The Epidemic of Rage in Spain (1996–2007)

Let them take away what we danced for

Los Tigres de Sutullena

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> Believe me, the way we operate, on the fringes of the law, anything less than the strictest honesty could have fatal consequences.
>
> Jack London, *The Assassination Bureau, Ltd.*

For some time now, some comrades have felt the need to take stock of the experience accumulated in the Spanish state by sectors of anarchist, communist and autonomous militants, who for a certain period of time converged around a certain "insurrectionary" idea. This need arose from two circumstances. The first is the evidence that a stage has come to an end. We are not at the same point as we were ten years ago — not even five years ago — and we want to draw the relevant conclusions in order to better face battles that are not in the misty future, but are already looming over us. To this end, it is essential to open a debate, or at least to provoke reflection.

The second circumstance that prompts us to write is the complete lack of knowledge of the events of the last ten years on the part of the new generations of comrades. It must be said that this lack of knowledge is largely due to the degree to which the lack of communication between us has taken over, almost completely replacing direct contact and knowledge. But it is also the measure of our failure to raise up points of reference with which these comrades could identify: projects of struggle and poles of aggregation that would have given continuity and depth to a combative effort that was no small thing.

This failure is that of what for a time was called "informal organisation", and with hindsight we realise that it was a failure that was part of the very assumptions from which we started. Despite this, we have no regrets, we do not believe that we have wasted our time or that our comrades have wasted theirs. Today it is all too easy to look at a pile of ashes and say that "it was all a mistake", that the staff simply "lost their minds". This false criticism forgets, out of self-interest or ignorance, the conditioning factors that were at work at the time. It takes us back to square one — to the leaden illusions of official anarchism or the blithe unconsciousness of youthful antagonism — and thus paves the way for everything to repeat itself again in an indeterminate period of time, within that "cyclical time" so characteristic of political environments sheltered by history.

It is much more difficult, and uncomfortable for everyone, to rehearse a dialectical analysis of what happened. The conditions from which we started left no other way out than the one that fortunately occurred. The epidemic of rage was not just another aesthetic/ideological ghetto fad: all the hypotheses that were formulated at the time were tested to the last consequences. Even if the results were often disastrous, this is the foundation of a collective experience worthy of the name, which is why self-criticism is possible.

In terms of positive results, they are far from the maximalism that has alienated us on so many occasions, but they are there. These years have made it possible to definitively overcome two decades of inertia and paralysis in the libertarian movement of which we were the unwitting heirs. But above all they have served to put central questions such as revolution and organisation back on the table, not as inert ideological certainties, but as living, complex, dynamic problems. These results, perhaps small in the immediate but qualitatively important because of the possibilities they open up, have also had a tragic cost paid by those comrades who were and are targets of repression. We dedicate these pages to them.

We must point out that this paper is not intended to settle anything, but to make a contribution in line with what we have seen, experienced and thought during all this time. Rather than speaking ex cathedra or putting "our opinion" first, what seemed to us to be a priority was to reconstruct this history as best we could, to attempt a panoramic view. And this cannot be done

simply by chronology or by dusting off little stories: it is necessary to judge which events were more important and which others were less so, and to venture hypotheses explaining why certain things happened in this way and not in another way. In this process, the text acquires, as is obvious, a subjective bias of which we are not ashamed: to give an objective view of things there is already the news and the daily press.

For the rest, it was impossible to do this work without reaching any conclusions, and we have drawn a few, although there will always be those who dispute them. So be it.

I. Once upon a time…

From 1996 to 1997, all the youth, antagonist and anti-capitalist movements on the Iberian peninsula were on the threshold of a transformation, the product of external conditions as much as of their own maturation over the course of a decade. This transformation, which was general, took the form of a violent rupture in the case of anarchism. This first part deals with the way in which this break came about, which occurred along two lines: with official anarchism and its traditions, and with the increasingly openly integrative positions that were developing within youth antagonism. In this terrain of criticism, comrades with diverse positions — autonomists, anarchists or "heterodox" Marxists — will meet, who will put aside their inherited doctrinal differences in order to seek in common an effective revolutionary practice. Insurrectionalist ideas will be the rallying point and the common denominator of this moment of strange regroupments.

1. Official anarchism.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the effects of capitalist restructuring in Spain have been evident. In this context, the sclerosis of official anarchism — the Libertarian Movement, which had simply given itself the capital letters — began to become more and more evident. At the end of the dictatorship, there had been an attempt to recreate the historical CNT, in conditions which led in a short time to its split into two factions. All this is old history and known to all, but perhaps it has not been noted that the polemic between these two factions — roughly summed up in the dilemma "trade union elections yes or no" — blocked militant debate within anarchism for two long decades. Immersed in this autistic monologue, the "no" sector, which managed to keep the historic CNT acronym, went through the restructuring of Spanish capitalism in a position of growing isolation and marginality. We refer to this faction as "official anarchism", as the other (today CGT) voluntarily diluted its anarchist references until it settled for a pale "libertarian" halo that did not affect its image of respectability.

In the twenty years we are talking about, official anarchism was perfectly incapable of elaborating a single concept that would account for the historical changes that were taking place, or of introducing a single organisational novelty that would enable it to cope with the transformations in the social and labour fields. Eternally on the defensive, it became entrenched in the reaffirmation of "principles", of ideology, of a mythologised past and of a no less mythologised organisational formula dating back exactly to 1918. Alongside all this, a suffocating bureaucratic atmosphere, a tangle of photocopies, stamps, committees, plenary sessions and plenary meetings for a tiny organisation which in 1996 had no more than three thousand members.[1]

In the early and mid-nineties, young militants arrived at the organisations of official anarchism, dazzled by their "glorious" past, by their aura of combativity that was more aesthetic than real, and by a discourse that at the time was, without exaggeration, the most extremist of the

[1] According to internal statistics carried out after the 8th Congress.

whole scene. The CNT did not put the slightest filter on this flood of youth membership, which was not surprising given its shortage of militants and the fixation on membership figures that dominated it. The Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth (FIJL) did not serve as a preliminary "school" for these militants, but rather, quite often and from the moment of entry, there was a double militancy in it and in the CNT. In the CNT, the young people often ended up in the latter's inoperative "student sections".

Once in the union, these young people perceived a notable gap between the radicalism of the discourse and the non-existence of practice; between the "1920s" workerism and the lack of presence in companies; between the proclaimed and the real membership figures; between the vision of the world and the reality of it… Between the "splendour" of the mythical past and the misery of the present, in short, between the "splendour" of the mythical past and the misery of the present. They also too often encountered the contempt and condescension of older and more experienced militants.

This youth militancy, in short, often served as cannon fodder in the bureaucratic infighting of official anarchism, without being fully aware of the manipulations to which it was subjected. There was undoubtedly a great deal of immaturity and inexperience in it, as could not be otherwise. It must also be said that nobody bothered to teach her anything beyond the four essential dogmas. In general, he allowed himself to be contaminated by the worst vices of the organisation, from extreme sectarianism to bureaucratic mania and intellectual laziness. But he also possessed a sincere will to overcome that painful situation, even if he did not know how. This commitment, which was very real and sustained for years by many, had to clash — and did clash — with the organisation's immobility, and this because it was accompanied by a desire for change, even if each one conceptualised change in his or her own way.

By the mid-1990s, the theoretical and practical paralysis of official anarchism had generated a more than rarefied internal atmosphere. In such situations of stagnation, internal conflicts inevitably flourish. In the CNT there were many, but the most resounding was the "defederation" — a euphemism for expulsion — of a significant, if not a majority, of the Catalan regional. As in most of the Confederation's infighting, the real causes of the confrontation remained in the shadows, as it was not in the interests of either side to air them. No single ideological motivation, no theoretical or practical disagreement, could be adduced — or even attempted — to explain such an organisational breakdown. It was simply a conflict between bureaucratic cliques, in which the sector that gained the support of the bureaucratic networks that governed the CNT in the rest of the state prevailed. Similar struggles took place all over the confederal geography. When the disputes ended in one place, they began in another, ending up sinking the morale of the organisation and dragging its image through the mud.

One of these conflicts is particularly relevant to the story we want to tell. It is the internal struggle that broke out within the CNT in Madrid between 1997 and 1998. No sooner had an internal conflict that had led to the expulsion of the trade union for various trades been overcome than another one began to incubate between two opposing sectors. The polarisation was typical of the pathology of cenetismo: a minority "anarchist" sector led by the metal workers' union confronted another "syndicalist" sector, made up of the new union of various trades, the transport union and the construction union. The members of the local federation of Juventudes Libertarias — one of the most numerous and active in the FIJL — were aligned with the metal workers' union. The "syndicalist" faction was irritated by the violence that these young people displayed, for example, in the anti-fascist struggle or in harassing the Temporary Employment

Agencies; and they were not forgiven for a particularly irresponsible action in an act of collective irresponsibility of the CNT, such as the occupation of the CES in December 1996.

The conflict, already simmering, broke out in 1997 within the national committee of the CNT, which had been established in Madrid a year earlier and in which the two bureaucratic sectors had shared the seats. For reasons unknown, the two representatives of the "metal" sector were expelled from the union, and thus from the national committee. In addition to this fact, a good part of the student section — which included several FIJL militants — was also expelled, under the accusation of being "violent" youths who were rioting at student demonstrations at the time. Members of the Students' Union itself had gone to the Tirso de Molina headquarters to complain democratically to the leaders of the cenetista organisation, who democratically expelled the wayward youths who disturbed the peace of the left-wing milieus. This led to an open clash in which the majority sector managed to liquidate the "metal" sector by means of a chain of expulsions justified on various pretexts, some of which were as bizarre as the one already mentioned. The highest level of confrontation was reached when members of the JJLL, already expelled from the union, burst into a meeting of the national committee in Magdalena Street to demand explanations from those they considered responsible, starting with the then secretary general. The national committee and the local Madrid federation presented the rest of the CNT as an organised "assault", obtaining the support of almost all the regional federations, which had remained silent in the face of the sequence of expulsions, considering it an internal Madrid affair.

Up to this point the situation corresponded to a methodology of conflict resolution developed and perfected by the CNT since 1977: bureaucratic manoeuvres[2], pure Stalinist expulsions and the inevitable dose of beatings, whether as an expression of the rage of the vanquished or as the ultimate argument of the victors. But the national committee decided to take another turn of the screw and extirpate the Juventudes Libertarias not just from the local federation in Madrid, but from the organisation as a whole. Victimism, as a consensus strategy articulated around the "assault" on the national committee, gave rise to a witch-hunt in which the FIJL played the role of scapegoat for the structural tensions inherent in the CNT. The union's national committee decided unilaterally and on its own to break off relations with the FIJL, something that strictly speaking could only be decided by a congress of the organisation. Such a break was not only of symbolic importance, but also meant that the FIJL could henceforth be seen as an "external vanguard" that sought to lead the union. As a result, harassment of its militants began in practically all the localities where there were groups federated to the FIJL. In Bilbao and Granada, their archives were broken into[3], and internal documents were stolen. In little more than a year,

[2] We will cite only a few of them: pacts prior to the elections on the agreements that "must come out"; constitution of phantom unions (without the necessary minimum number of members) or exaggeration of the number of members in order to attend plenary sessions and congresses with a greater number of votes; bureaucratic networks that operate at the click of a telephone; the takeover of committees with the subsequent control of the flow of information; systematic use of slander against the dissident on duty, and especially the accusation of "infiltrator"; and a long etcetera. One of the dogmas of the ideology of the cenetists is that the structure is perfectly horizontal and democratic and that there are no hierarchies. This dogma of faith does not in itself alter the reality of the facts: that the committees enjoy relative control of the organisation; that a body of "experts" has been generated who are the ones who usually attend the plenary sessions and plenary meetings and are, in fact, the ones who govern the organisation. As there is no admission of even the possibility of the existence of a "hierarchy", this hierarchy is camouflaged, made informal, and therefore even more difficult to control than in many "authoritarian" organisations, which usually have formal mechanisms to limit the power of the leadership.

[3] As a "sister organisation", the CNT hosted the FIJL on its premises.

it was possible to get all the FIJL militants out of the trade unions, put out of the game by direct expulsion, oppression or sheer disgust. The spectre of an eventual radicalisation of the CNT was thus averted, which would immediately take shape again, as we shall see, with that minority of militants in favour of supporting those imprisoned for the Cordoba robbery.

As for the FIJL, it would be demonised in the memory of official anarchism, and would embark on its own independent path. Until then, the youth federation had been a kind of extreme crystallisation of the sectarianism of official anarchism. Its existence had hinged on the erroneous belief that a more "radical" practice was possible without modifying the CNT's presuppositions. In fact, as union members, the FIJL militants defended the CNT's orthodoxy with fierce dogmatism, which is why they were so easily manipulated by the "purist" sectors. Their immolation at the hands of those who wanted a more friendly and "civilised" union will leave the FIJL absolutely disoriented and spinning in a vacuum, until it embraces insurrectionalism as a plank of salvation. But behind the members of the JJLL will soon go wider sectors of young cenetistas disgusted after having battled — for years in many cases — against an immovable bureaucracy.

2. Youth antagonism

Official anarchism stipulated at its congresses, with great exclusionary-inclusive delicacy, that the "Libertarian Movement" was made up of the CNT, the FAI, the FIJL and Mujeres Libres. But the truth is that the reality was more complex, and with its many changing facets came to alter the comfort of this bureaucratic and sectarian scheme. Outside the perfectly delimited borders of the formal organisations of anarchism, a more diffuse and heterogeneous movement, the embryos of which had appeared in the mid-1980s, had spread a little everywhere. It took the form of squats, fanzines, distributors, music groups, collectives and affinity groups… as well as its participation in broader movements such as the anti-militarist movement, which took off around the same time with the campaign for Insubmission. This constellation, whether it claimed to be anarchist or autonomous, was born on the fringes of the old workerism of official anarchism, and moved between multiple coordinates generally defined by the "anti" — anti-sexist, anti-repressive, anti-militarist, anti-fascist, anti-bullfighting, etc. — and with youth convivialism as the common thread. These networks supported emblematic publications such as Sabotaje, Resiste, El Acratador, La Lletra A and Ekintza Zuzena, among others. Given their inability to build coordination bodies and draw up common lines of action, part of this youth movement continued to have the CNT as a reference point, at the very least respected for its stability and mythical aura.

However, in various places, youth antagonism had a specific weight of its own that surpassed that of official anarchism. It is banal to point to the Basque Country as an exception in this case, being as it has been an exception in almost all respects. It is well known that the social war there has had a differentiated development, and the issues that the epidemic of rage reintroduced after decades in Iberian anarchism, such as violence or prison, have not ceased to be the daily reality of thousands of people there, and not of small circles of activists. It is therefore such a specific context that it is inevitable to leave it out of this story, despite the presence in the Basque Country of a youth antagonism that emerged strongly in the mid-1980s, which in fact inspired in many respects that of the rest of Spain and provided it with numerous points of reference.

For lack of time and space we cannot stop in all the places we would like to. Valencia was, for example, an important focus of squatting, apart from the fact that in early 1997 the mythical Todo

lo que pensaste sobre la okupación y nunca te atreviste a cuestionar was published there, the first indigenous text containing the ideas that the epidemic of rage later developed, and which was light years away from both the liturgies of official anarchism and the incipient spectacularisation of the squatting movement. We could go on citing some places worth mentioning, but due to the limitations of this work we want to focus on two points of maximum condensation of youth antagonism, which will have a strong influence on the developments that took place later in the rest of the state. We are talking about two metropolises: Madrid and Barcelona.

Madrid was a particular case in point. There, youth antagonism managed to set up coordination bodies at a very early date, and these structures lasted practically a decade. This was the coordinating body of the Lucha Autónoma collectives, founded in 1990 by the confluence of the first batches of Madrid squatters and youth groups that had broken away from the extreme left organisations MC and LCR, whose leadership had ended up disgusting them. Thus was born a unique organisation which, although it did not manage to transcend the Madrid sphere, gave rise to real dynamics of struggle and "self-organisation", to use the language of the time. LA did not escape a very strong aestheticisation common to the whole movement, which was in fact one of its constituent elements. It was an organisation with a markedly activist character that functioned as an ideological catch-all, a trait that allowed it to grow at first, but which in the end turned against it. By 1997, its own maturation and the lack of common ground had led to the development of divergent positions within the organisation. This led to a crisis that ended with its self-dissolution in 1998. Shortly afterwards, an attempt was made to re-found an LA "emancipated" from its "traditional" anarchist and autonomous components under the assumptions of Italian post-operaism, but this step into the void ended in a rapid and discreet failure. For the rest, this organisation does not exhaust the panorama of youth antagonism in Madrid during the 1990s, for outside it there continued to exist a wide and diffuse constellation of groups, squats, distributors, collectives and so on. However, it is fair to recognise that LA was a fundamental point of reference in Madrid throughout the decade, to the point that the false closure of its experience has had negative consequences that are evident, ten years later, in the internal fractures of Madrid's movements.

As for Barcelona, we do not believe that the emergence there of a vigorous youth antagonism can be dissociated from the tradition of rebellion in the city and its periphery, whose last link had been the workers' and neighbourhood struggles of the 1970s. In contrast to what happened in Madrid, there the movement was structured in informal networks based on the social fabric of the neighbourhoods, squatted houses and personal affinities between comrades. This political milieu developed outside any influence from the Catalan CNT, which since the early 1990s had been too busy destroying itself and giving the usual mafia-like spectacle of cenetista schisms. The first notable milestone of the Barcelona movement was the campaign against the '92 Fallas. From then on, the movement began to take shape and to turn increasingly to squatting as a form of aggregation and struggle. The number of "liberated" properties thus reached a critical mass unequalled in Spain. This effervescence would eventually give rise to a qualitative leap in 1996, around the squatting and eviction of the now defunct Princesa cinema, located right in the centre of Barcelona. After seven months of displaying an unstoppable dynamic of activity before the whole of Barcelona, the Princesa squatters were evicted in a sort of medieval siege in which the police were showered with everything they could get their hands on. The subsequent protest demonstration brought together thousands of people and ended in one of the most grandiose riots that fellow Barcelonians can remember. The upheaval that took place in Barcelona was

broadcast live to the whole state. The echoes of the Princesa were reinforced in March 1997 by another eviction with great media coverage, that of La Guindalera in Madrid, where more than a hundred people were arrested.

The events at the Princesa and La Guindalera were followed by a wave of squats across the country, most of them short-lived due to the swift intervention of the police, who were no doubt instructed not to allow the example to spread. The state had begun to worry, as evidenced by the fact that the new Penal Code adopted in 1996 established much higher penalties for the crime of "usurpation". The libertarian fringe of youth antagonism had for the first time a mirror to look into which was no longer that of the CNT, where it always appeared as the little sister. It had come of age and its little world had burst onto the news. From then on she could begin to look at the CNT with a certain distance. Without any rupture for the time being, criticism began to develop in a more gradual way; or else a more attentive ear began to be paid to the criticism of comrades who had long ago demystified cenetism, if they had ever come to believe it at all.

On the other hand, and more importantly, the diffuse awareness of having passed a phase opened the doors of youth antagonism to the introduction of new themes, ideas and conceptions. Here a new contradiction developed between positions that sought ways to deepen and radicalise the confrontation with the state and capitalism, and others that tended more to sublimate this conflict into a "sympathetic" and innocuous representation that would "reach out to the people". It would be a simplification — and one that has been made countless times — to define these two camps as "revolutionary" and "reformist". The former could not be effectively revolutionary, no matter how much will was put into the endeavour, lacking a revolutionary project that went beyond the merely destructive aspects (which prevailed at all times) and at a historical moment when the tide of the counter-revolution that followed '68 had not yet begun to recede. As for the second, it did not even aspire to reform anything, but to preserve the remaining islets of the "welfare state", and to obtain the para-state management of assistance in certain areas of social exclusion generated by the restructuring of capitalism (precariousness, immigration…). This contradiction ran through the movement as a whole, but where it became most clearly visible was around the dissolution of Lucha Autónoma and in the Madrid disputes over the legalisation of squatted social centres. Shortly afterwards, the big anti-globalisation meetings would stage this rupture in the form of spectacular representation, particularly in the polarisation between the "black bloc" and the "white monkeys".

3. A typical day in Cordoba

So far we have given some background information, trying to sketch the context in which the epidemic of rage spread. We could have started the narrative at this point, but at the price of distorting the dimensions of what happened. Every story has to have a beginning, or at least a trigger, and for us the trigger for this story broke out in Cordoba on 18 December 1996. Three Italian and one Argentinian comrades, then unknown to the movement, tried to rob a branch of the Santander bank. The story is well known and it is not worth going into detail. Two municipal police officers were killed and the four assailants were arrested. Their names: Giovanni Barcia, Michele Pontolillo, Giorgio Rodriguez and Claudio Lavazza.

At first it was just another event on the front page of the newspapers. The anarchist affiliation of the robbers and the fact that they explained their action as a political act took a long time

to become known. Although unknown in Spain, they were representative of the swings of the Italian revolutionary movement in the last twenty years. Lavazza had begun his trajectory at a very young age in the workers' struggles of the 1970s. Like so many other Italian militants, he chose to take up arms, joining the Leninist organisation Proletari Armed for Communism, which was oriented towards the struggle against the prison system. From there he evolved towards anarchist positions, without leaving the underground.

Pontolillo and Barcia were very active in the insurrectionalist fringe of Italian anarchism, which had developed in the 1980s. The former had a pending sentence in Italy for insubordination to military service, and the latter was being prosecuted in the context of the "Marini set-up", which we will discuss later. Their commitment to anarchism was therefore not recent, and even less so (as some people pettily claimed) a trait of calculated opportunism to gain support once they were captured.

Almost completely devoid of contacts with Spanish anarchism, their voices were still slow to reach outside the prison. They finally did so through the pages of the Llar, a bulletin published in Asturias and far removed from any dogmatism. The Llar combined its disconcerting layout with a much cleaner layout than the usual photocopied fanzines of the time. In addition to being free and maintaining its periodicity with remarkable rigour, it had an excellent distribution not only in Asturias but throughout Spain, reaching all the CNT unions and practically the whole of the antagonist constellation: collectives, distributors, squatters' houses…

For all these reasons, the Llar was the vehicle par excellence for a controversy from which the CNT could not have come off worse. From the moment the Asturian bulletin made known the anarchist positions of the Cordoba robbers, voices were raised inside and outside the CNT demanding that the union support them. In all fairness, it must be said that a minority but significant part of the union's militants were in favour of taking on the expropriators as their own prisoners — as had been done years earlier with the libertarian prisoner Pablo Serrano — and in fact some unions, such as the Aviles union, went so far as to do. These cenetistas, without abandoning the union, tended to group together with comrades from youth antagonism, forming the first generation of Anarchist Black Cross (CNA) groups in Granada, Villaverde and elsewhere. Their aim, apart from a generic "struggle against prisons", was to support anarchist prisoners. These groups were a curious "transitional" phenomenon in that they did not start from an a priori break with the CNT, and in fact met on their premises. But the mistrust, if not outright hostility they encountered from the organisation, soon led them to disillusion themselves with the CNT and follow other paths.

With these exceptions, for the most part the organisation was, rather than reluctant, openly reluctant to provide any kind of cover for the detainees in Córdoba. Although the underlying fear of criminalisation was at the core of the refusal, it was not without ideological arguments and an implicit condemnation of the perpetrators of the robbery. As we have said, this polemic developed mainly in the pages of the Llar, with some interventions from the cnt newspaper, and was still maintained "within an orderly fashion" throughout 1997. But in the first half of 1998, two events took place that were to provoke an irreversible polarisation. The first was the start of the trial for the robbery in Cordoba, where a rally was called in support of the Italian comrades. Some young people from abroad, not representing any trade union, turned up with a CNT flag. The media made a big deal of it. The CNT completely dissociated itself, an act that earned it even more criticism from the nascent support network of the imprisoned expropriators.

The second important event was the eviction of the Centro Social Autogestionado de Gijón (headquarters of the Llar, among other collectives) by the CNT -which had the premises in usufruct as part of the Patrimonio Sindical Acumulado-, by force and without prior warning. The poor reasons given by the union did not justify such an action, which was strongly reminiscent of the evictions of squatted houses, and provoked real indignation among many people. The unconfessed underlying reasons were the criticisms of the CNT that Llar published on a regular basis, sent in by its readers. The manner in which the eviction took place was also representative of the paternalism and superiority with which the CNT treated the "other" libertarian movement, and not only in Gijón. For this reason, the identification and solidarity of many people with the CSA was immediate.

From that moment on, the controversy escalated rapidly. The circulation of the Llar, which was already high for a counter-informative publication, continued to increase throughout this process, and the same could be said of its support. The last issue (September 1999) was printed in 7,000 copies. At the same time, the circulation of the cnt newspaper was 3,000 copies, a third of which were left gathering dust in the trade unions, which did not give them an outlet. The capillary and "informal" distribution of the Llar proved at that crucial time to be much more widespread and effective than that of the stagnant trade union press.

Because of its importance, we would like to make a few observations on that polemic, which was of a very low level on both sides. The CNT could have defended itself with a very simple and hardly refutable argument: that it had no obligation to take in prisoners who belonged to another current, unknown in Spain, and who had acted unilaterally, with methods alien to the CNT's repertoire. Such an obvious thing had occurred to almost no one. The faux pas of the cenetistas who intervened was to try to clarify, without anyone having asked them to do so, that the prisoners in Cordoba could not be anarchists, because neither their methods nor their views coincided with those of the sacrosanct Organisation. Accustomed for a long time to issuing certificates of anarchist purity, they did not doubt for a moment that this was one more case in which they could do so. They did not realise — their heads were not big enough — that the doctrinal excommunication of official anarchism worked well when used against any entity "to their right", but that the positions of the Italians were much more radical than theirs, in that they advocated the immediate revolutionary attack, and on top of that they put it into practice. Thus the poor inquisitors found themselves faced with the open rebellion of a lot of people who for years had put up with their nonsense in silence. Upset by this unforeseen event for which their programming could not find a quick answer, they were no longer able to get their heads around it, and could not think of anything else but moral condemnation.

The basic problem was that the CNT was being demanded, from an environment that had held it up as a point of reference, to live up to the verbal extremism it had displayed for years. As the discussion was not about theories, but about very serious faits accomplis that could splash it in the media, the CNT was overcome by panic, and it became clear that its radicalism was pure verbiage, and that it had made self-marginalisation a form of integration into the system it claimed to fight. What was seen in the pages of the Llar over many months (it should be noted that the advent of the Internet had not yet taken place) was a re-edition of that story in which a child, in his innocence, points out that the emperor is naked, and no one can pretend any more. But in this case the child's name was Michele Pontolillo, and his "innocence" came from the fact that, having been trained elsewhere, he was free of the intoxications and conventions of Iberian anarchism.

After the eviction of the CSA in Gijón, the rupture was irrevocable. The Libertarian Movement in capital letters had just lost, in a matter of months, the monopoly of anarchism that it had zealously defended for two decades. By the end of 1998, two camps had been perfectly demarcated. One, that of official anarchism, put on the defensive with all its doctrinal inertia; the other, that of a much more radicalised anarchism which has crystallised in one fell swoop to its left, and which for the moment only has as common binders its visceral rejection of the former and support for the prisoners in Cordoba.

Organisational crises are faithful companions of historical crossroads, and Spanish anarchism — which has shone in many fields, but never in that of theory — has always tried to resolve them by a forward flight, by the expedient of activism. With this background, it is not surprising, in perspective, that what came to be called "insurrectionalism" took off at full speed. This new anarchist camp and its critique of the bureaucratisation, dogmatism and immobility of official anarchism would, in the years that followed, exert a very strong attraction on the younger CNT militants, who would gradually abandon it in a veritable generational exodus that left practically no union untouched. The insurrectionalist positions exerted an identical attraction on comrades from the youth antagonism camp, and the weight of these different origins would be felt in the configuration of differentiated "informal" sectors, which would walk together but not together in the years that followed.

II. The role of insurrectionalism

1. The eruption of insurrectionalism

In their letters to the Llar, the comrades imprisoned for the Cordoba robbery confronted their positions with those of the cenetistas who wrote to the same bulletin. These positions were those of insurrectionalist anarchism[1], which found an echo for the first time in Spain through these pages. Also at the beginning of 1997, Alfredo Bonanno's pamphlet La tensión anarquista was published in Barcelona. And that was practically all that defenders and detractors of insurrectionalism in Spain could know about the subject at that time. That and the practical example of the prisoners in Cordoba, which from the outset led to a misunderstanding whereby many people believed that insurrectionalist approaches were limited to expropriation, or that robbery was the insurrectionalist method par excellence.

However, this was not the first time that insurrectionalism had been mentioned on the peninsula. As a curious note, even the newspaper cnt had occasionally published articles by Bonanno which had caused the perplexity, if not scandal, of many readers. The now defunct "Revolt" group in Cornellà had for years been disseminating information on revolutionary anarchism in Italy. Its bulletin had published information on the development of the Marini assembly[2], eco-sabotage and anti-development struggles centred on the HST and nuclear power plants, and communiqués from imprisoned anarchist comrades like Marco Camenisch. But by prioritising fragmentary information over theoretical texts, the background to these issues was largely blurred.

The "Revolt" group itself spread the call for the founding meeting of the Anti-authoritarian Insurrectionalist International (IAI) in 1996, which was attended by comrades from various parts of the peninsula. That call had reached, for example, the FIJL when it still had the CNT as its centre of gravity. At that time — prior to the events in Cordoba — the youth federation welcomed the proposal with a certain mistrust, mainly due to a lack of information. Although the invitation was of interest because it "landed" in the middle of a debate on the creation of an anarchist youth international (which never took shape), "fear of the unknown" prevailed at the time. This is regrettable, since this contact with the Italian experience would have favoured in Spain a bet-

[1] The very term "insurrectionalism" is problematic because, while many rejected it as a spectacular label or a new form of pigeonholing, others took it without further complications. For the sake of clarity, we have decided to use it here without too many complexes. (N. of the A.)

[2] The "Marini set-up", carried out between 1994 and 2004, was the main police-judicial operation by which an attempt was made in Italy to liquidate the most militant anarchist fringe. It takes its name from prosecutor Marini, who, with the intention of putting the comrades under the sign of a spectacular terrorism to which they are alien and thus be able to punish them more harshly, invented a ghostly centralised and hierarchical "terrorist organisation", which he called ORAI (Anarchist Insurrectionalist Revolutionary Organisation). Alfredo Bonanno, for example, was accused of being the "leader" of the non-existent organisation. As a result of the trial, several comrades remain imprisoned to this day. Apart from several pamphlets that have appeared since 1997, a good collection of materials in Spanish on the Marini assembly is included in *No podréis pararnos. La lucha anarquista revolucionaria en Italia*, Klinamen/ Conspiración. 2005. 2005 (N. of A.).

ter understanding — for better and for worse — of the insurrectionalist discourse, as well as a dissemination of it that was not mortgaged by the events of Cordoba.

None of these attempts had prospered, because Iberian conditions did not permit it. Youth antagonism had not reached the necessary degree of maturity, and official anarchism had not reached the necessary degree of putrefaction, for a whole stratum of libertarian youth to break away on both fronts. Only when that moment came did the insurrectionalist discourse have a real penetration. But this penetration was conditioned to a large extent by specifically Iberian circumstances, which gave rise to enormous misunderstandings to which we shall return a little later.

At this point, we must make a few clarifications. What we have called "the epidemic of rage" was a collective attempt, but not a united or coordinated one, to overcome the impotence and paralysis of the political means which in Spain claimed to be "anti-capitalist" and "revolutionary". If we have given it this somewhat lyrical name, it is so as not to confuse the whole with the — certainly important — part that corresponds to "insurrectionalism". This variant of anarchism, developed and fine-tuned between Italy and Greece, had a very important influence in the context of the epidemic, partly determining its development. But it was not its only component, nor is it sufficient on its own to explain it. The epidemic of rage was triggered by peninsular dynamics that we have tried to describe in the first part of this paper. The uncritical importation of insurrectionalism was not its cause, but its effect.

Insurrectionalism was not the only novel current[3] that burst into the libertarian camp as a result of the fracture opened up by the events of Cordoba. Once the ideological monopoly exercised in that field by official anarchism had been broken, diverse positions and ideas began to filter through the same crack. Some, like primitivism, proved to be no more than ephemeral ideological fads. Others, such as the anti-industrial critique, have proved more theoretically sound. Old Marxist currents such as councilism were unearthed and, with all the voluntarism in the world, people were led to believe that they were still very much up to date. Although this was not the case, their dissemination at least served to weaken the ancestral anti-communism of Spanish anarchism: we were now discovering a Marx much closer to us, who was neither the patriarch of Leninist scholasticism nor the caricatured Satan of anarchism. In this sense, Situationist theory, accessible for the first time in Spanish in almost its entirety thanks to the efforts of Literatura Gris, also had a very strong impact on us.

To sum up, from 98 onwards, and for at least five years, a great many ideas were being discussed at a vertiginous pace. As we have already pointed out, around that time there was a general mutation of all movements beyond the institutional left, and not only of anarchism. This transformation opened up spaces for debate where previously there had been none, and forced a generalised updating. It was accompanied by an "antagonistic" publishing explosion unprecedented since the 1970s. A characteristic phenomenon of that time — immediately prior to the irruption of the Internet — was the spread of the photocopied booklet or pamphlet as a support for longer and more in-depth texts than those that used to be published in the usual fanzines and newsletters. Unbound from the obligation to serve as a "spokesperson" for this or that group or

[3] While it was undoubtedly a "novelty" for us, it must be pointed out that insurrectionalism merely brought together elements that had long been present in the anarchist tradition. In the case of Spanish anarchism, these elements — individualism, illegalism, informality, etc. — had been overshadowed by the historical strength of its trade union organisation, to which they were also subordinated to a certain extent. But it could not be said that they had been completely absent: they had simply been overlooked by historiography, academic or anarchist. (N. of the A.)

collective, the pamphlet was an excellent vehicle of communication which, due to its very low cost and ease of reproduction, greatly accelerated the circulation of ideas.

In this way, the theoretical and practical memory of many struggles and historic moments that had been self-interestedly forgotten, distorted or exorcised in the traditions of the Spanish extreme left was rescued. Important history lessons that made us realise that we did not come from nothing. On the other hand, with the recovery of the memory of anti-authoritarian armed experiences — MIL, Comandos Autónomos, Rote Zora and a long etcetera — political violence ceased to be a taboo subject within the libertarian movement. In short, there was a rapid shift from an absolute lack of material and information to an overabundance of it, which led to more than one indigestible binge. The rage epidemic was also nourished by these themes, readings and ideas, which were present in it to a greater or lesser extent.

We want to make it clear that the subject of this article is not insurrectionalism per se, but the recapitulation and critical balance of a decade-long collective experience in which people who did not consider themselves insurrectionalists, and many did not even consider themselves anarchists, took part. If we are to specify the relationship between this experience — which it would be abusive to describe as a "movement" — and insurrectionalism, we would say that all its components ended up revolving around the central questions raised by the latter. Insurrectionalism did not impose all the answers as a standard dogma would have done, but it did raise the questions we were all trying to answer in those years. In this sense, we stated in the first part of this article that insurrectionalist ideas were at that time the "meeting point and common denominator".

For this reason, the account we have set out to give will be clearer if we address some relevant aspects of insurrectionalism. But it is necessary to clarify that it was far from being a structured doctrine, especially when it lacked central organisational bodies to ensure its "purity". This makes it difficult to analyse it critically, but we will nevertheless attempt to do so on the basis of a few texts that seem to us to be representative, without claiming that the subject is exhausted in them.

2. Vanguardist individualism?

Insurrectionalism affirmed that the revolutionary attack on capital and the state was possible by itself, here and now, whether or not the historical conjuncture favoured a radical transformation of society. According to Bonanno, the system had reached a level of complexity that made any strategic foresight impossible[4], so that it could only be subjected to continuous harassment on those flanks where, in the opinion of the revolutionaries, the greatest damage could be done or where there was the greatest possibility of extending the struggle.

Once this detachment from historical and sociological conditioning factors had been effected — more or less openly depending on the insurrectional theorist in question — the revolutionary subject of the attack could only be the anarchist himself, that is to say, the individual in struggle against the system that oppresses him. This "rebel" is called by various names in insurrectional literature, but constitutes one of its central and invariable theoretical referents.

[4] In this respect, see his paper "Capitalism's New 'Turn of the Screw'", included in the above-mentioned collection *You Can't Stop Us*. However, in his introductory text for the meeting of the Antiauthoritarian Insurrectionalist International, Bonanno introduced as a strategic perspective the idea that the Mediterranean countries would be the most prone to insurrectionary outbreaks in the years to come. A forecast which, more than ten years after it was formulated, does not seem to have any prospect of being realised. (N. of the A.)

Insurrectionalism thus carried with it a strong individualist component. On the contrary, it refused to clearly designate a collective subject capable of carrying out the attack against the system, beyond vague allusions to the "oppressed", the "exploited" or the "excluded". The lack of structure of the insurrectionalist theories, together with their vagueness, left a wide margin for attributing to this or that sociological figure the mission of putting an end to the capitalist set-up, or at least of carrying out a confrontation in the open and without compromise. Thus, in the Spanish case, there were those who believed that this role would correspond to the prisoners, and there were those who wanted to return to the old essences of the revolutionary proletariat. Some more recent developments have found a replacement subject in the excluded who are huddled together in the metropolitan peripheries, especially after the French revolts of 2005[5]. None of this is sufficient, however, to compensate for the individualistic basis of this ideology — which is, moreover, fully accepted — or to found a collective struggle, although there has been no lack of attempts in this direction.

Within the insurrectionalist conception, the renunciation of any strategic projection and the understanding of social war as a strictly private settling of scores gave the action an intrinsic value. However, insurrectionalist action was divided into two modalities, perfectly differentiated by several authors of the guild, although they named them in different ways. We will define them here as "diffuse attack" and "radicalisation of struggles". Both acted as substitutes for the strategic perspective that insurrectionalism had voluntarily renounced. The diffuse attack was a practice of sabotage detached from any concrete conflict or demands. By reaching into all aspects of life, domination offered multiple flanks, on any of which it could be struck.

The "radicalisation of struggles" already had other connotations. Here insurrectionalism revealed a background that can only be described as vanguardist. To explain this, we will allow ourselves to quote a few texts, which we have chosen as significant within the sphere of insurrectionalist thought:

> "Every specific objective of struggle brings together in itself, ready to explode, the violence of all social relations. The triviality of its immediate causes, it is known, is the entrance ticket to [sic] revolts in history.
>
> "What could a group of comrades do when faced with similar situations (…)?
>
> "It is quite clear that the interruption of social activity remains a decisive point. It is towards this paralysis of normality that subversive action must be directed, whatever the cause of an insurrectionary clash. […] Revolutionary practice will always be above [the] people. […] It is the libertarians who can, through their methods (individual autonomy, direct action, permanent conflict), push them [the exploited] to go beyond the model of the demand, to deny all social identities […],
>
> "For the moment, the capacity of the subversives to launch social struggles cannot be called "remarkable" […]. There remains the other hypothesis […], that of an autonomous intervention in struggles — or in more or less widespread revolts — that arise spontaneously. […] If we think that when the unemployed speak of the right

[5] Two representative texts of this tendency are Los malos tiempos arderán, by the Grupo Surrealista de Madrid and other groups, and Bárbaros. La insurgencia desordenada, signed by Crisso and Odoteo and published by the Biblioteca Social Hermanos Quero in 2006. Both were the subject of critical analysis in the first and second issues of *Resquicios* respectively. (N. of the A.)

> to work, we must act along these lines […] then the only place for action seems to be the street populated by demonstrators. (Ai ferri corti)[6]
>
> "Opening up a range of concrete possibilities towards the destruction of power means linking the tension of individual insurgency to all those moments in the social itself which, beyond the anarchist operation, take on the value of expressions of self-determination or of rupture with the imposed order. Such a link, however, excludes all instrumentalisation, all vanguardism. Anarchists have nothing to teach about revolt against the constituted order. So the link between anarchist tension and rebellious social forces materialises as a stimulus to the radicality of struggle and rebellion, accentuating some elements of self-determination and "prospecting others". (Constantino Cavalleri)[7]
>
> "[…] it will be necessary to build affinity groups, made up of a not very large number of comrades […].
>
> "The affinity groups can in turn contribute to the constitution of grassroots nuclei. The aim of these structures is to replace, in the field of intermediate struggles, the old trade union resistance organisations […].
>
> "Each base nucleus is almost always constituted by the propulsive action of insurrectionalist anarchists, but it is not only constituted by anarchists. In their assembly management the anarchists must develop to the maximum their propulsive function against the aims of the class enemy.
>
> "[…]
>
> "The field of action of the affinity groups and grassroots nuclei is constituted by mass struggles.
>
> "These struggles are almost always intermediate struggles, which do not have a directly and immediately destructive character, but are often proposed as simple demands, aiming to regain more strength to better develop the struggle towards other objectives". (Alfredo Bonanno)[8].

All these statements — and many others that could be quoted — share a common trait: the absolute disregard for the autonomy of social struggles and the immediate interests and needs of the people who drive them, as well as the clearly parasitic will to use these struggles as a platalorma of one's own ideology. As Ai ferri corti cynically puts it, "the ability of subversives to launch social struggles cannot exactly be called "remarkable". It will therefore be necessary to focus on those that can arise "spontaneously" outside the confined spheres of subversion. For the sake of brevity, we leave it to the reader to develop the implications of these positions.

Blocked between the "diffuse attack" and the "radicalisation of struggles", insurrectionalism did not contemplate the path that would have been of greater interest: that of a practice of sabotage guided by strategic considerations based on collective interests, not necessarily conditioned

[6] *Ai ferri corti/Etziok bueltarik. Romper con esta realidad, sus defensores y sus falsos críticos*, Muturreko Burutazioak, 2001, pp. 42–46.

[7] *El anarquismo en la sociedad postindustrial: insurreccionalismo, informalidad, proyectualidad anarquista al principio del 2000*, Llavors d'Anarquia, 2002, p. 21.

[8] "Capitalism's New 'Turn of the Screw'", included in the aforementioned *You Can't Stop Us*, pp. 33–35.

by the prior existence of social movements, but in any case attentive to their emergence and respectful of them and their circumstances.

We have briefly reviewed the answers given by insurrectionalism to the questions of revolutionary practice and the subject who would carry it forward. We cannot close this brief summary — which cannot exhaust the subject — without addressing its views on another key problem: that of organisation. Firstly, because the insurrectionalist ideas on this point were perhaps the most interesting and original aspect of this current. Secondly, because, in the Iberian case, the insurrectionalist critique of traditional forms of organisation and its positive proposals in this field made the greatest impression on our generation of militants. They were, in fact, what most favoured the spread of this discourse at the time.

The organisational proposal of insurrectionalism revolved around the so-called "informal organisation". According to its theoretical approaches, the informal organisation did not aspire to last over time or to conquer any kind of hegemony. It could therefore dispense with acronyms and all the usual proselytising paraphernalia. The informal organisation was — to use a now fashionable expression — "under permanent construction". It was born out of relationships of affinity, trust and mutual knowledge among comrades. It took shape around specific tasks and projects, moments of agreement or concrete situations of conflict. In it, communication and agreement had to take place in a fluid way and not through congresses, delegations, regular meetings, etc. The driving idea was to fully reserve the autonomy of each group and individual, which should not be sacrificed for the sake of unification under what Bonanno called "organisation of synthesis".

However debatable this may be, we would like to highlight a number of positive implications of this approach. First of all, it de-sacralised organisational forms at a stroke. Not only the concrete organisational forms of Iberian anarchism, but organisational forms in the generic, abstract sense. It made it possible to rethink organisation as a means, not as an end in itself. As something, therefore, that could and should evolve — and, if necessary, disappear — in step with historical transformations and the conditions of the struggle. It put qualitative aspects above quantitative ones. For all that, it unlocked the problem of organisation and approached it with a flexibility that had been completely extinguished within Iberian anarchism. This opened the door to creative experimentation with forms of organisation.

Secondly, within the informal organisation there was no place for militancy. In other words, there was no place for alienation from militancy itself. Informal organisation did not subject the militant to the pressure of rhythms decided at higher levels of coordination; it did not make him feel like a worm who had to live up to the "greatness" of the organisation and its mythologised history; it allowed him to question everything at any time. The informal organisation prevented, in short, the emergence of an organisational fetishism.

Finally, the informal organisational approach had a direct bearing on an issue that had been completely ignored in our circles, namely the quality of the human relations established within the organisation. It was no longer the possession of a membership card or submission to "principles, tactics and goals" that made us "partners" of people we did not really know. For the informal organisation, the relationship of solidarity, of comradeship, was determined by reciprocal, direct knowledge, by discussion and practical collaboration. It was therefore a concrete relationship, and not an abstract one as it had been until then in many cases.

These are, as we have said, positive implications that were potentially contained within the concept of informal organisation. They were not generally developed by insurrectionalist texts,

and were rather translated into the experiences of those who tried to translate the often very vague formulations of informal organisation into practice.

3. The Iberian drift of insurrectionalist ideas

At the time of its leap to the Iberian peninsula, insurrectionalism came to be a nebulous set of positions, collectively matured between Italy and Greece, around which there was a certain consensus among comrades in this area. In Italy, this discourse had developed gradually since the 1970s, within the trajectory of struggle of a sector of Italian anarchism that accumulated the experience of several generations of comrades. Without being a summit of revolutionary thought, the truth is that for the Italians insurrectionalism had a richness of nuances that we here were far from appreciating. And this was because it was born as a theoretical formulation of a previous experience which provided certain points of reference, certain assumptions, which were lacking here. The Italians were clear that these ideas were part of an open, ongoing process, and therefore subject to debate and evolution. In Spain, however, from the outset, these ideas were taken on board en bloc as a closed doctrinal corpus which only had to be put into practice: just another ideology. This type of reception, which had very negative consequences, was determined by two factors.

The first was circumstantial: insurrectionalism did not filter in gradually through a process of debate, but "burst in" in the midst of the bitter controversy arising from the events of Córdoba, in which there was hardly any room for nuance or equidistance. The second factor was structural: the dogmatism inherent in the Spanish libertarian movement, whether in its traditionalist or youthful variant. Any new idea was viewed with suspicion. There was not the slightest awareness of the necessity and value of theory, which is not surprising given the anti-intellectual traditions of Iberian anarchism. Dogmatic rigidity and theoretical indigence went hand in hand, and were both cause and effect of the absence of a tradition of critical debate, which found no space to develop. The first thing any militant learned was to consider the "movement" or the "organisation" as something immutable, eternal, unquestionable even in its secondary aspects. This lack of flexibility of Iberian anarchism, its inability to integrate new approaches, also partly determined the violence of the rupture.

We all bore this imprint to a greater or lesser extent, and it is therefore not surprising that insurrectionalism was immediately reduced to a kind of caricature of itself, useful for raising overnight a collective identity that became increasingly self-referential. The way we received it is an indicator of the limitations of Iberian anarchism at that time, limitations of which we were logically bearers and repeaters. In the midst of so much confusion, it was not exactly helped by the very bad translations of the Italian texts (some of which were already very difficult in themselves), nor by the fact that they reached us with the chronological order completely altered, making it even more difficult to understand the experiences of struggle from which they came.

To begin the critique of Iberian insurrectionalism, we will use one of the few notable local contributions that were produced. This is the text 31 tesis insurreccionalistas. Cuestiones de organización, signed by the Colectivo Nada and published at the beginning of 2001. This text played a role in spreading the epidemic of rage among militants disenchanted with official anarchism. What we want to address now is not so much what was said in it, but what was left out. And what was left out was repression: the logical and predictable response of the state to the implementa-

tion of everything that the text defended in abstract terms. What to expect from the state once it moved to "attack" and "continued confrontation" was ritually aired in a four-line paragraph, within an eighteen-page text:

> "The informal organisation has the need to provide itself with material means to combat repression. Solidarity with the [repressed] must be a constant priority since it is the only defence of the revolutionary. Solidarity with the repressed comrades cannot remain a pose or a circumstantial activity" (thesis number XX).

And that was all. This forgetfulness, or rather this frightening naivety at a time when severe blows had already been dealt, was not a particular fault of the authors of the 31 theses. It was rather generalised, and the fact that it was reflected in this text was purely symptomatic of the degree of collective unconsciousness: it started without any prior consideration of the hypothetical extent of repression, once certain ideas were put into practice. This led to innumerable recklessnesses, continuous lack of security and discretion, bungling and reckless actions. If the Italians had their "Marini set-up", which was intended to wipe them out in a single exemplary blow, here there was a chain of repressive blows which we will detail later. The history of the epidemic of rage can in fact be seen as a sequence of falls of comrades, each one marking a stage. Repression, which was hardly counted on, ended up becoming a determining factor in the whole process.

The 31 theses were in reality no more than a castle in the air, in that they hung everything on the emergence of hypothetical, highly radical "autonomous social movements" which we did not see anywhere (except perhaps in the prisons). But at least the 31 theses expressed their aspirations in terms of collective struggle, something that became less and less frequent over time.

For after moments of initial enthusiasm, it began to become clear that the spread of the struggle was not going to happen as easily as had been hoped. A certain frustration spread when, after the climax of Genoa and the televised execution of Carlo Giuliani, anti-globalisation tourism waned and its more moderate elements managed to contain the black blocs. The spectacle of revolt had run its course. The end of the 1999–2002 cycle of prison struggles also contributed mightily to this sentiment. The "individual in struggle", the "social rebel" who as a rhetorical figure had been crouching in the background from the very beginning, began to raise its head, gaining increasing prominence over the dormant collective subjects.

We do not know about Italy, but in the Spanish case the "rebel" of the insurrectionalist ideal was a tragic hero. His heroism lay in the continuous effort to free himself from any systemic adherence. His tragedy derived from the practical and direct consequences of such a commitment, and from a relationship of forces so disparate as to leave no room for hope. The "system" was a shadow to be beaten, the pretext that set in motion the personal odyssey of the individual in struggle. Hence so many writings born of this current, right up to the present day, are full of imperative exhortations to action, to the violent rupture of daily routines, to "coherence", to self-improvement in order to escape from the herd, to overcome fear, and so on.

This "individual in struggle", lacking strategic orientation and collective points of reference, was obliged to seek the motivations for his rebellion within himself. Thus began a significant existentialist drift, clearly noticeable in many texts and pamphlets, and in particular those that followed in the wake of the Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth. The usual rabid rhetoric of texts, communiqués and pamphlets began to be filled with a subjectivist lyricism of the worst kind. Any author with the aura of the damned was quoted indiscriminately, and almost always second-hand.

But the worst of the Situationist International, i.e. the hedonistic mysticism of Vaneigem, was especially called upon. The book (?) Sharpening our Lives, published by the FIJL in 2003, is a good testimony to this state of collective mental confusion, a juxtaposition of many individual confusions. The next logical step was an apology for nihilism, irrationality and even suicide, expressed in increasingly illegible and self-referential publications.

On the other hand, although the more elaborate texts of insurrectionalism had been careful to qualify that "action" did not necessarily mean violent or illegal action, the fact is that their advocacy of action in and of itself led directly to a fetishism of violence that valued illegal action above all others. This fetishism was clearly visible in the illustrations of the various bulletins, full of Molotovs and firearms. This fetishism was all the more sad because the level of violence actually exercised never matched the rhetorical calls for a cataclysmic, unbridled, total violence that would wipe the slate clean and leave no puppet with his head.[9]

Thus, when the "diffuse attack" began to be practised systematically, it was sincerely believed that these actions were self-explanatory and would tend to spread further and further. The anonymous mass was actually full of potential saboteurs, fed up with daily alienation, who would follow the example and take it further and further. None of this happened, and the "diffuse attack" progressively degenerated into a simple manifestation of rage at best, disoriented vandalism, a rite of group identification or a lazy pastime at worst. The amount of vandalism, however, was enormous, as attested to by the numerous "chronologies" of actions that were published in various bulletins, until someone realised that the police also read them with interest. As for the insertion of strongly ideologised militants under the influence of insurrectionalism into real social struggles, this was problematic and sometimes even negative. This was influenced by the contempt of these militants for any kind of partial demands, as well as by the vanguardism intrinsic to insurrectionalist ideology, which we have already discussed above. The main exception to this rule was the prison struggles that began in 1999, which we will discuss later.

Within this very bad Spanish adaptation of the insurrectionalist discourse, the notion of "informal organisation" was at some point replaced by that of "organisational informality", which significantly inverted the terms by swapping noun and adjective. The emphasis shifted from organisation to informality, with consequences that are easy to imagine. It became increasingly difficult to talk about organisation. We believe that this was influenced by the conditioning of so many militants who had grown up hearing the CNT referred to not as an organisation, but as The Organisation. Words are important and, after the rupture, in many spheres the disgust towards the rites and myths of official anarchism extended to the very notion of organisation. And along with this notion, other notions that go with it, such as communication, self-sacrifice, commitment, responsibility, effort and work towards freely chosen goals, were devalued. The existentialist drift we have already mentioned also played a role in this, and more specifically the discourse of "pleasure" — the umpteenth rehash of Vaneigem — according to which things were done for pleasure, or not at all: this is what the critique of the alienation of militancy came to derive from. Anti-organisational discourses, in short, took their toll on already battered networks, accelerating atomisation and isolation.

[9] As we do not want to plague the text with inverted commas, we will make the obligatory ritual clarification: here we use the term "violence" without any moralising intentionality or implicit condemnation of those who decide to take the struggle outside the legal margins. And just as we do not condemn a priori the use of force on people or things in the context of social warfare, neither do we exalt it as if it contained some immanent virtue that could be detached from each concrete situation. (N. of the A.)

Informality" also extended to everyday life. In an attempt to escape from the exploitation of labour, and more generally from the "herd" fed by the system, people fell into extremely precarious and tribal ways of life, for which they then made a corresponding apology. Thus, from criticism of precariousness to the exaltation of precariousness. This was often accompanied by corresponding aesthetic paraphernalia, so that "informality" clearly took the form of increasingly isolated and narrow closed circles.

In general, every statement of insurrectionalism had a grotesque translation on Iberian soil, or at least that is the collective perception that has remained. Many comrades define this phenomenon with a curious expression: "informality misunderstood". This expression has made a fortune without any reflection on it. It presupposes first and foremost that there was a "well-understood informality", which, however, is never precisely defined by anyone, let alone immediately put into practice and socialised, when there have been plenty of years to do so. There is no such thing as "informality", either well or badly understood: this notion was coined in order to escape from the notion of "organisation". On the other hand, if things were "misunderstood", it follows that the problem lay with us and our circumstances, and not with the insurrectionalist approaches as they came to us from Italy, which even today would not be open to criticism. We affirm, on the contrary, that a good part of the subsequent stumbling blocks were inscribed in the weakness of those theoretical approaches: in their inability to analyse the reality in which we were moving, if not in their contempt for it; in their individualist roots; in their ill-concealed vanguardism; in their deliberate vagueness; in their lack of articulation and rigour. That in the Italian context — otherwise so idealised — these ideas gave more of a chance is due precisely to that: to the context. A richer, broader context, with generational continuities that were lacking here, with a greater sedimentation of struggles, experiences, and so on. These ideas were not worth much in the abstract, in their "pure state", and that is precisely how we received them, completely dissociated from the experiences that had given them meaning.

But we will not let it all be buried under a cloak of negativity. Insurrectionalist ideas played a positive role, and we will never tire of saying so. Those who embraced and disseminated them at the time were not wrong: they broke many blockages that were suffocating us, and they put a red iron on official anarchism's numbness. It would be wrong to persist today in positions that have been exhausted in practice, that no longer work. And yet, insurrectionalism enunciated certain truths which today seem to us to be advances without turning back. Advances which are not enough on their own, but which are necessary to build other things. Among these, we have already mentioned the dynamic understanding of organisation and the rejection of militant alienation. We would now like to add the idea that in the current conditions, an anti-capitalist and subversive practice cannot remain anchored in the expectation of the "masses", of the support of broad sectors of the population, nor can it entrust all its future perspectives to the masses.

Los Tigres de Sutullena
The Epidemic of Rage in Spain (1996–2007)
Let them take away what we danced for
2008

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