

My Revolutionary Life

Juan García Oliver interviewed by Freddy Gomez

Interview conducted in Paris on 29 June 1977 by Freddy Gomez.

Translated by Paul Sharkey

Juan Garcia Oliver, the activist who became the world's only anarchist 'Minister for Justice' tells of his life in the CNT (National Confederation of Labour) and FAI (Iberian Anarchist Federation), and gives his account of the Spanish Revolution and Spanish Civil War.

Juan García Oliver (1901-1980)

His working life began at the age of 11. He turned from waiter to anarchist 'man of action' and was jailed from 1924 to 1931.

Sometimes characterised as an 'anarcho-Bolshevik', he spearheaded the cycle of anarchist uprisings in 1932 and 1933 and was jailed for his pains. He was prominent in the defeat of the fascist revolt in Barcelona in July 1936 and in November 1936 joined the republican government as minister of Justice. Helped broker a ceasefire in Barcelona in May 1937. In the 1960s he joined the Defensa Interior agency for a time.

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What is Anarchism?

Anarchism is a political theory which opposes the State and capitalism. It says that people with economic power (capitalists) and those with political power (politicians of all stripes left, right or centre) use that power for their own benefit, and not (like they claim) for the benefit of society. Anarchism says that neither exploitation nor government is natural or necessary, and that a society based on freedom, mutual aid and equal shares of the good things in life would work better than this one.

Anarchism is also a political movement. Anarchists take part in day-to-day struggles (against poverty, oppression of any kind, war etc) and also promote the idea of comprehensive social change. Based on bitter experience, they warn that new 'revolutionary' bosses are no improvement: 'ends' and 'means' (what you want and how you get it) are closely connected.

My revolutionary life
Juan García Oliver interviewed by Freddy Gomez (1977)

Q. What were the circumstances in which you became active in the libertarian movement and CNT?

A. We need to be precise about this. The idea of the “libertarian movement” surfaced well after the period we are talking about. The CNT, on the other hand, was a long-established battle organisation which in those days marshalled revolutionary syndicalists, especially in Catalonia and thereafter throughout Spain. I joined it as a 17 year old. I was working in the hospitality trade, as a cafe waiter. We had just seen the ‘La Canadiense’ strike¹ which is still famous because it was handled to perfection and won by the CNT’s Light and Power Union. At around the same time the cafe waiters struck to press for improved working conditions which had already been won abroad and to do away with the practice of tipping which revolutionaries thought degrading. We were asking for a wage or a percentage – just about anything other than having to say thank you to customers. It was hardly an obvious cause, for we were damaging the interests of a goodly number of cafe waiters who, thanks to the tips they were taking in certain establishments and provided that they put in the hours, were raking in wages that occasionally outstripped those of a high-ranking serviceman. To be honest, conditions were not the same for everybody. The catering industry included not just cafe waiters but also cooks, hotel staff and others. To arrive at an agreed schedule of demands, we had had to amalgamate the two trades defence associations in existence at the time – the Cafe Waiters’ Alliance (to which I belonged and which was affiliated to the UGT) and the Cafe Waiters’ and Cooks’ Alliance which was non-aligned and apolitical – and we set up the Hotel Industry, Cafe and Allied Union. Previously, the associations had agreed upon good demands – including abolition of tipping – but the employers had rejected these. So we had to call a strike. Since we had no experience of striking, we lost the strike. I was really sorry about that but we should have expected as much. Nevertheless it was on this occasion that I began to realise that the UGT reformists were hanging disputes out to dry and that direct action was the only way to win.

1 ‘**La Canadiense**’ Landmark strike mounted by the CNT in 1919 against a Canadian-owned power company in Catalonia. The 45 day strike demonstrated the power of the young CNT, but triggered employer organisation designed to destroy the Confederation through repression and hired gunmen.

Q. Given how your life developed, that was a significant discovery.

A. Yes, especially as it was during that strike that with other comrades from the trade, young men, we had set up an anarchist group that affiliated itself to the Barcelona Local Federation of Anarchist Groups. That federation bore the name “Bandera Negra” [Black Flag], borrowed from the title of the newspaper it published. In Barcelona there was another federation of groups as well, the “Bandera Roja” [Red Flag]. “Bandera Negra” was, let us say, a classic receptacle for anarchist ideas and was against revolutionary syndicalism. “Bandera Roja” claimed to be close to revolutionary syndicalism but it was, all in all, syndicalism pure and simple, with all that that implies ... I imagine we’ll be returning to this theme as our interview proceeds.

Q. So how did you see yourself then, as a revolutionary syndicalist or as an anarchist?

A. To tell the truth, I joined “Bandera Negra” by mistake. Our group merely followed the advice of somebody who had initiated us into anarchism, Ismail Rico.² In point of fact, we felt like fish out of water inside “Bandera Negra”. We should in fact have joined the other federation because “Bandera Negra” had not the slightest interest in workers’ struggle. It spent its time liaising – nationally and internationally – with other groups and its main activity was reading incoming correspondence and replying to it. As for trade unionism and the CNT, it was firmly against them.

Q. So was there no chance of some sort of an understanding between syndicalists and anarchists?

A. No understanding ... We were still a long way from what came later – anarcho-syndicalism – which overcame this dichotomy. Anarcho-syndicalism allowed anarchism to become part and parcel of trade unionist groups which were imbued with anarchist thinking.

2 **Ismail Rico** Rico was a baker, the brother in law of a leading syndicalist by the name of Emilio Mira. Rico encouraged Oliver to set up the “Regeneracion” anarchist group with people like Bover, Roma, Pons and Alberich and was influential within the Foodworkers’ Union. This was around 1918/19.

Q. Your name is not so much associated with trade unionism as with the Los Solidarios and later Nosotros anarchist action groups. Would you agree with that statement?

A. It's a very complicated matter. Without knowing the circumstances in which those groups were created, you can't understand much. For a start it needs to be said that just prior to the creation of the Los Solidarios group, the CNT damned nearly vanished as an organisation. To be more specific: in the struggle it was waging against the Barcelona employers and government authorities, the CNT had sustained very heavy losses. A fair number of its best militants were murdered. Brutally, in the streets, as they left the workplace, they were done for the offence of "attempted escape" as set out by law, which allowed for them to be shot in the back. The situation was so serious that it brought about far-reaching changes to CNT organisation.

Q. And Salvador Seguí was murdered at around this point?

A. Yes, Salvador Seguí³ – or Sugar Baby as we used to refer to him – was walking along the street with another comrade, Paronas [Francisco Comás y Pagés]⁴ when they were both cravenly murdered at noon on 10 March 1923 on the open streets. The killings came as such a shock that bodies within the organisation – local federation, regional committee and trade unions) held an on-the-spot meeting – a clandestine one, of course – on a small island on the banks of the Besós. There, brought together by despair, we agreed to declare open war on those who were liquidating our comrades hand over fist. At the same time, we decided to set up a committee tasked with implementing that decision. This point is worth labouring because later certain ... shall we say, reformists ... tried to give it out that the CNT had never been involved in terrorist actions and that these had always been the work of "mavericks". Which is an historic lie that needs to be rebutted. Otherwise, there is no understanding what really happened and the evolution within the CNT. At that point in its history, the organisation came within an ace of disappearing because it could not protect the lives of its militants. When an

3 **Salvador Seguí (1890-1923)** Exemplary public speaker and trade union activist who led a number of unions before becoming general secretary of the Catalan CNT, resigning in 1917. He steered the libertarian unions on a middle course between docile cooperation and needless violence, before perishing himself at the hands of a team of employers' hired guns.

4 **Francisco Comás y Pagés aka Paronas (1896-1923)** CNT activist shot alongside Seguí on 10 March 1923, dying after three days of wounds received.

organisation finds itself incapable of guaranteeing the safety of its militants, it is doomed to disappear. At the time I explained that we needed a collective approach to the problem of protection for the organisation's members. And I added: it is not a matter of retaliating against attacks with other attacks in a sort of tragic theatre with the working class cast as spectators, but of triggering revolution by drawing it into participating.

Q. And the CNT was persuaded by these arguments ...?

A. At that point in its history the CNT realised that it had to plump for the attentat approach [assassinations]. Not indiscriminate attentat but an attack on the highest levels of the Spanish state, an attack designed to promote revolution. It was to this end that an executive commission was set up – made up of Angel Pestaña,⁵ Juan Peiró,⁶ Camilo Piñón⁷ and Narciso Marco.⁸ It decided to seek an accommodation with Alejandro Lerroux⁹ and Marcelino Domingo,¹⁰ radical politicians who posed as revolutionaries. In the event of failure, the executive would organise an attentat. Which is what happened. It quickly became apparent that the republicans would have no part of an attempted revolution. So the CNT found itself utterly alone in the face of repression. At the same time, a large number of its militants, the intellectually best equipped ones, the ones who had been closest to Salvador Seguí, drifted away from it. Which was a great loss. The

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- 5 **Angel Pestaña (1886-1938)** Long-time leader of the CNT whose early radicalism grew more moderate. He eventually set up the Syndicalist Party.
 - 6 **Juan Peiró (1887-1942)** Moderate CNT leader who sided with the *treintistas* and Opposition Unions before returning to the fold, serving as the CNT's minister of Industry in the central government. He was extradited from Vichy France and executed by Franco.
 - 7 **Camilo Piñón (1889-1979)** Served on the CNT regional committee in Catalonia alongside Seguí. In 1914 he was secretary of the Barcelona Local CNT Federation. He was arrested following an attempt on the life of employers' federation leader Félix Graupera. Later he sided with the *treintistas* and Opposition Unions before returning to the CNT in 1936.
 - 8 **Narciso Marco** Associate of Pestaña's on the Catalan regional committee of the CNT; later joined the *treintistas*.
 - 9 **Alejandro Lerroux (1864-1949)** Rabble-rousing, anti-clerical politician who led the Radical Party and who moved progressively rightwards during his career, eventually occupying a centrist position.
 - 10 **Marcelino Domingo (1884-1939)** Founder in 1929 of the Radical Socialist Republican Party. Later joined with Manuel Azaña to launch Republican Left.

CNT thereby found itself staffed by youngsters who had to confront the struggle on their own. To be honest, the executive commission did not – outside of the revolutionary syndicalists – have much luck finding partners in the mounting of its plans for direct action and attacks against the very top. Which is why, being aware of my reputation as a man of action, it turned to me to organise a combat team. I accepted. And thus was born the Los Solidarios group, at the CNT's request.

Q. With what aims? What were the first actions by Los Solidarios?

A. The group's aims were set out by the executive commission. They were very specific. We wanted to lash out against the top men. Let it be said that none of these aims was achieved by Los Solidarios. One of the first ventures undertaken was the assassination of Cardinal Soldevila, a notorious figure on the Spanish reactionary side. Passing through Zaragoza, Francisco Ascaso,¹¹ Aurelio Fernández¹² and Torres Escartín¹³ decided to take this on, without consulting either the organisation or their fellow group members. Later, travelling up to Leon, two more members of the group assassinated José Regueral,¹⁴ former governor of Bilbao. That again was an unscheduled target chosen without consultation. That sort of operation posed problems and attracted criticism from members of the executive. They were not wrong. The execution of Cardinal Soldevila had triggered a genuinely alarming situation and increased the risk of a coup d'état directly targeted at us. It was in these circumstances that it was decided that the group should disband ... I fully endorsed this decision for I did not see eye to eye with the sort of operations undertaken by the group.

11 **Francisco Ascaso (1903-1936)** Inseparable comrade of Durruti, he was killed on 20 July 1936 during the storming of the Atarazanas barracks in Barcelona.

12 **Aurelio Fernández (1897-1974)** Member of the Los Solidarios-Nostros anarchist groups who became chief of the Security Council in Catalonia up until March 1937, co-founding the Control Patrols.

13 **Juan Torres Escartín (?-1939)** Arrested in Oviedo following a shoot-out with police in which his colleague Eusebio Brau perished, he escaped, only to be captured and charged with the assassination of Cardinal Soldevila. He was sentenced to life imprisonment but was freed after the proclamation of the Republic. Torture had left him mentally unbalanced and friends had to have him committed to a mental asylum from which he was removed by Francoists and executed at the end of the civil war.

14 **José Regueral** Regueral, ex-civil governor of San Sebastián and sponsor of anti-worker repression there was tracked to León and assassinated on 17 May 1923 by members of the Los Solidarios group.

Q. So the Los Solidarios group was wound up as it was created, at the behest of the organisation?

A. Yes. We were on the verge of General Miguel Primo de Rivera's coup.¹⁵ The repression was being stepped up. The group's members split up. Some were tossed into prison, others left the country. Come the Republic, the group no longer existed. I will even go further: not only did we no longer exist as a group, but Durruti¹⁶ and Ascaso were being criticised for a degree of reformism. At the time, I alone reckoned that we needed to start again from the very beginning and equip ourselves with an organisation that was capable of grappling with the situation in a revolutionary way. Very fortunately, Durruti and Ascaso quickly came to their senses again. Some of us – including Juanel,¹⁷ Arturo Parera,¹⁸ Gil Luzbel, José Castillo¹⁹ and Barberillo – had made up our minds to resume revolutionary activity on a wide scale. So, a fortnight after the proclamation of the Republic, the 1 May 1931 demonstration concluded in a revolutionary rally and spilled over into an attack on the palace of the Generalitat of Catalonia.²⁰ And it was on that occasion that red-and-black flags first put in an appearance.

Q. For the first time?

A. Yes. That flag symbolised the marriage of syndicalism and anarchism. This is a point worth exploring. It was after Salvador Seguí's death that unity was achieved between anarchists and syndicalists, spontaneously, so to speak, without

15 **Miguel Primo de Rivera (1870-1930)** Military dictator of Spain 1923-1929 and father of the Falange's founder, José Antonio Primo de Rivera.

16 **Buenaventura Durruti (1896-1936)** Anarchist from León who became the very embodiment of anarchist activism in the 1920s and 1930s. Led a militia column on the Aragon front after July 1936 and was killed on the Madrid front in November 1936.

17 **Juan Manuel Molina aka Juanel (1901-1984)** Anarchist involved with early attempts (in exile in France) to coordinate anarchist activity; founder member and regular officer of the FAI.

18 **Arturo Parera** CNT and FAI activist, active with Los Solidarios group in 1922. At one point he was the editor of *Cultura y Acción* in Zaragoza in the early 1920s. Secretary of the Catalan regional committee of the CNT in 1931.

19 **José Castillo** Barber, having served on the federal council of Solidaridad Obrera (the fore-runner of the CNT) he was assassinated in a barber-shop by Epifanio Casas, acting for Bravo Portillo in terrorism against the Confederation.

20 **Generalitat** The home rule administration of Catalonia.

negotiation of any sort. The notion of anarcho-syndicalism dates from then. Previously, it had never been used. With Seguí's death the situation took such a serious turn that naturally the anarchists' and syndicalists' activities blended into one, leading to the demise of the "Bandera roja" and "Bandera negra" federations. The amalgamation was total and there was no prior agreement by any sort of a congress. Everybody realised that we needed to start afresh and devise new forms of struggle, which we did. The reformists were no longer a hindrance to the revolutionary struggle. True, for eight years the activities proper of the organisation were stymied by the dictatorship, experiencing a resurgence come the Republic. The black and red flag was the symbol of this new era of anarchist-syndicalist fusion. I had argued this notion of anarcho-syndicalism to members of the CNT and to Spanish émigrés living in France during the dictatorship. As I saw it, on their own, the anarchists could not make the revolution. As for certain syndicalists, their views distanced them from it. The only possible option was to amalgamate them both and embrace this idea of anarcho-syndicalism.

Q. In the history of the Spanish libertarian movement, you will surely go down as one who introduced a measure of revisionism where anarchism is concerned. On two core issues – the issue of the seizure of power and the issue of the revolutionary army – you were even openly flying in the face of the classical approaches of traditional anarchism. What would you say to that?

A. Look ... If we espouse a strictly anarchist viewpoint, my stance vis a vis taking power or forming a revolutionary army would be nonsensical. If we take a revolutionary syndicalist line, these things were logical. Some day we are going to have to work out a precise definition of the notion of "direct action" which is part and parcel of revolutionary syndicalism. True, in his day Anselmo Lorenzo²¹ equated direct action with strikes and sabotage, but that definition is too restrictive. The notion of direct action is in fact very clear: it is the only way of guaranteeing the success of the working class as a class. To that end it must be studied and put into practice and all the consequences of it faced up to. The alternative is as follows: either the working class, by means of direct action, achieves its own emancipation as a class or it will be reduced forever to some

21 **Anselmo Lorenzo (1841-1914)** Anarchist founding father, early recruited to the IWMA by Fanelli, serving with the FRE and Solidaridad Obrera and witnessing the birth of the CNT.

form of more or less well paid slavery. In other words, either it gets used to be treated – economically and politically – as some inferior class, or it organises itself into a union and practises direct action. Besides, direct action can vary according to circumstances. For instance, back in the 1920s, I saw the syndicalists of Barcelona enforcing “red censorship”. The bourgeois press would carry a number of articles defamatory of syndicalists who were arming themselves in self-defence against the bosses’ hired killers, so the CNT decided to implement “red censorship”. It was straightforward: the printing workers affiliated to the CNT saw to it that what they judged to be defamatory was censored. That practice did not enjoy the support of the anarchist Federico Urales²² who was pretty much a radicalised liberal who always treated liberalism and anarchism as the same. He went so far (in a Madrid newspaper) as to denounce the “red censorship” as anti-anarchist ... Which brings us to the nub of the matter. In the fight they wage in pursuit of their victory as a class, the workers determine the forms of direct action for themselves. We are dealing here with the logic of class confrontation. These fighting methods are not 100% anarchist, they are 100% revolutionary syndicalist. The notion of anarcho-syndicalism is an attempt to arrive at some possible blending of the class fighting methods and anarchism, in the knowledge that revolutionary syndicalism serves the proletariat, whereas anarchism is one brand of humanism.

Q. To return to the Los Solidarios group. I'd like you to talk about the leading members of the group.

A. I met them all at the Woodworkers’ Union in Barcelona which had a cafe that was a rendezvous for comrades drawn from various regions of Spain. Every impetuous young man keen to get in on the struggle was making for Barcelona in those days. The Ascaso brothers were one example. One of them, the older one (Domingo²³) later was forced to flee to Belgium because he was a member of the group that executed Espejito,²⁴ a police inspector who had especially distinguished himself in the anti-worker crackdown. His brother, Francisco Ascaso was

22 **Federico Urales (1864-1942)** Real name Juan Montseny (father of Federica). Anarchist publisher and author who wielded great influence through his publication *La Revista Blanca* and his courageous denunciation of the repression and torture enforced by the authorities.

23 **Domingo Ascaso** Brother of Francisco Ascaso, and once a member of the Los Justicieros and Los Indomables anarchist groups, he led the column named after his brother for a time: he was killed during the May Events of 1937.

possessed of an outstanding intellectual grounding. Buenaventura Durruti came from northern Spain. He was a mechanic. At the Woodworkers' Union cafe too I met Alfonso Miguel²⁵ (a very good cabinet-maker). Miguel García Vivancos²⁶ (from the Foodworkers' Union), Ricardo Sanz²⁷ (a metalworker) and Aurelio Fernández (a fitter). When the time came for us to set up an action group, I contacted them, one by one, to ask them to join. None of them ever knew that I was acting on behalf of the CNT executive commission and that the Los Solidarios group was being set up at their behest. They had no idea that this group was purpose-built and that it had specific targets to meet. The members of Los Solidarios always thought they were joining an affinity group.

Q. Following the introduction of the Republic, the CNT was to split for a long time on the issue of “treintismo”. What is your take on that period?

A. First we need to explain what “*treintismo*” was about. The long years of dictatorship had brought about a stultification of the revolutionary mind-set of the CNT's historic militants. And the same thing happened with the Christians in the catacombs wearying of persecution, their bishops finally entered into negotiations with the emperor to turn Christianity from a religion of the persecuted into the official faith of the empire. That done, they then tinkered with the gospels in order to adapt them to the new historical circumstances ... There is no denying that something similar happened to the CNT. As a result of its having been involved alongside republicans and socialists in the so-called San

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- 24 **‘Espejito’** Inspector Espejo, known as ‘Espejito’, was a member of one of one of Bravo Portillo's 10-man gangs of hired guns deployed against CNT and labour activists and was one of the main players in the employer-state gun attacks on the CNT in the 1920s.
- 25 **Alfonso Miguel** Named in police files as the CNT gunman involved in a 1920 assassination bid on the life of Pedro Torrens Capdevila [one of the hired guns working for the phony “Baron” Koenig. He was wounded in an indiscriminate raid on these hired guns in the Plaza del Peso de la Paja in Barcelona on 28 April 1920 and was then followed home from hospital and finished off on 12 May 1920]. After July 1936 he was a leading light of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in Catalonia, designed to monitor and assist the revolution's new armed forces.
- 26 **Miguel García Vivancos (1895-1972)** Member of Los Solidarios-Nosotros who went on to serve with the Los Aguiluchos Column before becoming adjutant to Grigorio Jover and later a divisional commander in his own right.
- 27 **Ricardo Sanz (1898-1986)** Member of Los Solidarios-Nosotros who took over the Durruti Column after Durruti's death in Madrid in November 1936.

Sebastián Agreement during the dictatorship. Pestaña set the CNT on the path of compromise, in that, on its behalf, he recognised the political necessity of defending and supporting the Republic against the monarchy. To my mind, that stance was incompatible with the CNT's revolutionary spirit. No commitment of that sort should have tied the CNT to the republicans and socialists. There was an element of retreat in this move by Pestaña. Which is why I reckoned the old, historic leaders of the CNT needed ousting and replacement by younger ones. “*Treintismo*” which was quite simply a retreat into reformism furnished the opportunity for this. The “*Manifesto of the Thirty*” had nothing new to offer. It was content to expound the notion – a reformist notion, I insist – that the working class lacked the requisite capabilities to take control of its own fate. When the social question is posed in that sort of terms, it produces a petrified notion of the struggle. The revolutionaries of the day – the anarcho-syndicalists – saw it not so much as a time for querying the capabilities of the working class as for pushing their liberation plans as far as they would go.

Q. And what was your part in the debate between “treintistas” and revolutionaries?

A. There was no proper debate...

Q. Yet you did speak out and take up your pen when that *Manifesto* came out ...

A. I pretty much stood aside from the controversy proper ... I just thought that we had to get over it and move on, ousting the “*treintistas*” from positions of leadership within the organisation.

Q. Let's take a bit of a step back in time ... They say that comparisons can be made between your political thinking and the Arshinov²⁸ Platform. Now you happened to be in Paris in 1925. Did you find out about the arguments set out in that Platform at that time? Did they have any direct bearing on what you did?

28 **Piotr Arshinov (1887-193?)** Russian Bolshevik then anarchist who was Makhno's comrade in the Ukraine and later in exile. With Makhno and other exiles, he drafted the (controversial) Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists, sometimes known as the Arshinov Platform. He returned to Russia in 1932, dying in the purges in the later 1930s.

A. No, none. There is no point looking for non-existent analogies. Arshinov made do with drawing the lessons of the Russian revolutionary experience. We definitely did likewise later on, but his theses had not the slightest influence over us, for the good reason that we were not really familiar with them, even though I was up to speed with the frictions that the controversy had sparked in Russian anarchist ranks. I was, let me repeat, a revolutionary militant whose chief source of inspiration was the proletariat of Barcelona. The Russian revolution had no part in my choices: nor did “Arshinovism”.

Q. The FAI was launched in 1927. How did you receive the news of its establishment?

A. I found out that the FAI existed in 1931, when I was freed from prison where I had been since 1925. Prior to that, I had no idea ... The FAI was very weak at the time. In Barcelona, there were only three or four tiny anarchist groups which had set up a local federation. It did not amount to much. In fact, the FAI was never a very significant force. When people talk about the FAI wielding power over the CNT, they display tremendous ignorance. The FAI never wielded any influence over the CNT.

Q. And were you a supporter of the specific organisation [the FAI]?

A. The issue never arose. The FAI was there, just as anarchist groups had been around earlier as well. So there was nothing to argue about as far as their existence went. They were out there. It was only after the “*treintista*” split that the argument about specific organisation took on any significance and then only because the “*treintistas*” seized on anti-FAI-ism as a pretext to justify their own reformist stance.

Q. Under the Republic, the Los Solidarios group resurfaced as the Nosotros group...

A. Not right away. The veterans of the Los Solidarios group kept in touch with one another and would have the occasional get-together, but as individuals. In late 1933, the Barcelona local FAI committee asked Ascaso, Durruti and Aurelio

Fernández to set up a FAI group. Gregorio Jover,²⁹ Antonio Ortiz³⁰ and I were in jail following the revolutionary uprising of January 1933. Ascaso called to tell us of the decision to set up the new group and about its name – Nosotros. We went along with that.

Q. So you were all FAI members?

A. Absolutely not. It would be a mistake to think that. It would even be more accurate to state that none of us was in the FAI ...

Q. But that defies understanding. Why would the FAI have asked you to set up a group if you were not members?

A. That was down to personal connections, to individual contacts we had had with one another. But we were not in the FAI. In late 1933, anyway, we set up the Nosotros group, perfectly aware of what the FAI was. Besides, I personally was not a FAI supporter. I looked upon it as an organisation with leadership ambitions but which actually led nothing. The FAI had welcomed in groups that had none of the spirit of “Bandera negra” or “Bandera roja”: they had something of a clannish mentality instead. I have in mind the Urales family or the group that included Diego Abad de Santillán³¹ and Fidel Miró.³² Both of these, through the FAI, tried to exercise control over the CNT ... Besides, after my release from prison, the FAI put me on trial.

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- 29 **Gregorio Jover (1891-1964)** Member of Los Solidarios-Nosotros and close associate of Durruti; he went on to become a divisional commander and army corps commander during the civil war.
- 30 **Antonio Ortiz (1907-1996)** Member of Los Solidarios and Nosotros groups, this woodworkers’ union leader later commanded a militia column in Aragon. Closely associated with Joaquín Ascaso, he later fell into disrepute with the CNT. During WW2 he served with the Free French. In 1948 he was implicated in the airborne attempt to assassinate Franco.
- 31 **Diego Abad de Santillán (1897-1983)** Alias of Sinesio Baudilio García. Though Spanish-born he became a leading light of the FORA in Argentina before returning to Spain to project his influence over the FAI. A supporter of CNT collaboration during the Civil War before becoming disillusioned with its impact on anarchist influence.
- 32 **Fidel Miró (1910-1998)** In the late 1920s he was in exile in Cuba where he set up an anarchist group, forced underground by Machado’s dictatorship. Prominent in the Libertarian Youth (FIJL) during the civil war. Protégé of Diego Abad de Santillán.

Q. How come?

A. In prison, as it happened, I would often give talks. One day, during a debate, some comrades deplored the fact that some bourgeois newspapers had defamed the Asturian revolutionaries and accused them of having raped a young girl. In the course of the debate, I expressed by viewpoint vis a vis how I saw the social revolution. As far as I was concerned, it was primarily an explosion, a breakthrough, kicking over the traces: legal, political, military, familial, etc. I went on to say that, left to its own devices, the revolution would fly like an arrow into the infinite and that infinity might lead to madness. So the conscientious revolutionary's task was to channel it, devise fresh brakes and come up with some new notion of family, economics and justice. When the time came, the conscientious revolutionary had to become – not counter-revolutionary – but reactionary, in the sense of being capable of reacting to the break-down of restraints in order to organise libertarian communism. That was it. The local FAI federation was quickly briefed on the ideas that I had set out and accused me of marxist deviationism. When I was freed from prison, I discovered that the FAI was due to consider my case, in my absence. I had never been to a FAI meeting before but naturally I was not about to let this chance go by default. So I turned up at the editorial offices of *Tierra y Libertad* to insist on my right to take part in that meeting. In the end, they acceded. The participants in the meeting quickly concluded that I was blameless, but I came away from this mock trial with the impression that those present no more understood marxism than they did anarchism. At the height of the civil war in Spain, after we left the government, Santillán, who had been one of my accusers back then, wrote a book – *Why We Are Going to Lose This War* – the title of which was later altered to *Why We Lost The War*. The two versions of the book are very different from each other. As for me, I contend that in the first version, I was *a posteriori* vindicated in my conception of the revolution and of the role of conscientious revolutionaries. Oddly enough, that assessment vanished from the second version of the book.

Q. How did you experience October '34?

A. I was in Madrid at the time, having been appointed by the organisation to serve on the editorial staff of the newspaper, *CNT*. I was part of a team made up of

Liberto Callejas,³³ Horacio M. Prieto,³⁴ Lucía Sánchez Saornil³⁵ and José Ballester (a good comrade later murdered by fascists). I had two jobs at *CNT*: on the one hand, campaigning to extend the very narrow amnesty awarded by Lerroux to cover our jailed comrades; and finding some way around the authorities' regular impounding of the paper ...

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- 33 **Liberto Callejas (1884-1969)** Influential in the formation of Los Solidarios group. CNT journalist, resigned the editorship of *Solidaridad Obrera* in protest at “four ministers styling themselves anarchists”.
- 34 **Horacio M. Prieto (1902-1985)** Anarchist ‘purist’ who served as CNT general secretary in 1936, negotiating CNT entry into the central government. Held a number of junior positions in government himself.
- 35 **Lucía Sánchez Saornil (1895-1970)** A poet of some repute, she was one of the founders of the *Mujeres Libres* organisation. Frequent contributor to the anarchist press in Spain in the 1930s.

Q. And did you come up with anything?

A. I lobbied for adjectives to be cut down and for sticking to the facts. We were makeshift journalists and the articles we drafted at the time were awash with often offensive adjectives. The authorities seized on this as a pretext for impounding our paper on a sometimes daily basis, thereby strangling us financially.

Q. So you were in Madrid when the events of October '34 erupted in Asturias?

A. Yes ... At the time there were two outlook on the revolution: there was the Catalans' view, held by anarcho-syndicalists, and the Asturian view, closer to the communists. The famous "UHP" (Unite, Brother Proletarians) slogan of Asturias was not the splendid unity and brotherhood it has so often been depicted as. As I see it, the "CNT personnel" of Asturias – who were all for a workers' alliance with the UGT – were 'played' in October 1934 by the socialists and communists. The revolutionary uprising was called by the latter off their own bat. In fact, they confronted the CNT with a fait accompli and, in the same way, they called the uprising off without further consultation. José María Martínez³⁶ lost his life in this great adventure and that was a grave loss to the CNT for he was militant of outstanding calibre. He had resolutely committed himself to the strategy of workers' alliance with the UGT. His death – like Durruti's death, but we shall come back to that – belongs, as I see it, to the category of the "heroes' hundred deaths". Our history is strewn with deaths, the precise circumstances of which are unknown to us. The mystery contributed to their legend as forged by the people.

Q. So the unified revolutionary gusto in Asturias in October 1934 was only a myth?

A. We should never tail-end the socialists and communists. We can enter into specific or circumstantial alliances with them, but that's it ... The October 1934 uprising was not a revolutionary uprising: it was part and parcel of the anti-government strategy of the socialists who had just been beaten in the elections. It was none of our concern ... At the time I came up with a sort of a theory, which I

36 José María Martínez (1884-1934) Leading activist with the Asturias CNT and supporter of the Workers' Alliance policy. When the CNT nationally rejected this proposition, the Asturian CNT joined in with the October '34 uprising in the course of which he was killed.

referred to as “the pendulum” .The important thing – and our tactical choices were dependent on this – was to ensure that the bourgeois Republic was not consolidated and for it to be continually in crisis. This tactical option was also being exercised at the opposite end of the chess board. There had been General Sanjurjo’s attempted coup in Seville in 1932. On one side there were we who did not want a bourgeois republic and were fighting for social revolution and libertarian communism; on the other were the reactionaries, fighting to regain their privileges. This was the pendulum, swinging to the left and then to the right ... October ‘34 had to do with a different rationale: the socialists, who were republicans, had been in power but had lost out at the ballot-box. From a revolutionary vantage point, it was nonsense helping them in their efforts to regain power, just as it was nonsensical to believe that they had all of a sudden turned into “FAi-ists”! Back in December ‘33, the issue had been posed. After their defeat in the November elections, to which we made a considerable contribution, the socialists had come around to the idea of a general strike in Zaragoza against the right’s taking over the reins. By position was very clear cut at the time: we should act only on behalf of our own interests and in keeping with our own tactics. It was up to us and to us only to lead the revolution. We should not tail-end anybody.

Q. You played a crucial role in the important CNT congress held in Zaragoza in May 1936. What was the atmosphere at that congress? What issues were thrashed out? In your view, did the congress come up with hard and fast answers to the problems of the day?

A. It was not the main aim of the Zaragoza congress to think through the revolution, even if Horacio M. Prieto, the then secretary of the national committee, had had the brainwave of seeing to it that the CNT’s trade union structures would come up with constructive elaborations upon what they understood by “libertarian communism” and for them to argue these out. I welcomed that initiative, so much so that – with Alfonso Miguel, I think it was, and Ricardo Sanz and Juan Montserrat³⁷ – I served on a panel drafting my union’s “*Concept of Libertarian Communism*” and acting as rapporteur to the congress. However, I knew from experience that CNT congresses always worked the same

³⁷ **Juan Montserrat** chairman of the Barcelona CNT Manufacturing Union, representing it at the Zaragoza congress in 1936 along with García Oliver and Francisco Ascaso.

way. Due to some sort of immutable law of physics, we inevitably found ourselves faced with three schools of thought: one on the left, one in the centre and one on the right. Whenever, as happened in Zaragoza, the congress found itself grappling with a wide spectrum of opinions (in this instance on definitions of “libertarian communism”), we needed to come up with some common, unifying position acceptable to all. Which is what happened. The Zaragoza congress tackled a fundamental issue, but did not resolve it. Another important aspect of this congress was that it made possible a resolution of the problem of the split between the Opposition Unions and the CNT.

Indeed. To be honest, Horacio M. Prieto had prepared the ground well. Prior to the congress, we had met up in Barcelona and he had asked me to establish contacts with Juan Peiró and Manuel Mascarell,³⁸ influential figures in the Opposition Unions, that is, the “*treintistas*”. Which I did. I had an assurance from them that if we were to invite them to the congress and propose unity to them, they would agree to return to the CNT fold. I was even the one charged with tabling the unity motion at the Zaragoza congress. It was carried and right there and then the problem was resolved, which was a very good thing, for the split in the ranks had weakened us considerably in the run-up to what we knew were significant developments.

Q. How did these negotiations with Peiró come about?

A. I think I had the edge on Peiró at the time. The main charge levelled at us by the “*treintistas*” was that we were hot-headed revolutionaries, when they claimed to be so level-headed. This however had not stopped them from walking into the trap set for them by Companys³⁹ and the Catalanists in October 1934. Whereas we “hot-heads” had not ... We had resisted the temptation. The “level-headed” Peiró had fallen into line behind Companys in order to make the sort of revolution that Companys wanted to see. Both had been defeated. Quite obviously, that changed things because, after that, it was harder for the “*treintistas*” to pose as level-headed revolutionaries. Besides, Peiro realised his mistake, which I, naturally, made sure to remind him of on that occasion.

38 **Manuel Mascarell (1900-1953)** CNT activist, associate of Peiró and prominent *treintista* before rejoining the CNT in 1936. In 1938 he took over from Pierre Besnard as secretary of the IWA.

39 **Lluís Companys (1882-1940)** One-time labour lawyer to the CNT and leader of the Catalan Esquerra Republicana party, he headed the home-rule Generalitat government in Catalonia in 1936.

Q. The Zaragoza congress also debated the need on the part of the CNT to establish a defensive military apparatus, a matter on which you had very trenchant views.

A. I was all for the formation of an armed organisation and without delay. The point was to get the other regions to equip themselves with the same confederal defence cadres as we had in Barcelona. Nothing more. Unfortunately, people were not always hearing this right. Thus, I was on the rostrum arguing this line and explaining how we needed to prepare ourselves militarily for a confrontation that would not be long in coming. Cipriano Mera,⁴⁰ an outstanding comrade from the construction union in Madrid in fact, shouted out from the body of the hall: "Maybe García Oliver would like to tell us what colour of uniform he would like!" The funny thing is that this same Mera was later one of the very first people to agree to militarisation of the militias and thus to the obligation to wear military uniform.

Q. If you had to sum up the Zaragoza congress, how would you do so in a few words?

A. I had previously attended two other national CNT congresses: the national conference in Zaragoza in 1922 – which was a stand-in for a congress which it proved impossible to organise – and the 1931 Madrid congress shortly after the advent of the Republic. From the point of view of its intentions, the May 1936 congress was unquestionably the most important.

Q. Which brings us to the military uprising in July 1936. How did you experience those events?

A. This might appear presumptuous, but I found them much as I had been expecting them. The members of the Confederal Defence Committee of the CNT in Catalonia opposed the army revolt exactly as they had anticipated doing. We had advance knowledge of how the rebels operated. They were none too imaginative anyway in terms of coup techniques. On the other hand, we were an unknown quantity to them. They thought it would be a walk-over for the army, without any real opposition on our part, as usual. Their ignorance was our secret

40 Cipriano Mera (1897-1977) Madrid bricklayer and leading CNT activist who rose to command a Corps of the Republican Army and frustrated a communist coup attempt just before the civil war ended.

weapon. The novelty was that there was a well-organised force – the defence cadres – spoiling for a fight.

Q. Specifically, how did that happen?

A. A number of barracks had recently been opened by the authorities. These were in a sort of a fan formation overlooking the outlying working class districts in the city. One of the problems we faced was this: should we allow the soldiers to leave their barracks or not? The other problem was the issue of a general strike. Should one be called or not? To my mind, we should not, because its effectiveness was in any case questionable and then again, it would have put the rebels on the alert. As I saw it the ideal option was for the workers to take to the streets without any call issued for a general strike. In the end we issued two guidelines: one, let the troops leave the barracks, lest these be turned into strongholds and, besides, once they were out, the sirens were to sound from some textile mills and ships at anchor in the port by way of a psychological weapon. It was a gamble. Our reckoning was that, with there being no indication on our part to make them doubt their success, the military would have no reason to over-arm themselves. The gamble paid off. Attacked from the rear, the military were caught on the hop and quickly undermined. Running short of ammunition, they gradually surrendered. The only thing we had not anticipated was the attitude of General Goded, the leader of the rebels in Barcelona. Seeing that the situation was hopeless, Goded asked to speak to Companys, the president of the Generalitat, so as to surrender to the authorities and sign up to a cease-fire. The problem was that the sole legitimate authority at the time was the CNT's confederal defence committee and not the Generalitat. We decided to press on with the fight until the rebels were routed once and for all. That decision was made from the back of a lorry in the Plaza del Teatro, by the committee. That's how it happened. All in all, no great surprises.

Q. Your account accords no place to the so-called spontaneity of the masses ...

A. They followed us. The “revolutionary gymnasium” took it for granted that the defence cadres would be the first into the fight and the first to take risks. This separated us from the pseudo-revolutionaries who favoured the “we’ll arm ourselves and you kick off” approach. At the sight of the CNT leaders making their way from Pueblo Nuevo towards the city centre, the working class realised that, this time, the revolution's time really had come. In Zaragoza, on the other hand, they adopted the “old-fashioned” approach: the strike committee called for

revolution and cowered in a basement. As was only to be expected, no one followed it.

Q. 20 July witnessed that famous meeting with Companys. How did that go?

A. Once the fighting was over, Companys made an approach to the CNT regional committee which appointed a delegation. How did the meeting go? We listened to Companys's proposals and then withdrew to discuss them.

Q. What was your own point of view of the situation on the ground?

A. More than ever I was all for making a full-blooded revolution. No half-measures. It was plain to me that Companys was trying to make us his guard dogs. The Militias Committee to him was just a police agency. We had fought for revolution and there we were and we should have pressed on.

Q. At a plenum of local federations of the Libertarian Movement in Catalonia, held, I think, in late August, you – according to the account given by [historian] César M. Lorenzo – cited this alternative: “Either we collaborate or we impose dictatorship.”

A. I see you are skipping a very important chapter in this story. Not that I am surprised, in any case, for it is regularly omitted. By Peirats⁴¹, by César M. Lorenzo and by others. Prior to the meeting of which you are speaking, there was a regional plenum of local federations (CNT, FAI and FIJL) on 23 July and it was decisive. At it we looked at the situation in Catalonia in the wake of our victory. I tabled a motion that we introduce libertarian communism and, to that end, take complete power (...) This the plenum rejected. Everybody needs to know that much. With the exception of just one delegate, the libertarian movement (CNT-FAI-FIJL) declined on 23 July to take charge and introduce libertarian communism. Having taken that decision, all it did was surrender ground.

Q. How would explain their choice and the fact that you found yourself completely out on a limb?

A. The CNT fell victim to some sort of self-inflicted paralysis ... It had hitherto been a movement on the up and had passed every test, even the most tragic ones.

41 **José Peirats (1908-1989)** Official historian of the CNT. During the civil war he was aligned with the ultra-radical faction of the Libertarian Youth.

Now, when it was at its zenith – and with the revolution within its grasp – it applied the brakes and was thrown from the locomotive of history, just the way a fraction of a second's pause in the rotation of the earth would have done. Today we are still paying the price for the application of the brakes implied by that 23 July plenum. By refusing to press on, on the grounds that libertarian communism's time had not yet come, it put paid to our organisation's upward trend. Bringing it to a standstill.

Q. But, more specifically, how did that come to pass? Who stepped on the brakes?

A. The chief architect of this braking movement was Santillan, on the pretext that the British fleet was threatening Barcelona. I remember replying to him: "We have no right to leave it there when 400 comrades have died in Barcelona to breathe life into the revolution." I fought to defend the only consistent position. I did so in memory of our past struggles, for the honour of the militants I had been rubbing shoulders with since the age of 17, comrades who rejected compromise, and mindful of the fighters we had just lost. But I was defeated and I deferred to the plenum's determination. From that point on, the CNT's history is a history of decline. The plenum that came after the 23 July plenum merely signalled further stages in that decline. I offer plenty of examples of this in my memoirs, things Peirats never refers to. Thus, in the wake of widespread griping about inactivity on the Aragon front, they very nearly asked Durruti to stand down and hand over to Jover. My intervention made it possible for Durruti to hold on. From then on I stopped being an uncompromising revolutionary and had become a reconciler.

Q. You mean that, after the 23 July plenum, you reckoned that there was no alternative?

A. At one point, I reckoned that, through the Militias Committee, I was going to be able to create a revolutionary rallying-point which, if need be, might serve as a springboard to a leap forward. My thinking was that by concentrating as much power as possible in the Militias Committee we needed to bide our time until the organisation woke up to the fact that it had taken a wrong turn. That day never came. We were drawn into the logic of compromise. In spite of which I always did what I could to get the organisation to return to the debate of 23 July and espouse a revolutionary line.

Q. Seizing power?

A. That was the only alternative: either we collaborated in a government without being able to control it or we assumed full powers. There is quite a wide gap there. If we had to govern, it was better that the CNT should do it alone. It could have seized power, appointing a government and establishing collaboration with other forces on the left. That is how the Militias Committee worked. We led it. A far cry from what happened later, when we had joined the government in a position of inferiority.

Q. When you speak of taking power, do you think the CNT had the actual wherewithal for that? Its foothold varied greatly from one region to another. In Catalonia, it might have been possible to take the maximalist line, but elsewhere it was not.

A. I've always been a believer in the role of activist minorities. They are the ground-breakers. If you accept that rationale, there was therefore only one option for the Catalan CNT: to become reformist. Starting from the supposition that other regions did not have the same capabilities as Catalonia, the CNT in Catalonia ought therefore not to have attempted anything and should have bided its time. For how many years? I am not saying that this rationale is without foundation, but, taken to the limits, it legitimises reformism. I was all for pressing on, or at any rate, trying to.

Q. But from the point of view of doctrine, such a seizure of power was not a given either, was it?

A. It was down to the CNT to demonstrate that it had the capacity to take power without introducing dictatorship. Its strength lay in its collective capabilities. Why would we necessarily have failed by exercising power? That sort of thinking shows a lack of confidence in our ideas. Anarchists believe in the human being. That is the essential difference between us and the marxists. In Spain, syndicalism had been peddling the anarchist idea for decades. The time had come for us to discover what we were capable of. Today, we may analyse our mistakes and overhaul our principles, but we would no longer be in any position to ask ourselves whether or not we ought to step over that threshold, that is, go for revolution.

Q. Given that yours was a minority position, how come you did not openly oppose the majority?

A. Of course I opposed the majority! On the same evening of that plenum, I gathered together the members of the Nosotros group – plus Marcos Alcón,⁴² Manuel Rivas,⁴³ Joaquín Ascaso⁴⁴ and two or three other comrades. I explained to them that, given the motley nature of the CNT, I was not unduly startled by its stance, and I went to say that, as at other times in its history, only daring action by groups with no leader-ist pretensions could alter the course of events. As a result, I put the following suggestion to them: before the columns set off for the Aragon front, we needed to take power in Barcelona and throughout Catalonia. Durruti was against this, although he conceded that my argument was valid. He came out in favour of waiting for Zaragoza to be recaptured before acting. To which I replied: “And who is to say, given the conditions under which the fight is to be waged, that you are going to take Zaragoza?”

Q. In a speech broadcast over the radio, you were especially hard on the militants of the Zaragoza CNT. I quote: “You should kill yourselves. Don’t forget that if the Barcelona proletariat reacted like one man, that was because the most influential militants were in the front ranks of the fighting.” Wasn’t that tantamount to writing the Zaragoza people off as cowards?

A. I mentioned the Zaragoza business before but I can go back over it. We were connected by a congress resolution that stipulated that each region had to raise defence cadres trained in “revolutionary gymnastics”. That resolution was not carried out. In Zaragoza, there were no “revolutionary gymnasium” defence cadres. Which accounts for the fall of Zaragoza and the same holds true in part for Asturias and above all for Andalusia. I had a theory, the so-called “three circles” theory: rapid victory depended on our ability to trace three circles, one centred on

42 **Marcos Alcón (1902-1997)** Defence cadres activist in the 1920s, served on the CNT national committee from 1931 to 1933. Later replaced Durruti on the Central Antifascist Militias Committee. Influential figure in anarchist circles.

43 **Manuel Rivas** CNT general secretary in 1933. Also served as national secretary of the FAI and Defence Committee.

44 **Joaquín Ascaso (1906-1977)** Member of Los Solidarios-Nosotros, he led the hard-line faction of the Aragonese CNT in opposing the moderate policies of Miguel Abós prior to the civil war. Close associate of Antonio Ortiz. President of the Council of Aragon, 1936-1937.

Barcelona, one centred on Galicia and the third on Seville. If one of these went missing, the war would be protracted. Shortly before the rising I made a tour of Andalusia and came back from it very uneasy. I recall a conversation with Juan Arcas⁴⁵ from the Seville defence committee. As he saw it, a general strike would do the trick. At no point was anything said about tactics or strategy vis a vis the coming confrontation. The upshot was a reflection of these militants' failure to respond. Let me say it again: if we won in Barcelona, the reason was that we had raised a military force equal to the challenge. We only had to say: tomorrow at such and such a time, in such and such a place. And it was there. These defence cadres were made up of trained youngsters ready for battle, armed and confident. In Barcelona this worked. Besides, there wasn't the same spirit. The absence of defence cadres in other regions, especially in the rural areas, remains, as far as I am concerned, the main reason for the revolution's failure.

Q. How were the columns of militians organised?

A. In a completely improvised way. You have to understand that we had to conjure out of nothing an army to act as a bulwark for Catalonia against possible fascist incursions. Our columns played that bulwark role, but we quickly found ourselves dealing with a civil war, with CNT or UGT militians fighting against other "CNT-ists" and "UGT-ists" drafted by force into the rebel army. Unprecedented.

Q. Looking beyond the legend, don't you think that the militias were lacking in initiative in the fight against the rebel army?

A. There are two simple explanations for this. The first has to do with the personnel: those who spontaneously signed up for the militia columns were young workers, up for it but lacking in military training. On the ground, enthusiasm is not enough. When they were confronted by the enemy, they stopped and did not budge. Plainly they lacked the military training to stand up to a disciplined army and they were not alone in that: the same was true of the commanders. Among them there was no expert in military matters, only proletarians like Durruti, Ortiz, Vivancos, Jover, Sanz, Mera ... The other point has to do with armaments of course: all the military manuals state that combatants ought to be issued with a basic 200 rounds; our people got 25. How

⁴⁵ **Juan Arcas (?-1936)** Perished on the Ciero Murciano front during the civil war in 1936.

could they advance in those conditions? How could they advance with no air support to call in? It was impossible, impossible to do better than we did: hold the Aragon front as long as we did. If we compare, say, what happened on the Madrid front, the libertarian columns have no reason to feel embarrassed about what they achieved. In Madrid, the front was pushed forwards little by little by the fascists and this despite the 5th Regiment,⁴⁶ despite communist propaganda, despite the International Brigades. The best weaponry was ear-marked for the Madrid front; one need only look at film footage from the time to appreciate this. Well, in spite of all that, the fascists marched on, regardless ... On the Aragon front we held the line along the entire front. The fascists never took an inch of ground. That front collapsed when command was passed to the communists Lister,⁴⁷ Modesto,⁴⁸ Vega⁴⁹ and *El Campesino*⁵⁰ by the Negrin⁵¹ government. That is an indisputable fact, which proves that the military efficiency of the communists was sheer mythology.

Q. Interesting to note that virtually every member of the Los Solidarios and Nosotros group members held military posts (Durruti, Jover, Ortiz, Vivancos, Sanz) or law and order posts (Alfonso Miguel, Aurelio Fernández) or political office (like yourself) during the civil war.

46 Fifth Regiment Regiment raised by the Communist Party in Madrid in 1936 and hailed as a model for its discipline and military prowess.

47 Enrique Lister (1907-1994) Communist militant who trained at the Frunze Academy in Moscow after the October 1934 rising in Asturias and assumed command of the 11th Division during the civil war, deploying his troops in Aragon in the summer of 1937 to dismantle the collectives and the Council of Aragon.

48 Juan Modesto (1906-1969) Communist commander famously associated with the Fifth Regiment.

49 Etelvino Vega (1906-1939) Communist expelled from the party in 1932 but who later returned, becoming an army corps commander in the civil war. Shot by the Francoists in 1939.

50 'El Campesino' (1909-1985) Nickname of Valentín R. González, a communist activist and 'star' military commander during the civil war. Flamboyant and megalomaniac, his clashes – political, military and temperamental – with Lister, led him to resign his command.

51 Juan Negrín (1889-1956) Physician, Socialist Party leader and premier of Spain in close alliance with the Communist Party.

A. ... But no bureaucratic posts. Not one of us turned into a CNT bureaucrat. That's worth stressing and no doubt it was why they were beaten by the bureaucracy.

Q. With regard to Durruti's departure for Madrid, there are two contradictory lines of argument: one argues that he was forced into it, the other that he was happy with the decision. What is your view?

A. When the decision was made to send Durruti and part of his column to Madrid, I happened to bump into him. He had come down to Valencia and I travelled with him as far as Madrid. He told me that the decision had been made by Montseny,⁵² Santillán and Marianet.⁵³ They had persuaded him that he alone could save Madrid. Unadulterated flattery! Durruti resisted but eventually he gave in. Instead of going to Madrid under the conditions he did, I talked him into getting the War Ministry to entrust him with command of an army corps. It was on that basis that he returned to Barcelona to pick trusted comrades from his column to join the army corps he was due to command. But Montseny, Santillán and Marianet re-entered the fray, turning up the pressure: if Durruti did not go to Madrid, they said, he would be in disgrace. Which is how they suckered him into the whole filthy business. I was asleep in my hotel room one night in Valencia when they woke me to brief me on a change of plan. Montseny and Durruti were waiting downstairs for me in a car. I listened to what they had to say to me then I turned to Federica to say: "What is it that you want, to get him killed?" And in fact they were sending him to his death. The conditions in which Durruti left for Madrid defied belief. What good could 200 or 300 men do on a front already manned by about 200,000? What could Durruti do in a city he knew absolutely nothing about and where his men would be under the control of the High Command, where he was required to defer to their strategic choices? Mine was a very different proposition: an army corps three divisions strong with an autonomous command. I say it again: given the conditions in which Durruti left for Madrid, his death was a certainty.

Q. What is your version of his death?

52 Federica Montseny (1905-1993) Daughter of Federico Urales (her influence deriving largely from the family's publications and her own powers of oratory) who came to represent the FAI outlook in the FAI-ist v. treintistas controversy. In November 1936 she became the first female government minister (Health and Social Assistance) in Spain.

53 Mariano Vázquez Rodríguez aka Marianet (1909-1939) Construction union militant who became general secretary of the CNT, referring to himself as the "minister of ministers". Drowned while swimming in the Seine in 1939.

A. Since I wasn't there, I have none, although I do have my own opinion. I see his death as one of a hundred possible deaths that can strike down a hero. Which is how I describe him in my memoirs. It is not uncommon for the precise circumstances of a heroic death to be unknown.

Q. We come now to a rather controversial matter. César M. Lorenzo [historian] has written of CNT participation in the central government: “Largo Caballero having offered the portfolios of Justice, Industry, Trade and Public Health to the Confederation, it only remained for Horacio M. Prieto [the CNT national secretary] to nominate his appointees. When the choice of the latter was debated at a plenary meeting of the CNT national committee, he put forward the names of García Oliver, Federica Montseny, Juan Peiro and Juan López.”⁵⁴ And, on the basis of information received from Horacio M. Prieto, Lorenzo goes on to say: “Juan García Oliver spluttered with indignation: he reminded them that he already held the post of general secretary for defence on the Generalitat Council, a very important post that he could not possibly resign, and he announced that as a FAI man and revolutionary activist, he would never take a seat in government. Nevertheless, after a protracted discussion, he finally gave in, albeit reluctantly.” What do you have to say about that version of events?

A. On this score (and this is not the only one) César M. Lorenzo has been misled by Horacio M. Prieto, who was actually his father. His account is sheer fiction. Here are the facts: as secretary of the CNT national committee, Horacio M. Prieto called to see me at the general secretary of Defence offices in Catalonia to ask me if I would agree to become a minister. I refused, spelling out the many arguments that precluded my accepting. The interview went on for four hours. When he took his leave, my answer had not changed. It was “No”. So Horacio turned to the regional committee to get them to decide. The latter held an off-the-cuff plenum, which was easily done because all of the delegates from the local federations were to hand. I hadn't been invited to that plenum, nor had I been warned that it was in the offing. At the plenum, Horacio M. Prieto briefed the delegates on the answers he had had from comrades appointed to serve in the government: Juan Peiró and Juan López had agreed to the appointments; Federica Montseny had a few provisos to do, not with ideology but with convenience. In fact she insisted on two conditions: the first being that the plenum require me to

54 Juan López (1900-1972) Moderate CNT member with a background in treintismo who became minister of Commerce in the Largo Caballero government in 1936.

accept nomination and the second that the Urales family give her the go-ahead to become a minister. The plenum acceded to her and, in order to underline its wishes, it proceeded to appoint a replacement for me as general secretary for Defence, Juanel. Then Marianet informed me by telephone that, by a decision of the plenum, I should report to Madrid that evening to take up my post. I answered as follows: "I defer to the plenum's determination, but I want it in writing that I am deferring without accepting it and defer under the most vigorous protest. Let that be in the record!" No protest was recorded, for the minutes of the plenum vanished, just as the minutes of the 23 July 1936 plenum vanished and those of a later plenum dealing with the Aragon front also disappeared.

Q. And how would you account for the mysterious vanishing of those documents?

A. There is no mystery to it. It was in certain people's interests to dispose of those three important documents, especially the first, from which the rest all derived. I regret to say that in writing his history of the CNT, José Peirats should have noticed that those who had commissioned his book had also denied him those three documents, in the absence of which it amounts only to a falsification of history, unless he were to try to reconstruct the evidence by pressing witnesses to give him the truth. It was primarily for that reason that I made up my mind to write my memoirs. To combat these misrepresentations.

Q. But, aside from the circumstances in which it was made, was that decision to participate in government weighed up strategically? For instance, were you ministers-to-be given specific missions? Had you a line to defend? Were you prepared for a political fight?

A. Absolutely not. The national committee had not worked out any analysis of the situation. When the CNT decided to participate in the government, it was on the downward slide and was no longer in the ascendant. It did not own up to this, of course, but it knew it. At any rate I knew it and I am telling you ... From the decision made on 23 July 1936 onwards, the CNT was running out of steam.

Q. Anyway, you were appointed as Minister of Justice. On 28 December 1936, you signed off on an order establishing labour camps for fascists and on 13 May 1937 a decree broadening the functions of the popular

courts. My question may well strike you as very naive but I am itching to ask it: how could an anarchist suddenly placed in charge of keeping the state's court machinery operating square that with his conscience?

A. It's a good question, but it ignores one essential point. In the case in point, the anarchist has no trouble with his conscience, for the simple reason that he has stopped being an anarchist. Of course, later on, some people – I am thinking of Federica Montseny – expressed regrets and expressed her contrition by claiming to be even more of an anarchist than ever. Which has something farcical about it. One cannot step back as easily as all that. That would be too easy. That sort of decision is a commitment for life or are we to believe that it was the result of a personal whim rather than the culmination of an historical process starting from our refusal to push the revolution on through? The rest being a logical consequence of that. Moreover, both of us were voluntarily ministers, under no pressure other than from the organisation to which we belonged. Finally, as far as I am concerned, I have always professed anarcho-syndicalism, rather than 100% anarchism. My trajectory is completely different from that of Federica Montseny who never was a syndicalist because she never had to toil as a worker. She came from the petite bourgeoisie and brought the mentality with her and it had nothing to do with the mentality of Barcelona's workers.

Q. Besides being minister of Justice, you served on the Higher Council of War. What was the role of that body?

A. The Higher Council of War was set up at the instigation of the CNT. Previously, war affairs had been entrusted to the socialists alone. Largo Caballero handled landborne affairs and Indalecio Prieto⁵⁵ air force and naval affairs. Due to the incompetence of the secretary of our national committee, Horacio M. Prieto, in government we inherited matters of little account. We were completely excluded from the political and military direction of the war. So the idea was to look for some way of countering the socialists' power there. To my mind, this Higher Council of War should have become a sort of Militias Committee at a national level, something that we did not manage to achieve, even though its existence allowed us to get back in the saddle. For instance, it was through the Higher Council of War that I put it to Largo Caballero that General Miaja,⁵⁶ the Madrid chief of staff whose authority was under challenge should be replaced by

55 Indalecio Prieto (1883-1962) Moderate Socialist Party leader and rival of Largo Caballero. He resisted the flirtation with the Communist Party.

Durruti, whose fate as I have mentioned greatly concerned me. Oddly enough, that suggestion was accepted by Largo Caballero, the minister of War and prime minister, but, given the time that these things take to come into effect, Durruti perished on the Madrid front.

Q. What do you think about the militarisation of the militias? Did you think it was necessary?

A. Definitely, but not the way it was done. It would have needed positions of command to be assigned to officers who had received a political and military training that turned them into revolutionary officers. Which is why I set up the War Schools, for the sole purpose of equipping the army with revolutionary officers drawn from the working class rather than graduates from the bourgeoisie's military academies.

Q. And how did these war schools operate?

A. Along the most democratic of lines. Students were salaried, paid the same wage as a militiaman or workman. The first war school I set up came under the aegis of the Militias Committee in Catalonia. Recruitment was through political and trade union organisations. Candidates sat an aptitude test and followed an intensive course over three months. Once commissioned as officers, they were assigned to the Popular Army. On foot of that experiment with the school in Barcelona, and at the request of the Higher Council of War, I set up others as well: a school for engineers in Godella, a signals school in Villarreal, an infantry school in Paterna, a gunnery school in Murcia province. They worked well up until we left the government. After that the communists replaced them with other schools. Needless to say from that point on the only officers to emerge from them were communist officers.

Q. We turn now to a key moment of the Spanish civil war: May 1937. How did you experience those events and what is your take on them today?

A. My take today is the same as it was in the past but before bringing up May 1937 we need to look a bit further back. Shortly before May 1937 the investigation committee of the CNT regional committee for Catalonia made

56 **José Miaja (1878-1958)** Professional soldier placed in charge of the defences of Madrid in 1936. Became something of a front for expanding communist influence within the Republican Army.

inquiries in Paris into the conspiratorial activities of the Aiguader brothers⁵⁷ and contacts established with Gil Robles⁵⁸ and his supporters. The aim was to bring the war to a close by playing Don Juan's monarchist card. The investigation bore fruit. Once the evidence regarding the plot had been collated, Marianet, the then secretary of the CNT national committee, asked me to pass it on to Largo Caballero. My idea was to precede this with the promulgation of a law allowing for the prosecution of suspected spies, before briefing Largo Caballero on the affair and urging him to leave it to me. But Largo Caballero was a rather mediocre politician. He made, shall we say, the mistake of making the plot public. I immediately realised that confrontation was becoming inevitable and that every effort would be made to drive us out of the government, Largo Caballero and me. The first incidents had started in the Valencian *huertas*, where the communists were stirring up the smallholders against the collectives. Many libertarians and "Caballero-ist" socialists were arrested, only to be freed after a short while due to our intervention. It was against this backdrop that the events of May 1937 erupted in Barcelona. As I saw it, the root cause was obvious: they were meant to topple a government which had the proof of the Paris conspiracy and which had just passed a law enabling it to prosecute the plotters.

Q. If I follow you correctly, the forces that clashed in Barcelona in May 1937 – basically, libertarians and Stalinists – were therefore targeted for manipulation, the purpose being to bring about the downfall of the Largo Caballero government. Interesting argument, but an unexpected one...

A. Maybe but that is how history is made: those doing the fighting never imagine that there are other forces in the shadows pulling their strings. If we try to understand what happened, we must always familiarise ourselves with the real political processes. As for the role of agents provocateurs, that is hardly news, especially in our ranks. Besides, how could it have been otherwise? An

57 **Aiguader brothers, Jaume (1882-1943) and Artemi (1889-1946)** Co-founders of the Esquerra Republicana party of Catalonia. Jaume was the Generalitat's minister in the central government. Artemi was the Generalitat minister on whose orders Assault Guards tried to take control of the Telephone Exchange in Barcelona in 1937, triggering the May Events.

58 **José Maria Gil Robles (1898-1980)** Leader of the Catholic CEDA party which was 'indifferent' towards the Republic. His party later slipped from his control after the civil war broke out and was subsumed into Franco's "Crusade".

organisation whose very existence was an affront to the system's economic, political, legal and moral rights was of necessity going to attract the enemy's agents provocateurs. And this was the reason why I was for exercising strict control over the CNT defence cadres and for their modus operandi to be tightly monitored. You can't be a revolutionary AND naive.

Q. Just accepting your contention for the moment, what part did the Soviets play in this?

A. The soviets did of course profit from developments in order to play their own hand. And there is no denying that they played it cleverly. Krivitsky⁵⁹ explained it in detail too. Unfortunately, some of our people, well-meaning of course, walked into the trap of their provocation. This was a mistake, especially as I do not think that libertarians were at that point the chief target of the soviet agents. Those events may have had a crucial impact on the course of history. They could have brought the war to a close, that being, let me remind you, the aim of the plotters in Paris. Which is why my basic concern during the events was humanitarian in character. We had to get the fighting ended and end the pointless loss of life. Luckily our appeals were heeded. For my part, I do not think that libertarians were systematically persecuted on foot of these events.

Q. And the murders of Berneri⁶⁰ and Barbieri?⁶¹

A. The details of May 1937 are familiar to all. The case of Camillo Berneri needs separate treatment. There are grounds to believe that his elimination may have been a settling of accounts. Let me be clear: when I say there was no systematic repression targeting libertarians, I am not saying that there were no victims on our side. Domingo Ascaso and lots of others perished but they perished fighting the communists and Catalanists. I wouldn't be surprised if, against this backdrop,

59 **Walter Krivitsky (1899-1941)** Soviet agent who defected and exposed Stalin's machinations in Spain's civil war. Found dead in a Washington DC hotel room in 1941.

60 **Camillo Berneri (1897-1937)** Italian anarchist philosopher and spokesman for the Italian anarchist volunteers serving in the Catalan militias in Aragon. Murdered, probably by communist agents.

61 **Francesco Barbieri (1895-1937)** Italian shoemaker deported from Argentina and Brazil before returning to Europe in the 1930s and believed by fascist intelligence to be involved in bomb attacks on the Côte d'Azur. Abducted and murdered in May 1937 with Camillo Berneri.

there was some score-settling between individuals or groups. As for the Berneri and Barbieri murders, I see similarities there with the murders of the Rosselli brothers.⁶²

Q. You mean they might have been the handiwork of Italian fascists?

A. There were agents of all sorts in Spain, fascist agents, Stalinist agents ... I myself had to step in as minister of Justice to expose an Italian fascist agent who had infiltrated the International Brigades. He was court-martialled and shot. In conflicts of this sort, there are always agents. When crime occurs we need to ask who benefits from that crime. Personally, I do not think that Berneri's killing and Barbieri's killing were directly linked to the events of May 1937. We have to appreciate that Berneri's influence was very weak. Confined to a small band of friends. What interest would the communists have had in liquidating him? We could understand it if they had tried to kill Marianet or Federica or me or some other influential CNT militant, but not Berneri ... Berneri certainly had been a combatant, but he played no part in the running of the war. So why? I have my doubts as to who murdered Berneri and I wish that historians would make a serious investigation of this matter.

Q. And what about Andreu Nin?⁶³ The Stalinists cannot be exonerated of that outrage either ...

A. Nin's case is very different. That was a settling of scores between communists. Let's not forget that Nin was an agent of the Communist International and knew certain secrets. He cannot have been unaware of the risk he was running by defecting to the Left Opposition. Having practised them himself, he knew all about those people's methods. I only ever had dealings with Nin once in my life. Back in 1920 when he was in the CNT, I met him in Reus. His background was in Catalan nationalist circles. Reckoning that they were backward-looking and too

62 **Carlo Rosselli (1899-1937) and Nello Rosselli (1901-1937)** Italian brothers who led the liberal-socialist antifascist *Giustizia e Libertà* movement. Carlo co-led the Italian Section attached to the Ascaso Column in Aragon. Both were murdered in France by right-wing Cagoulard extremists acting for Mussolini's secret police.

63 **Andreu Nin (1892-1937)** Catalan leader of the anti-Stalinist Communist Left party and co-founder of the dissident communist party, POUM. After the launching of the Third International, he and Maurin tried to lead the CNT into affiliating to it. Formerly active in the Profinintern and a deputy in the Moscow Soviet. Kidnapped and murdered by Soviet agents in 1937.

close to the clergy, he switched to the CNT. Later, Nin switched position again. He attended the foundation congress of the Red Trade Union International and became a communist. He was representing the CNT there and failed to honour the mandate issued to him ... Later he popped up again in Barcelona as the leader of a tiny marxist group, Communist Left, which, with Joaquín Maurín's⁶⁴ Worker-Peasant Bloc, was behind the POUM. I never held any grudge against Nin over his repeated changes of position. Everyone is free to think what he likes and I reckon his liquidation by Soviet agents was a filthy act. That said, I insist that that repugnant settling of old scores, like the one that cost Berneri's life, was certainly linked to the events of May 1937, but had nothing to do with the goals pursued by those who were behind it: the aim being to ensure that the various antifascist factions should turn on one another in the rear, bring about a collapse of the front and paving the way for the fascists to enter Barcelona in order to restore order.

Q. There would of course be a lot to say about such a version of events but we need to move this discussion on. I think you will not deny that one of the direct consequences of the events of May 1937 was the downfall of the Largo Caballero government and the rapid tilting, in the Stalinists' favour, of the balance of power within the republican camp. May 1937 thereby becoming a key date in civil war history ...

A. No, no. The key date is 23 July 1936. Everything else is only a logical outworking of that. The CNT's downfall was staggered and passed through a number of stages. May 1937 was only one such stage among many.

Q. What did you get up to after leaving the government?

A. I did everything I could to be forgotten ... When the regional committee of Catalonia asked me to help out or offer it advice, I gladly accepted. Later, it set up the Policy Advisory Commission (CAP) and I served on that.

Q. What role did the Commission play?

A. It offered policy advice to the regional committee of Catalonia. The organisation then took the view – wrongly, in my estimation – that the members

⁶⁴ **Joaquín Maurín (1896-1973)** Former CNT activist who went on to lead the Worker-Peasant Bloc (BOC) one of two parties that amalgamated to form the POUM.

of the regional committee lacked political experience. Again wrongly, it reckoned that militants who had served as councillors or ministers, were better equipped politically than the rest. That is why the CAP was set up. I was asked to serve on it.

Q. During your term as a minister, you must have thought about the tremendous contrast between the days when you were languishing in Spanish prisons and when you were in charge of the Justice department.

A. I had a moral commitment to ordinary prisoners. In 1931, when the Republic was proclaimed, I had been behind a riot in Burgos prison. We had seized the prison and proclaimed a republic inside it. All of the ordinary prisoners in Burgos had taken part in this revolt. Besides, throughout my life, I have been impressed by the character Jean Valjean who, even after he had served his time, is haunted by his criminal record. I see this as the greatest symbol of injustice. When I reached the Justice ministry I had no confidence in those in government ... even though I was one myself ... especially those who would come after me, so I quite simply decided to burn the prisoners' court records. The archives were put to the torch.

Q. During your time at the ministry of Justice what legislative measures would you say were your most telling ones?

A. For a start, the measures making it easier to adopt stray, abandoned children or children left orphaned in the wake of air raids. Of which there were very many. From the point of view of existing legislation, adoption was very difficult. There were lengthy procedures to be followed that might last for years and years. I saw to it that adoption became fast-tracked, widening the definition of consanguinity to include adoptive relations. Next there was the legislation on unmarried couples. Lots of couples had their unions recognised by their trade unions, militia barracks, collective and so on. But this had no legal standing. When the male partner perished in combat, his partner and their children had no entitlements. Which is why I saw to it that such unions could be fast-tracked for recognition as lawful. Finally, there was the creation of work camps. This sprang from the idea that work is preferable to incarceration. Under the new legislation, a thirty year sentence could be commuted to five or seven years. By the same token, I proposed the setting up of penal settlements. The point was to ensure that sentences were no longer served in prisons but in urban surroundings with

workshops or homes where the prisoners could live in a family setting. The running and management of these settlements were to have been handled by the prisoners themselves.

Q. And was this law endorsed by the cabinet?

A. Absolutely, but our departure from government ensured that it was never implemented. However it set the standard, as did the law introducing equal rights for men and women, which we had pushed through and which was published in the *Government Gazette* in Madrid. You have to appreciate what this meant in a country like Spain where Federica Montseny could serve as a minister but had to ask her husband's permission to travel ... So we did what we were able to do, not a lot, but something at any rate. As far as I am concerned, the thing I am proudest of is the total amnesty that I passed. Everybody out! I could do no less.

Q. And if, at the end of this interview (one of very few that you have granted) you had to pick out only a few points from your lengthy career as an anarcho-syndicalist militant, which would you plump for?

A. My formative days, for a start. The formative days of a man who, since childhood, recognised that one had to fight, not because he had read his Bakunin, Kropotkin or Malatesta, but because he carried that urge inside himself. Anyone in Catalonia in those days who was moved by this urge to fight was drawn to the anarchists and to the CNT and became an anarcho-syndicalist combatant. Stage two was more political: the Militias Committee. That was a formidable revolutionary experience. Contrary to what had been the case in Russia, where the soviets were liquidated by a minority party, the Militias Committee, on which the anarcho-syndicalists were the majority, promoted the collectives and respected minorities. That experience lasted for only two months but it was full of promise. The third stage would have been our collaboration in the republican government. There was a little of everything: the good and the bad. But we have said enough about that and there is no point in adding any more.

Interview conducted in Paris on 29 June 1977 by Freddy Gomez, as part of a project for the National Cinema Archive of the Resistance (ANCR – Turin, Italy) on “Spain ‘36 – Video and Memory”)

Transcription and translation [to French] by Fredy Gomez and Monica Gruszka.

From www.plusloin.org website, No 17 of the review *A Contretemps*.

Appendices: García Oliver and Defensa Interior (DI)

Interview with Luis Andrés Edo

Q. Who was the brains behind the DI in the 1960s?

A. Octavio Alberola. Earlier, for a year, it had been Juan García Oliver, but when he saw the shit there was in Toulouse, with Germinal Esgleas suiting himself, he decided this was not for him and he returned to the Americas.

I'll tell you something very odd about García Oliver. His supporters had spent twenty years trying unsuccessfully to lure him back to Europe: and we, the Libertarian Youth, were the ones who got a decision out of him.

It happened like this. At the 2nd Confederal Congress in Limoges in 1961, approval was given to a "Confidential Resolution" which basically provided for the DI to be set up to carry on the fight against Franco within Spain. Against that backdrop, the *Julis* [Libertarian Youth] who at the time had a thousand militants across Europe and who carried some clout, suggested that García Oliver be brought over to play a leading role in the DI. And in the end, come over he did, although, as I have said, he could not stick the atmosphere among the anarchist exiles in France more than a year. Many years later, in May 1977, I would see García Oliver again. Floreal Barberà, whom I described as "García's ambassador plenipotentiary" tipped me off that he wanted to return to France. So the regional committee of the refloated CNT – on which Padilla, Cases, Matías de Badalona and I were serving – sent me up to Paris to speak to García Oliver. I taped my conversations with him – over two intense days – but those tapes have gone missing. The fact is that I tried to talk him into making a public appearance at the famous Montjuich rally to be held on 2 July that year. But it was out of the question.

Q. You mentioned once that García Oliver was convinced that if he set foot in Spain they would kill him on the spot.

A. That's true. In fact I put it to him that everybody had gone back: socialists, communists and our own people, such as Federica Montseny. Even Santiago Carrillo who was blamed for the Paracuellos massacre.

I'll never forget it: I saw him dither for a few seconds that seemed to last forever before he finally said no, because nobody, no one was in his the same position as him: as minister of Justice he had signed the order for the execution of José Antonio Primo de Rivera.

From www.soliobrera.org

From *El anarquismo español y la acción revolucionaria*

In 1962, García Oliver himself explained the DI's decision to launch operations harrying the Franco regime. He made this announcement to a gathering of exiled militants in France, a "top secret briefing meeting" a few days ahead of an abortive attempt of Franco's life in San Sebastian on 19 August 1962:

"The view being that the situation within Spain required it and that the profile of the Spanish question internationally could be given a favourable boost by radicalising the struggle against the Regime [...]

To that end, in phase one, the presence of an active resistance ready to make the transition from talk to action had to make itself felt.

[...] These actions are designed to achieve a variety of aims, all of them helping to invigorate the struggle.

1. To afford a more belligerent expression to popular discontent.
2. To back up workers' struggles through more active solidarity and tackling the repressive impunity of the regime.
3. To aggravate the differences between the "liberal wing" and "die-hard wing" of the regime, the opposition between them relating essentially to repression policy.
4. To expose the two-faced policy of the Church which, notwithstanding the stance of a number of clergy in favour of the strikers, remains one of the mainstays of the regime. Bearing in mind that active pressure brought to bear upon it can prove highly effective in imposing restraints upon the repression, obliging it to intervene in cases of extreme brutality by the dictatorship's thugs, whose outrages can no longer be excused and covered up as once they were. With the launching of this operation, the aim is also to affirm and radicalise the pro-alliance, pro-antifascist front policy endorsed by the Movement [...] The ultimate objective is: to escalate and update the struggle against Franco's fascist dictatorship and to force every political force, in Spain as well as abroad, to make a stand as a result. We stand at the crossroads: supporters of the "peaceful road" seek only to prolong a situation which has favoured the survival of the Francoist dictatorship ever since the end of the Second World War. We should strive to change the terms of the issue in order to render feasible a solution that favours the antifascist cause. There is but one way of achieving this: creating a truly subversive situation."

From Octavio Alberola/Ariane Gransac – *El anarquismo español y la acción revolucionaria (1961-1974)* (Ed. Virus, Barcelona 2004) pp. 74-75