportions' (*Triunfo*, 16th of October 1976). Instead of forcing concessions out of the government with the spectre of a revolutionary crisis, the crisis was a sword of Damocles, with which the government obliged them to make concessions. By such an inopportune strike, the Stalinists impeded solidarity; the urban transport system was militarised and the workers of EMT beaten and demoralised, returning to work without any guarantees, leaving a total of 40 dismissed and 8 on trial for treason.

The resolutely anti-proletarian attitudes of the unions and parties is easy to understand if we consider their relations with the bourgeoisie and the state. It is bourgeois politics which, in the



last analysis, determine the programmes of the parties and their methods of struggle. The task of the parties was solely to instruct the working class in the guiding principles of bourgeois politics in this phase of the self-transformation of francoism, and to play plebian music at the behest of the bourgeoisie. Throughout this stage, the bourgeois politicians in the government were the real masters of the opposition and their parties merely their humble executors, jointly protecting bourgeois society from social revolution. The one day strike of 12th of November 1976 was, by then, a forced compromise between the unions' hostility to the strikes and the combative energy and impetuosity of the proletariat.

As it was impossible to dampen proletarian determination by other means, this one day strike was suggested as the only means of calming the masses, of extinguishing their combative enthusiasm and dislocating the strike movement. For the bureaucrats it was a demonstration of the power of union control. The revolutionary proletariat made a mistake in following those who did not hold the initiative. The unions and parties, all of them without exception, are the enemies of workers' autonomy. After the day of strike action, the point of equilibrium between proletarians and bureaucrats was displaced little by little towards the latter; the strike movement was unable to generalise itself and lost any co-ordination. Everything had come to depend on the correlation of forces in the factories between the workers, separated and isolated, and the joint power of the employers, the unions and the state. All the subsequent strikes, those in the building industry in Zaragossa, Navarra, Tenerife, Valencia, those in Osram in Madrid, Roca in Gava, Tarabusi in Bilbao etc., occurred under these conditions.

The bourgeoisie had little to fear from a one day strike proclaimed as though it were a Holy Week procession, or from a strike which declared that it wanted nothing more than peace. The employers found themselves in a most favourable situation and used it to get rid of the most radical elements from those factories where they had been unable to do so. Thus strikes were threatened with just this objective in mind like, for instance, those in the Tarabusi and Roca factories. They used everything against the strikers given that the unions had condemned them: slander, prison, the police, the guardia civil, and the extreme right. The repressive forces besieged Roca militarily whilst the unions of the COS besieged it financially. The company wanted to negotiate with the unions and not with the workers' assembly delegates and risked everything for this. The Roca workers tried to link up with other struggles occurring at the same time but the employers ceded and rapidly resolved strikes in order to keep Roca isolated (the most important one being in the docks of Barcelona). They broke the information blockage by publicising their strike throughout Spain and abroad, something which gave rise to a great display of financial solidarity on behalf of the proletariat, thus preventing the strike from collapsing through lack of funds. When the judgement of the labour Magistrate was favourable to the workers, the strike threatened to unleash a tremendous wave of solidarity strikes. Just then, a flagging strike became a strike against the entire Catalanian employers and the unions. Changing tactics, the latter organised a campaign of demobilisation by proclaiming a day of superficial solidarity strikes in Barcelona, thus allowing the unions to pacify the workers and calm the employers. As a result the strike did not spread to the entire Catalanian working class. One of the first victories of the Roca workers was in provoking the parties and the unions into making pathetic declarations against the strikers. If we only knew beforehand where to dump this rubbish there would be no problems about the publication of such ignominy. But to accept their aid at the last moment, undid in a single day everything it had built up over weeks. If the unions organised demonstrations and stoppages in 'support', it was to impede all real solidarity. Not to have thrown it back in their

faces was to excuse all the preceding treachery. The Roca workers, solely by their radicalism, were able to scandalously declare to everyone what it was they wanted. To communicate this they could only count on their own radicalism. The strike in Roca ended having exhausted every possible recourse, and had cost 46 dismissals. It can be considered as a working class defeat because, unlike Vitoria, it had no effect on later events.

The conclusions of this whole period of struggle were admirably expressed in a manifesto written by the workers of the representative committee of the assembly of Tarabusi. 'All responsibility rests with the bureaucratic apparatus in our ranks, with the central unions which are only concerned with procuring a privileged position in this bourgeois democracy and which negotiates with the employers and the government. We affirm from our own experience that these union alternatives favour the bosses and not the workers, and that the only organisations of the workers are those which we build in factory assemblies and which struggle with determination uniting all the workers against the capitalists. We want here to put all the workers of Euzkadi and Spain on guard, because the dismissals of Tarabusi and Roca are only the beginning of a situation that is already becoming general. We do not avoid these problems by affiliating to 'centrales' like Comisiones Obreras, UGT, USO, ELA, STV. We can only solve them by struggle, organised and united by our interests, which are in no way served by agreements with capital or with the government.' (Vizkaia, Euzkadi. February 1977.)

## CHAPTER FOUR - DEMOCRACY AS INDEX OF SALVATION AND AS THE CONSOLIDATION OF EVERYTHING REACTIONARY

*'It is impossible to leave here without fighting; if we do not march then the enemy will march and follow us as we are marching and continue on our trail. . . while I am convinced, as you should also be, that if we attack them they will not be expecting it, but that if we retreat we shall know the daring of those who follow us.'*

- Xenophon: Anabasis

In Spain, as elsewhere, we do not find ourselves in a conflict between two sides within a single society, between two political options - democracy or dictatorship - within the same society. Rather, it is a conflict between two societies, a social conflict that has thrown overboard all political forms; it is at once a struggle between the old bourgeois society and the new classless society struggling to be born, a struggle between the classes that both societies represent: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Between two powers only force can decide. No apparent solution of this conflict can be a real solution. It is a question of a social revolution whose scope is not extinguished with a defeat.

The proletariat responded to the political transformation of the bourgeoisie, situating itself on the terrain of revolution, by obliging the state to turn its democratic phrases into actions. The relative and uncertain successes of the employers and the state, helped decisively by the parties and the unions, were paid for with the destruction of all the chimeras of a happy democracy. The final illusion had to vanish when it became clear that parties and unions had gone over to the side of the cops and had transformed themselves totally into the party of law and order. Profiting from the sensation caused by a combination of police excesses as a result of the hesitancy of the

state in reforming the institutions of the francoist state of siege (TOP, political police etc.) and the desperate actions of the extreme right expelled from power, it declared its unconditional support for the government and signed a joint declaration. That day had been a field day for bureaucrats. The killings in February meant the opposition could fabricate the rumour of a military coup, designed to frighten the middle classes and the less radicalised sectors of the proletariat and to paralyse the advance of the workers towards autonomy. 'The big central unions demonstrated their responsibility by trying to halt the extension of the strikes during these months that were so crucial for the country' (Cambio 16, 26 June 1977). What was happening was that the most rapacious bourgeoisie and the most miserable opposition in Europe were in constant fear of the rise of a new revolutionary period, but were incapable of actively terrorising the proletariat and were trying to invoke its own passive terror, its fear of the revolution. The proletariat had to be made to fear itself. The entire press collaborated in this operation, one of whose consequences was that the violence of the police remained well covered up and a law against pickets was promulgated.

Coups d'etat, like those in Chile and Argentina, have been immediate products of preceding revolutionary situations that threatened to alter the strategic defensive and economic interests of the American block, backed by the dominant classes of Chile and Argentina, for whom the only avenue of the recovery of their social predominance was a military coup. Those who see in the verbal excesses of some francoist generals the prelude to a Spanish or Chilean style coup d'etat are unable to draw the right conclusions from 40 years of Spanish history. Francoism, after having rescued Spanish society from the reefs of proletarian revolution by establishing bourgeois predominance in all aspects of social life, could no longer maintain itself as the political expression of bourgeois domination. Through its democratic transformation, bourgeois society, knowing how to adapt itself to its own interests, arrived at a normal existence. Francoism then cannot prepare a coup against itself. The military were assured of their privileges and their role in the post-francoist democracy more than the preceding dictatorship. The provocations of the extreme right could not even prepare the terrain for a pre-coup agitation, still less create the driving force for a coup. A coup d'etat is possible only if the military solution is the only possible solution to the class struggle, or if the proletariat seriously threatens the foundations of the Spanish bourgeois State, entailing a consequent alteration of the military status quo in Europe. When Santiago Carrillo, after being insulted by American strikers during his stay in the USA, complained that the unions in the US were manipulated by the CIA, he was forgetting that the object of his journey was precisely to guarantee to the American Government - and therefore to the CIA - that his party would respect the military agreements between the USA and Spain, which meant respecting the strategic position of the American military machine in Spain.

The distance that separated the strike movement from a revolution was the same as that which separated the assemblies from the militias. The roots of the crises lay elsewhere. The introduction of democracy as the most adequate form of the domination of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by a sharpening of the social question. The situation was painted black to hide the sad role of the opposition throughout this period. While the government promised it legality and elections, the opposition made the maintenance of the government the main aim of its behaviour. From a position of negotiation it had passed to a position of support. But in order to justify its approval of the government fiasco, it had to deny that such a fiasco had ever existed. The next step was to justify itself to the government, seeking not so much what separated it from the government as what it had in common. In this way, its politics became purely bourgeois, from which all oppo-

sitional half-heartedness had disappeared. With the opposition as its sure ally, the government was able to conclude its fight with proletarian autonomy and felt sure enough about its future by preparing anti-working class laws and creating a union and party structure set up to consolidate class collaboration. In March, the COS was dissolved on the initiative of the UGT, which now felt itself capable of conducting its own anti-assembly political drive. The relaxation of the pressure of the workers was visible in the shake-up of the bureaucratic apparatuses. The unions and the Stalinists were fully legalised although the ample tolerance that they already enjoyed was itself a form of legality. The bourgeoisie was unable to permit itself the luxury of maintaining them in opposition.

From the beginning of the year, the strikes had fallen in number but grown in duration and assembly consciousness. Resolute strikes like that at Induyco in Madrid or Acerinox in Cadiz are the best examples of how the workers resisted the disappearance of class action. But the majority of strikes were defeated. As one always seeks to avoid sure difficulties rather than probable ones, the unions easily deceived many of the independent assembly delegates. The latter were inclined towards peace seeing how troublesome a struggle against the unions would be, forgetting that the unions themselves were provoking trouble. In this way they put themselves into the arms of the unions leaving them to handle the strikes, which they quickly liquidated under one pretext or another.

In the building industry strikes of Barcelona, Valencia and Asturias, the workers were fooled by manipulative practices, which would have been inconceivable some months before, and which were carried out by the same people that had already tried them out in the building strikes of the previous year. The lack of co-ordination evident in these strikes was due to the influence and manipulative power of the unions at key points and in key factories (see the results of the disastrous Ford strike on the assembly movement in Valencia), after the assemblies had shown themselves unable to resist the corrosive action of the unions or to overcome isolation and so imprint their stamp on the march of events. Even so, it was not easy to reap the fruits of the victory over the proletariat. The unions, not having any margin for social reform, could not use wage increases to steal the victory already gained. The strike assemblies had produced an strikes were hardly under way than workers dared to do once again all they had dared to do previously. The revolutionary intensity of the period favoured the rise of assemblies in every conflict, which appeared more profusely than ever. The control of the government over the working class comes from its existence as a solitary uniformed mass preserved in its personal misery. It was sufficient for the proletariat to unite, to break the barriers that everyday survival had erected around everyone, to allow them to verify that they did not depend on the system, rather that it depended on them. The assemblies were the material and evident sign of a process of unification within the working class. Arising everywhere they became a major fact of existence. They showed to everyone what used to be evident to only a few. Demonstrating on whose side real power lay they determined from what direction victory, would finally come.

The prohibition of the 'peaceful' May day demonstration by the government was due to the government's fear of seeing more people assembled than the union bureaucrats could hope to control. In the eyes of the government it was like gathering up smouldering tinder. The cowardly opposition, incapable of risking its neck before the workers could easily provoke a riot, when in reality, they only wanted an argument. Nevertheless, nothing could stop the demonstration in Euzkadi, the most solid revolutionary bastion, because no one would risk trying to do so. The workers, having acquired the habit of imposing conditions rather than receiving them ejected

the unions. A periodical like Cambio 16, conscience and bad conscience of the enterprising bourgeoisie, had to drop its eulogising and platitudinous tone, becoming tragic and patriotic: 'All the elements of a potential crisis of national unity are to be found there (in the Basque country). And the worst of it is that such a crisis could drag down with it the rest of the country diminishing our progress towards democracy' (23rd May 1977). When there is a 'crisis of national unity', which means when the power of the bourgeoisie is in question, a unique and inviolable law subsists: the survival of bourgeois power. 'Our progress towards democracy' could not at the time signify anything more than bullets for the proletariat. The pro-amnesty demonstrations in the Basque country and Navarra were settled with six dead and many wounded. The reply of the workers was to call a general strike that hardly spread outside of Euzkadi because the unions called it off everywhere - especially the Comisiones Obreras - thus saving the government. Order was solidly established in alliance with the opposition. Only a month previously the Stalinists had celebrated the first anniversary of the Vitoria workers' battle in which workers had been massacred by the police (20 wounded) without defending themselves. Triunfo concluded, 'and so for now the working class of Vitoria had managed to save itself, acquiring a consciousness of having done so, of its specificity and a consciousness of its limitations faced with other forces round about it attempting to suffocate it. It is conscious now that through unity and self-discipline it can peacefully confront these forces that it has to get along with', (12th May 1977)

For the Stalinists, as for the bourgeoisie, as for the parties, it was a matter of eliminating all 'strikes or demonstrations to allow the elections to go ahead. The fate of all of them depended on the incapacity of the proletariat to take up the offensive on a national scale. After the second week of May, the forces of law and order were in control of the situation. The bourgeoisie organised its ad hoc parties to prepare for its electoral victory. The party political composition of the Cortes reflected the division of the spoils of victory over the workers' movement. With the holding of elections and the considerable reinforcement of the government, the bourgeoisie had achieved its political objectives and prepared now to resolve its economic ones.

## CHAPTER FIVE - CONSIDERATIONS ON THE CAUSES OF THE ADVANCES AND RETREATS OF THE WORKERS' ASSEMBLY MOVEMENT

*'In what concerns our war, It is a great truth always that when men are fighting they imagine that they are in the greatest of wars and once peace has returned, they prefer to admire the wars of yesteryear. Without a doubt a simple examination of the facts will make us see that we have here the most important conflict ever.'*

- Thucydides: The History of the Peloponnesian War

The workers' assemblies, defended by pickets and co-ordinated through revocable delegates, are not only the weapon of the social revolution but also its signal. They imply that the working class, dispersed into a multitude of organisations which divide them into a thousand parts, has joined together and that now no one part exists independently. It means that the entire class prepares for its communal existence with equal interests, formulating its own ideas from its own practice. The assemblies were not born as organs of power but as a stronger and more represen-

tative form of organising strikes, in which workers dealt with their own concrete and immediate problems and negotiate with management. Before exercising power they act as defensive organs for their everyday existence. At this stage of struggle the proletariat does not concern itself with an assured and permanent organisation of industrial sectors and branches, areas, provinces and at the level of the State. This indicates that it has not planned a systematic large-scale offensive against the dominant power. But by beginning simultaneously at various points, the historical logic of struggle changed the assemblies into organs of power whose enormous strength the proletariat was not fully conscious of. When assemblies exist as a real power alongside the fictitious power of the unions, opting for one or the other becomes the order of the day. It is a knife edged balance. Either assemblies or unions! The unions were too weak to oppose the assemblies but the proletariat was not sufficiently conscious to feel the need to destroy the unions. All throughout the first half of the year an immediate alternative was posed: either the autonomous affirmation of the proletariat or the defeat of the movement. For the unions an inverse alternative was posed - either lose their dominant position conferred on them by the bourgeoisie and the State as spokesmen for the workers or finish with the assemblies movement by impounding the workers within the unions. The unions had to accept the workers' conquests and recognise the power of the assemblies hoping to smash them in a moment of reflux the workers, in order to hold on to their gains, were obliged to follow through; they had to extend the movement to every sector and every town and defend it. The end of one fight could only be regarded as the beginning of a more tenacious and decisive one. If this was not to be, if the working class did not use the victories obtained to radicalise and consolidate its struggle elsewhere, and after a more or less favourable outcome to strikes, just let the assemblies dissolve and all communication channels along with them, then one has to regard this as one of those unusual situations in which a victorious army abandons the field to a conquered one, as happened in May 1937. The unions could recover lost positions and then the workers would begin the next strike in worse conditions than before. A victory never can have repercussions if it is not exploited. The pursuit of a conquered adversary must begin at the moment when, abandoning the struggle, it leaves the field of combat. The assemblies had to go on until the unions were smashed. The proletariat must know how to end a strike, keeping open its path of retreat - which is the same as that which it had advanced along - so that it can begin the next one in the best possible circumstances.

One could say that in Spain, bourgeois society declined rapidly and that this downfall of the bourgeoisie occurred in the presence of the revolutionary growth of the proletariat. During the francoist epoch the majority of strikes were isolated from each other. Separated by intervals in which the struggles declined they continued in no more than a latent or diffuse form. Each region, by not satisfactorily resolving its separation from other regions and because it only bothered about itself, had little interest in what was happening elsewhere. The decentralisation of the workers' struggle, distributed randomly over the different industrial centres, had saved the proletariat from being easily beheaded, increasing its resources and making it difficult for the enemy to find its centre since the enemy couldn't see that the centre of agitation was not to be found in anyone place but was everywhere. But a form of systematic and coherent struggle is necessary once the movement has progressed sufficiently on the local plane, when it can successfully combat repression, and once unions have begun to colonise the relations amongst workers from different areas. Today, seeing that the bourgeoisie has created a national union structure, all movements based on local dispersed struggles and which find any form of security in this dispersal shall fail. If a troop of intelligent 'leaders' supported by the State and the bourgeoisie, struggle

against workers' autonomy they are capable of hindering the victory of the; latter although all the other conditions might be favourable to it.

The positional war that the proletariat maintained under francoism corresponded to the defensive position in which they found themselves. But with the beginning of the breakdown of capitalism, the proletariat had to pass to the offensive. After the death of Franco the possibility and need to go on the offensive was dictated by the situation itself.

The radical workers formed in the milieu of strikes under francoism appeared like inshore sailors caught in a storm in mid-ocean, given the movement that surprised them within the localism of the factory. The little that they had learned was more of a hindrance than an asset in this profound struggle and often they were shown up as being less sure than others entering battle for the first time. The revolutionaries formed in the course of the events either managed in a very short time - or else never at all - to rid themselves of all surviving ideologies inherited from preceding struggles and the whole dead weight handed down from that previous period. They had to learn in their hearts that the political/union bureaucracies were capable of anything. They confused the still influential prestige of former militancy due to the well exploited, publicity-wise persecutions of the past regime, or a former honesty now corrupt, with that charlatanism which could summon up enough strength to broadcast its opposition daily, only to end up gaining a reputation for underhand deals. These people obstructed class action and the growth of the movement as much as they could. No conscious group foresaw the profound direction of the movement or understood its growth, much less acted with greater radicalism and consequence. The radical ideas of the movement were lost due to a lack of an organised and coherent theory, understood and elaborated by all. Instead they became dead, empty slogans recuperated in the mouths of the parties, or the disarmed and sub-aesthetic affirmation of anarchist lyrical and festive alienation. Minority unionists of the LAB or the CNT, or independent workerist groupuscules, put forward the watchwords of the assemblies without ever shifting from the sphere of the unions, trying to mediate between the assemblies and the unions when the conflict between them had broken out everywhere. They helped nourish the illusions of the proletariat about union assemblies. Their pro-assembly ideological prose helped falsify the real dialogues that were beginning everywhere. As a force of anti-historical inertia they counted decisively on the scales of the counter-revolution at the moment when the central unions were unable to play that role. They constituted the erased memory of the workers. They were content enough to have the assemblies remain as merely spontaneous reactions against the opportunism of the central unions, something, which might accord a place to them. The contradictions existing in Spain between a great theoretical poverty and an enormous richness of facts was fertile ground for the emergence of activist ideologies that were closer to petit bourgeois radicalism, neo-anarchism, national bolshevism, self-management ideologies that had been buried everywhere for some time. Partly, the proletarian assembly movement had meant that they had emerged, as degraded products possessed of diverse ideological premises assimilating certain radical ideas. Partly, they were promoted by bourgeois society as its own spectacular negation. Given the conditions that exist in Spain, it was nearly inevitable that these intermediary sects attempted to reconcile the nascent revolutionary movement with the conformist ideas of the official left. It was inevitable too that many workers arrived at coherent revolutionary positions through this round about way. But apart from all this, these currents had made possible the re-cycling of new miracle-makers and devotees of the new wave from swindlers to unemployed bureaucrats and businessmen prepared to exploit the revolutionary movement to their profit. The absence of truly theoretical struggles,

which were passionate and practical, meant that, in the beginning, part of the revolutionary proletariat reasoned and thought through the literature of these circles, so trite in their originality and so original in their triteness.

The working class entering by way of profound actions unleashed a radical movement of strikes whose effects still remain. It did what was essential but did nothing more, and allowed external powers to dispossess it of its gains and to speak in its place. The holding of elections in an atmosphere of momentary calm confirms just how much one had discounted the talent of the political bureaucracy to oppose the impetuosity of the proletariat using the mediocrity of the middle classes and Spanish philistinism. The PCE played its best role since the liquidation of the POUM and the Aragon collectives in the civil war. It was the principal counter-revolutionary force that shackled the movement. Neither the bourgeoisie or the police nor social democracy could combat it so effectively. Only the Stalinists possessed such a long strikebreaking tradition and a familiarity with the shortcomings of the struggle.

But all the objective obstacles could not have withstood the consequences of a strike like that in the Roca factory or in the Basque country if the proletariat had not possessed its own subjective obstacles. The proletariat mobilised initially from almost nothing. The absence of a defined revolutionary current was total, and throughout the movement the proletariat never succeeded in defining itself. The decadence of bourgeois society, whose ideological and organisational expression are parties and unions, produces a profound crisis amongst the workers. It is only with difficulty that significant numbers of workers liberate themselves from the ideological influence of bourgeois society continuing to cling with great determination to the illusions that the bourgeoisie puts into circulation. One does not resist several decades' counter-revolutionary history with impunity. The corrupting effects of 10 years of consumer survival and the backwardness of theoretical consciousness had the gravest consequences. The rejection of the poverty of everyday life, of wage slavery, of hierarchies, of the State, the alienation of the world of the commodity has certainly been present but not sufficiently conscious. The proletariat has entered into the struggle spontaneously armed only with their revolt. The profundity and violence of its action is the immediate reply to the insupportable capitalist system, but in the last analysis the workers have not spent enough time gaining an accurate understanding of just what they did. Theoretical backwardness - an insufficient historical consciousness - has engendered all the practical insufficiencies that have contributed to dispersing, postponing or paralysing the struggle. And an historical consciousness is the condition sine qua non of the social revolution.

Class struggle in its essence negates bourgeois society. This implies a method of waging the struggle, some outlets for practical intelligence, some positive forms of employing forces whereby the proletariat does not allow itself to be subjugated by the forms (e.g. unions and parties) which bourgeois society has constructed for its own ends. This implies a type of struggle where the initiative remains in the hands of the proletariat. As a consequence of the decline of bourgeois society, the spontaneous action of the workers assumes a revolutionary direction in the assemblies. Properly speaking the assemblies are not a defensive arm, rather they indicate that the proletariat has entered into a phase of struggle as a result of the correlation of forces between it and the enemy and its experience, where it combats the bourgeoisie and the state, with its own methods. The workers must stop the bourgeoisie from putting them on the defensive. In a defensive position the proletariat, recognising its weakness, is obliged to negotiate. But if as a consequence of a defeat, a set-back, exhaustion, or because the offensive cracks up, workers have to carry out a positional war, then they must prepare the defence in such a way that the



tactical initiative always remains in their camp and that the attacks of the bourgeoisie prove disadvantageous for itself.

In the offensive phase of the struggle it is not only the bourgeoisie and the social strata led by it who find themselves organised against the proletariat, but also organisations that originate either in the defensive period prior to it, or have the present aim of reducing the proletariat to a defensive position: i.e. the parties and the unions. The critique must not now in the first instance direct its fight against the bourgeoisie - these have already been judged by history ' but against the parties and unions, the fifth column of the proletarian movement without whose aid capitalism today would not have the least possibility ' even temporarily ' of overcoming the crises.

## **CHAPTER SIX - THE DARK IMAGININGS AND REAL FEARS OF THE DOMINANT CLASS AND THE POLITICAL BUREAUCRACY ON THE EVE OF THE SECOND AUTUMN**

*'Management and unions are confronting the same problem - the economic crisis - and are therefore obliged to get along with each other in the coming months'*

- Editorial: Diario 16, 12th July 1977

*'Just as in other European countries the central unions lack the necessary strength to guarantee a social contract. They can initiate conflict but one does not know, as has been proved to us in recent cases, if they have the power to keep it in check'.*

- Felix Mansilla, leader of the CEOE, talking to Cambio 16, 18th October 1977

After the elections in Spain world capitalism had to foot the bill in order to see its position consolidated in the southern flank of Europe. Public loans were re-negotiated and new credits and loans granted - from North American and European banks and the IMF- with which the Spanish government was able to cover the commercial deficit and support urgent financial measures. In attempting to banish all threat of revolution from the horizon, they had assured their credit worthiness in the eyes of international financiers. But international credit could only cover a minimum part of the necessities of Spanish capitalism as anti- inflationary policies had meant that credit from Spanish financiers - visible in the Stock Exchange slump - was withheld. With the contraction of the world market and the subsequent protectionist measures of the EEC and the USA tending to reduce imports, Spanish industry entered a serious crisis whose gravity was augmented by the many structural deficiencies in the different sectors of production - steel, textiles, footwear, shipbuilding etc... The necessary contraction of the internal market and the fall in investment, linked to the continued slide in profits (some 50% over the past two years) would extend the crisis throughout industry, beginning with the manufacturing industries (cars, production goods, transport material, and after that consumer goods, construction, agriculture, fisheries). Industry was torn between two alternatives: lowering production levels and thus productivity, given that the workers resisted dismissals in all kinds of aggressive ways, or else stockpiling and thus entailing an increase in financial requirements. Self-financing in Spanish industry only amounts to 30% of its medium- term requirements; the rest of the resources depend on credit

and issuing shares on the Stock Exchange. Given all this, the last word belonged to the bank of Spain, although the State opposed price increases so as not to provoke strikes, while industry, its own funds exhausted, approached the critical point of under or overproduction, depending on which road they would follow. But the economic crisis had not only broken the unity of interest between the bourgeoisie outside and within the Cortes, that is, between the capitalists and their political representatives, but between financial and industrial capital. The bank extended credit facilities for industries dependent on them while cutting off credit to other companies and so suffocating them. The collapse of big industries carried service enterprises in their wake (276 factories suspended payments and there were 54 bankruptcies in the first 8 months of 1977). Big companies like Ensidesa, Seat, Astilleros Espanoles, Babcock-Wilcox, Segarra, Altos Hornos del Mediterraneo were caught up in a crisis of overproduction. In Spain there is something in the region of 100,000 firms, 90% of which employ less than 250 workers. There are only a thousand or so large firms, which employ 15% of the working class. Such a structure for Spanish capital means that it is very vulnerable to crises, whose impact is much greater on smaller firms defenceless against any downturn in demand or credit. (In 1977, 60% of small and medium-sized businesses were experiencing financial difficulties. In Madrid every month a hundred court actions were started. In Viscaya, in July and August of that year, more than 100 court actions were lodged. In Barcelona there was a whole series of suspensions of payments<sup>6</sup>. It was estimated that, during 1978, ten thousand businesses could disappear).

Better wages, won in the course of numerous strikes as well as the efficient practice of absenteeism forced management to counter-attack since these actions were not accompanied by any increase in productivity and profits and the world crisis offered no margin for this in Spain. The bosses could do nothing other than attempt to reduce labour costs to less than those prevailing in the rest of Europe - just as in the old days of francoism. To achieve this it was necessary to obtain from the government non-compensatory or mildly compensatory dismissal measures and an agreement from the unions to crush the autonomous activity of workers. The unions in the July 1977 summit meeting with the employers showed they were willing to participate in this operation provided that the government allowed them to participate in the subsequent spoils. But pressure from striking workers organised in their own assemblies, continuing throughout August and September 1977 in the hotel industry, footwear industry in Alicante, assembly line workers in Viscaya, showed the unions that they could not be followed into a social contract with the bosses and that they could not finish off the assemblies by opposing them. The government then intervened, signing a contract with all the parliamentary parties. The Moncloa Pact<sup>7</sup> inaugurated a new period in the politics of class collaboration. 'It was necessary to impose economic limitations making it impossible for companies to cede to excessive demands' i.e. a wage freeze. The decrees of the Moncloa Pact amounted to a political solution to the economic problems of the bourgeoisie on a par with the Fuentes Plan that sought to be an economic solution to the political problems of the party in power. For the owners, the refusal to concede a non-compensatory dismissal law and pass a law against the assemblies was too much. But in the

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<sup>6</sup> 'This is a peculiarly Spanish device, whereby a company applies to the Courts for permission to declare a debt moratorium. If granted the court then specifies a period of time during which the company must sort out its finances. The difference between this and bankruptcy is that the debt moratorium is granted on the basis of the company's net assets being greater than its total debts.' Financial Times, 5 January 1979. (TN) 1979. (TN)

<sup>7</sup> The Moncloa Pact was signed in October 1977 by all the major political parties. It ended on 31st December 1978.

context of a social crisis, the methods of implementing political and economic measures are an expression of the course of the class struggle. The Moncloa Pact, assuring the co-operation of the parties, had as its first objective to stop a foreseeable proletarian offensive during autumn. The extremely antagonistic class struggle had led to the development of organisations such as the assembly movement, co-ordinated assemblies of strikers in the footwear industry in the province of Alicante and elsewhere. The reactionary press echoed the unease of the government and its allies: 'Politicians as well as government sources have compared this situation of class conflict to the same situation that erupted during the winter of 1975-76 some weeks after Franco's death against the wage-freeze measures imposed by the Arias government' (Hoja del Lunes, Barcelona 14 November 1977). The second aim of the Pact was to ensure that the unions were the sole executors of government policy favouring union activity against wildcats and reducing workers to the role of obedient servants of union bureaucrats.

With industry embarking on a downward turn, a union victory was impossible. The bosses, to recoup the losses suffered in the crisis, had to get the workers to agree to the ceiling fixed in the Moncloa Pact, given that freezing wages and reducing the number of employed workers were the means, given the situation, to sustain declining profit margins. The unions were seen as impotent since they were incapable of obtaining reforms or raising real wages.

In this conjuncture, the unions could not grow without state support thus accusing the state for this lack of support, singling it out as being the chief cause of their weakness when confronting workers. 'What capacity of response and opposition do the unions have? Their numerical weakness and lack of implantation (only 15% of the working population are unionised) prevents them from assuming positions of strength in the face of the threat of a hot autumn of uncontrollable strikes. . . One way or another, autumn could lead to a situation which is not so much a general strike (which the unions are obstinately against because, once started, it would be difficult to control) but more to a permanent strike which could spread discontent and struggles for wage increases to every sector of wage earners in the country!' (Cambio 16, No 296, 14th October 1977).

The workers' assemblies did not allow the parties to have any illusions about a stable bourgeois democracy, and the more the latter felt they were being pushed aside, the more rapidly they slid down the path of pure reaction. Academic dissertations in the Cortes with their foresight as well as false conflicts and clichés destined to enthuse Spanish philistinism, could not hide the existence of the class struggle from which the parties were distancing themselves up to the point of coinciding entirely with the dominant power. From there, to the great surprise of the petite bourgeoisie, intellectuals, stars, journalists, lawyers and students who had proceeded to model all those clay idols, for their own use, came the confrontation with the workers. The same language was in the mouths of the bourgeoisie, Stalinists, and social democrats, recalling the dark times of Negrin.<sup>8</sup> Diario 16 summed it up thus: 'The assembly - a sporadic organ without administrative regulation, without rules and in a minority - is playing a negative role while continuing to disregard and in fact, on some occasions, also impede the growth of the central unions. Assemblyism refuses to understand that its heroic epoch of struggle against fascist trade unionism has already passed and that the protagonists now must be free trade unions' (27th August 1977). So long as

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<sup>8</sup> Juan Negrin: socialist who left his profession as a scientist to take up politics at the beginning of the civil war. As Treasury Minister in the Largo Caballero government, he arranged for the transportation of the Bank of Spain's gold to Russia as a guarantee for arms. the gold never returned and the war material received was used to hurry the defeat of the Republic. He was overthrown in march 1939 by the Junta de casada. Died wealthy in exile (TN)

workers continued to persist with autonomous activity, such words merely proclaimed a prompt transformation of the 'democratic gains' into police business.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN - HOW THE UNIONS, ON CEASING TO BE POPULAR, CONTINUED TO EFFECTIVELY NEUTRALISE THE ADVANCE OF THE PROLETARIAT

*'They keep themselves free from attacks in such a way that the towns of Spain are not easily taken by their enemies'*

- Julius Caesar: The War in Spain

It was foreseeable that the agreement between the parliamentary parties and the state was not going to be respected by the workers who, not feeling affected by it, continued their struggles outside of the control of the unions. The strikers' assemblies of Santana in Linares and above all the insurrectional battle in Cadiz, followed by the immediate formation of co-ordinating committees of workers that were clearly anti-union, proved that the close of the first act was by no means the end of the performance. Parties reached the peak of their discredit, once the workers got over their initial astonishment at such illicit behaviour, the storm broke, and the proletariat, understanding that in this world it had only enemies and false friends, remained without any leadership other than that of its own anger. The unions, for their part, not able to be reformists who produce results, had to accept strikes and assemblies, which they did not at all want so as not to be routed and thus lose all control over the working class. The philistines reproached this stance of the Comisiones Obreras 'Senor Camacho shows he is favourably disposed towards controlled assemblies because he considers the CC.OO have sufficient experience, intelligence and strength to be able to exercise such a control. But he is not sure if this optimism will be borne out by events.' (El Pais, 11th November 1977). Nevertheless, the fact that the Stalinists could adopt such tactics showed that their hopes of triumphing over the proletariat could not be based simply on counting on the support of the bosses, as the UGT or STY had done, but also on the toleration of the proletariat.

The comical behaviour of the civil governor of Cadiz, lacking the power to stop reality, by forbidding any talk of Vitoria, only matched that of the Cadiz parties which got together 'to control the situation', before it took control of them. Different representations of power discover their fundamental unity in equally impotent gestures. When what they call normality is upset, i.e. when the circulation of commodities is interrupted to an intense degree, all that remains for capitalism is military occupation. And for the loyal opposition 'civic' collaboration with the police force would again be confirmed a month later in Malaga. In the course of an inoffensive demonstration proclaiming the autonomy and brotherhood of all Andalusian classes, omitting the exploitation of one class by another - a fact that henceforth could be considered as an act of Andalusian patriotism - a chance police provocation clarified the contradictory interests of those present at the demonstration. As there was a clear majority of radical workers in the streets they not only responded to police provocation but to another more humiliating one - the commodity - by taking possession of its showrooms and devastating them. By sacking the commercial district

of Malaga the social war was this time expressed as a great fiesta. In this way, the war against the commodity brought an important contribution in deeds to the task of revolutionary clarification.

The abject impotence of the unions, increasingly distancing themselves from the lucidity of the workers, was due to the abnormal situation in which they found themselves. As they were compromised in making deals with the bourgeoisie, they were unable to carry on the one thing, which justified them-the struggle for social reforms. Their actions had lead directly to a worsening of the living standards of the working class. Making the struggle against the unions a question of survival, the strikes had necessarily to take the form of assemblies. The big central unions had to make a spectacle of confronting each other in order to rotate the job of black-legging; all throughout the autumn the strikes displayed this false conflict, but they always ended up by collaborating in smashing the strikes: in the building industry in Zamora, in the pottery industry in Castellon, at the Santana factory in Linares, in the transport sector in Madrid, in the general strike in Tenerife, the strikes in Zaragoza in December, in the office workers' strikes in Madrid etc. Often caught out many union leaders were roughed up and constantly insulted. To cite one example, in the final assembly meeting of goods transport strikers in Madrid, various members of the CC.OO were beaten up and thrown out. By the end of the year the central unions had lost a good part of their members and after each defeated strike, thousands of membership cards were torn up. Sometimes it went so far as the union allowing themselves to be thrown out so as not to give the game away. But the crisis of the unions was not accompanied by an increase in the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat. The path that the workers took towards taking up radical positions was carried out in the majority of cases in an elementary way, under the pressure of immediate needs, without quickly grasping all their consequences or becoming aware of their content. What was lacking was the ability to overcome the essential deficiencies of the previous stage of the movement, principally its theoretical underdevelopment. Thus, the step-by-step interaction between economic demand and revolutionary struggle did not materialise. This explains why those who formed the negotiating committees lagged behind in relation to the development of the struggles and why they always had a preponderant influence on the direction of the struggles, to the benefit of the unions which introduced themselves into the assemblies constantly pushing the struggles in that direction. The combined committees were converted into a powerful arm of that bourgeois counter-balance to the assemblies - the unions - allowing these enemies of the workers to organise, their forces in a more efficient manner. The combined committees could not function well because the mutual agreement between its components-assembly delegates and union representatives - supplanted the majority decision of the proletariat meeting in the assemblies. With this bastard formula the assembly workers agreed to minority negotiating rights or at least to an inadequate form of representation, when in the factories and streets they had an overwhelming majority. Because the workers did not properly appreciate their own strength in struggle, they substituted decisions made in the assemblies for those reached at the negotiating table, and unconsciously helped transform the class struggle into a mere collaboration with the bosses. The threat hanging over the unions during the strikes, had the unions decided to openly oppose them, thus disappeared. All they had to do was adapt themselves to a situation which in fact could only evolve favourably for them, since through the combined committees they held the key to defending the reigning order, and would in this way preside over the defeat of the strikers.

The Moncloa Pact was not finally smashed by a generalised strike movement as the government and unions, had feared, it had merely created a favourable terrain as the decree of Villar

Mir freezing wages had done before. But the movement never went further than a series of important but nearly always-local strikes, and the skirmishes of Cadiz, Malaga and La Laguna. The strikes of the second autumn were, above all, rearguard actions. Considered in relation to the movement of the struggle, they were not an offensive against the new agreements endorsed at the beginning of the year, but a defensive reply to them. The exhaustion at the end of two years of struggle and the overwhelming pressures of unemployment had created a climate of weariness. Economic pressures had acted against the proletariat whereas before they had acted against the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie used their own crisis to reduce the workers' struggle to the defence of employment. With strikes on the wane, the unions managed to get the workers in many places to humiliatingly abase themselves by subscribing to ridiculous plans for industrial reconstruction, as in Seat, or assimilating a tearful, beseeching rhetoric that precluded strike action, or formulating demands in exchange for guarantees of jobs.

This time the unions were not the principal agents of defeat. They limited themselves to occupying the vacuum by organising union elections. The consolidation of the central unions depended on two things: the successful implementation of the Moncloa agreements and the defeat of the assembly movement as the method of workers' management representation and decision-making. After surpassing the unions, the workers did not consolidate their assemblies. They left the unions free to defend the social order within-the factories by recomposing, piece by piece, their bureaucratic apparatus aided by that indifferent attitude of the workers which often appears in deceptively calm moments. The workers had succumbed not so much to the illusions of the past, which were artificially orchestrated by the government, but to having ignored the unions by allowing them to re-establish themselves. The prevalence of anti-union sentiments throughout this period was useless; if not linked to the very movement, which could transform them into the rules of war. The assemblies by cohabiting with their union negation became props for the unions, and this millstone prolonged their ignorance of the necessary conditions for the revolutionary extension of the movement. They displaced the union illusion by the illusion of a union assembly, limiting the assemblies to the terrain of the unions as a permanent negotiating organ for the exploitation of labour power. The currents identified with this illusion participated in the union re-organisation within the factories as independent or non-affiliated candidates, reconciling, at the workers' expense, the different forces present. But the relative success of these candidates must not be attributed to these currents, since they do not in any way indicate an acceptance of their ambiguous positions. Rather it indicates an attitude of passive resistance on behalf of the workers in the face of the advance of the unions, pressured by unemployment and resentful of the relative impunity which union bureaucrats still enjoyed.

If the parliamentary elections, after a year and a half of struggle, were a great defeat for the assemblies' movement, the union elections are the final and total confirmation of this defeat. The proletariat came out of this process much weakened. Generally speaking we can state that the proletariat, now disorganised, went on the defensive during the two and a half months that the elections lasted. Rapid advance is a vital law for the revolution, crushing all obstacles, setting its sights higher each time, if it does not wish to be immediately sent back to its fragile point of departure and scattered by the reaction. But one must not forget that revolution is the only form of war in which the final victory is the consequence of a series of defeats.

## CHAPTER EIGHT - ORDER REIGNS ON THE FACTORY FLOOR

*'Do not bear grudges against the political measures which the government is about to institute or the order which will be maintained in the streets of our cities'*

- Declarations made by Jaroszewicz before the Szezecin strikers 24th January 1977.  
Taken from, Poland: 1970-77, Capitalism and Class Struggle, Black and Red translation of a text by Informations Correspondence Ouvriers. Spartacus, Paris

The decay of the assembly movement, which was total at the beginning of the year, marks a new stage in the advance of the counter-revolution in Spain. Up till then, the reaction had advanced under the aegis of collaborating with the neutral assembly members and minority unions, which served as a bridge between the clearly bourgeois programme of the majority unions and the revolutionary tendency of the workers' assemblies. With the union elections, the moment had arrived when the socialist-Stalinist union block could dispense with them. History knows the process well. Once the sabotage of the strikes had caused the workers to retreat from their pro-assembly positions, the reaction could ditch every ally whose services had been indispensable in making this retreat a success. As a result of the defeat of the workers' assemblies, the unions that had contributed the most to it were strengthened. Such had been the result of the repression of the Spartacists by the socialist Noske. The election slogans of the UGT and Comisiones Obreras clearly signified ending with the assemblies. Such was the aim of the projected UGT law 'trade union representation for workers', a project which pressed for the adoption of its more anti-assembly perspectives, with the aim of obtaining the maximum number of functions for works councils and for union branches.

But these assaults against the proletariat are not simply being carried out in the workplace, nor are the parties and unions its principal agents. In our time with the vastness of the productive forces, stoppages in production and in the circulation of commodities are so effective as to provoke grave disturbances in the system. We know, thanks to the North American miners, what the consequences are of paralysing coal production. And without needing to look elsewhere, we know that the consequences of a transport strike, such as a strike of the employees of Campsa,<sup>9</sup> or simply of bank employees, if prolonged for a long enough period of time, are mortal for the system. The system has to protect itself against its own vulnerability by reinforcing, in the name of security and protection, the police control over society on various pretexts. One is social delinquency -justifying the increase in the number of cops patrolling the big towns making them seem almost like semi-occupied. Then there is the pretext of terrorism, which justifies special commando units and, now, the Martin Villa plan to create a political police. Finally, there is the threat of an ecological catastrophe -chemical, nuclear or any other kind, which aberrations, indigenous to capital, could produce. Emergency plans include measures like militarisation and the collaboration of the army and 'civic associations' created by the parties. Up to now this sinister conspiracy against the proletariat has been circulated in a naive way throughout the press. The daily paper, El Pais (2nd February 1978) speaking about the reforms of the Public Order Act said: 'The projected act devotes various clauses to the definition of states of public emergency, to the way in which it is to be declared as well as the measures necessary to control it. A state of emergency can also be declared in case of catastrophes, calamities or public mishaps, the paralysing of essential services, and in situations where products of prime necessity fail to be delivered.

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<sup>9</sup> Campsa: the state monopoly of oil and gas (TN)

Amongst the measures that the authorities could adopt in such cases, figure various restrictions, amongst them, the temporary requisitioning of all kinds of goods and the imposition of obligatory personal loans, the revoking of permits to carry arms, the limitation of the movement and length of stay of persons or vehicles to certain places and times, the temporary occupation of industry, factories and workshops and the rationing of the consumption of services or basic necessities. The projected law foresees the collaboration of military units carrying out particular duties under the control of normal authorities or under the control of third persons such as the collaboration of civic associations created for such ends.

If bourgeois relations of production are conditioned by the position each country occupies in the world market, the proletariat cannot break them in one country, while they remain intact in the rest, and inversely, a revolutionary solution in a particular country totally depends on the situation of class struggle in all the others. A proletarian revolution cannot last very long if it is not extended to other countries, if it does not become international. The struggle against capital cannot be restricted to a single country. The degree of internationalism is exactly the degree of consciousness of revolutionary reality. We don't have to listen to General Haig to know that 'a country's membership of NATO is a guarantee against the development of certain revolutionary processes', and that should one take place 'there can be no doubt that NATO would intervene in Spain' just as there was no need to wait for the military interventions against the proletariat in Berlin, Hungary or Czechoslovakia to know the same about the Warsaw Pact. It is not necessary to wait for the formal entry of Spain into NATO to see that Spanish policy towards Africa or the conversion of the Canary Islands into a military base is an anti-working class strategy, one already employed by Franco in 1936. World capitalism cannot allow a revolution, even if local, for any length of time. Every social revolution must confront the danger of military intervention and must not hold itself back because of this, but, on the contrary, must extend itself beyond its own frontiers. It must constantly bear in mind that parallel struggles are going on under the same circumstances in Poland, Portugal, in the majority of Mediterranean countries and in the East.

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## CHAPTER NINE - NUCLEAR PERSPECTIVES OF THE MOMENTARY POWER OVER THE PROLETARIAT

*'I call forth all those that I have forgotten to name in any law, prerogative, or condition, and charge them to come in all haste and enter into my dance, you need no beckoning.'*

- The Dance of Death: Anonymous European text from the 14th century

With the worst of the proletarian onslaught over, capital can now think about a new offensive that allows the productive forces that vital breathing space necessary for a new boom based on a dual international process. This entails an advance in the bureaucratisation of society with the state taking charge of the restructuring of uneconomic industrial sectors, and a new process of accumulation led by the multinational capitalist sectors based on the cybernetic/nuclear reorganisation of the productive process. The backward sectors of Spanish capitalism with all their anachronistic appendages, are called on to play a self-financed auxiliary role by eliminating inefficient manual labour.

The nuclear question must feature in all radical theoretical analysis of the central fact of the social war and the essential element of the attempt at capitalist restructuring taking place through-



out the world. Nuclear energy, in its development as in its results, expresses the final domination of dead labour over living labour, of fixed capital over variable capital: in other words it does not create jobs and therefore cannot be a solution to the economic crisis. Instead it could be the solution to the crisis of the economy ' that type of solution whose secret capitalism possesses, a leap forward and a deepening of the contradiction. The old bourgeois project of the emancipation of nature is now being realised as nightmare which contradicts the real nature of man and is now endangering the survival of the species. The separation between the economic crisis and the crisis of the economy does nothing more than perpetuate the division of labour between the agents of the market economy, i.e. between the workers' bureaucracies and the capitalists, though we do not deny that possible and real conflicts exist between them, which are always negotiable and vouched for by the state mechanisms which control this collaboration. In the face of the crisis the most advanced sector of the capitalists have practised a scorched-earth policy, abandoning to the state (and up to a certain point to the bureaucrats) the management of the crisis affecting the backward sectors, gaining time in order to develop the basis for a new take-over with more advanced technologies (information, electronics, nuclear energy etc.) A real conflict exists, although the workers' bureaucracies, in so far as they represent variable capital, have had to struggle against their expulsion by fixed capital. We can for example, point to cases in Spanish industry where the union bureaucracies have said no to the introduction of modern machinery where this would reduce the number of jobs available, even though it went contrary to their promise not to make any demands. In the future these occurrences will be more frequent. All of the forms of the self-management of misery (we have seen practical examples of self-management of Roselon or in Eurastyl) also militate in this direction, whilst the most modern sectors of capital reconstitute their forces elsewhere for anew offensive. When we hear the voice of the capitalists raised against State intervention, it is because not only do they think it unnecessary to continue expanding the economic role of the State, but also because this expansion would extend the process of bureaucratisation, a process which would imply the inclusion of the workers' bureaucracies in the management of the State. Needless to say, the workers' bureaucracy struggles for this expansion not only as a perspective for the future, but because today they need the State to keep alive the traditional industrial sectors from which they presently draw their greatest strength.

Conflicts could arise (as has happened) between the banks, the electricity industries, and the State, in relation to the proposed programme of nationalising the nuclear power industry and the State takeover of plants responsible for the production of high tension electrical energy; between private capitalist forces, protagonists of nuclearisation and the political protagonists of bureaucratisation, but it would merely be incidental. In the particular case of Spain, the conflict has been settled since Fuentes Quintana stood down in favour of private capital, although the Central Bank of Spain is still the most important shareholder in the electrical sector, as a result of the policy of buying shares to sustain the Stock Exchange.

Though still an involuntary reaction of the ailing capitalist organism, nationalisation and State planning of production -although still partial and indicative - demonstrates the bureaucratic form property tends to take and the contradictory need to introduce a planned capitalist economy. From the social point of view these tendencies could be considered as leading to a partial suppression of private property and an increase in the productive forces. In the meantime, certain limits still exist and these phenomena appear in a sporadic form. The qualitative social characteristics of the economy in which they appear - the market economy - remain intact. But if the

phenomenon becomes general, the nature of the economy will change. At a determinate moment the economy, because of the extent of nationalisation, will lose its private capitalist character and the State will cease to politically represent the bourgeoisie, and come to represent the bureaucracy formed within it. This is the tendency, which provokes modern capitalism to oblige the State to concentrate its intervention on failing and bankrupt sectors. A new class then threatens to arise to solve capitalism's weaknesses in the domain of production and put a halt to the assaults of the proletariat. This class would be composed of bureaucrats and technocrats already formed within public and private enterprises, fused with the leadership of the party and union apparatuses, and the police and military high commands.

This could appear as an exaggeration of the Machiavellianism of the various sectors of the dominant class, but even if the objective side of the process-the spontaneously bureaucratic evolution of capital - is of great importance, we cannot underestimate the consciousness this class has that its survival is at every moment a war against the proletariat. The extension of their power throughout society depends on whether or not the proletariat, still side-tracked in its struggle by the bourgeoisie, is capable of destroying the State and the bureaucratic apparatuses, which sustain it.

The social war does not conceive of rights, morals, wrongs or injustice. The proletariat rids itself of wage slavery only if it wins the war. It also knows that it can lose in this inevitable combat. It will deserve defeat if it loses, as it shall deserve victory if it wins.

April 1978

# THE POVERTY OF UNIONISM: THE ASCON WORKERS' STRIKE - ASCON AND THE SPECTACLE OF DEMOCRACY

## *Autonomia Proletaria*

The struggle waged by the proletariat at Ascon has possibly been one of the most radical struggles in 1978, at least within the Iberian context. Most certainly it has been the richest in lessons. The struggle occurred when the proletariat was on the retreat; this reflux was due not only to its failure to develop the assembly movement on more consistent lines but also to the momentary impact of democracy, to its subsequent spectacular imposition. A new stage opened up in which the parties and unions, although not convincing anyone, and in fact unmasking themselves, were able together with the police and other forces which defend capital, to put a brake on and isolate the proletariat, thus inflicting on it a momentary defeat. Whether these workers' bureaucracies became strengthened or not depended on the weakness of the subversive movement of the proletariat.

This offensive of capital in Spain, based as it is on forms of domination which are different from the francoist stage, has demonstrated the inevitability of democracy and has resurrected a plethora of corpses from the old world: the left and far-left parties, the unions, political activity which involves elections and parliament, its professional politicians and their eternal separation from real life -succinctly, the process of mystification which tries to overcome the crisis and put a brake on the advance of the proletariat (obvious since the beginning of 1977). The role of the left was to have carried out this project, by either demoralising or simply repressing the proletariat. And given its real interests (management of capital) this is its real task. In the crisis which effects Spanish capital, and the attempt to overcome it, all the tendencies of capital, from the more grotesque (the far right) to the most radical (the far left), reveal themselves; they behave in exactly the same way in their language, their slogans and their established relations are no different in the way that they justify wage-slavery. The calls for order, responsibility, democracy first and foremost, the defence of capitalist production, along with the modernisation of all its kindred values (family, wage labour, country etc.) conjures up everyone from Carrillo to Martin Villa, from the PNV to the OIC and makes them re-appear on the Spanish scene recast in an old play in which the villain is always the proletariat. From this we conclude that the left and extreme left are no more than a variation of the programme of capital.

Thus the proletariat, due to the repression and emasculation of everything which is the expression of the social movement (assemblies, pickets, revocable delegates, i.e. the forms of organisation and the relations established within the class), has entered a period of reflux by exchanging strikes, demos, prison struggles, all choked through isolation, for some sort of prize bouquet or place of honour within the spectacle.

But these democratic gentlemen, ideological contortionists hoping to condemn us to eternal survival, will never sleep well, no more than those German or Russian technocrats who are so expert in institutionalised and normalised terror, and certainly no more than those incompetent sons of the Holy Pact of Moncloa who know deep inside that they really control nothing and that their decadence becomes more marked daily when faced with a class which demands the total management of its own everyday life. No matter how much they try to conceal it, the class war still goes on. The spectre of communism will always haunt them and will make the victory of the proletariat possible against the political domination of capital, which creates barbarism everywhere. In its own way communism exists.

The struggle at Ascon has to be situated within this context. Although it didn't arise in an offensive, anti-capitalist stage, the extension of the struggle, although on a localised basis, was possible. It became the best exponent of the present-day struggles, all of which are brutally isolated, conditioned by the negative effects of the crisis and subject to the contradiction of not overcoming the reigning theoretical confusion, in which the various vanguards, after having been held at bay, begin to reappear in a thousand forms because they had never been destroyed definitively. To deal with the Ascon struggle on a partial basis, such as the crisis in shipbuilding, fascist bosses, negotiations etc. without dealing with the aspects mentioned above would be tantamount to allowing ourselves to deal in banalities. To treat the Ascon struggle, or any struggle in this way is an unnecessary task, one that has nothing to do with any kind of ideological justification since there is nothing to justify and we are not trying to convince anyone. It has more to do with affirming ourselves individually and collectively and taking on all the risks of making a critique in words and in acts, and doing it because it is a vital necessity.

## **HOW DEMOCRACY CHANGES NOTHING WHILE PRETENDING TO MAKE EVERYTHING INTELLIGIBLE**

On 23rd February 1978, the economic group Peres Mauro ordered the indefinite closure of the Meira and Rios shipyards, both of them located in the Vigo Valley. These factories, which make up the company Shipyards and Constructions Ltd (Astilleros y Construcciones SA) employing some 1,850 workers had been bought out by this monopoly in March 1977. Since then the attempts to rationalise production, to reduce plant equipment etc. went on consistently, so much so that the climate of unrest amongst the workers began to increase. The formal reasons given for the closure were the workers' reactions to the dismissal of a worker who had talked back to a foreman. These reactions had not been excessively offensive - there had been one meeting inside the factory. But from this point on, the company used the situation to develop its well thought-out strategy, which included their much wanted reorganisation of labour, getting State credits, and bringing about a clear defeat of the workers. This latter would, on the one hand, eliminate resistance inside the company while on the other hand would serve as a good lesson in capitalist strategy for the entire area.

After this, assemblies began to occur. At the beginning they were no more than informative meetings controlled by union representatives of the company (mainly USO). Thus, in the midst of the passivity and general ignorance, the workers of Ascon, thinking that the conflict would not last long, started a series of pacific and semi-religious marches around the city at the same time

as the strike committee started their voyages in search of impossible dialogues. On 7th March, the police, using tear-gas, broke up a meeting of the Ascon workers who, at that moment, had been singing the Galician national anthem. Some robberies and traffic hold-ups in the city centre were condemned by the strike committee with the argument that they had been carried out by groups of *incontrolados* (uncontrollables). At about this time the engineering workers' strike collapsed, because of the terrible betrayal of the assemblies. It was brought about by the CC.OO and the UGT on the one hand, the representatives of the purest form of black-leg labour, and by ING, CSUT, USO and CNT on the other hand who, as supposed spokesmen for the assemblies, squabbled stupidly about who had more or less right to negotiate the contract. Such wheeling and dealing in union rivalries brought on the complete collapse of the strike. One last little thing; the stoning of the UGT offices, an act about which all the rival unions remained quiet, busy holding salon meetings held behind the backs of the workers, was to bring about the existence of distinct negotiating committees, something which both unions and employers welcomed. The weakness of the assemblies allowed unions like the CSUT or ING to stupidly spout their own assemblyism.

Without wasting any time, the union organisations as well as the Ascon workers filed sadly side-by-side on 14th March in a mystifying procession, an act of so-called solidarity. The joint communique of the unions, which demanded coherent and efficient policies from the government to solve the labour problem, gives us a glimpse of that illusory tone which instead of shedding light on the problem manages to obscure it even more. Some days later representatives of Ascon met with the local bishop amidst the general indifference of the workers. The conflict, hemmed in by the infantile disorders of a USO-controlled strike committee, could not extend itself. The occasional symptoms, which would break out, were immediately stamped out by the low price of so-called solidarity. The UGT, CC.OO and the USO, not to miss the opportunity, were soon off wandering about the corridors of the administration.

## **WHEN THE STREET BELONGS NOT ONLY TO COMMODITIES - AND THE POLICE**

But there was to be a quick about-turn in the apparent docility, which seemed to reign amongst the workers. The limits in which capital attempts to isolate struggles, the factories, were broken and the confrontation was brought out into the social space of the streets. Unions and parties were suddenly awoken from their lethargy and didn't delay in acting, some supporting the police while others, given the force of commodity politics, were to give moral support to the workers.

On 31st March, with dismissals showering down on everyone and while the union representatives were off in Madrid trying to figure out a solution, the workers managed to break through the domesticated limits in which they had been kept and the first confrontations with the police took place. The workers, in the notable absence of the bureaucrats and black-legs, assumed their condition as proletariat and made it clear as to which was the side of bourgeois legality and order and which was the side of the proletariat. It was to be the inauguration of new relations set up between an important section of the Ascon workers and the proletariat of Vigo who had taken to the struggle as though it were their own.

Roughly about the same time as the events in Cadiz (where the fishermen had demonstrated the reality of their situation by fighting in the streets, this despite the fact that they were condemned

by various bureaucracies) fierce riots occurred on 4 April, in which the proletariat of Vigo fought the repressive forces. Throughout almost the entire month a variety of barricades, bonfires, stone-throwing, cars overturned and burnt out, smashed shop windows, were to be the proofs and weapons which the proletariat was to extend throughout the entire city. The police demonstrating their characteristic and intrinsic brutality were overpowered continuously, even when, on the three days after 4 April, two special police units were sent in to reinforce them. Throughout various parts of Vigo, the workers of Ascon and other companies, which had become involved in these new relations, which were a reflex of the historical situation, acted clearly and swiftly. Once the proletariat had tasted this passion for social war all understood these actions clearly and explicitly. The burnings, the stoning of the police, FENOSA, banks; firemen, etc. acquired a lucidity and meaning for themselves. They were by no means gratuitous acts subject to the tactics of fascist provocateurs but, on the contrary, were acts, which were perfectly identifiable with the proletarian expression of social violence against capital.

And those things which were most attacked, even if they remained intact, was precisely those things which sustain and maintain capitalist relations. Thus, when cars were attacked, overturned or even burnt or just plain moved, it was something more than an attack on a lump of steel with four wheels and a motor. It was an attack on commodity fetishism, against a fetish which depends on the spectacle and which transforms it into an instrument of death. When bank and store windows were stoned it wasn't merely a question of smashing glass crystals but of also smashing the meaning, which these places take on as exhibition centres for the circulation of those products. These expressions of festive destruction came to be the means whereby communication was re-established in the streets.

The fear, which showed in the faces of the bureaucrats and blacklegs faced with the radical proletariat shouting out 'police-murderers', reminded them that they too were on the same side. In the midst of the smoke and the abnormal situation in the streets, the rest of the town participated in these events with no less passivity. The parties and unions, already situated where they belonged, and given the police repression and the ever-increasing number of arrests, were unable to stop that force, which despite the lack of theoretical clarity, pushed the class forward. The PC and PSOE calls for order and responsibility which were endorsed by the leftist groups, the campaign of lies which spoke of *incontrolados*, attempts at destabilisation etc., orchestrated by these parties as well as the various union representatives and even by certain sections of the Ascon strike committee, convinced nobody not even the antiseptic middle classes afraid of losing their cars or their lives and who remained the prisoners of proletarian wrath when they tried to go through a barricade. The only thing which all of them were agreed on was the need for police order.

## THE REAL RELATIONS ESTABLISHED ON THE PERIPHERY OF IDEOLOGY FORCED THE PROLETARIAT TO DEVELOP THEM THEORETICALLY SO AS TO MAINTAIN AND STRENGTHEN THEM

Those new relations, which had either come out of certain assemblies and the streets, made it obvious that any advance of the real movement was worth more than a dozen programmes. These relations, given the well-defined historical movement, correspond to the present phase of the class war and point in the direction of the real communist movement. These relations, involving both employed and unemployed, male and female, young and not-so-young workers had one of their most meaningful days on the 6th. In the midst of a large festival of destruction, the proletariat stormed the gates of poverty shouting 'Down with Capital' and 'Vitoria, Vitoria' (Victory, Victory), recalling those days of March 1976.

Despite what had happened the struggle was not understood theoretically, neither by the proletariat of Ascon nor by the others who had played an active part in the struggle. There was a real absence of thought about the necessary critical balances and reflections on what was already a reality and was anti-ideological, i.e. the real negation of the parties and unions and the possibility of reaffirming and substantiating these positions. The few isolated cases where there was an understanding of what happened was insufficient to develop the necessary critical theory in the assemblies. The principle reason for this was the general theoretical weakness, also present in Galicia) the weight of Stalinist ideology, the lack of historical information) the situation of reflux, isolation and non-communication in which the present struggles occur.

On the other hand if the PC-CC.OO, PSOE-UGT and others, set out to discredit the struggle as it was, the other more leftist groups like the PCE(R),<sup>1</sup> AOA, CNT, PGP, only tended to mystify it by trying to hide the fact that this struggle also meant their own negation. These leftists, historically condemned to the impotency of delirium, now practised an open and opportunist policy of trailing along behind the struggles in the hope of extracting something for their groups from the reigning theoretical confusion. The position of the independents and anarchists was little different, situated as they were between this policy of trailing along behind struggles and an elitist sectarian attitude, clearly anti-proletarian and philistine, an attitude, which criticised proletarian intervention as a function of ideology. Such a process of ideologising reality always leads to a cultural vanguardist separation from the struggle and to a petit bourgeois stance, which is incapable of understanding the present struggles of the proletariat.

And we mustn't leave out the press, which openly collaborated with the police, the bosses, the CC.OO and the UGT and daily showed whose interests they serve, no matter how progressive or democratic they claim to be. From the absolute silence about what was going on inside the assemblies or what was happening on the streets they put out alarmist diatribes which spoke about infiltrators, wildcats, provoateurs who were nostalgic for a Pinochet etc. These were tremendous lies designed to hide the fact that it was the assemblies that decided and assumed the responsibility for what was happening on the streets and that it was generally the workers of Ascon who, although wavering occasionally, always took the initiative. But all these grub street papers, these sons of mediocrity forever in the service of capital, had, ideally to falsify everything so as to

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<sup>1</sup> Purely regional parties. PCE(R) - a Maoist lot, PGP-Popular Galician Party - a centre right lot etc. etc. . . (TN)

avoid upsetting their labour and political hierarchies (like the Voice of Galicia with respect to the PC). The spectacular descriptiveness of certain events was not just informative ostentatiousness but was a concession to the spectacle and the worst kind of sensationalism.

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### **IF A DUALITY OF POWERS EXISTS WITHIN THE ASSEMBLIES AND IF SUCH AMBIGUITY IS NOT RESOLVED IT WILL TURN SOONER OR LATER AGAINST THE PROLETARIAT**

If a lack of theoretical reflection existed in relation to what was happening in the streets in the month of April 1978, it also existed inside the assemblies. It created an ambiguity between those occasions when the assembly took on a radical character and those when passivity allowed it to be the victim of manipulation by the strike committee.

On the 9th, the Voice of Galicia published the following statement: 'According to company sources, the fact that negotiations are taking place with the unions (CC.OO, UGT, USO) is because they are permanent entities, while the workers have no fixed representation, and also because the union representatives are stable, unlike the personal representation which can vary. They have shown that they are against assembly decisions taken by the workers'. This shows, for anyone who still doubts that the unions are the faithful collaborators of capital, that the assemblies, where everything was possible - even manipulative practices when the assembly is weak, for example - are something that the unions want destroyed. If this was something, which was well understood, it was not something that was sufficiently contested. The unions tried to finish off the struggle in Vigo by defaming and boycotting the support of the workers while they were off in Madrid negotiating the burial of the struggle, doing it badly or not so badly but doing it nevertheless, while in the rest of the State it was collaborating with the bourgeois press in hiding what was going on in Vigo at that time.

And all of this was tolerated by the strike committee, which, day after day, insisted that the union - mainly USO - must faithfully go along with the assembly. The committee, subject to two distinct questions, the union and the assembly, was never partisan to the assembly and always saw itself in terms of its own 'possibilism', its honourable unionism, its manipulatory attempts and its desire to transform the assemblies into something whereby they could simply inform the rest of the assembly about what they had already decided on and carried out. If the strike committee, certain exceptions apart, was able to present an assembly image, this was always due to the fact that the pressure from the assembly was greater since obviously the power of the assembly was more in this vein than any other. It was the assembly, despite the above noted ambiguity, which always developed the criticism and certain types of the actions, which were to be carried out. The committee did nothing other than underline certain expressions of the assembly and this only when it had no other option. But if the assembly was divided and weak then it played its real cards, denying what yesterday it had agreed to, undermining what was taking place on the streets, like the harsh attacks made against the parties and unions, claiming that these latter were necessary and irreplaceable. Given such a position it was logical that they used less combative and more reactionary elements in order to put these against the proletariat outside this control. They used arguments like 'those who protest against our interventions are not Ascon workers' or else by holding assemblies which were of more interest to them in Balaidos instead of Nautico, this after seeing that the behaviour of those attending the assemblies varied from one place to the other.



The 11th April was very revealing in this respect, revealing, that is, in confirming the ambiguity of the assembly and the manipulation of the strike committee. On the 11th, the day after Elvira Parceró died of a brain haemorrhage, due to the extreme emotional reaction following a police charge, the committee through demagoguery and coercion prevented the workers from taking to the streets, and refused to wait for the assembly to debate the matter given that they had already made up their minds and were not going to accept any contrary opinion. With very few exceptions, no one dared to denounce the committee despite the fact that by only going beyond these occurrences could the workers have given the offensive a completely different character. It was no surprise on the 13th of April, the day of Elvira's funeral, the committee repeated their manoeuvres, transforming the demo which came out of the cemetery into a remorseful, silent procession, even though it was the butt of various verbal attacks by elements from outside. Ascon, who were determined that the moments of silence would not be useless, unlike the others who seemed to agree with the funereal air of the demo, had closed their eyes to the real situation. They had also closed their eyes to the possibility of definitely reaffirming that the power of the assembly was incompatible with any other power.

## **ANY APRIL THE 25th<sup>2</sup> WILL NOT BE FOR SOME BUT FOR ALL AND WITH A DEFINITIVE CHARACTER**

With some 30 dismissals already, and the possibility of over 400 more, the executive representatives of the unions are hissed and booed by the assemblies on the 14th of April, so showing its disagreements with these bureaucracies. The calls for a general strike from the assembly came up against union opposition. The latter, some openly (CC.OO, UGT), and the others by their silence, want at all costs to avoid presenting themselves before the employers as trouble-makers. Unionism is nothing more than negotiation, agreements, bureaucracy, hierarchy, membership cards, civilised images, and the ideal go-between to discuss the selling price of labour power. Unions can never be the vehicle of an assemblyist and radical anti-capitalist general strike. This is the task set to those limited relations which distinguish themselves historically, these new relations being also its condemnation and negation. Unionism is a corpse raised up over the spectacular alienation of the commodity. It is the bureaucracy which necessarily does what it must. It is nothing more than this and is by no means traitorous. It is merely a mechanism for integrating the workers into capitalist society.

The day before the management suspended the negotiations, the PC-CC.OO and the UGT-PSOE (UCD to the core) called for a day's struggle in order 'to save Ascon and the ship-building industry of Vigo'. They wanted this to be inter-classist, citizenly, i.e. a demobilisation. Once April 25th came, the date set for this event, which had not been supported by the CNT and the ING, a communique signed by the Ascon Workers' Assembly called for a total stoppage as a first step towards a general strike, considering that a two-hour stoppage was ridiculous. But what was certainly the case was that on that day the word solidarity can be seen as an abstraction, something which can be reduced to newscuttings, current prices and all sorts of things. Solidarity

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<sup>2</sup> The date of the coup d'état in Portugal (1974) which overthrew the fascist-colonial dictatorship there, as well as the date of the Italian liberation from fascism (1946) (TN)

can really only be understood as a form of identifying an existing problem as part of the totality. Consequently, for us, it doesn't mean some religious solidarity which wears a price-tag separated from a global problematic. Only when the proletariat assumes a particular problem as their own can we talk solidarity. Everything else is the pious words of political sanctity. This aspect, though always pushed into the background, was to weigh heavily on 25th of April and confirm that the Ascon strike was upsetting, and prejudicial to the ideological/political orientations of the different organisations involved. No one wanted to be seen as urban guerrillas, the way in which certain news media described the interventions of the proletariat on the streets.

With April 25th, nothing in relation to the condition which had brought about the stoppage had been changed. Less than fifteen thousand workers stopped their alienated activity for two hours and in many cases with the opposition of the CC.OO and UGT. In the afternoon, and just before the PC-PSOE demo had gotten underway, an Ascon workers' assembly exposed the ridiculous positions of the big unions, which wanted to be seen as protagonists of the conflict in spite of their dealings with the government and their attempts to destroy any of the struggle's radicalism. The assembly decided to go along with the demo but prevented the CC.OO and UGT from taking the leadership, even though they realised that the demo would resolve nothing. They had done the only possible thing in such a situation 'break up the head of the march making the assembly the real protagonist of the struggle. At the beginning of the demo, before the march got underway, fierce disagreements broke out between the assembly proletariat and the union bureaucracies. The unions, with their respective march stewards, refused to abandon their claims to orchestrate the march. However, under a rain of shouts of 'out, out', so threatening and so meaningful they had no choice but to disappear. And so, the bureaucrats and the stewards of the CC.OO and the UGT, expelled from the own party, gathered up their own banners and ran off to warn the police that they could no longer be responsible for order. The demo, thousands strong and now relieved of the burdens of the unions, felt free to shout out against the parties and the unions, against the Moncloa Pact, for the release of all prisoners'.

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## **HOW CAPITAL, WITH THE HELP OF ITS COLLABORATORS, RECLAIMED THE STREETS FOR POVERTY**

After the revealing failure of the unions and parties in their demonstration of 1st May, an assembly was convened for the following day in Ascon in which the unions and parties gave their Doring opinions on the dispute. The committee even before the assembly took place had agreed with the authorities that there would be no march. The majority for better or for worse condemned the unions for not knowing how to control any longer either the proletariat or even the committee. Others did not know how to conceal their unpleasant opportunist odour. But the PC knew best how to play the piper's music, provocatively devoting itself to attacking the 'irresponsible behaviour' in the streets, praising the Moncloa Pact etc. etc. The assembly's reply to such a terrorist intervention was immediate, scarcely allowing a single word to be spoken on such a dismal subject.

But in any case little or nothing mattered in what they had to say to the assembly, considering how at the moment of truth the CC.OO factory union branches avoided any supporting

action, even figuratively. 'Ascon' was a subject that was not even worth a leaflet (on the other hand something to be thankful for), and between the charitable gestures of the workerist CNT (practically their entire activity consisted of collecting provisions for the strikers), or perhaps publicising their dispute through leaflets which mentioned the anarcho-syndicalist presence in the streets of Vigo and the CC.OO cops, each after its own fashion, were just killing time for what mattered to them.

A resounding NO was the response of the assembly of 8th May, to the firm's order to carry out maintenance work and as one worker said, 'if we are for it, the company's for it also'. From then on emphasis was placed on picketing at the gates of the shipyards. On the same day a demonstration throughout the city was instantly broken up by the police, resulting in violent confrontations at different points in the city. On the following day another demonstration was dispersed even more promptly. Violence then flared throughout the city spreading from the periphery to the commercial centre. Huge barricades paralysed the normal functioning of the city while the police detained, revealingly, gun in hand, numerous people, applying themselves to the task with as great a determination as anyone could recall.

On Thursday 11th May 1978, another demonstration was again broken up by the police with incidents occurring afterwards, but from 12th May onwards the assembly agreed to disband instead of meeting -an agreement reached beforehand in order to avoid the blacklegs and in order to continue picketing at strategically surveyed points springing up in a synchronised fashion on all access routes to the city.

The next few days continued like this, but things now weren't the same as in April. The number of injured and arrested was increasing. Of the workers of Ascon, only three hundred of the most combative and intransigent remained on the streets, while the rest of the proletariat retreated in the face of the police terror. Finally, after mid May, those continuing to resist finally cracked and then the Forces of Public Order (FOP) were able to control the situation. Consequently, some proletarians came round to believing it wasn't possible to adopt the same methods in the streets as those employed in April or even on 8th May. The falling participation in the street struggles was shifting the balance of power to the police and this on the one hand could only be offset by a different strategy (repetition in these situations was death) and more effective actions in the streets. On the other hand, a change of policy in the assemblies was needed which would eliminate every ambiguity within the assemblies, which always kept the need for active support from the rest of the proletariat in mind.

Without a suggestion of a way, it became clear that these actions in the streets would have to be abandoned. So, in an assembly on 19th May, the strike committee changed tack. Unions, parties, businessmen and all those fearful of communism, could breathe freely again and catch up on their sleep disturbed by the spectre of class war. Elsewhere, the streets, deserted until then, were reclaimed for the commodity and business returned to resume its habitual transactions.

## **THE GRAVEDIGGERS SOMETIMES BURY THE WRONG CORPSE**

The CC.OO and UGT now thought there was no more opportune moment to strike the final blow. After a thousand and one negotiating twists and turns, both organisations were within reach of settling the dispute with six dismissals; but with many disciplined, a retraining scheme

and the possibility of re-negotiation. But neither the CC.OO nor the UGT had taken into account that factor of ambiguity in the assembly, a factor that, although it meant that the workers had abandoned the streets and had tolerated the strike committee, they were not so docile in other respects. The one thousand and three hundred workers present at the assembly held on 23 May replied to the proposition the bureaucrats had brought from Madrid with 'either all or nothing'. Juan I. Marin of the CC.OO and Corcuera of the UGT were obliged to listen to deafening boos and insults until in the end Corcuera had to shut-up because of the ear-splitting din. Any interjection by Ascon workers attacking either of the union centrals was greeted with great applause even when criticism was generalised to include all of the other unions. The other political organisations which intervened were constrained to bend to the prevailing wind taking the opportunity of publicly displaying any dirty linen belonging to the two main unions, so as to gladden the hearts of the assembly and no less of the strike committee, believing themselves to be back in favour once again. They did not mention anything else because they knew they were only tolerated as long as they attacked unionism as mirrored in the CC.OO and UGT and went along with 'either all or nothing'.

## **WHEN THE DOUBLE GAME PLAYED BY ONE UNION CAUSED HAVOC TO THE GROWTH OF CLASS STRUGGLE**

With the arrival of June (1978) the combativity and the analysis of the situation took a downturn. In these circumstances, time usually has a wasting and harmful effect on the workers. The most radical workers of Ascon, though in a minority, understood this and yet, apparently incomprehensibly, did not denounce what was an evident fact and nor did they express the anxieties many felt within. This downturn did not pass unnoticed by the unions, which now settled down to wait. The CC.OO, through Camacho, revealed the manner in which it esteemed the assembly held on the previous 23 May, His references to the fact that every battle has its dead and other stylistic witticisms are only to be expected of a Stalinist of his stature.

It was very significant that every organisation gave its support to the Ascon workers' march to Pontevedra. It revealed that all appeared to be in agreement on how best to chastise themselves for actions committed previously, now that the proletariat itself was having to atone and provide evidence of its goodwill. But the march was nothing more than a spectacular act mounted by the strike committee seeking only to justify in the quantity of its gestures (asking for money, putting on festivals) an evident lack of quality. And like every symbolical-religious act, the march on Pontevedra signified nothing.

Throughout this period the majority of assemblies were mere parodies consisting of sporadic and monotonous news broadcasts repeating on every occasion the same homilies to drive out the proletarian devil that was lodged in many a breast. The committee, without the combative pressure of the assembly, dragged its feet, repeating the same things as the USO until finally there was no difference when the USO spoke and when the Ascon strike committee did so.

July came and owing to inter-union rivalries a not so surprising Group of Workers of Ascon appeared and brought out several leaflets stating that a responsible, civilised unionism had to take charge once and for all to avoid situations like the one we've had to put up with. There's room to suppose that the model unionism referred to the CC.OO and UGT, which, for reasons

the USO knows, had reappeared again in a new negotiating committee alongside workers from Ascon. The assembly that had been the only organ of resistance (and which had a good economic organisation) accepted this decrepit commission, which went off to fawn to parliamentarians, government officials and other professionals adept in underhand practices.

## **IN THIS ATMOSPHERE TEMPTING THE ASSEMBLY IS LIKE PLAYING WITH DYNAMITE**

It was in this atmosphere that the assembly convened for 5th August arrived, the first to be held since 20 July, and with it the decision to go back on the streets. The committee, continuing to play its double game, had postponed recalling it, so respecting the wishes of the negotiating committee, which was demanding sole negotiating rights, and negotiation meant accepting dismissals. Quite a few believed that the assembly to be held on the 5th was to be the last. But after nearly six months of isolated struggle, the workers were going to prove that even in difficult and theoretically confused periods they know how to distinguish a certain type of enemy. At the entrance to the assembly and in an atmosphere of great tension, the first confrontations, physical as well as verbal, took place. A clear expression of class war, these explicit confrontations continued on the steps, and in the aisles of the Pabillon Deportivo (Sports Pavillion). The strike committee, after an interjection stating that the dispute was becoming the greatest within living memory in Spain, made it clear from the beginning that it was impossible to negotiate without accepting at least six dismissals. The CC.OO and UGT, as was to be expected, insisted on an immediate end to the struggle. Juan Moreno, secretary of the CC.OO's national executive, put on a display of compliance uselessly aimed at cleaning up the CC.OO image, which had been defaced by a torrent of accusations (e.g. the refusal of the CC.OO and UGT factory committees to organise a whip-round for the strikers). As for J. L. Corcuera, the UGT's slow and stupid national secretary, he confused the Ascon assembly (without being demagogic enough to be aware of doing so) with an audience of blacklegs more befitting his own union. His contribution thus constantly provoked refreshing outbursts of anger from among the workers. The remainder of the assembly on the contrary was solely taken up with calls to continue the struggle and in the streets. 'When a Pamplona or Renteria happens in Vigo the dispute at Ascon will be settled in two days' - phrases like these were received with thunderous applause, 'all or nothing' echoed constantly. The assembly thus recovered its authentic role, and to the surprise of many, once again recovered its stride.

Of the 482 workers that remained to vote, 326 decided to continue the struggle rejecting any negotiation or arbitration. The pathetic members of the CC.OO and UGT, having attempted to smash the assembly during the afternoon, were violently repulsed when they tried to adjourn it over the microphone. The committee itself also tried to dissolve the assembly, firstly say document using its reputable image, and later, by saying those who voted for it could now go home. Both propositions were rejected outright. Finally, to the relief of the workers and the disgruntlement of imbeciles the bureaucrats disappeared from the midst of a markedly threatening atmosphere.

The reaction of the CC.OO and UGT to the development of the assembly was not slow in coming, repeating the same old stories on the absurdity of continuing the struggle. Such

behaviour was foreseeable and inevitable, the stupid thing was allowing the unions to get up and make recitals, (they don't speak), sowing division and discord in the assembly. Both unions (and every other one in reality) have said all they were going to say to the proletariat. Now it was the proletariat's turn to take the chair. Equally the USO, as it was also a proponent of arbitration as also were many other members of the strike committee expressed their surprise at the attitude of the assembly. The demands then in the assembly to carry on the strike caught them out in their game of double dealing.

## **THE BEST WAY TO DESTROY THE ASSEMBLY'S STRENGTH IS TO GIVE IT A BAD NAME**

On Wednesday 9th August, after harshly attacking a communique of the CC.OO and UGT the assembly decided to go back out onto the streets even if it was necessary, as a member of the strike committee said, to burn down half of Vigo. However, there were too many loose ends concerning the preparations to take the struggle out on the streets again. It was expected that the police might charge that day, but cleverly they did not do so. They confined themselves merely to stopping the traffic. The most moderate section of the committee considering the march over had even struck up the Galician anthem to show it. Whistles and boos were the response.

In a new assembly held the following day a committee member let drop the possibility of resorting to arbitration - a thing that should be calmly considered. Another member violently opposed the possibility of returning to consider something decisively thrown out at the last assembly. Going out into the street became his only response. But here lies the central question. After six months, to once again raise, 'the question of going onto the streets cannot fail to be revealing. But the motives for resuming what had been dropped in May went unanalysed. It was abstract to refer to Euzkadi with perhaps less than three hundred people. In the street it is possible to do many things from slowing up production to going on the offensive, but it is necessary to specify exactly what and get clear not only what one would like to do but what one can do and the assemblies are there for that purpose. The social war is fought in many arenas all at the same time.

On the 10th of August, the belief that the police would not intervene was widespread. But very quickly it became evident how the proletarian offensive was going to unfold. Bars and cafeterias were energetically emptied and obliged to close. The imbecilic amorphous mass, jostling with the tourists, together with the rest of the second-rate citizenry who amble aimlessly around the bars and streets at this time, were shaken right out of their nonsensical dreams. Amongst those ejected from a smart restaurant were various members of the PC. The Casino and Circulo Mercantil suffered the same fate and their glass fronts were kicked in. Accumulated rage broke out even amongst committee members. Some crummy journalist who dared to express himself out loud was thumped, as were some peaceful citizens who became critical at that moment. The more moderate section of the committee led by some Jesuit, or other opposed everything taking place and hurriedly abandoned the street front to get up a leaflet condemning the events.

However, this attacking attitude should not be mythologised such as lovers of noisy activism are wont to do. These actions were the expressive feeling of the workers in a given moment. But the conditions to re-affirm this offensive did not exist. This path which had been chosen effected

the events in a dual manner, for there are times when actions are not assumed by many of the participants, thus making it difficult to sustain them. Many who like flies attracted to shit, jump into a noisy brawl, equally promptly disappear when faced with the police or such like. This lack of reflection on what it means to retake the social space of the streets, the certainty that wars are not simply won with demonic courage meant that, placed in this context, such events offered no possibility of advancement. On the other hand the strike committee, loyal to the USO, paraded to the tune of the arbitration card, taking it out whenever it considered it opportune.

Thus in the assembly held on Friday, confusion and division were evident. The committee said no to a demonstration since they had already taken such a decision. But a spontaneous and aggressive reaction in the assembly opposed them and decided to go out in the streets but the committee cleverly contravened this agreement and made them dissolve when the police arrived. On Monday 14 August, with the growing rumours that the committee was continuing to consider arbitration, the USO resumed its reactionary initiatives. One of the members of the committee who had been most active on 10th August, was delegated to publicly show his regrets, hysterically counter-attacking a confused CNT jingle (which had only now discovered that the committee had several faces). The language and arguments employed in the ridiculous confrontation between the defenders and opponents of the documents did no more than increase the wretchedness and foul smell that all unionists, from the biggest to the littlest, give off.

In the following assemblies the dominant criterion was to continue in the streets. Consequently, until 25th August, social violence again exploded similar to that of May but not to that of April. The neighbourhoods on the outskirts became the place where the workers armed with molotov cocktails, built huge barricades, lit fires and faced a police force freshly reinforced with special patrol groups. Once more, as in May, they had to retreat for a number of reasons. Without having advanced much along the road to overcoming theoretical confusion and with perhaps less than two hundred individuals (minus the support of the rest of the workers) the attempt to caricature actions of the recent past is laughable. If one's outlook has to be directed toward the future, avoiding reproducing past situations, henceforth it will be necessary to repose many things, in particular the revocability of the strike committee. But the workers of Ascon, confused and worn out, were not ready for that. They merely lacked the reason to leave the streets. And this was to be nothing less than terrorism. The terrorist attack of 24th August, was used by the police to regain control of the entire city and prevent the holding of any more assemblies. The violence, separated and distanced from certain terrorist 'rackets', themselves prisoners of lunacy, had a demobilising and repressive meaning for the proletariat. On the one hand it provided the police and others with a free reign and on the other hand it gave them the appearance of desiring to substitute these 'terrorist's rackets' with an enlightened and militaristic vanguard, which made-believe that these actions were unreal. That is to say, both the bullets of the 'rackets' against the police and vice-versa became an outside problem, but both are situated on the same level: that of the police.

## **TO MAKE SHAME MORE SHAMEFUL BY GIVING IT PUBLICITY**

Through a striking communique and later in an assembly held on 24th August, the strike committee revealed that four CC.OO members were now part of the committee. Amongst other things

the communique said, 'some concern themselves with safeguarding democracy and other abstractions while we have dedicated ourselves to defending the interests and the jobs of the workers of Ascon'. The CC.OO and company during this lull in activity took advantage of the opportunity to accelerate the decline of proletarian resistance managing, to the satisfaction of the bourgeoisie and the police, to deliberately compare the violence in the streets to the terrorist bombings at the end of August. Their answer to this was none other than their forthcoming mobilisation against terrorism (only against terrorism?) with the preparation of a new social contract as the basis.

During this final stage, in addition to the various bureaucracies, those slaves of the anecdote and the worst defects of the spectacle, the press, reappeared, demonstrating more clearly than ever their cretinous labour. But let's take a look: 'Until now too many accusations - with or without foundation have rained down on the central unions and this can increase the potential of yellow unionism, thus provoking a lack of trust in the union centrals which already have some implantation. -What have they to offer workers? More disputes of this character.' (La Voz de Galicia, 9th August 1978). As a consequence 'during the space of more than an hour, the streets of Vigo belonged neither to Martin Villa,<sup>3</sup> or the Civil Governor, nor to peace loving citizens, but only to thugs who have indiscriminately terrorised women, children and the elderly'. (EI Pueblo Gallego, 11th August 1978). And some asked: 'Do the union leaders really know the true identity of those who dragged the workers into the streets?' but what is clear is that 'they are trying to create a chaotic situation, seeking a serious confrontation with the forces of Public Order; in Vigo they are seeking a victim, seeking a corpse'. (EI ABC, 19th August 1978). But to continue: 'A Fuenteovejuna<sup>4</sup> of irresponsibility has changed a minor dispute into the most wasteful and lengthy dispute in the history of the Spanish workers' movement'. Clearly (according to statements issued by the UGT) 'the strike committee had been swamped and in part fallen into the hands of the revolutionaries'. (EI Pais, 6th September 1978). And it turns out Ascon is a tale 'of the nonexistent efficacy of assemblies' while the central unions, the CC.OO and UGT 'are fed up with and have washed their hands of Ascon and its assembly approach' (Cambio 16, 10th September). All of this is only a sample. How then can one characterise the joint statement issued by Vigo journalists on 14 August 1978? In it they condemned the acts of aggression and coercion which, according to them they were subjected to by the proletariat, and called for freedom of expression. . .

At this stage the USO, which through its control over the strike committee (notwithstanding opposing minorities) had been very active in the Ascon dispute (where it had its most important leader and ideological fraction in the area), let the most radical sector in the assembly burn itself out and collapse impotently. Given that on 5th August, the USO had faced a reaction, which caught it unawares, there was nothing it could do but wait for an opportune moment in which it could demonstrate the pointlessness of continuing. While the workers (no more than one hundred and fifty to two hundred of them) theoretically confused, continued to resist in the streets, the USO committee awaited the moment of disaster to introduce the inevitability of arbitration. 2nd September was the date chosen. In a deadly ordered assembly the USO committee called for a vote on arbitration and the UGT /CC.OO for negotiation (in reality both proposals were the same), a small independent sector supported by the ING tried to continue the struggle. With an ease which except for the proletariat was to the liking of all, the proposal to go to arbitration

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Villa: Minister of the Interior (Home Secretary).

<sup>4</sup> See previous translation note on Lope de Vega's play, Fuenteovejuna.



received the greatest number of votes (428) in a secret ballot which was legally supervised). The desire to continue the struggle was reflected in the radical fraction that polled one hundred and fifty-five of the nine hundred votes cast. The USO had achieved its objective - to defeat the proletariat - then pass the buck to the assembly, then get ready to pick up its bureaucratic threads to place the question of dismissals, sanctions, and the rest in the hands of a neutral, respected arbitrator... (Hernandez Gil, Gil Robles...) Sickening to be sure.

In the days that followed, with the preparation of a more improved social contract as its basis, the USO became high-handed, that is: to negotiate, resorting to the same arguments as the CC. OO and UGT. This final stage of the struggle reaffirmed that when a committee is in the hands of a union, and therefore dependent on it, however much it may have played at promoting assemblies it had only done so due to opportunism, tactics, or rivalries with other unions. Sooner or later its real, inevitable intentions are shown up. The best union is not to have one.

If only the rage that now spread throughout the workers who had witnessed it all was sufficient to overcome past misery, and to decisively influence the constant confrontations between labour and capital. The question of the result of the negotiations (with or without arbitration) was something quantitative that wouldn't much modify the qualitative. The questions awaiting a settlement were many: dismissals, labour regulations and the question always excessively minimised, of the four hundred contract workers. For these workers, whatever the conditions of returning to work are, there's no way of discounting the possibilities of new difficulties when, inevitably, the proletariat assimilates and reflects on the last seven months in time to come. If not, a new conflict would simply be a caricature of the previous one, and all caricatures are negative. It is certain that the reflux of combativity in Ascon is obvious daily. But nevertheless, Ascon already marks a precedent on a par with Roca or Vitoria and as such without elaborating on its differences with the others, serves and shall serve as an example and a lesson for the entire proletariat.

## **'ASCON' OR HOW BUREAUCRACY TURNS OUT TO BE A BICYCLE WITHOUT WHEELS WHICH EVERYONE PEDALS SO THAT NOTHING MOVES**

The struggle of the Ascon workers has hung over the entire radical proletariat of Spain during these last few months, here were present all the conditions of present-day class confrontations; from the role of the proletariat's perpetual enemies (police, government, management, press. . .), to those who are no less its enemies-except that they exist within the working class (unions, parties, manipulative committees), and to which we must add the theoretical confusion of the working class. The struggle of the Vigo proletariat has once more shown that it is not enough to act without leaders but that it is necessary to act against them and their organisations. It was clear also that if the proletariat does not arm its autonomy with its own theory it ends up the object of the ravages of any variant of capitalist ideology. The theoretical problem, evident throughout the conflict was most notably felt in the almost total lack of information put out by the workers. The walls cried out for posters that never arrived and the printing machines were idle waiting to give shape to all the words.

Now, the unionist vultures from all the federations swooped down on the remains of the dispute, eager to bury it. Each tried to stake their claim in its will. Each separately but following the same path showed for the millionth time their yearnings as they got up a new social contract. Here in Galicia (and everywhere else), these bureaucrats never desist from adding to the increasing slavery of the workers. The disputes at Corfi (nearly five hundred workers on strike since May) at 'Regajo' (around two thousand workers on the verge of being made redundant), at Bein and Duro Felguera are proofs of the isolating and commanding control of the bureaucrats. The question of the naval dockyards in Ferrol borders on madness; thousands of workers practically forced out on strike, made helpless, are incapable of responding to the terror that the PC and CC.OO has implanted in the city, prohibiting and attacking any attempt that might contradict its interests; mounting rescue schemes and processions with the UCD, the public authorities and local bigwigs of the /until. Combined with all this there is total silence on the constant harassment of the peasants resisting the expropriation of their plots of land. It is the same story the length and breadth of the peninsula: in order not to see itself completely displaced by the present managers of Spanish society, the left must increasingly reveal its true face.

## **REVOLUTIONARY THEORY IS NOW THE ENEMY OF ALL REVOLUTIONARY IDEOLOGY AND KNOWS IT**

The Ascon workers' struggle has also shown that certain types of intervention and relations that spread like wildfire through the streets are clear symptoms that in contemporary class war, the proletariat necessarily makes use of a series of weapons and does so on a world scale. Poland 1976, like Vitoria, like Euzkadi at the slightest opportunity, Tunis, Algeciras, Italy, Peru, Cadiz, Tenerife, are examples of how the world proletariat resorts to the same weapons. Barricades, torchings, attacks on official buildings, the destruction by the score of the ingredients of commerce, lootings, are not something invented in the mind of some conspirator or specialist in street violence. They are irredeemably the ray of light that illumine on a worldwide basis the way in which the proletariat frees itself and confronts capitalist terrorism.

It is no longer a novelty to discover that Polish workers like those in Vitoria say the same thing once they act. The concentration of capital, daily more pronounced, as well as the extension of the crisis, the continual perfecting of techniques of repression and alienation, mean that the proletariat's theoretical and practical perspective is, consequently just as global. Therefore, all those professional ideologues who speak of stages, or of second and third worlds, do no more than string themselves up desperately by their own falsehoods.

When Martin Villa visits France or Germany, when the heads of European states meet to strengthen the fight against terrorism (terror-ism is only a smokescreen), when Bulgaria or England detains German militants, when any African Liberation movement is a pawn in the hands of some or other great power (American or Asian), or, when we discover that the Camachos', Carrillos', Fragas' or Suarezs' of this world are everywhere, then it is necessary to understand that given the possibility of barbarism, irrationality, inseparable from capitalist social relations, tends to intensify its offensive, normalising, terror. The perspectives for domination, which nuclear energy and technology open up, further contribute to this process, a process that already, on the

other hand, in its need for growth, devours and eliminates so many present-day features, ranging from existing economic operations to tendencies in capitalist management. It is the advance of State capitalism, of monopoly technocracy.

Faced with the evident fact of the internationalisation of every aspect of everyday life, no other alternative remains than to bury forever any project aiming to reform the system, any leftist project leading to the self-management of misery, and any attempt to maintain wage slavery.

Whether it is the people of Renteria saying to parties and unions 'we don't want leaders, we can depend on ourselves' or, when in San Sebastian the perpetual colonisers of our life were confronted and new communal relations are established based not on ideology (which is the art of inverting everything explicit, eternally rationalisable, at the same time as it tries to conceal it) but based on the reflection of what one is now doing and which is real; in short, theory. These relations are expressed amongst the proletarian groups which in Milan, Warsaw and elsewhere organise themselves and struggle and amongst prisoners who fight without let-up in the prisons. All of this forms beyond nation states and distances, the real movement of communism, a movement which does not seek any kind of management for capital not even workerist and revolutionary, but only its destruction.

All of these new autonomous relations, that now draw their poetry from the future, and which are embodied in assemblies, pickets, revocable delegates, factory committees and other kinds of relations, are the negation of unions and parties (forms testifying to the alienated past history of the workers' movement) and all that hinders its development and affirmation. There are no more doubts in this respect: the proletariat's enemies are perfectly delineated in the social war. From party bureaucrat to the union police in the factories, all, without exception, are reactionary expressions, which do not merit the respect of one single assembly. Their good words are demagoguery and their bad ones an ideological commodity of the most repressive type. To condemn them, to attack them once and for all wherever they are, tearing up in front of their noses every social contract they sign, to do this is to affirm oneself, to affirm a social movement that without any kind of ideological attachment has already in its own way passed onto the offensive.

*Autonomia Proletaria: September 1978*

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## Glossary:

- CC.OO - Comisiones Obreras ' union structure of the Spanish communist party.
  - CNS - Vertical trade union structure of the francoist regime
  - CNT - Anarcho-syndicalist union
  - COS - Coordinadora Obrera Sindical, a trade union federation which included CC.OO, UGT and USO.
  - ELA - Christian democrat organisation in the Basque Country
  - OCA - A semi-catholic trotskyoid group.
  - PCE - Spanish communist party.
  - PSOE - Spanish Socialist Workers' Party ' 2nd internationalist party.
  - STV - Basque workers' union ' Catholic and Nationalist.
  - TOP - Tribunal of Public Order.
  - UGT - Trade union organisation of the Spanish Workers' Party
  - USO - Catholic and independent unionists.
- The following are a number of texts written by workers at the very centre of particular struggles during the same period

# **RENFE: THE TESTIMONY OF A MILITARISED WORKER...**

Renfe, through its rail services, spreads throughout the Spanish State, and is the company which employs most workers (72,000). Every Spaniard knows this and also knows that these workers have the job of ensuring a regular service to the country, crucial to its well-being and development.

What few know, however, is the kind of life which the majority of these men live. For example those belonging to the train service have to stand up in the engine cab, without knowing when they can rest, on journeys which are totally exhausting. The men who work in the baggage and parcel sections, under sub-human conditions, are treated by the managers in a way which is no different from the times of the Inquisition - these are the real tortures within the company. The men of the marshalling yards and repair yards are perhaps the most despised and worst paid, but who, without anyone ever bothering about them have a job as important as anyone in guaranteeing the circulation of the trains. They live a life of pure slavery and get paid miserably for it. If to this we add the persecution which those who struggle for their comrades suffer, the threats, punishments, being shifted to the worst jobs, the pressures to which they're subjected and the famous BLACKLISTS which were made out by fascist motherfuckers from within the ranks of the workers - the picture could not be blacker.

Renfe has always been dominated by a group of capitalists who have fattened themselves out of the misery of the railwaymen until, little by little, the railwaymen shrugged off their lethargy and paralysis to become those who have recently waged the most important struggles that Renfe can remember in 40 years. And if this struggle has not been greater then it is due to the fascist dictatorial repression carried out through the militarisation of the workers. It is worthwhile going back over what happened from October until today.

## **THE SEARCH FOR A COLLECTIVE CONTRACT**

Renfe is a State-run company which has no collective contract and is subject to labour legislation which is completely anti-worker since all its articles favour the bosses, and those which appear to favour the workers have a series of clauses which condition them and take away all the benefits which they could have.

Because of this we decided to struggle for a collective contract. To do so we gathered signatures and got some 30,000 which we presented to the company.

But the committee set up to investigate the petition had been bought out by the traitor Garcia Rives, head of the transport and communications union, and the petition was turned down. Other actions, like sending telegrams to the ministry of labour or communiques to the industrial relations officer of Renfe etc, were taken. The answer was nearly always complete silence, but when

we did get an answer, it was to the effect that Renfe was losing money and therefore could not make a contract. In the meantime, the railwaymen were desolate and condemned to a situation whereby they had not even the basic rights of the Spanish worker. They were paid miserably, only able to eke out a living by putting in 12-14-hour days or else by taking on part-time jobs after work, thus unable to rest or to spend time with their kids.

After years of unsuccessful petitions October 1975 came. At this time various departments took the decision to struggle more openly.

After various assemblies at the Central Repair Yard in Lower Villaverde we decided to take more direct action so as to get the other departments to make a series of necessary and urgent demands of a local nature.

It is worthwhile keeping the working conditions in these yards in mind. Renfe, from its foundations, had established a work system which was medieval. It was based on repression and keeping tabs on the workers and this system has been maintained up to the present day. A group of fascists had taken over and around them they had gathered intermediaries, foremen and sub-foremen, who in exchange for certain advantages carried out the lowest and vilest services in order to humiliate and persecute the workers. Of the twenty such types only three were able to defend themselves against our accusations.

This work system used all the modern European tactics and techniques for increasing production. They copied the production systems in various countries and put them into practice in Spain, especially in these yards. Thus European-style time and motion systems were used to ensure the greatest exploitation of the men. They made considerable profits at the cost of the miserable wages of the workers.

In October 1975, at the Central Repair Yards it was decided that this system had to be changed. It was decided to press for a higher hourly rate - this rate, the same as in 1968, is still 28.50 pesetas. (20p) .

After a great deal of thought, Renfe replied to our petition, giving us an increase. The new rate was 29 pesetas, an increase of 50 centimes per hour!

It's not difficult to imagine the reaction of the workers. We had various assemblies and we agreed to a go-slow; to maintain the work rate at 100% as established by the company and by the ministry of labour according to the norms laid down by the national committee of productivity. We had been working at 130%. In this way we were able to create a dent in production without exposing ourselves. At the same time we all agreed not to work overtime.

Two months came and went like this. The measures were unanimously put into effect.

## **15th JANUARY, 1976: THE STRIKE BEGINS...**

Since Renfe did not react in any way whatsoever, despite the losses it was making, and because of the increasing cost of living we began to make contact with other departments. We decided to go on strike for the demands listed in our Platform, the most important points being:

- A minimum wage of 25,000 pesetas
- Three extra paid months per year

- Automatic increases of 7% for every three years of service
- Reassessment of wages every six months
- A forty hour week
- The right to hold meetings, association and strike
- Amnesty
- Election of representatives to negotiate the first contract
- Re-admission of all personnel fired for labour or union activities.

Thus the day of 15th of January came and the strike took place in various yards and departments in Renfe. Among them, on the first day, were the Central Yards, the Puesentes, Fuencarral and General yards. Others joined on the following day, doubling the number of yards and depots on strike. Production stations stopped, the entire technical part and various regional stations also stopped, Valladolid, Sevilla, Orense, Valencia etc.

By the 17th the strike was being extended to a few baggage warehouses, ticket control etc. . .

## **TOTAL MILITARISATION...**

The form which the strike was taking caused the government to decree the total militarisation of all Renfe personnel. On the 19th of January, 72,000 people in Renfe were subject to military discipline.

Then the real shame. Immediately after this bill was passed four jeeps appeared at the Villaverde Yards under the command of a comandante and a captain. These proceeded to terrorise the entire factory, their details with automatic rifles at the ready, ordering everyone back to their jobs.

The comandante climbed up on top of a machine and called all the personnel together in order to give us his chat. He told us that we were all military now, both inside and outside the factory, that any disobedient act would be punished by the military code, that we could not meet in groups of more than three and that we were to talk to no one... if you like, the true model of the fascism of the 1940s.

A worker asked the comandante if now that we were all military would we receive the same salaries as they did? 'Arrest that guy', came the reply. This didn't happen though, because we all protested loudly.

At the end of his little chat with us the comandante concluded, 'And now I want everyone to shout loud and clear - 'Soldier, long live Spain!'. The railwaymen remained totally silent. With this the military parade was terminated.

The Yard changed into a real concentration camp. The director and sub-director were relieved of their posts and the comandante and captain took over. On the next day, the 20th, some twenty civil guards arrived and joined the soldiers, forming groups of four to patrol different parts of the Yard. Everyone was dead nervous but it didn't go beyond this since the calmer workers cooled out the more nervous.

In this situation of high tension a railwayman was arrested. The military and the civil guard made him march through the great nave (350 metres high), four soldiers and four civil guards forming the guard with automatic rifles held in firing position. In an act of provocation he was marched through twice. It was a repugnant sight.

He was held for five days and no one knew where, neither his family nor us. No one knew anything and neither the barracks nor the DGS (political police) would give us any information. We were to find out but he was being held in Carabanchel prison where he is still being held. If they accuse him of sedition we would like to know the reasons.

Meanwhile the military carried out their repression in this and that yard. They forced the workers to work at a pace greater than 100%. They warned various comrades that they would appear before the captain and threats like the following were made: 'You work at 125% or go directly to Carabanchel, there are still some cells empty.' And not satisfied with that they worked out another tactic to achieve this fabulous level of production, whose so many benefits were reported in the press. It consisted of the following. They sent letters signed by the director to various comrades to oblige them to do overtime (up to four hours daily) with the threat that they'd be sent to Carabanchel.

Against the military code there are few or no recourses.

In this way they humiliated the working class. But we will continue fighting until we achieve our total liberation and the end of exploitation of man by man.

February 1976

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## ROCA IN GAVA

Roca Radiators Ltd is situated in Gava, some 35 km south west of Barcelona. Founded at the beginning of the century by the Roca family it now employs some 4,500 workers and is listed as the 65th largest company in Spain. Some 20% of the share capital was owned by American Standard but these shares were sold as soon as the strike began.

The strike, which began at the beginning of November 1976, was a response to the dismissal of a worker. Demanding that the 1973 work contract (which set a 48 hour week) be reviewed, the attitudes of the management hardened and the civil guard was called in. The strike was attacked by management, government and unions alike and the strikers were physically attacked by the right wing guerrillas of Christ the King.

The strikers were financially supported by workers in many other companies through a strike fund, although many Roca workers had to take on part-time jobs in order to survive.

The strike ended on 11 February 1977, after lasting almost 100 days. 42 workers, 35 of them ex-delegates from the workers' assembly were dismissed. Given 'the lack of solidarity in the region', as one worker put it, the strikers were forced to return to work without any of their demands being satisfied.

### ROCA IN STRUGGLE *Number 2 (of the strike bulletin)*

**TO ALL THE WORKERS AND THE POPULATION IN GENERAL** Given the constant distortions made in the press about our struggle against dismissals, as well as the slanders made against all Roca workers, we want to make public our protest and clarify our positions to all the working class and the population. The company, the authorities, the civil guard and armed fascist gangs have contrived an all-out attack on the workers, designed to influence the course of the struggle, make us work like idiots and leave the 42 dismissed workers in the street. In this, the press (though not the periodicals) has participated fully, deforming and putting so-called news in a way which favours the bosses, since it is they who have the money to pay for the news, something which we haven't. Really this must be the freedom of the press which is being given by the political reforms, the same as over the last 40 years. The communique signed by the general manager of 'Roca Radiators Ltd.' which was published in the press is a case in point. In this it was said that due to the abandoning of the furnaces it would be impossible to restart production for approximately three months, now they say that the situation can return to normal in eight days. To see that the Roca workers have never given up the intention to negotiate, it should be borne in mind that we have written to the civil governor, the provincial delegate of the unions, to the press, even through the archbishop, without getting a reply of any kind. Nor did the trade union provincial delegate accept the committee of ten workers who were elected in a general assembly by a show of hands, saying that the vote had to be by secret ballot and forgetting that previously the contract committee had been elected by the same method and was recognised. Nor did they accept the regional committee proposed by the assembly of Roca workers. It was equally rejected

in Madrid by the minister of labour who stated 'we have no knowledge of the Roca conflict', thus trying to ignore the 4,500 families in the street by saying that the strike 'was illegal'. We responded by asking 'how many legal strikes are there in this country?' At this meeting in Madrid to which we'd been invited to negotiate the third phase of the contract, we made various proposals to negotiate with the company on certain aspects which we considered more important than the contract. Some of these were: exchanging dismissals for sanctions, leaving the sanctions to the discretion of the company; the acceptance of the last platform presented. All of which the bosses rejected completely, once again confirming their intransigent position maintained right from the beginning. They wanted us to accept the compensation payments, which could be as much as a million pesetas, even two million. **JOBS HAVE NO PRICE.**

Despite all the slanders, despite the repression, despite the attacks, we, the workers, have continued united, even as the government and the bosses want a referendum to impose a fascist reform which has cost so many lives over the past year. Because of this, 4,500 families doubt the truth of such a reform which includes the right to dismiss workers and the economic package of the government which wants to dump everything on the backs of the working class.

Given this situation they need to have done with the Roca strike. Their only weapon in open repression. With respect to this strike there have been six attacks on the homes of delegates made by the extreme right. There is the repression of the civil guard as they threatened the delegates to get the workers back to work without any conditions. They tried to place all responsibility for the conflict with the delegates.

All of this combined with the provocations in the press, trying to get us to go back to work next Monday, systematically rejecting all forms of negotiation.

Yesterday, 3 December, we the workers, very clearly said 'NO!' to this provocation, 'ALL OF US OR NOBODY!'

Yesterday morning we met at the entrance to the town hall to demand that they find out those responsible for the savage attacks by the extreme right made the previous night (three attacks with molotov cocktails burning down one of our homes). The general indignation was clearly visible at the meeting. The meeting asked to be received by the mayor of Viladecans shouting out 'YOU, FASCISTS, ARE THE TERRORISTS!'

Meanwhile when the contract committee went to the company to negotiate, it was asked to accompany the civil guard to the station to make a statement. Previously they had tried to get the committee to cancel the meeting outside the town hall.

The mayor agreed to be present at the station given that the workers demanded that guarantees be given in relation to the physical well-being of the delegates. The assembly held at noon agreed to go to the station if the delegates weren't freed in a given time. The unity of the workers made it possible that their companions were with them again at 4pm.

In an assembly of the majority of the workers and their wives the following was agreed:

- unanimously not to return to work on Monday;
- to ask the authorities again to re-open negotiations to resolve the conflict;
- to form groups of workers to patrol the houses of the delegates. The assembly shouted furiously with raised fists 'UNITY! UNITY!'

**ALL OF US OR NOBODY!**, thus making a demonstration of the high level of class consciousness reached.

We call on all the workers, all of the workers' organisations, to support our struggle and to combat all the lies told about us, to collect money in all the factories and unite our struggle to the generalised fight to impose our demands through active solidarity.

RE-ENTRY OF THE DISMISSED WORKERS FREE THOSE DETAINED

AGAINST THE RIGHT TO DISMISS WORKERS AGAINST THE ECONOMIC MEASURES

WE SHALL PREPARE A GENERAL STRIKE

LONG LIVE THE UNITY OF THE WORKING CLASS.

*Assembly of Roca Workers Gava, 4 December 1976*

## **ROCA IN STRUGGLE *Number 3 (of the strike bulletin)***

### **TO ALL THE WORKERS AND THE POPULATION IN GENERAL**

After more than fifty days on strike due to dismissals caused by disagreement over the contract and the intransigent position of the Roca bosses and despite the numerous and various manoeuvres to try to divide us and finish off our struggle, manoeuvres which have clarified the inefficiency of the vertical trade unions as opposed to the real forms of self-organisation which the workers' assemblies have achieved; despite all this, we continue to remain united and we are trying at all costs to break off the isolation of our strike.

Our struggle clearly shows how the official State organisations are in the service of capital (our exploiters) and are not the 'impartial mediators' they claim to be with all the means at their disposal (press, radio, TV, laws, magistrates, CNS, repressive bodies etc.). It is plain that it is only the contrivance of the bosses and the State which impedes the minimum improvements that we, the workers, need.

In ROCA we can see the real spirit of the repressive and anti-worker laws which the government of the fascist monarch have promulgated. They are the disguise for the interests which the large capitalist monopolies have in our country, allowing their expansion without ever worrying about the economic ruin which this could cause the country. STANDARD (an American imperialist monopoly) have 43% of the ROCA capital and with this they are able to influence the management board. This explains the intransigent position of the management who in servicing those monopolistic interests want, at all costs, to halt the self-organised forms of the workers from becoming a reality.

The director-general of labour pronounced sentence in the arbitration courts (el Laudo) on our contract. Yet again our demands have been ridiculed. They've offered us a ridiculous wage increase (13,250 pesetas per month gross and 1,950 pesetas for the supplementary months!). This, while the whole question of the number of hours of work has not yet been revised - we work 2,080 hours per year which is much more than the 1,957 hours stipulated in the 1977 agreement for the iron foundry workers.

Armed with the arbitration court judgement and wanting to believe that we were demoralised, the company launched a new offensive against the workers saying that the factory was to re-open on 22 December. They tried to buy off the workers with some christmas club nonsense, which in the words of the director would be distributed as soon as the first day's work was finished, threatening to hold back on those who didn't go to work. The assembly reaffirmed its decision once again by saying that to accept this 'christmas stocking' under these conditions

would be tantamount to condoning the brutal exploitation of Roca, the repression by those in charge, silicosis and without any doubt, dismissals. The assembly decided unanimously 'No one, or everyone'.

On that afternoon the workers demonstrated on the Rambla of Gava and on the Viladecens Plaza to show that our unity cannot be destroyed, and certainly not for a 'christmas stocking' offered by the bosses. .

Faced with this unity the civil guards, cocked rifles at the ready, were unable to halt the demo. The workers took on this challenge and sat down on the street with their fists raised in the air and shouted 'Open Fire', 'Dissolve the repressive forces', 'Christmas without dismissals' and 'First re-admit everyone, then give us the christmas stocking'. At the end of the demo we went to the houses of the 'black-legs' of the town and invited them to join our struggle, letting them know that they were committing treason to the class and that by refusing to accept workers' democracy they were carrying out a labour of division. We told them that they would be condemned by the 'justice' which springs from this democracy, which, if you like, means the respect by a minority for what the majority decides.

On the 27th, given the failure of the company manoeuvre, the forces of law and order, in conjunction with management tried another tactic; increase the repression and create a psychotic climate of fear, by breaking up workers meeting in groups, blocking the access to the town and forbidding the assemblies. The workers responded by forcing an assembly and telling the captain of the forces which surrounded it that if they really wanted to break up the assembly they'd have to shoot first.

Given these events we have called on the various unions to begin to organise an active solidarity in the factories, towards a campaign which would prepare the conditions to link up all the workers' struggles for a general strike which could be called between the 10 and 15 January.

Also we have called on all the support committees of the Roca struggle, as well as all the factories in struggle (MATAGAS, MAQUINISTA, CONSTRUCTION WORKERS etc.) to co-ordinate their actions so as to prepare for this struggle in which we could unite our forces and demands and thus achieve victory.

Also we call on the political parties of the working class, on all the trade unions to mobilise in a united front.

AGAINST THE ECONOMIC MEASURES OF THE MONARCHIST GOVERNMENT

AGAINST THE RIGHT TO DISMISS WORKERS

AGAINST THE REPRESSION

A JOB FOR EVERYONE

A JUST CONTRACT FOR ALL WORKERS

AGAINST THE BOSS AND GOVERNMENT

ATTEMPT TO IMPOSE NEW DEFEATS

LIKE THOSE AT MOTOR IBERICA AND SABADELL.

EVERYONE TO THE MARCH ON 4th of JANUARY.

We will prepare for this struggle between the 10 and 15 which should facilitate the unity of all the working class towards a general strike.

*Assembly of Roca Workers*

Gava, 31st December, 1976

# APPENDIX

Parliamentary games:

Franco dies: 20th December 1975. Referendum on the political reforms including a ratification on the monarchy of Juan Carlos: 15th December 1976.

General election: Suarez and the centre-right coalition elected: June 1977.

General election: The same coalition re-elected, but with a significant decline in the percentage of people voting. 1st March 1979.

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Los Incontrolados  
Wildcat Spain encounters democracy, 1976-1978  
A manuscript found in Vitoria  
1978

<https://libcom.org/history/wildcat-spain-encounters-democracy-1976-1978>  
A fascinating set of documents from and about the workers assembly movement which swept Spain as strike spread following the death of dictator General Franco.

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