

Introduction to *Appeals from the Prison in Segovia* by Autonomous Groups¹

Before our communiqués, gathered together here for the first time, can be published, we believe it necessary to give them a collective introduction so that they are better understood. They were written between 1978 and 1979, and they take into account several concrete necessities confronted by a part of the real movement towards the realization of communism: the Autonomous Groups. Our insistence on the critique of anarchist ideology, among others, might seem excessive to those who are badly informed about the social situation in Spain. One cannot go forward towards a modern communist revolution without previously having systematically critiqued the two revolutionary ideologies that, due to their practical insufficiency, render the victory of counter-revolution possible: Bolshevik ideology, inspired by Marxism, and the “Cénétiste”² ideology, inspired by anarchism. With this difference: the first one leads to an open repression of the proletariat (as in Kronstadt in 1921), while the second leads to the complete abandonment of Spain’s radicalized proletariat (as in May 1937, when confronted by Stalinist-Republican repression).

At the beginning of 1978, the first members of the Autonomous Groups were arrested and imprisoned. The news agencies at the service of capital presented them as being anarchists. *Diario* #16, dated 7 February 1978, presented them this way: “Perpetrators of numerous attacks and *hold-ups*,³ twelve anarchists [were] arrested in Madrid and Barcelona.” In *l’Alcazar*, dated 10 February 1978, one could read the following: “The take-down of these libertarian commandos has allowed the Civilian Guard to shed some light on the wave of crimes that have been perpetrated in Spain during the last few months and that had been blamed on GRAPO.⁴ The police have presented them as the ‘armed wing’ of the CNT” (because a CNT membership card was found at the home of one of the people arrested).

The CNT’s newspaper – a copy of which we do not possess: interested parties should consult the publications *Solidaridad Obrera* and *CNT* from 1978 to 1980 – denied any link with the group in question. In sum, it said that in the CNT one only finds syndicalist methods and that the organization was opposed to armed actions. But because the members of this group were already in prison, the CNT’s paper tried to present them as “comrades of the libertarian movement” so as to capitalize on their actions as much as possible.

Some of the attacks carried out by the Autonomous Groups were either not signed or were attributed to diverse names: “July 7th” (Saint Firmin’s Day), “December 28th” (Holy Innocents Day, the equivalent of April First in France), “February 31th,” “The Last of the

¹ Datelined Segovia prison, August 1980. French version published in Coordination des groupes autonomes d’Espagne, *Appels de la prison de Ségovie* (Éditions Champ Libre, 1980). Translated by Bill Brown and uploaded to the *NOT BORED!* website (notbored.org) in 2010. All footnotes by the translator.

² Associated with the CNT (*Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*) (“National Confederation of Labor”).

³ English in original.

⁴ *Grupo de Resistencia Anti-Fascista Primero de Octubre* (“First of October Antifascist Resistance Group”) was founded in 1975 as the armed wing of the then-illegal Communist Party of Spain.

Philippines,” etc. The actions were always explicit and took place in [the context of] a larger social movement. Each time, they were a punctual response to capitalist repression. Several days after the arrests were made, the police invented the acronym “GAL” (Groupes Autonomes Libertaires), which appeared in all of the country’s newspapers. In this way, they tried to bury us in an acronym, all the more since the cops could not understand how an organization might not have one. Using torture, they forced several comrades to sign their declarations in the name of this “GAL.” From that moment on, these groups were known as the “GAL” by “public opinion.” So as to not create even more confusion on the outside, some of the first communiqués were signed with this acronym (see the press release “To Public Opinion”).

The fact of being detained in different prisons in the country – in late 1978 and early 1979 more comrades were arrested – rendered communication between us impossible and, consequently, any theoretical clarification was very difficult. Each of the autonomous groups or individuals decided upon their respective actions and declared themselves responsible for them. When the actions were coordinated, they were claimed by a collective name in accordance with a preliminary accord between the participants. This was the dominant rule in the street and, in the prisons, we kept to the same methods. From the moment when a minimum number of comrades from distinct groups joined us in the prison at Segovia (reserved for “libertarians” by the Minister of Justice), we began to unify our communiqués and, at the start of 1979, we signed them the Autonomous Groups, not as a pair of initials to capitalize, but in order to express our collective struggle globally. Ever since this accord, we suppressed the “L” in “Libertarian,” which was present in the first communiqués from several groups in 1978 and was included to make our political recuperation more difficult.

All during this time, the bureaucrats at the CNT took every occasion to recuperate us into the “libertarian movement,” which obligated us to make clear to the working class – through longer and more precise communiqués – our real theoretical positions and actions. The necessity of making clear our political identity, which already consisted of acting without acronyms, martyrs or ideologies, led us to oppose (in both theory and practice) the organized political *rackets*⁵ of the parties and unions. We are not apolitical, but anti-political.

A part of our communiqué, “Call for International Solidarity,” which – in view of the first verdicts that were going to be made against several comrades in November and December 1979 – we initially intended to be published in several different places, was brazenly censored by the bureaucracy of the CNT. In an attempt to soften this censorship, the editorial board of *Solidaridad Obrera* published the following explanatory note in the paper’s November 1979 edition.

Note from the editorial board. With respect to the letter that has reached us thanks to the Legal Secretariat for the Defense of Prisoners of the Local Federation of Barcelona, a letter that was addressed to it by a detained comrade, who is affiliated with the Transportation Union and who is a member of the Libertarian Autonomous Groups, the editorial board declares that the article to which it alludes and which was published on page 16 of *Soli* #50 was neither censored nor masperized⁶ by anyone, and that it was published without its final

⁵ English in original.

⁶ Originally coined by the situationists in the late 1960s, “masperized” refers to Éditions Maspero, which falsified texts by dropping out key sections.

two paragraphs entirely due to an edit made at the printer and because of a lack of space. So that no misunderstanding remains, we reproduce the entirety of this communiqué.

The hypocrisy and cynicism of this note surpasses the limits of the ridiculous. Who could possibly believe that space is lacking in this periodical, in which the majority of the articles published speak of the martyrs of anarcho-syndicalism and its gods, Bakunin and Kropotkin? Not to mention the imbecilities of its style of writing, which has no interest for anyone who isn't a fervent worshipper at the Cénétiste chapel!

Ever since the assembly-fetishizing⁷ struggles between 1970 and 1975, there has existed a confused awareness that can be summarized by the principles of proletarian self-organization, which are fundamentally anti-party and anti-union. It existed in parallel with the autonomous coordination of neighborhoods, businesses, universities, student-worker contacts, etc. of an anti-authoritarian tendency.

In the period of political transition between the Francoist and democratic dictatorships, a period that stretches from the end of 1975 to the middle of 1977 (in fact the "transition" still continues!), one at first tolerated and then legalized the political parties and the unions that, starting in 1976, came to be an element of the new democratic spectacle.

The CNT represents the "revolutionary" pole of this spectacle, because most of the Leninist groupuscules had been discredited before the workers' assemblies. Previously, the MIL⁸ and then the Autonomous Groups, which coordinated in 1974 to free several of their members from prison (see our *interview*⁹ with the FIGA)¹⁰, had distributed pamphlets that claimed and demonstrated that the political parties, united with the unions, constituted an element of permanent counter-revolution. In *¡Coño!* a pamphlet published in 1975, the following was affirmed on pages 29-30:

The current tasks of the proletariat in Spain and the Autonomous Groups are the generalization of the class struggle and its extension to the national and international levels; combat against capital in all its forms (democratic, fascist and socialist); the demystification of the unions and the struggle against them (whether they are fascist or democratic) by identifying them as the organs of the permanent counter-revolution; the elaboration of possibilities that are radically different and so cannot be satisfied or recuperated by capitalism; the formation of autonomous newspapers and propaganda in the service of the proletariat; the organization of technical tasks imposed by clandestine struggle (border-crossings, identification papers, economic means, weapons, etc); the completion and total realization of the program interrupted in May 1937 by the Stalinist counter-revolution and the leaders of the CNT and the POUM,¹¹ that is to say, the

⁷ The French word here is *assembléistes*.

⁸ The *Movimiento Ibérico de Liberación* ("Iberian Liberation Movement") was active from 1971 to 1973.

⁹ English in original.

¹⁰ *Federación Española de Grupos Anarquistas* ("Spanish Federation of Anarchist Groups"), interview dated October 1979.

¹¹ *Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista* ("Workers' Party of Marxist Unification").

destruction of the capitalist mode of production. The unification of the proletariat takes place in struggles and assemblies, in the factories and beyond. It is the radicalized proletariat that must organize itself and equip itself with the means necessary for its self-emancipation.

All of these pamphlets weren't widely distributed, due to the clandestine conditions, and they were mostly read by people who were politically engaged in radical struggles, with the result that these publications had a very limited audience in the working class.

Obviously the spectacular-commodity novelty of the CNT was more powerful than theoretical experience. The proletariat had to know through practice, and not only through theory, what a free union (in which the workers elect their representatives) means. As a result, the Autonomous Groups – when they collectively refused to enter the CNT – remained alone and isolated, because the autonomous coordinating groups rallied en masse to this union, which thus came to be an image of autonomy and legalized assemblyism. In such a moment, when the false appears to be true and the appearance dominates reality, the struggles of the true uncontrollables must task themselves with unmasking the modernist spectacle.

From 1976 to 1978, a long series of uncontrolled assemblyist strikes took place throughout the entire country. During those strikes, which took on a clearly offensive character, there were numerous confrontations with the police, pickets, barricades, instances of sabotage, attacks upon the offices of the “Workers’ Commissions” and the UGT¹² in Eibar, etc. The unions blocked the strikes in order to obtain their proper legalization in return. They only had to disguise themselves as partisans of assemblies to fight against the strikers. Through false information and bureaucratic maneuvers, they managed to deceive the workers and re-take the workforce, factory by factory. When they weren't able to do this, it was the police who dissolved the assemblies *manu militari*¹³ (Vitoria and “Roca” in 1976), thus completing the repression begun by the unions. The political innocence of the workers, who tolerate the unions in their assemblies by allowing them to negotiate in their name, is the cause of the momentary defeat of the strikers’ movement.

On the practical level, it was difficult to deceive the assemblies because of the experiences with struggle that the workers possessed, but, on the theoretical level, anyone who played at assemblyism and autonomy was accepted as valuable. Of course this resulted from the fact that, thanks to the Francoist dictatorship, people had been forced to distribute theoretical texts clandestinely, which guaranteed the absence of information within the proletariat. This prohibition is still in effect. In the current era, the merchants of ideology are still selling what they have to sell, and all the aspiring bureaucrats seek a job that will permit them to prolong their existence as intermediaries. Thus, we can see how certain former adherents of the “Platform of anti-capitalist firms” entered into the USO¹⁴ and the CNT, and thus joined the installed bureaucracy, which didn't hesitate to denounce the uncontrolled violence of the workers and the armed struggle of the radicalized groups.

It was also between 1976 and 1978 that there developed a wave of riots that demolished most of the Spanish prisons. Originally, these riots started with the demand for amnesty for the “social prisoners” at the moment in which political prisoners were being released, following a

¹² *Unión General de Trabajadores* (“General Union of Workers”).

¹³ Latin for “with military aid.”

¹⁴ *Unión Sindical Obrera* (“Workers’ Trade Union”).

government-decreed amnesty. The struggles within the prisons took on assemblyist forms. Nevertheless, the COPBL (Coordination of Prisoners in Struggle), which is the self-organization of the prisoners themselves, could not escape the phenomenon of “leaderism,” which ended up by dividing it: on one side, the reformist leaders, who limited themselves to demanding more “humane” prisons, negotiated with García Valdés, the Director of the Prisons, and had faith in his promises; and, on the other side, a radicalized minority that emerged from the dynamic of the struggle, and that demanded the destruction of the prisons. The police savagely repressed all of the riots, and the General Directorate of the Penitentiary Institutions buried alive in special prisons the minority that distinguished itself by its radicalism during the riots. Since then, a kind of pacification of the prisons has been obtained; today, they are still occupied militarily by the police. Only a few pro-COPBL committees, a few sections of the CNT and the Autonomous Groups have brought this struggle to the outside, to the street.

Between 1979 and 1980, there was a clear ebb in social struggles. Only the assemblyist strikes at the hospitals and the FASA-Renault plant (in Valladolid) stood out: there were pickets and clashes with the police. Between 1976 and today, the political parties as well as the unions have seen the numbers of their respective members diminish considerably. In the most recent elections, there was an abstention rate of about 40 percent. All this signals a scorn for politics and signifies that the replacement of the Francoist dictatorship with a democratic-capitalist dictatorship – after only four years – has been completely discredited. The democratic lie that has ruled for so many years, in the majority of the other countries, without being unmasked has, here, been completely burned after only four years.

For the working class, for the Spanish proletariat, the imposition of its own path, the social revolution, is all that remains. We believe that this is only a simple question of time; it is possible that an international revolutionary process will come into existence before the terroristic counter-revolution of the multinational corporations has reduced us to the existence of simple automated robots. Social contradictions must explode; the objective conditions are already present; the only thing lacking are the subjective ones.

When the practice of armed struggle tied to (but not claiming to lead) the social movements of the proletariat began, at the beginning of the 1970s, with a very small number of participants, and then, starting in 1974, with a slightly larger number, we were the only ones to employ this method of offensive struggle in Spain. This was the only possible adventure that appeared to us to be worth the difficulty of trying to live (here “possible adventure” means the only one that could accomplish the destruction of the capitalist mode of production in the modern era). Currently, the entry into this struggle, into what can be called the Zone of Social Autonomy, of the autonomous anti-capitalist commandos of Euskadi and the workers at SEAT¹⁵ (formerly ERAT) confirms for us that our theses were correct, and that the appearance of other similar experiences in Spain and Europe as a whole is nothing other than a question of time. Starting from a social reality and an experience with struggle that previously was different from ours, they have arrived at the same conclusions: the knowledge that through armed struggle, but not through armed struggle alone, one can resolve the economic difficulties of financing the destruction of what prevents us from living: salaried work, the commodity and the State.

¹⁵ *Sociedad Española de Automóviles de Turismo* (“Spanish Passenger Car Company”).