

Commentaries about Wildcat Spain in the Run up to the Second Revolution by Workers for Proletarian Autonomy and Social Revolution¹

“There is nothing more improbable, more impossible, more fantastic than a revolution one hour before it breaks out; there is nothing more simple, more natural, more obvious than a revolution when it has waged its first battle and gained its first victory.” – Rosa Luxemburg, *Der Kampf* (7 April 1917)

CHAPTER ONE:

The Social and Political State of Classes in Spain in the Hour of Francoism’s Relief

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

The preponderance of Catholic technocrats² in the State presided over an industrial growth, which took advantage of the expanding world market in the 1960s (and therefore of the investment of foreign capital), as well as tourism, eliminating the excessive labor force in the rural areas. Agrarian production lost its weight in the national economy and the rural bourgeoisie lost out politically to financial capital. But the greater the successes of the industrialization program of the Francoist technocrats the greater was the historic failure of the Spanish bourgeoisie that was necessarily contained within it. By accumulating capital, the bourgeoisie

¹ Written by Miguel Amorós and published in *Wildcat Spain Encounters Democracy 1976-1978* (London: BM bis, no date). According to the publisher’s notes, “the theoretical texts . . . collected here . . . [were] translated and compiled London/Lisbon 1978/79.” Unfortunately, the translation reads as if it was very literal and done in a word-for-word fashion. As a result, the English version is very awkward and sometimes even unintelligible. Substantial editorial revision of the syntax and grammar of the original by Bill Brown. Uploaded to the *NOT BORED!* website (notbored.org) in 2014. All footnotes by the Spanish-to-English translator(s), except where noted.

² A reference to certain Opus Dei technocrats who played an important role in the Francoist government after 1958: López Rodó (Economy), López-Bravo (Industry and Foreign Affairs), Espinosa San Martín (Housing), Villar Palasí (Education), amongst others.

accumulated the proletariat and created its own negation on a far greater scale than in the past – that very past that it was trying to renounce.

The wage policy of the dictatorship reached its zenith in the 1970s, when the workers' movement had attained an important degree of radicalism and was abandoning the legalist reformism in which the Stalinists and Christians had tried to encase it. This was especially true given the recuperation of the primitive and limited forms of struggle – the *Comisiones Obrera* – which arose spontaneously as irregular strike committees during the Asturian and Basque strikes of 1962-4. At the same time, the energy crisis was proclaimed, bringing industrial expansion based on the refining of low-priced crude oil to an end; such a formula had been in decline since the end of classical colonialism. The increase in the cost of oil and raw materials provoked such economic and financial chaos that every State was forced to fall back upon economic protectionism in order to avoid modern economic anarchy. Francoist society, paralyzed by the attempt to balance the proliferation of bourgeois private-interest groups, and by an overblown State bureaucracy (the result of Francoist management of power), was on the road to bankruptcy. Francoism was falling with the peseta. Having installed itself by virtue of arms, it was going to explode by virtue of money. Merely a few months of decline was enough to annul 35 years of victory.

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

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

If Francoism, weak and irresolute, uncertain as to whether it would live or die, reminds us of Maura's³ maxim – “either we have to change from above or they shall give us a revolution from below” – it is because it was condemned by its decline and not inspired by its vitality. If Francoism had always presented itself as the reaction that had won, now it had to present itself as the cheapest and surest remedy for all the ills it had produced and as the only force capable of liberating society from itself. Democracy appeared in this way, as a reason of state and a political reconstitution of the bourgeois order directed by the Francoist state which, through some area of agreement between Francoism and the opposition, managed to prop up bourgeois society and

³ Antonoi Maura: conservative statesman, prime minister of the first monarchist government of Adolfo XIII from 1906-1909.

make the proletariat an obedient, amorphous mass, chained by its new unions to the economic imperatives of the bourgeoisie.

After Franco, the false confrontation between fascism and anti-fascism disappeared from the scene like the lie it always was, and the social question blossomed like an old truth. The opposition, even before reconciling itself with its old enemy, had to confront a new one. The working class, in the streets and the factories, was occupying the terrain that the retreat of the dominant power had left open: the terrain of politics and unionism, which was to a large extent void of parties and unions. Throughout 1976, the spectacle of unions offering their services at the gates of factories on strike was frequent. From the beginning of the strike movement in January 1976, the workers through the practice of direct democracy managed to formulate particularly subversive demands, such as management recognition of assembly delegates and general assemblies as the sole negotiating organ. Or, as in the general strike in Madrid, they demanded the joint negotiation of all the sectors on strike, through the election of a general strike committee. When the unions were finally able to organize, they found themselves facing workers already educated in the self-organization of their struggles, convening assemblies, electing delegates and forming pickets.

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

The historic weakness of the political opposition to Francoism is due to its double rejection by the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, to its role as mediator in the class struggle. So it had to wait for the revolt of the social layers that capitalism spawns one by one from below, frustrated by illusory ambitions: the intellectuals, students, priests, professionals of all classes and all the remnants of the middle classes. The anti-Francoist opposition has been the political sediment of all these layers and the general representation of their mediocrity. Even in the middle of 1976, the opposition only counted on one real party (the Stalinists), along with the rotten remains of another, the Social Democrats, plus the Maoist offerings scraped from the bottom of the barrel – all the others were small circles gathered around right wing individuals, mainly ex-Francoists.⁴ They were unable to represent any general interest, only a reserve of old back-stair

⁴ Groups such as the Christian Democrats led by Joaquín Ruiz-Giménez (ex-minister of Education under Franco), Joaquín Garrigues Walker (industrialist); Antonio Fontán (ex-director of the daily *Madrid*); Fraga Iribarne (ex-minister of Information and Tourism, and ex-ambassador to England); left wing falangists like Cantarero del Castillo, right wingers like José

whores whose hunger to occupy official positions was proportional to the duration of their covetousness.

The opposition parties – with perhaps the exception of the Stalinists – were launched onto the scene, not through their own efforts, but through a peaceful transaction with the Suarez government. As no one other than the government had opened the way to them, they had nothing to defend other than *their own interests*. In their eyes, the negotiated institutions were nothing more than a facade to hide their own interests and their corresponding political forms. Translated into constitutional language, this meant the preservation of bourgeois forms of government with fascist vertebrae intact. The opposition had scarcely been called to the palace when it stopped talking about an agreed rupture, and began speaking clearly about negotiation, dissolving all its united forms (regional committees, democratic coordination, the assembly of Cataluña), which were now seen as impediments to it. For the Stalinists, their entry into the Cortes⁵ was dependent on the inability of the Social Democrats to destroy the organized autonomy of the proletariat. They were the plebeian detachment of the bourgeoisie. The greater their service to the bourgeoisie, the more valuable was their party and union in the latter's eyes. They gave as much service as they could and for much of the time they were absolutely essential, since it was impossible to break a strike without them.

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

CHAPTER TWO:

The Workers' Assemblies as Negation and Prelude

Froncosa: Who killed the commander?

Mengo: Fuenteovejuna did.

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

Laurencia: It was Fuenteovejuna, my kind sir.

Froncosa: Who killed him?

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

Lope de Vega: Fuenteovejuna.⁶

The actions that sparked off a movement involving hundreds of thousands of workers transformed everyday life to such an extent that things could no longer remain stationary. Once

Utrera Molina (General Secretary of the movement) or Bias Pinar (the leader of the neo-fascist group, New Force) etc. etc.

⁵ The Cortes Generales: the parliament of the medieval Spanish Kingdom and the modern national legislative assembly in Madrid.

⁶ In Lope de Vega's play *Fuenteovejuna*, an entire village assumes responsibility before the King for the slaying of its overlord and wins Fuenteovejuna's exoneration.

the battle has been joined, either the movement advances by extending the struggle throughout the working class, formulating the movement's precise objectives, or it has to retreat. The strike movement of January-March 1976 was confronted with the alternative of either making a new leap forward or beginning to withdraw. Divided because of the action of the Stalinist cadres that impeded the formation of radical organs of struggle as much as possible and that, when they were unable to do so, isolated or sabotaged them, the strike movement was forced into a disorderly retreat. When the unions called on the strikers to resume work, they did so without effective guarantees against sanctions and dismissals. There were beautiful exceptions, however, giving rise to exemplary actions like the attack by the workers of Terpel in Madrid on the tribunal, which was busy annulling their case. The bourgeoisie, courted continually by the parties, was able to determine every move of the unions, getting them to break the movement, factory by factory, the whole thing terminating with the promise of some apparent concessions or a promise not to take reprisals. The PCE [Spanish Communist Party] had tried to give the movement a bourgeois, democratic character by asking the bourgeoisie for support in order to press for joint negotiations with the moribund government of Arias and Fraga. Casting petitioning aside, the PCE decided to put an end to the strike movement and thanks, to an intelligent use of the forces at their disposal, were able to reduce it to a series of juxtaposed strikes, smashing them one by one. When faced with the totality of these strikes, the correlation of forces did not favor the PCE, as its maneuvering ability initially affected less than 10% of the masses in struggle. All these methodical violations of the assembly agreements, with which the Stalinists in particular distinguished themselves, constituted *their strongest weapon* against the workers dispersed in their own assemblies, unable to conceive in days what only took minutes to carry out.

The Stalinists and the rest of the opposition in general sought to give to the State all kinds of guarantees of their good intentions. Whilst the workers wanted to settle accounts, the opposition only wanted to find a niche for itself. All confrontations with the bourgeoisie, all class struggle, had put the parties and unions in conflict with the radicalized workers. To the extent that they went beyond the parties and unions, the workers had to confront the riot police. These two truths were amply confirmed throughout the year. We can count the deaths from the latter. From the former, we can see how the opposition wagered the years of no daily bread on the small relief offered by the government. By not preoccupying themselves with organizing the defense of the assemblies and separating their movement completely from the parties and the unions, the workers did not grant the assemblies the importance that they in fact possessed. The consequences of this were decisive in the defeat of all subsequent struggles.

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

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

Instead of waiting for favors conferred on them by the government, the working masses availed themselves of the only means that really leads to their emancipation: the struggle against capital. And the only means encounters its only form in strikers' assemblies that concentrate all the functions of decision and their execution, federate by means of delegates responsible to the base and revocable at all times. The strike assemblies, which have continued non-stop since the beginning of 1976, were not merely banal controversial unions concerned with the ins-and-outs of wage negotiations. Nor did they give support to the diplomatic contrivances of unions at those moments of high social tension. Rather they were the natural response of workers to the state of violence that has characterized their relations with capital, the root of the crisis that the Spanish bourgeoisie suffers from. They were the first response in a generalized struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The strikers' assemblies were not isolated acts but a moment of the class struggle, which is still far from finished. They liberated the living social forces of the modern revolution and inaugurated a period of the direct activity of workers, in which the confrontations with the unions and the police were only the accompanying music. The strikers' assemblies exhibited typical revolutionary characteristics, which for the time being cannot crystallize into a revolution; rather they are a prior phase before the real insurrectional strikes. They were not an artificial product of a deliberate tactic but a historic phenomenon of class struggle. The law of the assembly movement does not reside in the strikes themselves, nor in their technical peculiarities, but in their relation to the social forces of revolution. Strike assemblies were the form that the revolutionary struggle adopted in the actual historic moment. Any disequilibrium of class divisions or the situation of the counter-revolution immediately influenced the actions taken by the assemblies in various ways. Nevertheless, action is never contained; it merely takes other forms, changing its direction, aims and effects. It is the living pulse of the revolution and its most powerful motor.

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

CHAPTER THREE: The Widespread Use of the Forces of Law and Order and the Disclosure of the Real Value during the First Autumn

“In this country, the people are always with the party most ready for action.”
Letter from J. Mesa to Engels, 10 March 1873.

When Suarez came to power on 15 June 1977, the State trembled as much from the overtures of the proletariat as from the intrigues of the discontented Francoist factions. To be saved, Suarez had to be a savior. If we examine the conditions of class struggle, we see that victory frequently goes to the class which, when conditions are against it, knows how to protect itself and then, when conditions are more favorable, knows how to take full advantage of the enemy. The bourgeoisie achieved the former in the autumn of 1976 and the latter in the autumn of 1977. It authorized Suarez to protect it from the blows that the workers rained down on it. Really, however, he was unable to protect it; this task was to be carried out by the parties and unions, which had set up the COS exactly for this purpose. The opposition, wanting to behave *as though it was one*, was willing to serve *to the full*. Suarez, picking up the threads from all sides, could choose the most useful combination of police and union action to conjure up a victory over the workers and so acquire that little extra fame needed for the magic of his future role.

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

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

But the bureaucrats were unable to remedy this tragedy by using the farce of a military coup. The workers could not be forced into supporting the democratic farce by reducing their struggles to symbolic actions. Reacting to this situation, returning blow for blow, ready for

everything, the workers threw all their weight against the bourgeoisie and the State. In Viscaya, on 11th October 1976, the first big strike, the construction workers' strike, run completely by assemblies, began. The workers set up a solid network of daily assemblies: excavation assemblies, site assemblies (with 15,000 to 20,000 present) in which agreements were debated and then put to the general assembly, the motor of the strike. The coordinating committee of delegates received their authority only from these general assemblies, as did the alternative committee, the management committee, the pickets, the resistance fund and the editing of a strike bulletin. It was the first time that the unions were clearly acknowledged as the enemies of the workers and, accordingly, were stopped from speaking, prohibited from distributing propaganda in the assemblies, from displaying their symbols, and were even stopped from collecting money for the strike fund. "Everything is dealt with by the building workers and signed by them" the workers had decided in their first assembly. The bosses were ready to give in, provided that the COS or the STV were accepted as mediators; in the end they had to surrender unconditionally just so that the strike would end. The press amply took up the expressed hatred of the union bureaucrats for the strikers. As a prelude to their attitude towards other assembly-led strikes, the bureaucrats accused the assemblies of being manipulated, whilst the police carried out their job. This brand of ideological authoritarianism, which screams manipulation at any free discussion or politicization not controlled by the unions, brings to mind the old days of Stalinist provocation/politicization interpretation – as had happened before at Kronstadt or in May 1937 – would shortly be followed up by repression: the police finishing in the streets what the unions had started in the factories.

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

The Stalinists, particularly, distinguished themselves in action: "At the same time the atmosphere amongst the Madrid workers was becoming steadily more charged – the authorities should not forget that. The EMT strike was brought forward 12 days after the general 24 hour convocation launched by the COS. . . Important sectors of the metal industry and others could have come out in solidarity with EMT, unleashing a strike wave of massive proportions" (*Triunfo*, 16 October 1976). Instead of forcing concessions out of the government with the specter of a revolutionary crisis, the crisis was a sword of Damocles with which the government obliged the Stalinists to make concessions. By such an inopportune strike, the Stalinists impeded

solidarity; the urban transport system was militarized and the workers of EMT beaten and demoralized, and returned to work without any guarantees, leaving a total of 40 dismissed and eight on trial for treason.

The resolutely anti-proletarian attitudes of the unions and parties is easy to understand if we consider their relations with the bourgeoisie and the state. It is bourgeois politics which, in the last analysis, determine the programs of the parties and their methods of struggle. The task of the parties in Spain was solely to instruct the working class in the guiding principles of bourgeois politics in this phase of the self-transformation of Francoism, and to play plebian music at the behest of the bourgeoisie. Throughout this stage, *the bourgeois politicians in the government were the real masters of the opposition and their parties merely their humble executors*, jointly protecting bourgeois society from social revolution. The one day strike of 12 November 1976 was, by then, a forced compromise between the unions' hostility to the strikes and the combative energy and impetuosity of the proletariat.

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

The bourgeoisie had little to fear from a one day strike proclaimed as though it were a Holy Week procession, or from a strike that declared that it wanted nothing more than peace. The employers found themselves in a most favorable situation and used it to get rid of the most radical elements from those factories where they had been unable to do so. Thus strikes were threatened with just this objective in mind like, for instance, those in the Tarabusi and Roca factories. Management used everything against the strikers, given that the unions had condemned them: slander, prison, the police, the *guardia civil*, and the extreme right. The repressive forces besieged Roca militarily whilst the unions of the COS besieged it financially. The company wanted to negotiate with the unions and not with the workers' assembly delegates and risked everything for this. The Roca workers tried to link up with other struggles occurring at the same time, but the employers ceded and rapidly resolved strikes in order to keep Roca isolated (the most important one being on the docks of Barcelona). They broke the information blockage by publicizing their strike throughout Spain and abroad, something which gave rise to a great display of financial solidarity on behalf of the proletariat, thus preventing the strike from collapsing through lack of funds. When the judgment of the labor Magistrate was favorable to the workers, the strike threatened to unleash a tremendous wave of solidarity strikes. Just then, a flagging strike became a strike against all Catalonian employers and the unions. Changing tactics, the latter organized a campaign of demobilization by proclaiming a day of superficial solidarity strikes in Barcelona, thus allowing the unions to pacify the workers and calm the employers. As a result, the strike did not spread to the entire Catalonian working class. One of the first victories of the Roca workers was in provoking the parties and the unions into making

pathetic declarations against the strikers. If we only knew beforehand where to dump this rubbish, there would be no problems about the publication of such ignominy. But accepting their aid at the last moment undid in a single day everything built up over weeks. If the unions organized demonstrations and stoppages in ‘support,’ it was to impede all real solidarity. Not to have thrown it back in their faces was to excuse all the preceding treachery. The Roca workers, solely by their radicalism, were able to scandalously declare to everyone what it was they wanted. To communicate this, they could only count on their own radicalism. The strike in Roca ended having exhausted every possible recourse, and cost 46 dismissals. It can be considered as a working class defeat because, unlike Vitoria, it had no effect on later events.

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

CHAPTER FOUR: Democracy as Index of Salvation and the Consolation of Everything Reactionary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The prohibition of the 'peaceful' May Day demonstration by the government was due to the government's fear of seeing more people assembled than the union bureaucrats could hope to control. In the eyes of the government, it was like gathering up smoldering tinder. The cowardly opposition, incapable of risking its neck while the workers could easily provoke a riot, in reality it only wanted an argument. Nevertheless, nothing could stop the demonstration in Euzkadi, the most solid revolutionary bastion, because no one risked trying to do so. The workers, having

⁷ Note by Bill Brown: there is text missing here in the English translation.

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

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

CHAPTER FIVE: Considerations on the Causes of the Advances and Retreats of the Workers’ Assembly Movement

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

The *workers’ assemblies*, defended by pickets and coordinated through revocable delegates, were not only the weapon of the social revolution but also its signal. They implied that the working class, dispersed into a multitude of organizations that divide them into a thousand parts, had joined together and that no one part existed independently. They meant that the entire class was preparing for its communal existence with equal interests, formulating its own ideas from its own practice. The assemblies were not born as organs of power but as a stronger and more representative form of organizing strikes, in which workers dealt with their own concrete and immediate problems, and negotiated with management. Before exercising power, they acted as defensive organs for their everyday existence. At this stage of struggle, the proletariat did not

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

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

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

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

through the literature of these other circles, so trite in their originality and so original in their triteness.

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER SIX: The Dark Imaginings and Real Fears of the Dominant Class and the Political Bureaucracy on the Eve of the Second Autumn

“Management and unions are confronting the same problem – the economic crisis – and are therefore obliged to get along with each other in the coming months.”
Editorial in *Diario 16*, 12 July 1977.

“Just as in other European countries, the central unions lack the strength necessary to guarantee a social contract. They can initiate conflict but one does not know, as has been proved to us in recent cases, if they have the power to keep it in check.” Felix Mansilla, leader of the CEOE, talking to *Cambio 16*, 18 October 1977.

After the elections in Spain, world capitalism had to foot the bill in order to see its position consolidated in the southern flank of Europe. Public loans were re-negotiated and new credits and loans granted – from North American and European banks and the IMF – with which the Spanish government was able to cover the commercial deficit and support urgent financial measures. By attempting to banish all threat of revolution from the horizon, they had assured their *credit worthiness* in the eyes of international financiers. But international credit could only cover a minimum part of the necessities of Spanish capitalism, as anti-inflationary policies had meant that credit from Spanish financiers – visible in the Stock Exchange slump – was withheld. With the contraction of the world market and the subsequent protectionist measures of the EEC and the USA, which tended to reduce imports, Spanish industry entered a serious crisis whose gravity was augmented by the many structural deficiencies in the different sectors of production – steel, textiles, footwear, shipbuilding etc. . . . The necessary contraction of the internal market and the fall in investment, linked to the continued slide in profits (some 50% over the past two years), would extend the crisis throughout industry, beginning with the manufacturing industries (cars, production goods, transportation materials and, after that, consumer goods, construction, agriculture, and fisheries). Industry was torn between two alternatives: lowering production levels and thus productivity, because the workers resisted dismissals in all kinds of aggressive ways, or else stockpiling and thus entailing an increase in financial requirements. Self-financing in Spanish industry only amounts to 30% of its medium-term requirements; the rest of the resources depend on credit and shares issued on the Stock Exchange. Given all this, the last word belonged to the bank of Spain, although the State opposed price increases so as not to provoke strikes, while industry, its own funds exhausted, approached the critical point of under- or over-production, depending on which road they followed. But the economic crisis had not only broken

the unity of interest between the bourgeoisie outside and within the Cortes, that is, between the capitalists and their political representatives, but between financial and industrial capital. The bank extended credit facilities for industries dependent on them while cutting off credit to other companies and so suffocated them. The collapse of big industries carried service enterprises in their wake (276 factories suspended payments and there were 54 bankruptcies in the first 8 months of 1977). Big companies such as Ensidesa, Seat, Astilleros Espanoles, Babcock-Wilcox, Segarra, and Altos Hornos del Mediterraneo were caught up in a crisis of overproduction. In Spain there is something like 100,000 firms, 90% of which employ less than 250 workers. There are only a thousand or so large firms, which employ 15% of the working class. Such a structure for Spanish capital means that it is very vulnerable to crises, whose impact is much greater on smaller firms that are defenseless against any downturn in demand or credit. (In 1977, 60% of small and medium-sized businesses were experiencing financial difficulties. In Madrid every month a hundred court actions were started. In Viscaya, in July and August of that year, more than 100 court actions were lodged. In Barcelona there was a whole series of suspensions of payments.⁸ It was estimated that, during 1978, ten thousand businesses might disappear).

Better wages, won in the course of numerous strikes as well as by the efficient practice of absenteeism, forced management to counter-attack since these actions were not accompanied by any increase in productivity or profits, and the world crisis offered no margin for this in Spain. The bosses could do nothing other than attempt to reduce labor costs to less than those prevailing in the rest of Europe – just as in the old days of Francoism. To achieve this, it was necessary to obtain from the government non-compensatory or mildly compensatory dismissal measures and an agreement from the unions to crush the autonomous activity of workers. The unions in the July 1977 summit meeting with the employers showed they were willing to participate in this operation, provided that the government allowed them to participate in the subsequent spoils. But pressure from striking workers organized in their own assemblies, continuing throughout August and September 1977 in the hotel industry, footwear industry in Alicante, and assembly line workers in Viscaya, showed the unions that the workers would not follow them into a social contract with the bosses and that the unions could not finish off the assemblies by opposing them. The government then intervened, signing a contract with all the parliamentary parties. The Moncloa Pact⁹ inaugurated a new period in the politics of class collaboration. “It was necessary to impose economic limitations, making it impossible for companies to cede to excessive demands,” i.e. a wage freeze. The decrees of the Moncloa Pact amounted to a political solution to the economic problems of the bourgeoisie on a par with the Fuentes Plan, which sought to be an economic solution to the political problems of the party in power. For the owners, the refusal to concede a non-compensatory dismissal law and pass a law against the assemblies was too much. But in the context of a social crisis, the methods of implementing political and economic measures are an expression of the course of the class struggle. The Moncloa Pact, assuring the co-operation of the parties, had as its first objective to stop a foreseeable proletarian offensive

⁸ “This is a peculiarly Spanish device, whereby a company applies to the Courts for permission to declare a debt moratorium. If granted the court then specifies a period of time during which the company must sort out its finances. The difference between this and bankruptcy is that the debt moratorium is granted on the basis of the company’s net assets being greater than its total debts.” *Financial Times*, 5 January 1979.

⁹ The Moncloa Pact was signed in October 1977 by all the major political parties. It ended on 31 December 1978.

during autumn. The extremely antagonistic class struggle had led to the development of organizations such as the *assembly movement*, coordinated assemblies of strikers in the footwear industry in the province of Alicante and elsewhere. The reactionary press echoed the unease of the government and its allies: “Politicians as well as government sources have compared this situation of class conflict to the same situation that erupted during the winter of 1975-76, some weeks after Franco’s death, against the wage-freeze measures imposed by the Arias government” (*Hoja del Lunes*, Barcelona 14 November 1977). The second aim of the Pact was to ensure that the unions were the sole executors of a government policy that favored union activity against wildcats and reduced workers to the role of obedient servants of union bureaucrats.

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

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

The workers’ assemblies did not allow the parties to have any illusions about a stable bourgeois democracy, and the more the latter felt they were being pushed aside, the more rapidly they slid down the path of pure reaction. Academic dissertations in the Cortes – with their foresight as well as false conflicts and clichés destined to enthuse Spanish philistinism – could not hide the existence of the class struggle from which the parties were distancing themselves up to the point of coinciding entirely with the dominant power. To the great surprise of the petite bourgeoisie, intellectuals, stars, journalists, lawyers and students who had proceeded to model all those clay idols for their own use, the confrontation with the workers came. The same language was in the mouths of the bourgeoisie, the Stalinists, and the Social Democrats, which recalled the dark times of Negrin.¹⁰ *Diario 16* summed it up thus: “The assembly – a sporadic organ without administrative regulation, without rules and in the minority – is playing a negative role while continuing to disregard, and in fact, on some occasions, also impede the growth of the central unions. Assemblyism refuses to understand that its heroic epoch of struggle against fascist trade unionism has already passed and that the protagonists now must be free trade unions” (27 August 1977). So long as workers continued to persist with autonomous activity, such words merely proclaimed a prompt transformation of the “democratic gains” into police business.

¹⁰ Juan Negrín: socialist who left his profession as a scientist to take up politics at the beginning of the civil war. As Treasury Minister in the Largo Caballero government, he arranged for the transportation of the Bank of Spain’s gold to Russia as a guarantee for arms. The gold never returned and the war material received was used to hurry the defeat of the Republic. He was overthrown in March 1939 by the Junta de Casado. Died wealthy in exile.

CHAPTER SEVEN: How the Unions, After Ceasing to be Popular, Continued to Effectively Neutralize the Advance of the Proletariat

“They keep themselves free from attacks in such a way that the towns of Spain are not easily taken by their enemies.” Julius Caesar: *The War in Spain*.

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

The comical behavior of the civil governor of Cadiz, who lacked the power to stop reality, but forbid any talk of Vitoria, only matched that of the Cadiz parties that got together “to control the situation” before it took control of them. Different representations of power discover their fundamental unity in equally impotent gestures. When what they call normality is upset, i.e. when the circulation of commodities is interrupted to an intense degree, all that remains for capitalism is military occupation. And for the loyal opposition, ‘civic’ collaboration with the police force would again be confirmed a month later in Malaga. In the course of an inoffensive demonstration that proclaimed the autonomy and brotherhood of all Andalusian classes, and thus omitted the exploitation of one class by another – a fact that henceforth could be considered as an act of Andalusian patriotism – a chance police provocation clarified the contradictory interests of those present at the demonstration. As there was a clear majority of radical workers in the streets, they not only responded to police provocation but to another more humiliating one – the commodity – by taking possession of its showrooms and devastating them. By sacking the commercial district of Malaga, the social war was this time expressed as a great fiesta. In this way, the war against the commodity brought an important contribution in deeds to the task of revolutionary clarification.

The abject impotence of the unions, which were increasingly distant from the lucidity of the workers, was due to the abnormal situation in which they found themselves. As they were compromised in making deals with the bourgeoisie, they were unable to carry on the one thing that justified them – the struggle for social reforms. Their actions led directly to a worsening of the living standards of the working class. Making the struggle against the unions a question of

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

The Moncloa Pact was not smashed by a generalized strike movement, as the government and unions had feared; it had merely created a favorable terrain as the decree of Villar Mir freezing wages had done before. But the movement never went further than a series of important but nearly always local strikes, and the skirmishes of Cadiz, Malaga and La Laguna. The strikes of the second autumn were, above all, rearguard actions. Considered in relation to the movement of the struggle, they were not an offensive against the new agreements endorsed at the beginning of the year, but a defensive reply to them. The exhaustion at the end of two years of struggle and the overwhelming pressures of unemployment had created a climate of weariness. *Economic pressures had acted against the proletariat whereas before they had acted against the bourgeoisie.* The bourgeoisie used their own crisis to reduce the workers' struggle to the defense

of employment. With strikes on the wane, the unions managed to get the workers in many places to debase themselves by subscribing to ridiculous plans for industrial reconstruction, as in Seat; assimilating a tearful, beseeching rhetoric that precluded strike action; or formulating demands in exchange for guarantees of jobs.

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

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

CHAPTER EIGHT: Order Reigns on the Factory Floor

“Do not bear grudges against the political measures that the government is about to institute or the order that will be maintained in the streets of our cities.”
Declarations made by Jaroszewicz before the Szezecin strikers, 24 January 1977.¹¹

¹¹ Taken from *Poland: 1970-77, Capitalism and Class Struggle*, Black and Red translation of a text by *Informations Correspondence Ouvriers*, Spartacus, Paris.

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

But these assaults against the proletariat were not simply being carried out in the workplace, nor were the parties and unions its principal agents. In our time, due to the vastness of the productive forces, stoppages in production and in the circulation of commodities are so effective that they provoke grave disturbances in the system. We know, thanks to the North American miners, what the consequences are of paralyzing coal production. And without needing to look elsewhere, we know that the consequences of a transport strike, such as a strike of the employees of Campsa,¹² or even bank employees – if prolonged for a long enough period of time – are mortal for the system. The system has to protect itself against its own vulnerability by reinforcing, in the name of security and protection, the police control over society on various pretexts. One is social delinquency, which is used to justify the increase in the number of cops patrolling the big towns, thus making them seem almost like semi-occupied. Then there is the pretext of terrorism, which justifies special commando units and, now, the Martin Villa plan to create a political police. Finally, there is the threat of an ecological catastrophe – chemical, nuclear or any other kind – that aberrations, which are indigenous to capital, could produce. Emergency plans include measures like militarization and the collaboration of the army and 'civic associations' created by the parties. Up to now this sinister conspiracy against the proletariat had been circulated in a naive way throughout the press. The daily paper, *El Pais* (2 February 1978), speaking about the reforms of the Public Order Act, said: "The projected act devotes various clauses to the definition of states of public emergency, to the way in which it is to be declared as well as the measures necessary to control it. A state of emergency can also be declared in case of catastrophes, calamities or public mishaps, the paralyzing of essential services, and in situations where products of prime necessity fail to be delivered. Amongst the measures that the authorities could adopt in such cases figure various restrictions, amongst them, the temporary requisitioning of all kinds of goods, the imposition of obligatory personal loans, the revoking of permits to carry arms, the limitation of the movement and length of stay of persons or vehicles to certain places and times, the temporary occupation of industries, factories and workshops, and the rationing of the consumption of services and basic necessities. The projected law foresees the collaboration of military units carrying out particular duties under the

¹² Campsa: the state monopoly of oil and gas.

control of normal authorities or under the control of third persons, such as the civic associations created for such ends.

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

CHAPTER NINE: Nuclear Perspectives on the Momentary Power over the Proletariat

"I call forth all those that I have forgotten to name in any law, prerogative or condition, and charge them to come in all haste and enter into my dance; you need no beckoning." *The Dance of Death*, an anonymous European text from the 14 century.

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

The nuclear question must feature in all radical theoretical analysis of the central facts of the social war and the essential elements in the attempt at capitalist restructuring taking place throughout the world. Nuclear energy, in its development as in its results, expresses the final domination of dead labor over living labor, of fixed capital over variable capital: in other words it does not create jobs and therefore cannot be a solution to the economic crisis. Instead, it could be the solution to the crisis of the economy – that type of solution whose secret capitalism possesses, a leap forward and a deepening of the contradiction. The old bourgeois project of the emancipation of nature is now being realized as a nightmare that contradicts the real nature of man and is now endangering the survival of the species. The separation between the economic

crisis and the crisis of the economy does nothing more than perpetuate the division of labor between the agents of the market economy, i.e. between the workers' bureaucracies and the capitalists, though we do not deny that possible and real conflicts exist between them, which are always negotiable and vouched for by the state mechanisms that control this collaboration. In the face of the crisis, the most advanced sector of the capitalists have practiced a scorched-earth policy, abandoning to the State (and, up to a certain point, the bureaucrats) the management of the crisis that affects the backward sectors, gaining time in order to develop the basis for a new take-over with more advanced technologies (information, electronics, nuclear energy, etc.) A real conflict exists, although the workers' bureaucracies, in so far as they represent variable capital, have had to struggle against their expulsion by fixed capital. We can, for example, point to cases in Spanish industry in which the union bureaucracies have said no to the introduction of modern machinery where this would reduce the number of jobs available, even though it went contrary to their promise not to make any demands. In the future, these occurrences will be more frequent. All of the forms of the self-management of misery (we have seen practical examples of self-management in Roselon and Eurastyl) also militate in this direction, whilst the most modern sectors of capital reconstitute their forces elsewhere for a new offensive. When we hear the voice of the capitalists raised against State intervention, it is because not only do they think it unnecessary to continue expanding the economic role of the State, but also because this expansion would extend the process of bureaucratization, a process which would imply the inclusion of the workers' bureaucracies into the management of the State. Needless to say, the workers' bureaucracies struggle for this expansion not only as a perspective for the future, but also because they need the State to keep alive the traditional industrial sectors from which they currently draw their greatest strength.

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

Though still involuntary reactions of the ailing capitalist organism, nationalization and State-planning of production – although still partial and indicative – demonstrate the bureaucratic form property tends to take and the contradictory need to introduce a planned capitalist economy. From the social point of view, these tendencies could be considered as leading to a partial suppression of private property and an increase in the productive forces. In the meantime, certain limits still exist and these phenomena appear in a sporadic form. The qualitative social characteristics of the economy in which they appear – the market economy – remain intact. But if the phenomenon becomes general, the nature of the economy will change. At a determinate moment, the economy – because of the extent of nationalization – will lose its private capitalist character and the State will cease to politically represent the bourgeoisie and come to represent the bureaucracy formed within it. This is the tendency that provokes modern capitalism to oblige the State to concentrate its intervention on failing and bankrupt sectors. A new class then threatens to arise to solve capitalism's weaknesses in the domain of production and put a halt to the assaults of the proletariat. This class would be composed of bureaucrats and technocrats

already formed within public and private enterprises, fused with the leadership of the party and union apparatuses, and with the police and military high-commands.

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

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

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