



Bulletin of the
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THE FIGHT FOR HISTORY - A MANIFESTO

The amnesia arranged between the trade unions and political parties of the democratic opposition and the last managers of the Francoist State upon the dictator's death, was yet another facet of the Transition that had important consequences for the historical remembrance of the Francoist Dictatorship and the Civil War. The amnesty represented a clean slate and a clean break with the past. It necessitated a deliberate and 'necessary' forgetting of all history prior to 1978. A new official history needed to be written, since the Francoist and the anti-Francoist versions were no longer of service to the new established order with its eyes fixed upon rising above the strife that had triggered the Spanish Civil War. At present, now that all hint of strife or anything that might suggest that the civil war was also a class war, has been abolished from the collective memory, the task of recuperating it as an episode in bourgeois history is underway. The mandarins of Official History, having played down or ignored the civil war's proletarian and revolutionary character, are bent upon recuperating the past as the story of the formation and historical consolidation of the democratic bourgeoisie, or, in the historical home rule area, as the basis for their nationhood. The working class has had its historic protagonism wrested from it for the benefit of the new democratic and nationalist myths of the bourgeois now exercising economic and political power.

HISTORICAL MEMORY IS A THEATRE OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE

The bourgeois institutions of the State's cultural apparatus will always attempt to control and exploit the historical record for their own benefit, covering up, ignoring or misrepresenting

facts that place a question over or cast doubts upon the class rule which academics and professional historians, with but a few rare and honourable exceptions, accept with alacrity. The publication of Elorza and Bizcarrondo's *Queridos Camaradas*, the chapters by Casanova, Solé i Sabaté and Villarroya in the book *Victimas de la Guerra Civil*, compiled by Santos Juliá (himself the author of an introductory anthology), or the ineffable course of the civil war offered last March-May by the slavish Museo de Historia de Cataluña, are the most recent examples of the Official History mentioned in this manifesto.

OFFICIAL HISTORY IS THE BOURGEOISIE'S CLASS HISTORY

Objectivity as a Platonic ideal actually does not exist in a society split up into social classes. In the specific instance of the history of the civil war, the Official History is characterised by its EXTRAORDINARY incompetence and its no less EXTRAVAGANT stance. That INCOMPETENCE resides in its absolute inability to attain, or indeed to strive for, minimal scientific objectivity. Its STANCE may be gauged by its deliberate IGNORING or NEGATION of the existence of a very powerful revolutionary movement, mostly libertarian, which, like it or not, shaped every aspect of the civil war. These bourgeois functionaries in the field of history lapse into a number of intellectual aberrations (aberrant even from a bourgeois viewpoint): THEY PRAISE and EULOGISE the methodology and repressive efficacy of the S.I.M. [Republican secret police, controlled by the CP] Maybe they are none too aware that they are singing the praises of torture,

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and it may even be the case that, personally, they support Pinochet's being brought to trial. But this is a feature that, like other, betrays the influence of the class perspective and interests in historical endeavour, because such praise for the efficacy of the S.I.M. against revolutionaries, runs parallel to a display a horror at the class violence unleashed by 'uncontrollables' in July 1936 against the bourgeoisie. They may well be specialists in the matter of violence, efficient registrars of violent deaths, yet they display utter partisanship when they describe as anarchist 'terror' or police 'efficacy' what is nothing other than the violence deployed by one class against the other. Except that as far as they are concerned, worker violence amounts to terror, whereas the violence of the S.I.M. is efficiency, class outlook being their only criterion. Violence cuts both ways, in accordance with the giving and receiving of whoever wields or suffers it. They DENY, although they would prefer to IGNORE (that being more convenient, effective and elegant) the decisive strength within the republican zone of a revolutionary and chiefly anarchist movement. They DENY, or so play down as to misrepresent the documented facts, the enormous repressive, reactionary and complicit role of the Catholic Church in the military coup d'état, and its active involvement in the preparation, unleashing and benediction of the subsequent fascist repression. They BEMOAN the fact that Orwell should have written an 'accursed' book that should never have been read, and that Loach should have filmed a 'ghastly' movie that ought never to have been screened.

We wish to raise the ALARM against a swelling tide of revisionist historians of the Spanish Civil War who deny or ignore the eruption in 1936 or a sweeping revolutionary workers' movement which, like it or not, impacted upon every aspect of the war and subsequent developments. ALARM at the determined and blatant misrepresentation of historical facts, regardless of the available documentary evidence. The very facts are driven underground and documentation is ignored or misconstrued. Historiography of the civil war has

turned from militant history written by the protagonists and eye-witnesses of the civil war, with all of the dangers that this implies, but all of the irreplaceable passion of someone who is not given to playing with words because earlier he gambled with his life, into a doltish academic history characterised by nonsense, incomprehension and indeed contempt for the militants and organisations of the workers' movement. ALARM at the increasingly banalisation of Official History and the methodical side-lining of research, no matter how rigorous, that highlights the crucial role of the workers' movement.

In actual fact, there is on the part of the bourgeois historians an utter inability not just to understand but even to accept the historical existence of a mass revolutionary movement in 1936 Spain. We find ourselves faced with a history that denies the revolutionary upheaval that took place during the civil war.

Official History posits the civil war as a dichotomy between fascism and antifascism which smoothes the way for consensus between academic historians from left and right, the Catalanists/nationalists and the post-Stalinists who, together, are agreed upon heaping the blame for the republican defeat upon the radicalism of the anarchists, POUMists and revolutionary masses, who thereby become their common scapegoat.

By ignoring, omitting or playing down the proletarian and revolutionary connotations that characterised the republican period and the civil war, Official History manages to stand the world on its head, so that its chief priests set themselves the task of rewriting it all OVER AGAIN, thereby completing the theft of historical memory as yet another instalment in the general expropriation of the working class. Because, when all is said and done, it is historiography that makes History. If, alongside the demise of the generation that lived the war, the books and handbooks turned out by Official History ignore the existence of a magnificent anarchist revolutionary movement, within ten years they will be emboldened enough to contend that that

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movement NEVER EXISTED. The mandarins firmly believe that anything that THEY do not write about EVER existed: if the history calls the present into question, they deny it.

There is a blatant contradiction between the calling of recuperating historical memory and the profession of servants to Official History which needs to forget and block out the past existence and thus future potential for a frightening revolutionary mass workers' movement. This contradiction between trade and profession is resolved by ignoring that which they know or ought to know; and this makes them fools. For which very reason Official History is characterised by an absolute incapacity for rigour, objectivity and comprehensiveness. It is, of necessity, partisan and incapable of espousing any perspective but the bourgeoisie's class perspective. It is, of necessity, exclusive and excludes the working class from the past, future and present.

Official Sociology is hell bent upon persuading us that there is no working class and no class struggle any more; it falls to Official History to persuade us that they never did. A perpetual, complacent, a-critical present renders the past banal and destroys historical awareness.

The bourgeoisie's historians have to rewrite the past, the way that Big Brother did time and again. They need to disguise the fact that the civil war was a class war. Whoever controls the present, controls the past and whoever controls the past decides the future. Official History is the bourgeoisie's history and its mission today is to wreath nationalism, liberal democracy and the market economy in myth so

as to have us believe that these are eternal, immutable and immovable.

Signatories to this manifesto declare their belligerent status in this FIGHT FOR HISTORY.

Barcelona June 1999

Signatures for this manifesto can be sent to:

Apartado 22.010 - 08080 Barcelona

or to the e-mail address:

balance@infomail.lacaixa.es

Signed:

- Manuel Aisa (president of the Ateneu Enciclopèdic Popular)
Andrew Durgan (historical advisor on the movie *Land and Liberty*)
Ramón Gabarrós (secretary of the Ateneu Enciclopèdic Popular)
Carlos García Velasco (co-author of an anthology of councilist texts)
Agustín Guillamón (*Balance*, labour history monograph series)
Abel Paz (CNT, anarchist historian, author of a life of Durruti)
The review *Anthropos*
Sergi Rosés (co-author of an anthology of councilist texts)
Ignasi Sendra (degree in Contemporary History)

(Since the above list of signatories was issued, other names have been added. The 'Fight for History' Manifesto is due to be publically launched and presented at 7:30 p.m. Thursday 28 October 1999 in the Espai Obert (Open Space) at No 2, Calle Blasco de Garay, Barcelona)

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Lucien Tronchet (1902-1981)

Born in Geneva in 1902 while a building workers' strike in favour of the 60-hour working week was underway (it was Switzerland's first general strike) Lucien Tronchet became an anarcho-syndicalist militant from 1920 onwards and played his part in all of the social disputes in Switzerland.

He experienced a very impoverished childhood in Carrouge, one of the most deprived towns in the Geneva district. After the end of the First World War, having tried his hand at several menial jobs, he was dismissed by a baker and pastry-maker in Granges for petty pilfering. On 14 November 1918 he witnessed strikers being gunned down in Granges. He was never to forget those three deaths and they weighed mightily upon his subsequent career as an anarcho-syndicalist activist.

His apprenticeship as a baker over, and unable to find work, he was taken on as a bricklayer in Geneva alongside the construction workers who had been behind the victorious strike of 1918. He joined with anarchists committed to trade union struggle. Between the world wars, it was hard times for the workers' movement and the unions were forced to start all over again. Lucien Tronchet threw himself into this work in a social climate of increasing tension. On 1 July 1922 the FOBB (Federation of Wood and Construction Workers) was launched. The FOBB was to affiliate to the Swiss Union of Trade Unions. Lucien Tronchet joined the FOBB in 1926 and was to lay the groundwork for its bricklayers' strike two years later. Besides this he had to defend the unions' independence against the "moscoutaires" (Moscow-teers), Communists determined to wipe out all opposition to the Third International's Twenty One Conditions for affiliation. This obsession with the independence of the union was to remain a lifelong theme in Tronchet's activities.

In the 1930s, Tronchet was to become of the leaders of the LAB (Construction Industry Action League), a direct action organisation set up in response to the reluctance of employers to observe collective agreements. There were many breaches of these agreements and regulations on working hours were ignored. The LAB stepped in to shut down the offending sites and bring work to a standstill. On every occasion, the bourgeois press whipped up a frenzy against the labour unions. Whereupon the FOBB issued two watchwords - "Any worker agreeing to work in conditions less than those stipulated in collective agreements is guilty of treachery" and "All work performed outside of the regulated collective agreements is to be demolished immediately or at a later date". Given the intense trade union activism, police pressure was stepped up against the Action League. After a minor incident, fourteen militants were brought to trial. The trial was so stormy and solidarity with those charged so solid that every one of them - Tronchet among them - was to be acquitted. But the trial was only the first of a long line of trials.

In a Europe where the rise of fascism was creating fresh tensions, workers' efforts to erect a barrier against the totalitarians were many and repeated. Thus on the evening of 9 November 1932, a fascist kangaroo court had decided to arraign socialist leaders at a public meeting. There were significant counter-demonstrations but there was no threat posed to the armed forces cordoning off the hall. Yet the army opened fire. Thirteen people died and sixty five were wounded. Naturally Lucien Tronchet was among those rounded up in the ensuing police swoop. Yet again he was acquitted on the grounds of insufficient evidence, whereas other workers received prison terms. Once again no soldier and no fascist was charged. The real terrorists in society were getting off scot free.

Not that that was Lucien Tronchet's last brush with the law. In 1935 the FOBB launched an intense campaign of agitation over workers' homes which were little better than hovels. Many huge posters were put up. Leaflets and pamphlets were issued in large numbers. Soon, public

UNKNOWN ANARCHISTS

opinion began to respond and to shift. It was quickly determined that the slums should be demolished and demolition teams went into operation on the night of 4 December 1935. Thirty trade unionists started to smash up the roofs and windows! By morning the authorities in Geneva gave in in the face of the anarcho-syndicalists' determined battle against slum housing and the TB which infested it. At the end of the campaign Tronchet alone was arrested and brought to trial. He was sentenced to a month in prison and to a heavy fine.

In the same spirit, in 1978, Lucien Tronchet was called in to lend his support to the actions of squatters in the Grottes area of Geneva.

In July 1936, he was take practical steps in solidarity with the comrades of the CNT-FAI. News from the CNT was released through *Le Reveil anarchiste- Il Risveglio*. Tronchet travelled to Spain in the company of Luigi Bertoni, arms shipments were arranged, etc. Like other anarchists abroad, he was to lend his support to the Spanish anarchists in the construction of a libertarian society.

Tronchet was an anarchist and he was to remain such in 1940 when his call-up papers arrived. This was the second time that he had refused the draft, having refused to join the army in 1920. In March 1940 he was brought before a court martial and asked his friend Luigi Bertoni to plead his case. This provided a chance to reassert that national defence merely preserved a certain social set-up of which the ruling class are the real beneficiaries. In the end the court sentenced him to eight months in prison plus five years of deprivation of civil rights. Tronchet was back behind bars again!

Not that the war stopped trade union activity though. There was a flurry of wildcat strikes throughout Switzerland. Right after the war these led to a demand for paid holidays ("days off, days of misery" was the slogan). In spite of trade union pressure the bosses stood their ground and at Easter 1946, a strike erupted. It had been organised by Tronchet. This

unforgettable stoppage was to end in rioting and in the storming of the town hall in Geneva.

The bosses caved in and agreed to award paid holidays - May Day excluded!

In spite of everything, Tronchet the trade union secretary could rightly be proud of what he had achieved through his use of radical anarcho-syndicalist methods.

Not that his commitment to economic struggles prevented Tronchet from having commitments elsewhere - to the campaign to liberalise abortion rights, anti-militarism, setting up producer and housing co-ops, etc.

In 1968 Tronchet reached retirement age and was able to devote his attentions entirely to May, the month when the workers' memories come back to the surface. 1968 also saw the resurrection of *Le Reveil anarchiste*.

Tronchet had high hopes for this and dreamt of seeing the anarchist movement in Switzerland revive. It was to prove one of his last campaigns. The fight for workers' dignity was and remained for him an all-round struggle for human dignity.

Adapted from *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris, No 452, Summer 1982)

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THE ONLY HOPE OF IRELAND BY ALEXANDER BERKMAN

first published in The Blast! vol.1, no.1 3, page 2;
May 15, 1916

Most Irishmen, in and out of Ireland, seem unanimous in condemning the brutality of the British government toward the leaders of the unsuccessful revolt.

There is no need to recite here the atrocious measures of repression practiced by England toward her subject races. The arrogant and irresponsible tyranny of the British government in this relation is a matter of history. The point of interest just now is, what did the Irish people, or at least the Sinn Feiners, expect England to do in the given circumstances?

I am not interested in the weak-kneed editors of Irish-American papers who bemoan, with all due decorum, Great Britain's "lack of generosity" in dealing with the captured Sinn Feiners, or who hide their cowardice by arguments about the "mistake" the British government has committed by its harsh methods.

It is disgusting to hear such rot. As a matter of fact, it is entirely in keeping with the character and traditions of the British government to show no quarter to rebels. Those familiar with the colonial history of Great Britain know that the English government and its representatives have systematically practised the most heinous brutality and repression to stifle the least sign of discontent, in Ireland, in India, Egypt, South Africa - wherever British rapacity found a source of aggrandizement. Burning villages, destroying whole districts, shooting rebels by the wholesale, aye, even resorting to the most inhuman torture of suspects, as in the Southwestern Punjab and other parts of India - these have always been the methods of the British government.

"The measures taken by us", said Sir Michael O'Dwyer, Governor of the province of Punjab, in his Budget speech in the Punjab Legislative Council, April 22, 1915, "have proven that the arm of the Sirkar (British government) is long enough to reach and strong enough to strike those who defy the law." The nature of this "long and strong arm" is clearly characterized by Lord James Bryce:

"The English govern India on absolute principles. There is in British India no room for popular initiative or popular interference with the acts of the rulers, from the Viceroy down to the district official. Society in India is not an ordinary civil society. It is a military society, military first and foremost. The traveller feels himself, except perhaps in Bombay, surrounded by an atmosphere of gunpowder all the time he stays in India."

The Irish rebels and their sympathizers know all this. But what they don't know, or refuse to admit, is that these methods of suppressing discontent are not merely colonial policy. They have also been practiced by the English government at home, against its native sons, the English workers. Just now the iron hand of conscription is driving thousands of Great Britain's toilers into involuntary military servitude. Long terms of imprisonment are meted out to everyone having conscientious scruples against murder, to every anti-militarist protestant, and many have been driven to suicide rather than turn murderers of their fellowmen. The Irish people, like everyone else, ought to know that the claim of the English government of "protecting weaker nations and fighting for democracy" is the most disgusting hypocrisy ever dished up to a muttonhead public. Nor is the British government in this respect any better or worse than the governments of Kaiser, Czar or President. Government is but the shadow the ruling class of a country casts upon the political life of a given nation. And the priests of Mammon are always the ruling class, whatever the temporary label of the exploiters of the people.

We don't fool anyone by parroting that it was 'a mistake' on the part of the British

BERKMAN ON IRELAND

government to use the sternest methods against the Sinn Fein leaders. It was *not* a mistake. To the English government, to *any* government, the only safe rebel is a dead rebel. The ruthless shooting down of the insurrection leaders, the barbarous execution of James Connolly, who was severely wounded in the Dublin fighting and had to be propped with pillows that the soldiers could take good aim at him - all this may serve to embitter the Irish people. But unless that bitterness express itself in action, in reprisals-individual or collective- against the British government, the latter will have no cause to regret its severity. It is dangerous to let rebels live, If the Irish at home have no more spirit than the Irish in America, the English government has nothing to fear. The Irish-Americans are easily the most powerful influence in American political life. What have these Irish-Americans done to stop the atrocities of Great Britain? They have held mass meetings here and there to 'protest' against the continuing executions of Sinn Feiners. They have sufficient political power in the country to cause President Wilson to call a halt to British atrocities, to force the English government to treat the Sinn Feiners as prisoners of war, which they are. But the Irish-American priests of Church and State would not dream of such drastic measures: politicians don't do that.

More effective yet it would have been if some member or members of the numerous Irish societies had captured a few representatives of the British government in this country as hostages for the Irish rebels awaiting execution. A British Consul ornamenting a lamppost in San Francisco or New York would quickly secure the respectful attention of the British lion. The British Ambassador, in the hands of Washington Irishmen, would more effectively petition his Majesty, King Edward, for the lives of the Irish rebel leaders than all the resolutions passed at mass meetings.

After all, it is the Redmonds and the Carsons who are chiefly responsible for the failure of the rebellion in Ireland. They were the first to condemn the 'rash step' of a people for centuries enslaved and oppressed to the verge of

utter poverty and degradation. Thus they in the very beginning alienated the support that the uprising might have received in and out of Ireland. It was this treacherous and cowardly attitude of the Irish home rule politicians that encouraged the English government to use the most drastic measures in suppressing the revolt.

May outraged Ireland soon learn that its official leaders are like unto all labor politicians: the lackeys of the rulers, and the very first to cry Crucify!

The hope of Ireland lies not in home rule, nor its leaders. It is not circumscribed by the boundaries of the Emerald Isle. The precious blood shed in the unsuccessful revolution will not have been in vain if the tears of their great tragedy will clarify the vision of the sons and daughters of Erin and make them see beyond the empty shell of national aspirations toward the rising sun of the international brotherhood of the exploited in all countries and climes combined in a solidaric struggle for emancipation from every form of slavery, political *and* economic

ALEXANDER BERKMAN

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OPERATION CONDOR
From the Terror Archives and
the Letelier assassination to
the Berrios case.
Samuel Blixen Introduction
by **Roberto Bergalli**
Virus, December 1998,
268pp.

The 21 September 1976 assassination by car bomb in Washington of one-time Allende minister Orlando Letelier provoked outrage among the Chilean opposition. The United States political class and, above all, the secret service agencies were left dumbfounded by the daring displayed by one of their own creatures: the Pinochet regime.

The disappearance from Uruguayan soil in the early '90s of Chilean citizen Eugenio Berrios - a scientist working with the DINA (Secret police) and implicated in the Letelier assassination- together with the uncovering of the Terror Archives in Paraguay in December 1992 made available definitive evidence regarding what was by then a long-established certainty: "co-ordination of repression in the Southern Cone, whereby, in the mid-1970s, the dictatorships had set up a supranational structure, was still up and running under democracy and committed not just to monitoring popular

movements but also to protecting military personnel wanted by the courts."

At the heart of "Operation Condor" - as this set-up was dubbed - was a centralised system for the collection and exchange of intelligence and involving assassination, kidnapping or clandestine extradition operations against militants from the Latin American left who had fled to or gone into exile in neighbouring countries or, indeed, beyond the shores of the Americas. This Security Co-ordination arrangement could count upon the full commitment of the intelligence services of Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and Brazil.

Samuel Blixen, researcher and journalist, a regular contributor to the Uruguayan weekly *Brecha* not only guides us through the complex warp and weft of the Berrios case and the Letelier assassination, but poses an essential question: To what extent do the "viable democracies" which have emerged from the military-supervised transition wield real control over the civilian and military authorities? What role have armies enjoying impunity and "clean slate" legislation appointed for themselves at a time when widening economic gaps may trigger social unrest akin to that which preceded the military dictatorships in the 1960s?

VIRUS editorial
C/Vistalegre, 9 bajos
08001 Barcelona
Spain

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