

Agustín Guillamón

Versus the State : Theses on War, Revolution and Proletariat

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Publisher's blurb (back cover) reads:

Versus the State is an anthology of incisive articles wherein Agustín Guillamón dismantles the ideological and material underpinnings of modern capitalism: representative democracy, human rights, the State and the bamboozlement of freedom. Through rigorous historical and theoretical analysis, the author shows how the State and capital make up a single, indivisible unit based upon exploitation of waged labour and a monopoly upon political violence.

Shunning all nostalgia or reformism, these articles grapple with central issues such as the nature of the proletariat, the counter-revolutionary function of democracy, the role of social democracy and the workers' movement's historical defeats, with particular attention to the 1936 Spanish Revolution and the Friends of Durruti.

This book offers no abstract recipes or utopias, but rather a radical critique geared to the dismantling of the State and of waged labour as the necessary precondition for human emancipation and the building of a communist, solidarity-based and classless community.

Does not seem to be any copyright. A note on the fly page states "Read, copy, distribute, rewrite, sing out, set to music, shout out, or recite this book. Spread the Idea!"

1. Democracy, Freedom and Human Community
2. Human Rights
3. What is the State?
4. What is the Proletariat?
5. The Being and Essence of the Proletariat
6. How Come the May 1937 Insurrection?
7. Fascism and Antifascism
8. Social Democracy
9. The French-Spanish Friends of Durruti Group
10. The Fight for History
11. Eleven Class-based Theses
12. Thoughts on History as the Theorization of the Proletariat's Historical Experiences [May 2026, added by the KSL]

Notes

An anthology of articles by Guillamón from 2016-2024.

1. DEMOCRACY, FREEDOM AND HUMAN COMMUNITY

Our only interest is in critiquing democracy from the vantage point of moving beyond it in the practice of brand-new social relations of production that strip it of its current class character. Critiquing democracy and critiquing totalitarianism are at the same time a critiquing of two different but complementary forms of capitalist governance.

The point is to shine a light on the forms and content of the self-organization appropriate for a classless world that has no armies, no police, no borders, no wage system nor capital, and no State. Representative democracy is an alienated form of human freedom.

When we speak of freedom, we mean the freedom of the wage slaves, the freedom of those of us who have no decision-making power over the laws, ordinances or accords that affect our day-to-day lives and our children's futures. When we speak of freedom we are talking about the removal of any dividing-line between the leaders and the led, between the representatives and the represented. We are talking about the freedom of those excluded from and marginalized by the system. We are talking about the freedom and decision-making power of the vast majority, currently nullified by periodical election of representatives that do not represent us.

Freedom and democracy are opposites and contradictory, because freedom is incompatible with the existence of the State. In the opposing corner, fascism is against democracy because it reckons that the latter does not have the capacity to mount an effective defence of the State. The foundations of bourgeois democracy are economic inequality and the exploitation of waged labour. If the emancipation of the workers from capitalist exploitation has to be the doing of the workers themselves and if the workers are to emancipate themselves through their own efforts and if nobody represents and is incapable of representing us because the system turns them into champions of the capitalist system and its electioneering logic, it is high time for direct democracy to be enacted through decision-making power over everything that affects our lives and the futures of our children. Social revolution consists of the creation of brand-new non-commercial, cooperation-based relations of fellowship and brotherhood. Entrepreneurial dividing-lines, money as a universal mediator and work as activity divorced from everyday life must be done away with. This is an enormous undertaking, but is also a program that cannot be abjured, as it is the only route to a humane, sustainable world.

Parliamentarism is the ongoing compact and negotiation in which the various parties of capital engage as they search for the most appropriate and profitable way of managing capitalism; sometimes, it may be democracy; at other times it may be fascism, and, on occasions, a shrewd blend of them both. A revolutionary organization of the exploited class cannot be parliamentary and, to the extent that it is parliamentary, it ceases championing the interests of the exploited class.

Democratic elections provide a disguise for the brutal, unrelenting political, social and economic violence deployed by the bourgeoisie against the proletariat, all in the shape of a ballot paper that is credited with magical powers and which nurtures the dream that “something” can be changed by parliamentary means. The State is represented as a neutral arbiter, but it is nothing more than a fetishist disguise that, in times of crisis, cannot hide the fact that its role is not, and never can be, other than to act as a bulwark of the capitalist system against the proletariat’s revolts and rebellions.

Democratic ideology imposes the illusion that democracy is the range of methods, representation and rights that guarantee and regulate the social lives of free citizens. Parliamentary representation is founded upon the fiction that violence is being eschewed, that the State is a fair and impartial arbiter and that every citizen is equal before the law.

The suggestion is that there is no appeal against the discourses about democracy and human rights and in theory they banish violence from social relationships, other than when these affect the economic interests tyrannically imposed by the IMF or the World Bank upon defenceless peoples and citizens faced with the harshest measures affecting their day-to-day lives and the future of upcoming generations.

Bourgeois democracy is based upon the existence of lone, friendless individuals divided against one another and where the freedom of each individual is bounded by the freedom of the next.

Freedom can only find expression through human Community, in the context of a communist, solidary and egalitarian society that has thus far never been witnessed on this planet.

Communism presupposes the destruction of the State, of money and of enterprises, meaning the dividing-line between producer and production. Human Community is neither democratic nor totalitarian: it goes beyond politics. It is rooted in the banishment of the sort of self-centred, lone and un-solidary individual that typifies bourgeois society and capitalism. He gives way to a brand of human that is into fellowship and rooted in a collectivity, that cooperates with other human beings and is out to protect future generations, and whose sole ambition and outlook is to conserve natural resources and improve the future prospects of the species over which the threat of extinction is currently hovering.

Freedom and power are intimately connected. There is no freedom without power. Freedom is always the power to make decisions bearing upon all matters affecting our everyday lives and the futures of our children and grandchildren. Freedom is always the power to do things unhindered by bodies detached from the human Community, without having to defer to any sort of fetishes, be it the State, the fatherland, the leader or the Hallowed Economy.

Freedom is the collective capacity to agree upon priorities and satisfy needs by means of human Community, the fruits of human beings’ inclination to come together and become that association.

In capitalist society, the relations between individuals award power to certain leaders to represent us all and handle all the decision-making, instead of the decision-making being done by the majority. Such open-ended representation, such delegation of decision-making powers ensconces itself in permanent forms of representation: the institutions of the State. The existence of any such

institutionalized power is incompatible with freedom. State and freedom are incompatible. Individual and freedom are opposites, because selfish individuality is a feature of capitalist society and of how it separates individuals vis à vis the human Community. Freedom is achievable only in the context of community, through participation in a collective in a communist society, as a member of the human race.

Abolition of the State entails opposing a society wherein various powers are institutionalized, centralized and hierarchical with the single purpose of perpetuating the division of society into classes. Power and freedom are not compatible. Freedom is the power to have an impact on reality and our life circumstances in order to alter them.

Freedom is not some beautiful, radiant, though ineffectual idea; it is an ongoing struggle, an effective organization and an historical gain. A slave can only be free when fighting for his freedom and through that same struggle, even should he die in action.

Freedom is a notion that came into being with the practical emancipation of the individual in the context of enslaved, authoritarian societies and it can only accomplish its purpose and final achievement in a classless, Stateless society wherein individuals are no longer separated and pitted against one another, because they belong to the human Community within a communist fellowship-based society.

Democracy is the favoured stomping ground of counter-revolution, where capitalist society's divergent interests acknowledge their differences, as long as they always defer to the so-called "general interest", which is to say, to respecting the State as a "neutral" arbiter. In its origins, democracy was merely political and the democratic State emerged as the champion of the community of human beings created by universal suffrage. The dividing-line between it and social life was plain. The employer confined himself to purchasing labour force at the cheapest possible price, or increasing working hours without increasing wages. The State's chief function was to repress labour.

Later, the welfare State emerged and by Bismarck's day it operated as a regulator and intermediary that looked after wages, social security, working hours, as well as there being a sizeable social democratic presence in Parliament that guaranteed the feasibility of significant reforms and the absorption of the workers movement into society and the German State. The so-called welfare State peaked in the United States, Europe and Japan in the thirty years after the end of the Second World War. Capitalism and democracy looked like the best of all possible worlds in the entire history of humankind: a flawed but improvable society.

In the wake of the 2008 crisis and the ensuing depression, the welfare State has fallen apart everywhere and individuals these days are prey to impersonal and de-humanized influences that are blindly obedient to the abstract, unfathomable and irrational logic of Hallowed Economics. Individuals have never before been faced with such an impersonal, omnipresent, alien and foreign and intangible overlordship as the current one.

In bygone days one might dream about slaying the tyrant, and indeed sometimes the great revolutions did just that, as in the case of Louis XVI. These days it makes no sense to believe that

toppling or putting some tyrant, or this or that leader, on trial would alter anything. It would be gesture as meaningless as casting a vote for or against him. The “citizen” is that much more powerless to alter his day-to-day life, but he has to pursue the never-ending winning of fictitious rights through the theatrical staging of democratic elections. The staging of the right to choose our representatives on the city council, home rule administration or State enjoys an especially high media and propaganda profile. Those representatives actually represent nothing and no one, other than the interests of the major pressure groups (lobbies) or the broader interests of international finance capital.

Yet people carry on voting for their representatives and are even starry-eyed when fresh faces show up, since we have at least the assurance that we are not living under a totalitarian dictatorship where the terror is relentless and torture carried out in the ministry basements. Democracy is a step up from blatant police and State terror. And this is why terror prevails even in territories where torture is not practised and in the thinking of persons not under threat. Which is why, in every country, we have the upsurge in “gagging” laws that whittle away rights and the freedoms of expression, association, demonstration, unionization and strike are being whittled down to nothing ... thereby protecting our representatives’ rights to represent us and nullify us politically and socially.

Agustín Guillamón, Barcelona, November 2015

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2. HUMAN RIGHTS

In memory of Emilio Madrid

What are human rights? Human rights, so called, were laid out in the late 18th century bourgeois revolutions in France and the United States as political rights. The rights of man are different from the rights of the citizen. Man has a claim on human rights simply by virtue of his birth (albeit that initially they were not extended to women and slaves) and the citizen enjoys certain rights by virtue of his living in society.

Human rights were recognized as such because the view was that they predated the French Revolution and they were universal and natural rights acknowledged as such in the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

It should be noted that the rights of man, so called, as distinct from the rights of the citizen, are simply the rights of the bourgeois individual, the member of civil society, meaning of self-seeking man, of the man separated from his fellow men and from the community. The most radical constitution, the 1793 constitution, stated in Article 2: “Such rights (natural, inalienable rights) are: equality, liberty, security and property.”

Of what does liberty consist? In Article 6 the 1793 constitution asserted: “Liberty is the power of man to do whatever does not infringe the rights of his fellow man”; according to the 1791 Declaration of the Rights of Man: “Liberty consists of the power to do whatever does no injury to one’s fellow.”

Liberty, then, is the right to do and engage in whatever constitutes no trespass against one's fellows. The boundaries are set by law, just as two camps are outlined: these are closely inter-related. It is a matter of the freedom of man as a lone and self-sufficient individual, reliant upon himself.

For that very reason, man's right to freedom is not based upon the relationship between one lone man (individual) with another, but rather upon the isolation of one individual from the next. This is the right of the individual, the right of individual per se confined to himself and separate from the community.

The practical implementation of man's right to freedom is the individual's right to private property.

Of what does man's right to private property consist? According to Article 16 of the French constitution of 1793: "The right to property is the right enjoyed by every citizen to enjoy and to do with his assets, income, fruits of his labours and industry whatsoever he pleases."

The right to private property is the right to enjoy one's assets however one pleases. That individual freedom is the foundation of civil society, leaving every man free to see another, not as the attainment but as the boundary to his own freedom. The right to property is the foundational right of bourgeois society and capitalism.

Which still leaves those other rights of man: to equality and to security.

Equality is merely the equality of all individuals before the law. Article 3 of the 1795 constitution defines it this way: "Equality consists of the law treating everyone equally, whether in terms of protection or punishment."

Equality is always equality before the law and is never an economic, social or political equality.

And what of security? Article 8 of the 1793 constitution defines it thus: "Security consists of the protection afforded by society to every single one of its members in terms of the security of his person, rights and possessions."

Security is the over-riding social theme of bourgeois civil society, the notion of policing as the guarantor and underpinning of social order: where the whole of society has only one purpose, to guarantee each and every member that his person, his rights and his property will be protected. The bourgeois notion of security is essentially a reaffirmation of self-interest. Security relates more to assurance of self-interest and property rights. As for the glorious trinomial that provided the French Revolution with its slogan at the outset – liberty, equality and fraternity – fraternity had been readily eclipsed by property. In the winter of 1795-1796, sans-culottes' invocation of the right to life, meaning the right not to starve to death, had been sent packing by Napoleon by means of a whiff of grapeshot in the streets of Paris. The bourgeoisie's rights to security emerged the victor: property was the priority, sacred and inviolable.

Those very same guns prescribed representative democracy as the only possible option and put paid to the direct democracy being practised by the sans-culottes.

Thus, not a single one of the so-called rights of man looked beyond the self-seeking man, the lone, self-absorbed individual, his private interests and personal choice, always detached from the community. Society looked like something outside of the individuals, like a restriction of their original independence. The only tie binding them together was innate needs, necessity and personal interest, the preservation of property and their self-interests.

This view of man as a lone, self-centred individual always ready to break ranks and gratify his own personal interests does not at all fit in with what the findings of anthropology and history tell us.

There is no way that prehistoric man can be imagined as an individual cut off from the community, bereft of ties to his tribe and disconnected from the interests of the human race.

Human rights, so-called, which have been turned into myths and manipulated and which they would have us embrace as a good thing that we should stand by and as something proper to man on the simple basis of his being a man; and which are therefore innate in that they are born with man and will perish with him, are merely the rights of bourgeois man, and, being such, are not proletarian and nor have proletarians any reason to champion them; liberty, security and property are specific to the bourgeois and, as such, have their origins in history and will have a finite life-span; and, that being so, they are not inherent in man per se, nor are they, therefore, immutable and timeless.

Equality should be something more than mere show and ought not to be achievable only under the aegis of the State but ought to be real, which is to say, social and economic realities. The true content of the proletarian demand for equality is the abolition of social classes. The notion of equality in its bourgeois form as well as in its proletarian form is a product of history and, of necessity, assumes certain historical circumstances.

Evidently, the bourgeois character of the rights of man and are, historically speaking, temporary in nature and form no part of human nature.

Defence of human rights and democracy is forever being peddled relentlessly by those who hold political and economic power in the more developed countries which mercilessly prosecute all the wars in the world and are behind the endless hunger, thirst, poverty, disease, fears and oppression. They peddle the allegedly peace-loving ideology of defending human rights and democracy precisely in order to disarm the very people they are out to exploit and massacre. Which is why that pacifist ideology needs to be exposed for what it is: a weapon deployed by the enemy as a means of defeating us. The only way of putting paid to calamities and wretchedness in any shape or form is to eliminate what permanently engenders them, to wit, capitalism, be it in its democratic or its fascist guises, since both guises are just manifestations of the dictatorship of Capital. And the only way of putting paid to Capital is to fight for a classless society, meaning a communist, egalitarian society.

The point is not to champion fictitious human rights, but to scrutinize the current situation and identify the real interests being defended by all these democratic States and other institutions, behind the mask of the human rights they purport to be championing.

The laws of the market as such generate the conditions suited to the emergence of the dictatorial regimes which are needed to break and exploit the populations of the poorer countries.

We should be inquiring into whichever material causes and historical circumstances allow and indeed nurture the emergence of dictatorships and dictators, as they are not the ones that shape history; instead, the primary factor there is the growth of productive forces, which leads to one sort of government or another, reflecting an overall, historical and geographical context.

The abstract nature of liberty and equality under Capital is no obstacle to notions' carrying genuine content. Capitalism is the regime that imposes wage-slavery and the marginalization of those wretches that cannot resign themselves to being exploited. Money and the State impose themselves as the great social mediators: money as a measure of the value of all goods (including the commodification of human relationships); the State as the arbiter that enforces the defence of democratic bourgeois order, as well as the sanctions deployed against its adversaries.

Democracy is not a dogma, nor is it an immutable reality to be invoked like something permanent and intrinsically the same, like something that stands out from all the rest, like something metaphysical. Instead, democracy is a product of History, the fruit of society's evolution over time. In modern times, liberalism and democracy emerged in opposition to the regime that predated them – feudalism – a regime now historically obsolete, which made democracy revolutionary at the time of its birth, in that it was a beacon lighting the way to a brand-new society, opposed to and an improvement upon its predecessor.

Economically, it out-performed feudalism, by giving an extraordinary boost to the means of production and politically, it released individuals from feudal vassalage and conjured up a “neutral” State wherein every citizen was equal *in the eyes of the law*. The complete unfurling of democracy corresponds to the comprehensive domination of the bourgeoisie as a class when, thanks to the full expansion of capitalism, the latter enforced its power over everything and brooked no challenge from anyone. In order to hold on to it, it turned conservative and reactionary and in order to achieve it, it showed no hesitation in demolishing its own *raison d'être*: historical expansion of the forces of production on a gigantic scale. Today, capitalism is destroying and degrading natural assets, woodland, oceans, soil, the atmosphere, food, and the lives of millions of people and has no hesitation in crushing and slaughtering the source that gave birth to it: the life of toil, the labour force, from which it extracts the surplus value which is to Capital what oxygen is to the human being. By this point, democracy is no longer revolutionary the way it was at its inception, not has it any historical justification the way it had in its glory days of expanding forces of production. It has turned reactionary and, in order to be able to prolong its life somewhat, it resorts to ruses like the so-called “human rights” fig-leaf that hides its shame from millions upon millions of the exploited and oppressed, shame that cannot be hidden because it is as striking as the exploitation, repression and all manner of injustices and suffering endured by the greater part of the population of the world, at the hands of the very people purporting to be champions of democracy and human rights, such as every single developed capitalist State, whose leaders are the outstanding champions of such cant. Which is only logical, because democracy is the political rule of the bourgeoisie, the exploiter class par excellence, and human rights merely the rights of the bourgeois man, the self-seeking man, the lone individual impervious to the charms of solidarity.

So, what needs defending is not democracy and not human rights, which are bourgeois in character, but the rights of the exploited and oppressed to rise up against Capital's dominion and slavery and to establish a brand-new, classless society freed of exploitation, money, armies, surplus value, oppression and States.

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3. WHAT IS THE STATE? THOUGHTS ON POLITICAL VIOLENCE

The State holds the monopoly on political power and as a result lays claim to a monopoly on violence, the definition of legality and the administration of justice. Any challenge to that monopoly on violence is deemed criminal and is an affront to the law and the capitalist order.

We could come up with a thousand different definitions the State. But essentially these boil down to two. One that is comprehensive and talks historically about the State way back in the earliest civilizations in Mesopotamia and Egypt, followed by Greece and Rome; that one we shall not be using and it is not up to task of scrutinizing the current capitalist society in which we are living. In any case, it is a definition that requires that the State be taken as synonymous with the prevailing mode of production: the slave State, the Feudal State, the capitalist State. Another, narrower definition that employs the current notion of the State, or capitalist State or modern State, to indicate the absolute or sole sovereign authority in each country; this is the one we shall be relying upon.

The State is, in historical terms, a recent mode of political organization of society, one that emerged around five hundred years ago, in a number of countries, through the collapse of feudalism, the rise of mercantilism and the earliest manifestations of the capitalist mode of production. The emergence of the capitalist State implied the extinction of feudal modes of political organization.

The notion of the modern State surfaced with the arrival on the capitalist mode of production on the stage of history. It is the political organization that suits capitalism. Extrapolating this notion to cover ancient civilizations is socially and politically a pointless and muddle-headed anachronism.

In Feudal society, sovereignty was construed as a hierarchical relationship between a range of power-holders. The power of the king was based upon the fealty of other, seigneurial powers and the king's powers were venal, which is to say, might be sold off or ceded to the nobility: the administration of justice, the raising of armies, the collection of taxes, bishoprics, etc., might be sold off to the highest bidder or parcelled out to a complicated network of favours and privileges. Sovereignty resided in a number of authorities which might defer to or compete with one another.

In capitalist society, the State made a monopoly of sovereignty: the State is the country's sole political authority. The State holds a monopoly on political power and thus lays claim to a monopoly on violence, the definition of what is the law and on the administration of justice. Any challenge to this monopoly on violence is deemed criminal, a trespass against the capitalist law and order, and, as a result, is prosecuted, punished and eradicated.

In feudal society, social relations were based upon personal dependency and privilege. In capitalist society, social relations can only obtain between persons who are, in the eyes of the law, free and equal. Such legal liberty and equality (but not property-based) are crucial when it comes to the formation and existence of a proletariat that provides cheap labour to our manufacturing entrepreneurs. The worker needs to be free and free of all property at that, if he is to be available and ready to hire himself out to the factory-owner in return for a wage. He needs to be free and released from any dependency upon the soil he tills and of any income or ownership, if he is to be herded by hunger, pauperism and poverty into the brand-new industrial complexes where he can sell the only commodity that he owns, his brawn, which is to say, his labour force.

The new social relations specific to capitalism have their corresponding brand-new political organization, different from the feudal one: a State that holds a monopoly on all political dealings. Under capitalism, every individual is free and equal (before the law) and no one retains any political dependency upon his erstwhile feudal lord or brand-new factory-owner. All political relations are monopolized by the State.

Under the pre-capitalist modes of production relations of production were also relations of domination. The slave was the property of his master, the serf was tied to the land he worked or was

dependent upon a lord. Under capitalism, such dependency has been done away with. The State, then, is the product of capitalist relations of production. The State being an organizational model for political power specific to capitalist societies. There is a strict dividing line between the economic, the social and the political.

The State monopolizes power, violence and political dealings between individuals in those societies where the capitalist mode of production prevails. Contrary to what happened with pre-capitalist political relations, the State IS NOT A RELATION OF PRODUCTION. Under the capitalist mode of production, capital is not merely money, or factories, or machinery: capital is also a social relationship of production and actually the case among proletarians who sell their labour power in return for a wage, and the capitalists who purchase that “labour force” commodity.

The State is of recent vintage, being around five hundred years old, and it will disappear when capitalist relations of production do. So the State is not eternal but is of very recent vintage and will sooner or later come to an end.

The political theory of the State emerged in 17th century England with Hobbes, side by side with the historical process known as the Industrial Revolution.

Not only was Hobbes the first theorist in chronological terms; the whole current issue of the State can be found in Hobbes (and in Locke).

From Plato through to Machiavelli, pre-State political theory represents political power and community as something NATURAL and makes no distinction between civil community and political community. Ever since Hobbes, statist political theory had depicted the State as an ARTIFICIAL device, drawing a distinction between the notions of civil community (civil society) and political community (the State) and posed the matter of the reproduction of political power.

The State grows out of a contradiction, one that spawns it and provides its *raison d'être*, between theoretical defence of the common or general good and the practical defence of the interests of a minority. The contradiction that obtains is between the dream of championing the general interest and actual defence of the class interests of the bourgeoisie. The State's *raison d'être* is nothing other than to ensure reproduction of the social relations of capitalist production. For that very reason, the State is not equipped to overcome the contradiction that exists between championing the general (and historical) interest of society (and the human race), which, in theory, it purports to champion, and the short-term interests of capital and its reproduction, these being, in practical terms, its priority and sole purpose. The State cannot own up to its incapacity to grapple with the short-term interests of the reproduction of capital, nor its relentless need to drive the profit-making cycle which entails the exhaustion of natural resources, polluting the planet to a suicidal extent, mortgaging the future of upcoming generations and placing the survival of the human race in jeopardy.

However, the State as embodied by its institutions is society's mask, feigning an outside force driven by a higher rationale and embodying a just order of which it serves as the neutral arbiter. Such fetishization of the State ENABLES the social relations of capitalist production to look like mere, non-coercive economic relations, even as the oppressive aspect of State institutions VANISHES. Inside the market, worker and employer look like free individuals engaged in an “entirely” economic exchange: the worker selling his labour power in return for a wage. From that “merely” economic exchange, all coercion has evaporated and the State has had no hand: it is non-existent and has disappeared.

The dividing line between the public and the private is a pre-requisite of capitalist relations of production because only thus DO THEY LOOK LIKE agreements freely arrived at between persons that are free and equal before the law, wherein the violence monopolized by the State has left the stage. The upshot of all this is a CONTRADICTION between the State AS A FETISH that has to conceal its monopoly on violence and the coercion relentlessly brought to bear on the proletariat by way of guaranteeing capitalist relations of production, to wit, retaining the conditions whereby the proletariat is prey to exploitation by capital; and the State, AS THE ORCHESTRATOR OF (social) CONSENSUS and legality, the State that calls free elections, allows parties and labour associations, legislates for working gains such as health care, pensions, working hour regulations, etc.

In the event of crisis, the capitalist State instantly reveals itself as primarily a capitalist State, more so than a nation State, people's State or citizens' State. The coercive aspect of the State, tied up with class rule, is its VERY ESSENCE which becomes transparent once social consensus and State legitimation are being sacrificed on the altar of the proletariat's submissiveness to capital's exploitation.

The State is rooted in this contradictory relationship. It seeks to cover up its repressive role as the guarantor of class rule by means of its monopoly on violence, whilst simultaneously wanting to look like the organizer of civil society's consensus which in turn legitimizes the State as a neutral arbiter. The State thereby also bolsters its own ideological dominion and secures a more comprehensive covert dominion over civil society. The State, naturally, criminalizes all political violence (revolutionary or otherwise) that operates outside of its own monopoly.

The fundamental institutions of the State are a standing army and a bureaucracy. The army is tasked with defending its geographical borders against other States, imperialist conquest designed to expand markets and capture raw materials and, above all, with acting as the ultimate recourse of the established order in handling worker subversion and proletarian uprisings. The bureaucracy's tasks are to administer all of the functions that the bourgeoisie delegates to the State: education, policing, public health, prison services, postal services, the railways, the highways The State official, from schoolteacher through to university professor, from police officer through to minister, from postman through to doctor all perform tasks that are needed for the smooth running of the business affairs of the bourgeoisie, provided that those affairs do not represent a good investment for the bourgeoisie, in which case those services are privatized.

The State is the ORGANIZATIONAL FORMAT of the political rule, ongoing coercion and economic exploitation of the proletariat by capital.

The State, then, is not a machine or tool that cuts both ways: as if yesterday it served the exploitation of the proletariat and in future can serve the emancipation of the proletariat and be turned against the bourgeoisie. It is not a machine that can be captured, nor can it be operated according to the whim of the machinist in place. The proletariat cannot capture the State, because it is capital's political ORGANIZATION: it has to be demolished. Some party bolstering or rejigging the State or being content to capture the State do not constitute a proletarian revolution; these add up to just another form of capitalism. The most outstanding historical example of this was the State capitalism of the now defunct Soviet Union. The State cannot be ABOLISHED overnight by some sort of "revolutionary" decree or a social consensus of the majority of society, because it constitutes the political organization of capital and its social relations of production: such social relations of

production and their political organization – namely, the STATE – need to be DESTROYED. There can be no part replacement of the State nor can it (along the lines of some sort of a workers’ semi-State) be deployed by the proletariat against capital during some transitional phase between capitalism and communism, in the hope that it may PETER OUT like a flame starved of oxygen, because the State is capital’s political organization and the guarantor of the capitalist social relations of production. There is no such thing as a semi-organization of capital nor a semi-guarantor of the social relations of production and, as we have said already, the machinery of State cannot be used or half-used as a two-edged sword, currently for the exploitation or semi-exploitation of the proletariat and, in the future, for its emancipation or semi-emancipation. The State is the complete and totalitarian political organization of capital (and its ongoing reproduction) tasked with the exploitation of the proletariat. The proletariat cannot use nor half-use it in order to eradicate or abolish the State – by means of decree, mutual consent or a vote: all it can do is destroy it.

The proletariat has to destroy the State because the latter is the political organization of the economic exploitation of waged labour. The State’s destruction signals the start of a proletarian revolution.

WHAT REPLACES THE STATE?

The administration of things and society’s priorities under communism. But proletarian revolution is not a matter of parties or organizations. It is not organizations that make the revolution; it is the revolution that conjures up the appropriate forms of class organization. In the more developed capitalist societies it is the extent of the condition of ‘proletarian’ that determines the chances of communism. Organizational issues cannot be tackled without input from the person doing the organizing and the issues that crop up at any given point. There are no rules, no magical spells, no guarantees to ward off bureaucratization and counter-revolution. Bureaucrats are normally experts in handling matters of organization to their own advantage and removed from the general interest of society. The proletariat’s experiences in history point to the Russian soviets in 1905 and 1917, the German *räte* in 1918-1920 and the committees in Spain in 1936, meaning, the organization of the proletariat along the lines of workers’ councils as the revolutionary organizational format of the working class...

We are not, then, talking about this or that organizational model of committee or council, but about society organized along councilist lines. Councils do not represent the workers, THEY ARE THE PROLETARIAT ORGANIZED. Which is a class organ of struggle. Not a political organization and thus not democratic nor dictatorial, it looks beyond politics and steers clear of the dividing line between the public and the private which is a feature of capitalism. Soviets, *räte* and committees in the past have come to grief but they did exist, demonstrating the proletariat’s ability to run and manage factories, cities and countries, whilst also providing evidence of their limits, their MISTAKES and their limitations. They have surfaced every time that the revolutionary proletariat has risen up against capitalist barbarism. They have been the workers’ response to the vacuum left behind by the bourgeoisie; more so, than as the outcome of any radicalization of the committee. Councilist ideology sees councils as the goal rather than as a step in the transition to councilism. Councilists substitute the notion of “council” for the Leninists’ notion of “the party”. Both those ideologies are barren, because, according to the old, emphatic cry of the International Working-Men’s Association had it, the emancipation of the workers will be the workers own doing, or it will not happen. The

councils or the organizations that the proletariat may devise at any point are going to be whatever they can achieve in the fight to destroy the State and bring about communism.

WE are talking here about the proletariat's being established as a class and thus as an autonomous revolutionary body independent of the bourgeoisie and in opposition to the counter-revolutionary faction of capital, one which directs its every effort into the State's utter and definitive destruction and its replacement by a brand-new political organization of communist society that leads on to the abolition of all social classes.

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4. WHAT IS THE PROLETARIAT?

The proletariat is not a thing, nor is it an identity, a culture, a statistical collective championing interests of its very own. The proletariat is shaped as a class through a process of growth and formation that can only be found inside the class struggle. Confined under advanced capitalism to the status of producer and consumer, the proletariat becomes a passive social classification, bereft of any consciousness of its own: as far as capital is concerned, it constitutes a class subject to capitalist ideology. It is nothing, has no aspirations and is capable of nothing. Only when the class struggle intensifies and sharpens does it surface as a class and wake up to the exploitation and domination that they endure under capitalism and share a commonality of struggle. The conflict is comprehensive and to the death, and excludes any chance of reformist aspirations or managerial options for the running of a system that has now become obsolete and outmoded.

This notion of class as "something happening", something that sprouts and flowers in the soil of the exploited and oppressed, is key. The class refers not to something that people are, but to something that they do. And once we understand that class is a by-product of action, then we are in a position to understand that any attempt to come up with an existential or cultural-ideological notion of class, is mistaken and is doomed to failure.

Class is not a static, solid or enduring notion: it is dynamic, fluid and dialectical. Class only shows itself and recognizes itself during those short spans of time when the class struggle is at its height.

The proletariat is defined as a social class that is bereft of any sort of property and which, in order to survive, needs to sell its labour power for a wage. Consciously or not, wage-earners, the unemployed, casual workers, migrants, the undocumented, retirees and their dependents are part of the proletariat. In France almost three million jobless and twenty-six million wage-earners or self-employed living in fear of being added to the ranks of the unemployed, plus an indefinite number of the marginalized who do not feature in the statistics because they have been excluded from the system make up part of the proletariat.

Ever since the start of the depression (2008), Europe's parliamentary democracy has been quickly turning into a "nationally useless", authoritarian, mafia-style party rule dominated by a stateless capitalist ruling class in the service of international finance and the multi-nationals: the corporate class. We have a far-reaching and widespread proletarianization of the middle classes, a massification

of the proletariat and violent, fitful eruptions from irretrievable collectives, suburbs and marginalized and anti-systemic (more as the result of exclusion than out of conviction) communities. National States are becoming obsolete tools (but necessary ones, in terms of their being guarantors of public order and the armed champions of exploitation) of that capitalist class with its global outlook and interests. Its form of government is democratic totalitarianism: a democracy whittled down to the minimal expression of casting a vote every so many years, when it comes to choosing capital's poor or worst representatives, without our being able to have any input of decision-making powers where social or political life are concerned.

Suburbs are turning into ghettos from those excluded from the system as the State strives to keep them apart from one another, surrendering control to gangs, drug-dealers, mafias, the schools, social workers, drunks, addicts, prisons and the police, so that, in concert, they can enforce control and/or economic, political, social, moral sacrifices and loss of initiative and, if need be, the physical sacrifice also of "all those who are surplus to requirements", the specific and concrete aim being to de-fuse their revolutionary potential in an attempt to turn these outlying suburbs into hives of the living dead, upon whom the institutions of the State has declared an out-and-out war of extermination and annihilation.

The class struggle is not just the only option when it comes to resisting and surviving capital's savage and sadistic onslaught, but the ineluctable road to the search for a definitive revolutionary solution to the decline of a now obsolete and criminal capitalist system that believes itself to be irreproachable and eternal. Class struggle versus boundless exploitation: decision-making power over one's own life versus marginalized wage-slavery.

It's the class war, stupid. The old mole that pops up on stage only to vanish while he gets on with the excavation of his tunnel underneath a world that is in decline and obsolete.

Agustín Guillamón

5. THE BEING AND ESSENCE OF THE PROLETARIAT

YESTERDAY

"Proletariat" derives from the Latin term "*proles*", meaning offspring or descendants. The term dates back to the Roman Republic and the Empire. Proletarians were citizens drawn from the lowliest class, persons of no property, with nothing to offer other than their offspring ("*proles*" to swell the Roman legions: sacrificial lambs for the war effort and in the subjugation and enslavement of neighbouring peoples.

The roots of the word can be traced back to the authorities' five-yearly census registering citizens and their properties, upon which their military obligations and voting rights were dependent. Those without property (or owners of property of negligible value) would register their offspring (*proles*) as their only assets. Proletarian derives from "*proletarius*", meaning "producer of offspring". Prior to Marius's reforms, they were barred from possessing arms or enlisting in the army... Roman society

was split up into five categories of property-owners or landowners. Proletarians were citizens classified as the sixth class.

The issue of the origin of the modern proletariat as a social class dates back to the Industrial Revolution. In 16th century England the expression meant the fourth estate. With hardly any variations, the expression survived up until the 18th century.

Come the French Revolution, the term “proletariat” took on a brand-new meaning. The proletariat was that class of workers denied all rights, but, being conscious of its marginalized situation, it fought for the right to live (meaning not to perish of starvation), prioritizing this over private property.

The notion of the proletariat as a class of exploited workers within industrial society, crops up in the language of the pre-Marxian and utopian socialists in the early decades of the 19th century. To Saint-Simon proletariat meant the mass of the men of no property. To Blanqui, the proletariat had two uses, meaning both the poor worker and the worker as against the capitalist.

A lot of liberal-minded scholars pointed to the socio-economic similarities between the rapidly expanding modern industrial working class and the proletarians of classical times. One of the earliest comparisons appeared in an article by the French philosopher and student of politics, Lamennais, in his book *On Modern Slavery*.

The Swiss economist Sismondi was the first to use the term “proletariat” to refer to the working class created under capitalism. His writings were frequently cited by Karl Marx. There is every likelihood that Marx picked up the term after studying the works of Sismondi.

During the second half of the 1840s, the notion of the “proletariat” was comprehensively reworked by Engels and Marx. Moreover, Marx had studied Roman Law at the university of Berlin. The term was used to designate the class possessed of no property or assets, a class free to sell its labour power. The proletariat or working class is a social class at loggerheads with the bourgeois class.

No matter how summary, simplistic and indeed incomplete the precedents cited up until now as far as the historical notion of the proletariat goes, they are enough for us to argue emphatically that when Miquel Amorós says that the proletariat is something conjured up by Lenin in 1917, he is arguing arrant, irrational and anti-historical nonsense.

So let us drop the neo-situationist nonsense and offer a rational, rigorous and historical description of capitalism and proletariat in the shape of these five fundamental theses:

1.Capitalism is a SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP of production that obtains between capitalists who purchase the commodity of labour power, and the proletariat, which sells its labour power in return for wages. The relationship is not personal but is a relationship between classes. So much for the essence of capitalism and the proletariat.

2. Capitalism is an HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP between two antagonistic classes, one that requires and bullies the bulk of the population into selling its labour power to capital in return for wages. (But for that historical process of primitive accumulation of capital and the expropriation and ousting of

the peasantry from rural communities into the factories and big industrial centres, the social relationship cited in thesis 1 above, would not exist.)

3. Capitalism triggers a CONTRADICTION or conflict between the SOCIAL development of productive forces and the current social relations of production and the private appropriation of value that does not correspond with the social character of said productive forces. (This translates into the unequal division of wealth in the world: in 2007, three United States citizens – Bill Gates, Paul Allen and Warren Buffett – between them, were in possession of wealth outstripping the GDP of 42 poorer nations with a population in excess of 600 millions: the 356 richest people in the world have an income greater than that of the annual income of 40% of humankind; the United States accounts for 6% of the world's population, but consumes 48% of the total wealth of the planet.

4. Capitalism has become an OBSOLETE system because the process whereby capital is valorized is a hindrance to the actual growth of productive forces. Capitalism has entered a phase of decline and the current crisis is structural in nature. We are not facing a classical crisis of over-production. What we have, today, is a capital vaporization crisis and consequently a crisis in capitalist relations of production that can no longer guarantee the process whereby labour power is reproduced. There is now a huge (worldwide) industrial reserve army on account of the inability of the process of capitalist production to absorb enough labour power.

This has or potentially will trigger brand-new phenomena that are hard to classify:

- a. The dismantling of the “social gains” of the so-called Welfare State. The European worker must compete, worldwide, with the subsistence wages and non-existent unemployment, sickness or pension payments levied on the Asian worker. Measures advocated by the IMF favour finance capital, but deepen the crisis and the unemployment problem.
- b. Entire countries and continents are being excluded from the capitalist production process: mass migration phenomena, driven by factors that may be economic, war-related or due to catastrophes, cannot find countries willing to offer them anything beyond a partial and selective welcome.
- c. The final stages of the processes of primitive capital accumulation in Russia, China, Brazil, South Africa and India, with the wage-earning working class spreading to those countries.
- d. Ecological restrictions upon massive, indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources, without any effective preventive actions regarding pollution and climate change. Pandemic erupting, triggered by industrialized farming and livestock rearing. Nature turned into a rubbish tip. Threats to the very survival of the human race and no proper preventative action taken.
- e. The surfacing of lots of sites and sectors featuring (sometime child-based), slavish work.
- f. The emergence of a virtual economy, the product of enormous, unhindered and unregulated financial speculation, leading to an unbridgeable gap with the real economy, with a resultant risk of financial crises and economic depression.
- g. The emergence of imperialist wars over control of oil and limited natural resources. War looked upon as a short-term economic solution to the fall in demand, meaning war between powers as the sole solution to the internal crises facing all the competing protagonists.

- h. Growth in the economy but no jobs generated.
- i. New models of entrepreneurial organization designed to boost work productivity, make for a flexible labour force (in terms of pay, length of contract or spatial accessibility), destroying the Welfare State's social gains and bans on trade union associations other than company unions or State-dependent unions.
- j. In Japan, Toyota-ism emerged in the 1950s to meet the war needs of the United States in the Korean War. National trade unions were dismantled at the point of a gun and replaced by compliant company unions. Big firms concentrated in districts that they ruled over like despots. Quality control teams were set up and these successfully set the rates of competitiveness for workers to abide by in reaching the company's targets. The emergence of some companies sub-contracting to others. High tension at work has become the norm, with some 10,000 deaths annually due to "*Karoshi*". ("*Karoshi*" is a composite term, made up of "*karo*" plus "*shi*", signifying, respectively, over-work and death; together they have come to mean "sudden death due to over-work", which is to say, stress-induced deaths.)
- k. The army, the police, the civil service, the mafia, the churches, trade unions and political parties are State institutions serving the interests of capital, which supplies their funding and sustains them. Step one in any autonomous worker struggle is their destruction.
- l. Class consciousness, if lost, can be recovered and swiftly radicalized, albeit that to begin with it will somewhat lag behind the neo-liberal offensive and the anti-people legislation passed by the various States. Brand-new popular and class organizational models will surface and overtake the discredited and useless parties and trade unions whose true statist, policing and mafia-like natures will be exposed.
- m. In the current phase of capitalist decline its limitations and the barbarism that it has planned for us will become glaringly obvious. The system's propaganda will become increasingly more brazen, despotic and irrational and tilt in the direction of social democratic, blatantly fascistic options or cleverly measured combinations of both. Democratic formalities will be discarded (Trump). Some sort of obsessive radical militarism will surface, directed either against an external enemy (triggered by commercial rivalry) or an internal one (driven by the demands of anti-subversion efforts).
- n. Nation states have always governed with their own peoples on the receiving end and for the benefit of the financial and business elites; except that now they are more brazen about it, deploying hardly any democratic disguises and veils and the last-ditch justification of widespread well-being. The different States will impose a war economy, an "efficient" management of wretchedness and sacrifice, for which they are going to have to come up with some enemy or scapegoat, be they immigrants, those subverting the established order, those crackpot anarchists, elderly pensioners and unproductive invalids, dictatorships, or such-and-such a hostile State, Russia, China, the Arab world or Islam, the marginalized and the poor, the unemployed and "other layabouts", etc., etc.
- o. Primitivism, ecologism, opposition to development, home-town Carlism, and the broadest range of desperate, nonsensical post-modern alternatives such as the Green New Deal will at best outline a social democratic scheme for managing the chaos, the disaster and misery at

the heart of a spent and obsolete capitalism that cannot offer guarantees of the process of valorization of capital.

- p. Solidarity, ethics and sheer collective survival become redoubtable weapons in Humanity's battle against an obsolete, corrupt and – by its very nature – criminal economic system that is sick, predatory, unsustainable and apocalyptic.
- q. Encouragement will be fed into a very pronounced social, cultural and political infantilization, because fear and ignorance are crucial factors in voluntary servitude to the State.
- r. An urgent choice will have to be made between communism or barbarism, between revolution or reform, between collective life or death ... because what is at stake is the very survival of the human race.
- s. There is, in progress, a worldwide proletarianization of immigrant labour, which has become the most widespread form of work, in the form either of migration to other countries (like the EU) or internal migration, as in China, where there are 130 million migrant workers, 80 million of which have migrated from impoverished regions in the Interior to coastal cities. As of 2013, the number of immigrants, worldwide, is higher than ever: 232 million (back in 2000, the figure was 175 million), some 20 to 30 million of whom are undocumented. Between 2000 and 2013, they increased from 2.9% of the world's population to 3.3%. For the most part, they are immigrant labour and not refugees nor asylum-seekers.
- t. It is worth highlighting this upsurge in the proletariat of migrant workers who, through international hiring agencies, perform unskilled tasks in a range of countries at low rates of pay, even though, initially, they have no intention of putting down roots there; building workers from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh working on huge projects in the Gulf States, living in camps and dealing with collective conditions that have often prompted them to strike or rebel and grappling with brutal repression. Millions of domestic servants from the Philippines and Indonesia, etc., working for wealthy families in the Gulf states as well as in Hong Kong. Domestic servants caring for the elderly and travelling from Eastern Europe into the West or from Latin America to Spain (and elsewhere in Europe) to work for families unable to find carers locally. More and more "skilled" industrial workers contracted to work in some very far off countries and used to undermine the local working class.
- u. The jobbing Superman and his Super-State will be presented as saviours of the planet and species, even though they are actually their grave-diggers.
- v. Revolution or barbarism: there is no other option.
- w. History has never been able to show a proletariat as authentically global as that of 2025. One need only stroll through the streets of major European cities for proof of that. At the same time, prophets and saviours of humanity will surface to peddle the message that the proletariat is petering out and they will even explain to us that there never was one and it has never been anything more than an invention or a fiction.

Communism is not a BEAUTIFUL IDEAL; it is a MATERIAL NECESSITY, the groundwork for which has been laid by capitalism, with a productivity that is in a position to guarantee the sort of society that can meet every one of humanity's material needs. It is up to the proletariat to destroy the State, because the latter is the political organization of the economic exploitation of waged labour. Destruction of the State is the sine qua non of the establishment of a communist

society. But the capitalist State cannot actually be destroyed unless the working class first puts paid to the economic, social and historical conditions attendant upon the existence of waged labour and the law of value, on a global scale.

What will there be in place of the State? The administration of things under a communist arrangement. But proletarian revolution is not a party or organization affair. What renders communism possible is equitable distribution of the forces of production and the spreading consciousness of wage-slave and proletarian status.

The historical record of the international proletariat can point to Russian soviets, German *räte* and Spanish committees, meaning the proletariat organized into workers' councils as the revolutionary organizational brand of the working class. So we are not talking about this or that organizational version of committee or council, but rather about society organized along councilist lines. Councils do not represent workers; they are the proletariat organized. A fighting class agency. Not a political agency, but society organized in accordance with brand-new relations of production and which is therefore neither democratic nor dictatorial, but looks beyond politics, and steers clear of the dividing line between public and private which typifies capitalism. Soviets, *räte* and committees have been the workers' response to the vacuum left behind by the bourgeoisie; more than some radicalization of the fight. For the Leninists' notion of "the party" councilists substitute the notion of "council". Both ideologies lead nowhere. The councils are going to be only whatever the workers can pull off in the battle to destroy the State and construct libertarian communism. Social revolution is now the only option.

A revolution needs to be not merely economic and political together, but must be total, meaning, it must be simultaneously anti-economic and anti-political, thereby staving off any chance of a restoration of the power of capital. Anti-economic in that it is not restricted to socialization, nor does it lapse into productivism, but does away with waged labour and surplus value. Anti-political insofar as it is organized into workers' councils that dismantle all State structures and do away with all borders, meaning that it will, of necessity, be on an international scale.

TODAY

Wages are the main form of modern slavery. The WAGE RELATIONSHIP is not merely social and economic in nature, but is also political, since it determines the lifestyle of those who wield no decision-making power over their own lives.

The proletariat is defined as that class in society that lacks property of any sort and which, to survive, needs to sell its labour power in return for a wage. Whether they know it or not, wage-earners, the unemployed, casual workers, retirees and their dependent relatives make up part of the proletariat. In Spain, roughly 2.6 million unemployed, plus 21 million wage-earners and casual employees who live in fear of dropping into the ranks of the unemployed are part of the proletariat, as are an ill-defined number of marginalized persons who do not feature in the statistics because they have been excluded from the system.

Working class is an OBJECTIVE social category that applies to all who have a WAGE-BASED relationship with an employer (be he private sector or State sector) to whom they sell their

labour force (their brawn and their intelligence). The working class makes up part of the proletariat, which also includes the unemployed, retirees and marginalized. Proletarians do not own the means of production. The wage is the leading form of modern slavery.

These days, the middle class includes a number of “self-employed” workers, meaning that they are independent and “Self-exploiting” workers, a number of highly skilled technicians and professionals and entrepreneurs without waged employees. The upper middle class would consist of entrepreneurs with a few waged employees, but bereft of any telling political influence.

The definition “capitalist” refers to all the owners of the mean of production, or top managers with decision-making powers (regardless of whether they themselves are on a wage or not) of the bigger private or State ventures. They account for less than one per cent of the population, but their political influence is absolute and they decide the economic policies applied to and affecting the day-to-day lives of every single part of the population. Their motto might be: “All States in the service of capital: each State turning on its own people.”

European parliamentary democracy has, since the onset of a depression (2008) undergone a rapid transformation into a “nationally useless” authoritarian and mafia-style party-ocracy dominated by a stateless capitalist ruling class in the service of international finance and the multi-nationals. There has been a thoroughgoing and extensive proletarianization of the middle classes, a massification of the proletariat and casual workers (with very pronounced immigration worldwide) and a violent and fitful eruption of irreconcilable collectives, suburbs and marginalized, anti-systemic communities (more as a result of their being excluded rather than out of conviction). National States are becoming obsolete (yet still necessary, in that they guarantee public order and defend exploitation by force of arms) instruments serving that ruling capitalist class, with its global outlook and interests.

The present-day capitalist society upon which we have based the preceding classification of society as three essential classes, still allows within the ranks of each class an infinite sliding-scale of economic, social, political and cultural circumstances, whilst still identifying with the capitalists’ EXPLOITATION of workers, and is trending in the direction of a swift polarization between the proletariat (plus a proletarianized middle class) and a tiny (stateless and under one per cent) minority of all-powerful leaders.

Everybody understands exploitation when somebody brings up the topic of child labour use in companies in India, Vietnam or China making branded footwear or clothing on behalf of multi-nationals, with working days of between 18 and 20 hours, unpaid except in the form of meals and some bedding in the workplace, their products being marketed in the USA or Europe. And they are rightly outraged by such exploitation of child labourers.

It needs to be understood that EXPLOITATION of the wage-earner is the ESSENCE of capitalist society. All wage-earners (and not just Indian child labourers) suffer capitalist exploitation. The greater the productivity of a society’s collective labours, the higher the degree of exploitation endured by its workers, even though they may consume more goods.

The ferocious inter-capitalist battle to out-perform and outlive their rivals is behind the escalating exploitation of their workers, quite apart from any good will or ethics on the part of each individual entrepreneur. Capital amalgamates and is concentrated and is forever at loggerheads with the living and working conditions of the workers, threatening to relocate to a different country or to look to the millions of indigent jobless for cheaper labour. In every country a handful of transnational firms make purchases annually that far exceed the national budget and they wield the power to grant millions of the dispossessed employment, or to withhold it from them. The proletariat, which these days tends to include 75%-80% of Spain's population, can be broken down into wage-earners, casual employees, jobless, people approaching retirement and the marginalized. The middle class is undergoing a very pronounced proletarianization, with broad swathes of professionals (in the fields of medicine, architecture, education, technology and social services), civil servants and medium-sized or small entrepreneurs (groups that, up until a few years ago, enjoyed high incomes) being proletarianized, or even finding themselves economically and socially marginalized.

The very high numbers of unemployed and the statistically unknown numbers of the excluded (due to their being long-term unemployed and/or in receipt of no income at all) are ensuring that wage-earners, overall, are seeing their working and living conditions menaced to an extent that would have been unthinkable only a few years ago in Spain and across Europe. Collective bargaining across sectors or companies is even disappearing and being replaced with rock bottom and wretched contract arrangements. Suburbs are being turned into ghettos for those excluded from the system and the State is out to isolate them one from another, surrendering control to gangs, drug-dealers, mafia groups, schools, social workers, winos and addicts, prisons and the police, so that, altogether, these can impose control and/or economic political, social, moral and volitional sacrifices, plus, if need be, physical controls over "all who are surplus to requirements", for the specific and concrete purpose to defusing their revolutionary potential, in an effort to turn such outlying districts into hives of the living dead, upon whom the institutions of the State have declared an out-and-out war of extermination and annihilation.

Not only are the neo-situationist and millenarist arguments about the withering away of the proletariat demonstrably irrational and false in light of the immeasurable expansion of the proletariat in countries like China, South Africa, Brazil, India or the *maquiladoras* in Mexico, but their failure to understand the new reality in Europe, characterized by massive and global immigration and the proletarianization of the middle classes following the depression that set in in 2008.

Primitivists and "pro-situs", grassroots Carlists (such as Félix Rodrigo Mora and David Algarra) or those prophesying the defeat and demise of the proletariat (like Miquel Amorós¹), have remained anchored in their outmoded analyses which are stultifying as much as they are contrived, chaotic and useless, with their bewildering blend of features specific to the days of

¹ The better to appreciate the roots of encyclopedist thought upon which Amorós feeds, we can only recommend a reading of the text "From situationism into the abyss" (Del situacionismo al abismo), which can be found on a number of web pages.

Keynesianism/Fordism (1945-1975) and capitalism's neo-liberal/Toyota-ist phase (1876-2007) and its essence.

Catastrophists, Luddites, anti-developmentists, the leftists and rightists of capital, technophobes and idealists of various hues and persuasions, broken-down theorists and fans of the spectacle and novelty are agreed on one essential point, that leaves us bare-handed as a revolutionary class locked in battle with the capitalist system: they argue that the proletariat is no more and/or no longer functions as a revolutionary actor. They mistake the part for the whole. They muddle up the industrial working class with the proletariat. They sneer at the lumpenproletariat in the ghettos as uncouth, déclassé barbarians. They are brilliant, supercilious, coherent and extraordinarily self-satisfied reactionaries that are very useful these days to capital by adding to the confusion and are leading us into the abyss and into defeat: but they will soon disappear into the maw of silliness and extravagance.

The class struggle is not only the only chance for resistance and survival in the face of capital's ferocious and sadistic onslaught, but the irreplaceable avenue for a search for a definitive revolutionary solution to the decline of a capitalist system that is now obsolete and criminal and which holds itself to be beyond reproach and everlasting.

Those who deny the class struggle or even query the existence of classes and prattle to anyone willing to listen about the disappearance of the proletariat, are on the opposite side of the barricade.

Revolution or barbarism, class struggle or boundless exploitation: decision-making power over one's own life, or wage-slavery and marginalization.

Agustín Guillamón

Barcelona, June 2025

6. HOW COME THE MAY 1937 INSURRECTION?

What next? For an entire month, between 21 July 1936 and 21 August 1936 the anarcho-syndicalist "bigwigs" blathered on about the dilemma regarding whether to wind up the CAMC – Central Antifascist Militias Committee – without joining the Generalidad government, or holding on to it.

The revolutionary situation was characterized by the conversion of the defence committees into barrio-level or local revolutionary committees that tended to supplant the State by handling and taking over its functions. At the same time, there was a widespread and far-reaching process whereby the factories were being impounded methodically by the industrial unions that were enacting one of the most thoroughgoing social and economic revolutions in history, one that has been poorly analysed and even more poorly explained to this very day.

But the CNT's higher committees, organized into an elitist executive and authoritarian Committee of Committees, were not leading and orchestrating that revolution by the grassroots membership on the streets and in the factories; instead they evolved into just another antifascist organization in cahoots with the other antifascist parties, ranging from Stalinists and POUMists to republicans and the Generalidad government, which embraced an ideology of antifascist unity with no purpose other than winning the war on fascism, even though it implies the renunciation of any revolutionary aims and of anarchist principles per se.

There was, therefore, a divergence, dichotomy, contradiction and real separation between the Committee of Committees' policy of antifascist unity and the social and economic revolution spearheaded by the revolutionary committees and the trade unions.

This antagonism which some historians have ventured to categorize, incorrectly, as a dual power situation, obtained, not between the Generalidad government and the CAMC, but between the revolutionary committees (embodying proletarian autonomy and implementing a program of methodical expropriation of the bourgeoisie) and the CAMC (a class collaborationist, antifascist unity body).

The class contradictions between the CAMC and the revolutionary committees of July 1936 resulted, inside the Organization, in an opposition that in December 1936 pitted the Committee of Committees against Barcelona's barrio committees, when the latter refused to hand over their weapons for dispatch to the front, the argument being that such weapons were the only guarantee of the revolution that was under way, and that, if there was a need for arms for the front lines, the Assault Guards and Civil Guards were confined to their barracks and armed and were right there in the Barcelona rearguard. That the revolutionary barrio committees would never surrender weapons wrested from the Army in the street-fighting.

When insurrections die, its grave-diggers immediately step on to the stage. The July 1936 insurrection, spearheaded by defence committees that over the course of the victorious uprising had evolved into revolutionary committees, had been hijacked by a Committee of Committees, hell bent on protecting, at all costs, the CNT's sacred antifascist unity with Stalinists, the ERC, the POUM and the Generalidad government.

That antifascist sacred union was regarded as the only instrument capable of ensuring victory in the war on fascism. The Committee of Committees foreswore any revolutionary approach lest it jeopardize that priority of antifascist unity and, in the short term, that entailed the Committee of Committees standing up to and liquidating the revolutionary committees. The class struggle was also being fought out inside the CNT organization itself.

A REVOLUTIONARY SITUATION BUT NO PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION

Consequently, we define the situation that obtained in Barcelona between 19 July 1936 and 26 September 1936 – characterized by the defence committees' and CNT unions' rout of the Army and the fascist revolt – as a revolutionary situation.

No organization gave the word that political power was to be seized and the Generalidad snuffed out. The anarcho-syndicalists declined to take power. The CNT-FAI decided to partner with the CAMC, an antifascist unity and class collaborationist body which, over the following nine and a half months, resurrected the machinery of state.

Meanwhile, grassroots CNT militants, without awaiting instructions from their leaders, but trained by seventy years of libertarian education, prosecuted, within the barrios and the factories, a thoroughgoing social and economic revolution without parallel in history, by systematically expropriating companies, barracks, churches and bourgeois properties.

That social and economic situation, characterized by widespread expropriation of the bourgeoisie and trade union take-overs of factories, complemented by the raising of revolutionary workers' militias that marched off to Aragon to tackle the fascists and the organizing of Control Patrols by way of a revolutionary police force charged with embedding and defending the new revolutionary order imposed by the barrio committees and local committees that also aimed at supplanting the State in all of its functions is what we term a revolutionary situation.

THE LENINISTS

The Leninists of the PSUC (which was founded on 23 July 1936 through the amalgamation of four tiny socialist and communist parties) spearheaded the Stalinist counter-revolution, which was typified by advocacy of a strong bourgeois State capable of raising a traditional army equipped to win the war on fascism. They denied that there was any revolution in Catalonia. Once the army and fascist would-be coup had been defeated, the Leninists from the POUM proposed a program that provided for rent reductions, pay increases and other minor short-term demands, rather than getting to grips with the only issue that mattered, the crucial and pressing issue of power. In 1936 Catalonia, Leninism, painlessly and ingloriously, foundered amidst a counter-revolutionary Stalinism and the most short-sighted and pointless short-termism.

FAILED THEORY, MISSING VANGUARD

We are forced to the conclusion, then, that on 21 July 1936 the anarcho-syndicalist movement was found wanting in terms of a revolutionary theory capable of getting to grips with the issue of power. It also lacked a vanguard (not the sort that stands in for the class) capable of orchestrating, expanding, managing, bolstering and embedding the potential power of those revolutionary committees that were spearheading a very profound and extensive social and economic revolution in Catalonia).

The revolutionary situation in place in Catalonia between July 1936 and May 1937 quickly boiled down to an ongoing bolstering of the counter-revolution and the Generalidad government, which, in the end, defeated the revolutionaries in the events of May 1937.

MISSING VANGUARD, FAILED THEORY

No one on 21 July 1936 broached the orchestration, expansion and strengthening of the nameless, thoroughgoing, collective, proletarian and intense social and economic revolution that

the revolutionary committees, the industrial unions and the rank-and-file workers were autonomously carrying out at street level, without instructions from any organization and on foot of seventy years of libertarian education.

Where theory fails and a vanguard is missing, insurrections die and the way is opened for ferocious counter-revolution.

MAY 1937 WAS A NECESSARY DEFEAT

May 1937 marked the defeat of the most advanced revolutionary proletariat, a defeat needed and pursued by the Stalinist counter-revolution and republican reformism, in order to disarm the threat posed by the CNT's defence committees to bourgeois institutions and through the unleashing of a selective crackdown whereby the higher committees were recruited into the machinery of state and the revolutionaries annihilated.

In the 1930s antifascism was fascism's greatest success. A sacred union of all antifascists for the purpose of defeating fascism and defending democracy entailed the workers' movement's renouncing its own principles, renouncing a proletarian revolutionary program, renouncing the gains of the revolution, renouncing everything ...

This embracing of the antifascist program (meaning defence of capitalist democracy) explains why and how past revolutionary leaders themselves turned, within just a few months, into ministers, appeasers, bureaucrats and counter-revolutionaries. The CNT produced ministers and those ministers betrayed nothing and no one: they merely performed their duties as best they knew how.

The uprising in May 1937 was the result of the defence committees' resistance to the heralded and foreseeable military coup de force mounted by the PSUC-ERC-Generalidad government counter-revolutionary bloc, plus the provocation offered in the form of the order to storm the Telephone Exchange building. In addition, it was part of the Stalinist strategy of building up to a strong State capable of winning the war on fascism. Disarming and weakening the CNT was, as far as the PSUC was concerned, a strategic necessity, of which the murder of Antonio Martín in Bellver had been the opening act.

May 37 did not come out of the blue, but was the result of the resistance to the disbanding of the Control Patrols and militarization of the militias and, above all, worker opposition at company level as they fought, one by one, in an isolated way, to deepen and retain control of the process of socializing the economy of Catalonia and the rolling back of the "gains of July". Because implicit in the Generalidad's "regularization" drive as it sought to enforce the S'Agaró decrees that Tarradellas had approved in January 1937, was the ending of the revolution and Generalidad state institutions' assuming complete control of Catalonia's economy.

THE DEFENCE COMMITTEES INSURGENT AGAIN

Julián Merino's leadership at the morning sitting of the higher committees on 4 May 1937, the establishment of a secret revolutionary committee under the aegis of the CRTC (Catalan Regional

Confederation of Labour) and of two combat commissions to take the fight to the streets – these were, without question, an attempt to go on the attack but it failed due to the ceasefire call broadcast over the air that afternoon by García Oliver and Federica Montseny. That would-be offensive and the swift defeat inflicted upon it, merely underlined the mainly defensive character of the workers' uprising in May '37.

The uprising between 3 and 7 May was essentially a Barcelona affair, although there is no denying that there were significant overtures across Catalonia and in the Pais Valenciano, as well as some resonance (surprisingly similar sometimes) in a lot of towns around Catalonia such as Tarragona, Reus, Tortosa, Amposta, Lérida, Gerona, Cadaqués, Manlleu, Vich, Bisaura de Ter, Montesquiú, La Farga de las Lloses, Vilafranca del Penedés, Sitges, etc. Be that as it may, at no time did the May 1937 insurrection spill over from the borders of Catalonia.

ATTACK IN JULY, DEFENCE IN MAY

July 1936 was an offensive uprising against the military-fascist revolt: the May Events of 1937 were a defensive uprising against the coup de force being planned by the Stalinists, the [Catalan] nationalists and the Generalidad. A comparison of both uprisings leaves no doubt as to their main features: July 1936 was an attack and May 1937 a defence.

The defence committees launched a defensive uprising against the Stalinists and the bourgeois Generalidad government, in defiance of their own organizations and leadership, but they proved incapable of seeing the fight through to the finish without their organizations and in defiance of their leaders. In May 1937, as in July 1936, what was missing was a revolutionary organization with clout and prestige and capable of championing anarchist principles, destroying the State and imposing a social alternative upon capitalism and State structures.

Viewed in that light, May 1937, though doubtless a product of the growing unhappiness with rising prices, food shortages and the struggle at company level to enforce socialization of the economy and worker control, the Generalidad's step-by-step drive to disarm the rearguard and recapture control of public order, etc., etc., was primarily the requisite armed defeat of the proletariat, which the counter-revolution needed in order to snuff out once and for all any revolutionary threat to bourgeois republican institutions.

THE LESSONS

The lessons that need drawn are plainly the need to utterly destroy the State and disband its forces of repression, as well as the implementation of the proletariat's program of social revolution; these, the anarchists organized into the Friends of Durruti Grouping saw as synonymous with the establishment of a Revolutionary Junta made up of all the organizations that had played their parts in the revolutionary street-fighting in July 1936 and ruling out collaboration of any sort with Stalinists, bourgeois or State organizations. May 1937 was the consequence of the mistakes made in July 1936.

Plainly, in the absence of the proletariat's taking power, which is to say, without the dismantling of the power of the bourgeoisie and its State, collectivization would founder and all of the

collectives would be revamped and denatured: but it is equally obvious that expropriation of the bourgeoisie, for all its limitations, was the fruit of the proletarian revolutionary revolt in July 1936.

The essential lesson of the revolutionary situation in Barcelona (and pretty much all over Catalonia and parts of Aragon and the Pais Valenciano) was the ineluctable need for a vanguard to champion the proletariat's revolutionary program – the first two moves in which are the utter destruction of the State and the establishment of a Revolutionary Junta, as proposed by the Friends of Durruti. That Revolutionary Junta constituted a novel body, beyond politicking and parties and fleshed out through workers' councils and it was tasked with tackling inevitable counter-revolutionary violence, dismantling statist structures the way a number of churches had been dismantled, with only their bell-towers and ground floors left standing.

Power has always meant a completely free hand in collectively deciding upon the important issues with a bearing on our everyday lives. As far as the proletariat is concerned, there can be no freedom in the absence of proletarian power, which is to say, where there is no State, no police, no armies, no borders, no money and no waged labour ...

ACADEMIC HISTORIOGRAPHY

Be it Stalinist, social democratic or [Catalan] nationalist, the academic historiography strives to peddle a slanted interpretation of May 1937, amounting to an expression of regret at the crisis and fratricidal breakdown within the antifascist camp. The May Events of 1937 cannot be understood unless one understands that Barcelona's revolutionary workers were not fighting for a bourgeois Republic nor for a democratic State. The revolutionary committees in the barrios, having grown out of the defence committees' victory over the rebellious army and the fascists' would-be coup d'état, were fighting for social revolution and for a brand-new world, in a class war. They were fighting for the dismantling of the State and for it to be supplanted in all its functions, expropriating factories and bourgeois-owned properties by raising an army of volunteer militians and taking charge of the political, social and economic running of a city with a population in excess of a million people. And that is something that [Catalan] nationalist, social democratic, fascist, reformist, leftist, rightist or Stalinist post-history can neither digest nor countenance.

On foot of that simple premise – that the barrio committees were fighting for revolution – we arrive at the following inescapable considerations:

- A. In July 1936 the essential issue was not the taking of power by a minority of anarchist leaders, but rather the committees' orchestration, boosting and deepening of the dismantling of the State.

The revolutionary committees at ward level (plus some local committees) neither made nor failed to make the revolution: they *were* the social revolution.

Destruction of the State by the revolutionary committees was a very concrete and real task, whereby the committees took over all of the tasks that the State had been performing prior

to July 1936. And therein lies the big lesson of the 1936 revolution: the over-riding need to dismantle the State.

- B. During the civil war, the political project of State anarchism, performing as just another antifascist party, indulging in class collaborationist approaches and partnership in government, organized along bureaucratic lines for the main purpose of winning the war on fascism, proved a spectacular failure on every score: but revolutionary anarchism's social movement, organized into barrio-level, local, workers' control, defence and whatever revolutionary committees, added up to the embryos of a worker power that registered achievements in terms of economic management, revolutionary popular ventures and proletarian autonomy that, to this very day, shed light upon and herald a future radically different from capitalist barbarism, fascist horrors or Stalinist enslavement.

CONCLUSIONS

For the first time in history, we have an instance of an uprising instigated and sustained in defiance of the wishes of leaders to which the vast majority of the insurgents were affiliated. But, although an insurrection can be improvised, a victory (as Escorza pointed out) cannot, especially when all the antifascist workers' organizations – from the UGT through to the higher committees of the CNT – proved hostile to the revolutionary proletariat.

The higher committees hedged their bets by allowing the formation of a secret CNT Revolutionary Committee (Merino) whilst assembling a delegation (Santillán) to go and negotiate at the Generalidad Palace. But they very quickly dropped the insurgent card and played the ace of the ceasefire, which ensured their future prospects as bureaucrats.

The UGT and the CNT, the Generalidad government and the ERC, the Stalinists and the higher committees – all of these, together – turned the splendid military victory of the insurrection (within reach of Merino and Rebull) into a horrific political defeat. All of them together, each after its own fashion, each of them playing its own part to some effect. The Stalinists and republicans did so bluntly by fighting on the counter-revolutionary side of the barricades. The anarcho-syndicalists and POUMists espoused an ambiguous "I'd love to, but I can't" stance: a "to be or not to be" stance; the former by pushing for a ceasefire and the dismantling of the barricades; the latter by "boldly" falling into line behind the former.

Only two tiny organizations – the Friends of Durruti Grouping and the Bolshevik-Leninist Section of Spain (SBLE) – made any attempt to avert defeat and endow the insurrection with specific objectives. Barcelona's revolutionary proletariat – anarchists, essentially – fought for revolution, even to the extent of fighting against their own organizations and their own leaders, in a battle that had been lost as far back as July 1936, at the point where the machinery of the State was left standing.

There are, though, some lost battles that must be fought for the benefit of future generations, for no purpose other than to place it on record who was who, noting which side of the

barricades they fought on, indicating where the class boundaries sit and which is the course to follow and the mistakes to be avoided.

7. FASCISM AND ANTIFASCISM

THE THREAD OF TIME

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

In a flurry of articles between 1921 and 1926, Amadeo Bordiga² tackled the subject of fascism. Fascism was the number one issue that the Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I) had to grapple with in terms of its activities at the time.

Above all else, if we are to understand Bordiga's theses regarding fascism we need to single out his thinking regarding the antifascist ideology.

Antifascism took the view that fascism was essentially characterized by its violent trampling over the law and democratic political rights. Bordiga reckoned that the brazen recourse to violence characterizes nothing. Violence per se carries no specific significance. What matters is analysis and the identification of which class it is that is using violence and which classes are the targets. In Bordiga's view, even the most rudimentary theoretical ABC teaches that, in any society split into classes, the ruling class uses violence to subjugate the ones that are ruled.

Bordiga's reckoning was that ideology that held that fascism was a reversion to pre-capitalist practices had no bearing upon the revolutionary theory of the proletariat. Political frameworks do not fall in and out of fashion but are determined by the range of prevailing social relations, and any evolution within them is not dependent upon chance, caprice or whimsy, but upon the economic and social development within that society, meaning the changes working upon that structure of social relationships as it comes into contact with historical events.

To Bordiga's way of thinking, the proletariat's embrace of the antifascist ideology implied its defending democracy, turning its back on its class interests, or, and this amounts to the same thing, giving up on asserting itself as a revolutionary class.

Therefore the alternative between democracy or fascism was a phoney one. Democracy and fascism are not mutually exclusive, but mutually complementary: that would be a basic and distinctive tenet, not just for Bordiga, but for the Italian communist Left Faction in the 1930s.

In Bordiga's articles, fascism and democracy alike are the big bourgeoisie's strategies for ruling and geared to sustain the social relations of capitalist production.

² Amadeo Bordiga (1889-1970) was an Italian marxist revolutionary who spearheaded the foundation of the PCd'I in 1921 and served as its top leader up until 1922, He was thrown out by the Stalinists in 1930. He was the inspiration of various ultra-left currents during the 1960s.

Jettisoning fetishist definitions and ideas of capital, which is to say, the treatment of capital as a thing – be it money, factories, etc, – he fell back on the definition of capital as a social relations of production, of the very sort that obtains between one social class, characterized by freedom (the freedom to sell its labour power) and that other social class which is characterized by its purchase of waged labour.

Starting from that definition of capital, Bordiga argued that the ruling class, meaning the class identified as the purchaser of labour power, would turn and turn about (or both together) resort to the democratic approach and/or the fascist mode of rule so as to retain capitalist social relations of production, which is to say, the buying and selling of labour power in a market governed by the laws of supply and demand.

The ruling capitalist class's recourse to a democratic approach or to a fascist approach was not dependent upon some ideological choice: it was not a voluntary act, but rather hinged upon the extent of the ripeness of social conflicts.

The slickest approach, the one that delivered the best outcomes in the Italy of 1920-1925, was a general recourse to fascist violence, encouraged and supported from democratic institutions, alongside the subtle paralysing weapon of social reformism and the championing of democratic freedoms and bourgeois legality as the objective being peddled to the workers' movement.

Bordiga did not see fascism as a reversion to pre-capitalist political formulas, let alone a style of politicking incompatible with democratic principles, but rather as a pre-emptive counter-revolution designed to banish the revolutionary threat posed by the proletariat. Bordiga and his supporters on the PCd'I leadership derived their arguments from the historical experience lived on a daily basis by the proletariat in Italy.

The repression during the 'two red years' of popular unrest triggered as a result of the post-war crisis in the economy – inflation, industrial readjustment and unemployment, which hit the working class's living conditions hard – was the handiwork of parliamentary democracy.

It was only after the factory occupations wave of September 1920, at the end of those two red years, that the fascist militias intervened decisively.

The most effective weapons deployed by Giolitti in defusing the revolutionary unrest, were the General Confederation of Labour (the CGL) and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), meaning trade union and socialist reformism. In concert with the social democrats, the democratic State had established the conditions leading to the emergence of a third counter-revolutionary actor: the fascist squads.

Their task was not to crush a revolutionary movement that had already suffered defeat at the hands of the democratic State and with the cooperation of reformist socialism, but to nip any resurgence in the bud.

In Bordiga's estimation, one essential feature of fascism was its industrial roots and so he rejected the label of feudal backlash hung on the fascist movement.

Bordiga contended that fascism had been born in the big industrial cities of northern Italy, like Milan, where Mussolini launched the *fasci* in 1919. Hence the early funding of fascism by the big industrialists, as well as the presentation of the Fascio as a great unifying movement of the ruling class. Its establishment in huge, wealthy rural areas such as Emilia-Romagna, which even predated control of the big industrial cities, came about precisely because it occurred in rural areas characterized by a forward-looking, fully capitalist approach to agriculture, such as prevailed in the Po valley. The big land-owning bourgeoisie in Emilia-Romagna threw its support wholeheartedly behind fascism, which actually drew hardly any response in Italy's backward south.

Yet it took two years of out-and-out civil war (1921 and 1922), the priceless cooperation of reformist socialists and the treachery of the CGL unionists, before fascism was able to dominate the big industrial cities of northern Italy. But once that was in place, following the failure of the August 1922 general strike, the March on Rome was a mere formality. A formality in which Bordiga continually stressed the democratic assumption of power by the fascists, with all the liberal and democratic political factions in Parliament at the time voting to endorse it.

YESTERDAY

A hundred years on from publication of Bordiga's articles on the origins and rise of fascism in Italy, we are in a position to argue, without the shadow of a doubt, that antifascism proved the worst historical and ideological legacy of fascism and is today capital's last ideological bulwark. In essence, antifascism promotes the fight against fascism through the strengthening of democracy. Which is to say that it does not support the fight against capitalism, other than in its fascist form. It is not out to destroy capitalism and does not fight on behalf of proletarian revolution; no, its aim is to see fascism brought down and bourgeois democracy restored.

Antifascism leads to fighting on behalf of a bourgeois option and rules out any revolutionary anti-capitalist option. And that exclusion is actually antifascism's counter-revolutionary purpose.

Other than in the empty rhetoric of some muddle-headed oxymoron, there is no such thing as revolutionary antifascism... Antifascism is always democratic and unifying and never anti-system and it is – always – objectively counter-revolutionary.

The warped and phoney picture in which antifascist activists believe and as which they represent themselves, as fighting cocks with vicious spurs is one thing, whereas they are merely plucked farm hens ready to have their throats cut and be tossed into the cooking pot.

TODAY

The media are 'his master's voice' and the voice of the big capital that funds them. Discredited, fraudulent and corrupt members of the Socialist and Popular figures from the PP-PSOE uni-party are in desperate need of a fascist bogeyman if they are to survive on the political stage and act as if they were different options, when they are nothing of the sort.

Democratic rights and freedoms clash with and contradict the prioritization of the State's defence of the rights of capital. This contradiction induces the bourgeoisie to set aside its own

democratic ideology and strips bare the repressive nature of the State, which is called upon to champion the interests of big capital by every means at its disposal, including the ones that imply the abolition of the most fundamental democratic rights and freedoms.

Democracy and fascism are not mutually incompatible, but are actually complementary, as either alternatives or complementary solutions. The complement to the *Podemos* party and its proposition of an antifascist alliance is the fascism of *Vox*: the aim is to force the proletariat to choose between fascism and antifascism and blind it to any anti-capitalist solution.

Podemos calls for defence of capitalist democracy by waving the fascist bogeyman that is *Vox*: Watch out for the big, bad wolf! They champion the existing system, which is corrupt, criminal and exploitative because fascism would be worse!

The bourgeoisie's political duplication behind the double labelling of fascistic³ or democratic⁴ come together in the bourgeoisie's common strategy, defence of its historical class interests. The function of the social democrats (the PSOE and *Podemos*) is to lure the proletariat's struggles away from their historical mission of class-based and thus, anti-capitalist emancipation in order to steer it into defending capitalist democracy.

An altar has to be raised to a hallowed antifascist union of all classes as a way of getting people to swallow all the "requisite" economic sacrifices, including democratic freedoms and the living standards of the workers. So budgets are cut with regard to education, social services or health with boosted spending on arms and defence and whatever the US emperor demands.

The drums of war are beating and a worldwide war economy is looming as the essential driver of a dystopian future.

Vox has no program because its one hundred-point alleged political project can only be described as paving the way for wildcat capitalism and the enslavement of the proletariat: Francoism as the solution. Fascism is not a product of the reactionary strata of the bourgeoisie, nor is it a product of feudal society; it is, instead, the product of an advanced capitalism that is mounting a pre-emptive offensive in response to the runaway economic crisis on the horizon.

There is an essential continuity between democracy and fascism, just as, back in the 19th century, there was a basic kinship between liberalism and democracy. The social democratic and the fascist approaches, rather than alternating in government, have a tendency to amalgamate. *Podemos* and *Vox* are two different voices speaking up for the same interests: the interests of big finance capital and the multi-nationals.

The PSOE, *Podemos* and others ask us blithely to accept the current wildcat, corrupt and clapped-out capitalist system in order to save ourselves from fascism.

Fascism and democracy are merely two forms of capitalist government. But these days, capitalism is an obsolete system with nothing to offer us but misery, horror and death. For the

³ Meaning the far right of *Vox*, plus that of the PP and Junts, not to mention the pro-independence Nazis of the *Aliança Catalana*.

⁴ Meaning the PSOE, *Podemos*, the PNV and the ERC

first time in history there is a possibility that the human race and life in every form might disappear because of the runaway, excessive exploitation of natural resources by a maverick and suicidal capitalism. However, since this hits the short-term profits of the multi-nationals, governments are not lifting a finger to ward off the catastrophe that they see is approaching.

The choice is not between fascism or antifascism, in that they both champion the capitalist system, whilst they both gull us by means of a sham confrontation.

Eighty years ago, fascism and democracy were two different forms of capitalist State government: forty years ago, they were two alternative approaches, which States implemented as a function of the existing balance of power: today, they have amalgamated and are all but indistinguishable facets of the same mode of government, unbridled exploitation of nature and a widespread assault upon the living conditions of the proletariat. Better slaves than workers.

GLOBALIZATION

Globalization tinkered lightly with the rules of the game. Up popped a brand-new corporative class (under one per cent of the population), one managing the multi-nationals and, in outlook, character, purview, life, habits and international interests, one that is different from and even opposed to the entrepreneurial class in terms of character, geography and local circumstances. The tensions between them brought about novel and extravagant developments like Brexit or the push for Catalan independence. Nation states proved unable to reconcile or represent the interests of a proletarianized middle class and a national bourgeoisie in danger of extinction. Parliamentary democracy gave way to a democratic totalitarianism with no real rights or freedoms.

Among proletarians, there was a dizzying upsurge in unemployment, poverty and precariousness. Fresh, harrowing phenomena emerged, like the impoverished worker on starvation wages and living in misery.

This brand-new corporate geographically rootless class seems utterly indifferent and impervious to social, ecological or workplace issues. Democratic governments have been taken hostage by the new corporate class over which they have absolutely no control of the sort they may still wield over domestic firms.

And so the formal façade of the western democracies disguise the tyrannical running of the world economy by this minority, elitist corporate class which is independent of weak nation states that subjugate and subordinate everything to the profits and interests of the big multi-nationals that pay no tax, fail to comply with existing legislation, pollute without restraint or measure or threaten to pack up and move elsewhere.

There is no future for capitalism and post-globalization is flagging up fascistic, anti-proletarian nationalisms at loggerheads with one another in trade wars that will inevitably culminate in countless, ongoing imperial military wars which have turned into the economic driver required by and vital to this totalitarian, obsolete and clapped-out capitalism.

Let us delve deeper and tidy up and refine our theory, because the battles of the future are on a mammoth scale and our very existence as a human race is at stake. Revolution or barbarism is the choice.

Agustín Guillamón

Barcelona, 1 February 2025

8. SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

YESTERDAY

Social democracy is a political brand that emerged at the end of the 19th century from within the German workers' movement. The *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (or German SPD), launched in 1869, was not just the oldest and largest social democratic party but also the model to be aped by the rest of the parties belonging to the Second International – the Danish one, founded in 1878, the Spanish (1879), the Belgian (1885), the Austrian and the Swedish (1889), the Hungarian (1890), the Italian and the Polish (1892), the Romanian (1893), the Bulgarian and Dutch (1894), the Argentinean (1896), the Russian (1898), the French (1902/1905). In England and a few other countries they preferred the label Labour.

Once the anarchists had been thrown out of the Second International in 1896, all the socialist parties espoused ideological principles inspired by Marxism. Up until the First World War broke out, there was, embedded within all these national parties a revolutionary, radicalized and minority tendency that was, however, strong in terms of theory and highly active (Luxemburg and Lenin), at odds with a trade union and popular grassroots that were moderate and reform-minded (Bernstein, Kautsky in his latter days and Lassalle).

The basic aims of the socialist parties were universal suffrage and capture of the State so that it might be used as a means of gradually tilting capitalism in the direction of socialism. Bernstein argued the case for such gradualism as part of a process of political and economic reforms. Those reforms were the workers' movement's primary goal and, as a result, elections and parliamentarism turned into the main, if not the only, approach in the slow, progressive, relentless stride in the direction of socialism.

To Bernstein, the reforms that he was lobbying for were not just a method of securing short-term, trade union or social improvements, but democracy itself was an idea open to improvement, plus a political goal to be achieved through the fight for trade unions' right not just to be partners in running firms, but also in the political direction of the State.

For their part, the labour parties reckoned that the transition to socialism could better be achieved by means of development within representative democracy than through any violent revolution or anything other than democratic elections.

Bernstein was condemned and rejected, in theory, by all of the socialist parties: but in terms of practice his gradualist stance had a tremendous influence upon international socialism and the mind-set of social democratic activists.

The First World War led to the collapse of the Second International as the various socialist parties – primarily the German and the French ones – voted almost unanimously for war credits in their respective national parliaments. The international conferences held in Zimmerwald and Kienthal furnished proof that it would require only two cars to accommodate all of the revolutionaries opposed to the mass slaughter of workers.

The success of the Bolsheviks in Russia triggered a definitive split in the ranks of international socialism into two main ideological camps: the more radical factions within the socialist parties broke away and finished up setting up communist parties attached to the Third International (known also as the Communist International or Comintern) which toed a line close to the Moscow government.

And so communist parties emerged in Italy, Spain, France and so on. The socialist parties, once their radical fringes had broken away, clung all the more tightly to the social democratic idea and label.

Some of these parties achieved government office, on their own or as part of a coalition, including in coalition with communist parties, in inter-war Europe, as part of the so-called Popular Fronts. Those social democratic parties championed antifascist unity plus reforms as the road to a socialism where there would be no private ownership and they had no quarrel with the existence of the USSR. Labour parties, influenced by Keynesianism took the line that the essential point was State control of financial mechanisms, on the basis of which a slow process of drift in the direction of socialism would follow.

After the Second World War Europe's social democrats jettisoned Marxism and devised a brand-new vision of the relationship between capitalism and socialism, urging greater State intervention in the processes of wealth distribution, a progressive taxation policy and a subsidized network of assistance that amounted to a Welfare State. In 1959, at its Bad Godesberg Congress, the German SPD washed its hands of Marxism and saw socialism as wholly identical with democracy. The Spanish PSOE would follow suit in 1979.

The most outstanding thinkers and politicians were: Léon Blum, Ramsay MacDonald, Pierre Mendès-France, Tony Crosland, John Maynard Keynes, John Kenneth Galbraith, Olof Palme (prime minister of Sweden from 1969 until 1976), Bruno Kreisky (Austrian chancellor, 1970-1983), Willy Brandt (German chancellor, 1969-1974), Nehru, and so on. Not to lapse into caricature, their Spanish counterparts were Pablo Iglesias Posse (1850-1925), Francisco Largo Caballero (1869-1946) and Felipe González. Zapatero is supposedly a progressive from head to toe, but shows no sign of any sort of thoughtfulness, social democratic or otherwise.

TODAY

Prior to the 21st century, socialists portrayed themselves as capitalism's best managers. There was a political movement that lobbied for reforming capitalism's social and political structures. They placed the greatest store by parliamentary struggle as the means of accomplishing their aims: they repudiated violence and actions outside of the law. They showed the greatest reluctance to enter into alliance with communists and the greatest favour and solicitude for trans-national corporations and financial speculation.

A lot of social democrats insist that there is no conflict between capitalist market economics and their definition of a welfare society, as long as the State has the necessary powers to guarantee its citizens the social protection that is their due. What distinguishes them from liberalism and neo-liberalism is their insistence upon regulation of productivity and upon a progressive system of taxation and its levels. This translates into a boost to State action and the activity of the public communications media, as well as pensions, assistance and subsidies for cultural and social associations. Some European governments, under the cosh from neo-liberalism, have plumped for a variation upon this: the so-called Third Way, with not so much interventionism and role for public concerns, but with the retention of the assistance and subsidies that have come to typify social democracy. This was the course advocated by Tony Blair (United Kingdom prime minister, 1997-2007) but it very quickly proved to be obsolete.

We might say that at present social democracy feeds into the ideology of capital's political left and the 'progressive' mental outlook, but it has been severely damaged by neo-liberal criticisms and the ruination of the welfare State.

Among the thinkers who have had the greatest influence upon social democracy today are Gerhard Schroeder, Paul Krugman, Robert Solow, Joseph Stiglitz, Norberto Bobbio and Zygmunt Bauman. The thinking that paved the way for Tony Blair's stance was drawn from the works of Anthony Giddens and Jeffrey Sachs.

In most European countries, social democratic parties rank among the most important. In the United States, socialists are a rarity and, against all logic, are still looked upon as dangerous revolutionary extremists.

Most social democratic parties belong to the anodyne, hide-bound and bureaucratized Socialist Labour International set up in 1950.

The words "socialism" or "socialist" are often bandied around when speaking about social democracy and social democrats, since, in various countries the terms encompass socialists, communists and anarchists as well, although this relates more and more to an allusion to their shared historical ideological origins in the mid-19th century.

PROGRESSIVES

Progressive thinking is understood as a series of pretty much incoherent and unconnected happenings proper to the centre-left segment of the parliamentary spectrum. The re-constituted PSOE spearheaded progressive politics during the government of Felipe González (1982-1996). Under Zapatero (2004-2011) the whole social democratic ideology was jettisoned and the

progressives displayed all their contradictions and ineffectuality, typical of the empty political opportunism by which they are driven.

Once Felipe González (1979) jettisoned Marxism and once the PSOE under Zapatero turned into the PP-PSOE uni-party, progressives verbally proposed a number of social welfare schemes that were increasingly tight and unfeasible, effectively defending the maverick capitalism of the trans-nationals and finance capital and this led only to a greater concentration of wealth and social inequality, with no prospect beyond acceleration of the worldwide catastrophe and potential demise of the human race.

Come the 2008 crisis, the only jewel in the socialist program – the Welfare State – dwindled away into nothing, making progressives capital's direct managers. There was scarcely any difference between them and the far right beyond their good intentions, tolerance and cultured demeanour as they favoured abortion rights acknowledgment of gay rights, equality for women and a relaxed approach to mass immigration.

In August 2011, Zapatero and the uni-party, without bothering with a referendum, made urgent changes to the constitution so as to make its budgeting subject to the fiscal discipline upon which Merkel was insisting. Its failure in terms of social policy, its failure to ringfence its budgeting for education, health, social benefits and the protection of pensions, etc., plus the runaway growth in joblessness and cases of widespread corruption within its own ranks, just like any other party, turned the progressives into buffoons with no credibility at all. They did in private the very opposite of what they had been preaching in public. They had lost all belief in utopia and may well have no longer believed in anything. They turned a blind eye to long-standing socialist tradition which still pretended to defend principles such as solidarity or equality. Their patent de-politicization turned them into amoral, unbelievable, contemptible and despised opportunists.

The socialist deputies who allowed Rajoy to be installed are traitors to nothing: they are the very opposite: they have been consistent. Those that voted no to Rajoy care more about their own image than the service they owe to their masters: it all comes down to a matter of aesthetics.

The progressive ideology is no longer a philosophy, nor is it an ideology, nor a belief: it is simply a ploy by which to look after their own elitist privileges in a society such as the Spanish society, which leads Europe in terms of unemployment, prostitution, alcohol abuse, drug trafficking and use, with worthless educational services and failing schools, an upsurge in poverty and representative democracy having fallen into disrepute and a happy hunting ground for political castes and the loss of ethical values.

They are useless idiots and there is no way that they can recapture their former prestige. Their ideological and programmatic debris can be found in the midst of the following postulates in which they have no faith, nor are they themselves believed, because they run counter to their basic loyalty to and defence of the capitalist system and deference to the masters of the world:

1. The mixed economy, with private ownership and State ownership existing cheek by jowl. The State subsidizing quality health and education for all.

2. The State orchestrating and planning efficient and virtually universal social security capable of providing decent pensions, anti-poverty and anti-sickness arrangements and unemployment benefits.
3. The State should promote unionization of the workers and legislation to protect consumers against the malpractice of the trans-nationals and finance capital.
4. The State should protect the environment, passing laws to protect nature, alternative energy sources and grapple with climate change, without laying a finger on the trans-nationals' profits.
5. The State should be enforcing a progressive taxation system, but does not go after major fraudsters. The State should be incorrupt and incorruptible like St Teresa's arm, but in her case the preservation is a miracle.
6. The State should be secular, but the Catholic Church pays no taxes and enjoys unrivalled privileges in terms of schooling and the capture of communal or unclaimed assets.
7. The State should pass laws in favour of immigrants, fair international trade and cultural pluralism: but it funds Salafist mosques and puts up barbed wire fencing or commissions Foreigner Internment Centres (CIEs).
8. The State should be protecting human rights and democracy everywhere in the world, yet does not investigate civil war-time murders and disappearances.
9. Should it really get carried away, basic universal income for every citizen might be suggested, on the simple basis of their having been born or being resident within the territory of the nation.
10. They are out to be capitalism's best managers and the best champions of the interests of the trans-nationals and finance capital – the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO. And when the system runs up against a crisis, that fundamental fact enjoys utter priority over the previous 9 points which are whittled down to "I'd love to, but I can't".

*

These ten points highlight the brutal and irreparable contradictions afflicting the progressives and turning them into capital's left, the natural allies of the capitalist right with which they are of like mind and have formed the uni-party (PP-PSOE) and it encourages them to think of themselves as theatrical rivals of capital's far left (*En común* and *Podemos*), to whom they are intent upon handing on the torch so that the farce can carry on.

Because the point is not to capture the State but to destroy it. It does not come down to managing, reforming or improving capital and its mode of political representation: democracy: but to denying these and moving beyond them.

Agustín Guillamón

From the webpage of *Ser Histórico*, January 2016

9. THE FRENCH-SPANISH CHAPTER OF THE FRIENDS OF DURRUTI

(For historical context see A. Guillamón *CNT versus AIT: Los comités superiores cenetistas contra la oposición revolucionaria interna e internacional*, Descontrol, 2022)

*This article has been made possible thanks to the invaluable personal cooperation and extraordinary kindness of Phill Casoar who unearthed for us and supplied the requisite documentary evidence, as well as some outstanding biographical notes about Mercier Vega, Feuillade and Carpentier. See Various authors *Présence de Louis Mercier* (Atelier de Création Libertaire, Lyon, 1999); most especially the chapter by Phil Casoar “With the Durruti Column: Ridel in the Spanish Revolution” and David Berry’s “Charles Ridel and the review Révision (1938-1939)”*

INTRODUCTION

The Belgian Charles Cortvrint⁵ and Charles Carpentier⁶ from northern France both of them anarchist activists, crossed the French-Spanish border on 29 July 1936. Charles Cortvrint aka “Ridel” had been in Spain before, attending the CNT’s Zaragoza Congress in May 1936 and he had written a report on that congress, published in *La révolution prolétarienne*. Within days of crossing the border and by then in Barcelona, they had a meeting with Abad de Santillán who offered them press passes which they declined, because what they had in mind to do was fight on the Aragon front. They joined up with Louis Berthomieux, one-time artillery captain but by that point on his uppers and living with gipsies in a slum district.

In light of the influx of lots of anarchist volunteers arriving to fight fascism in Spain, the trip came up with the idea of marshalling them into the International Group of the Durruti Column. They had a hand in the capture of Pina de Ebro and Osera, as well as in the failed attempt to establish a bridge-head on the far bank of the Ebro. In September 1936 sixty men from the International Group with extensive military experience participated as elite troops in the attack on Siétamo, in which they sustained – what with dead and wounded – 37 losses.

On 17 October 1936 the International Group was decimated in Perdiguera following tough fighting with the Moroccan cavalry which had managed to cordon them off and isolate them from the remainder of the front, since the order to withdraw had failed to reach them due to the runner carrying it having got lost. Berthomieux thought it better to blow himself up with a stick of dynamite rather than fall into enemy hands. Ridel and Carpentier, who had set off only a few hours earlier to fetch additional arms and ammunition, were only able to assist in breaking through the cordon and

⁵ Charles Cortvrint was born in Brussels in 1914. From the age of 16 he was active in the Belgian anarchist movement. Settling in Paris, he represented the UA at the congress in Orléans in 1933. His best-known aliases were Charles Ridel (which he used in Spain) and Louis Mercier Vega (which he used while in exile in Chile); the latter became his best-known alias, the one with which he signed several of his books. He committed suicide on 20 November 1977, on the anniversary of Durruti’s death.

⁶ Born in Reims into a working class family in 1904. His childhood was spent in the Pas de Calais. With his father, he was deported to Germany at the age of ten and once the Great War was over he worked on recovering unexploded shells and filling in trenches and later in textile plants, in mining, as a docker in Rouen, and so on. Based in Paris from 1924, he started hanging out with the anarchists around *Le Libertaire*. He died in 1988.

forcing the eventual withdrawal. Some 170 militians out of a total of 240, which was the International Group's strength by that point, perished and the Group effectively disappeared as a separate unit. In the wake of this military disaster, Ridel and Carpentier made their way back to France. Charles Ridel (or Cortvrint), at the request of the Union Anarchiste (UA) set off on a lecture tour to raise funds and to organize assistance for the militians fighting for the revolution in Spain. Carpentier returned to Spain in December 1936 and was involved in the fighting on the barricades in Barcelona during the May Events of 1937, shortly before he returned to France once and for all in order to give the slip to the communist *checas*.

In November 1937, Charles Ridel, Charles Carpentier, Lucien Feuillade (aka *Luc Daurat*) and Guyard spoke out against the resolutions and accords passed by the UA congress.⁷ That congress met from 30 October to 1 November 1937. For one thing, there was an acknowledged need to switch to brand-new organizational approaches to cope with the ever-increasing membership figures and the print-run of *Le Libertaire*, both of which had quadrupled over the past year. However, the matter that encapsulated and sharpened the debates at the congress was the matter of solidarity with Spain. In actual fact, when the resolutions passed at the congress called for "whole-hearted UA solidarity with Spain" what that meant was French anarchists' solidarity with and endorsement of the CNT and FAI's COLLABORATIONISM with the Spanish bourgeois republican government.

Ridel opened the proceedings with a critique of the UA's most glaring mistakes over the previous year; in his eyes, these were::

- "1. Anarchism ought to be a segment of the workers' movement, rather than a philosophy.
2. There needs to be a change to organizational structures which heaped all of the work on to the shoulders of five or six posts of responsibility, instead of sharing it with the entire organization.
3. Greater political consistency was called for.
4. He lamented the inadequate preparations made for the Congress.
5. He deplored the participation in the rally at the Vélodrome d'Hiver⁸ of stalinists like Cachin⁹ and Jouhaux.
6. He wanted permission for the various political stances of Spanish anarchists to be spelled out in *Le Libertaire*. At the French congress, the majority faction uttered things worthy of inclusion in any anthology of the supporters of anarchists' collaboration with the republican State.

In response to Ridel's criticisms, Servant stated:

"If the Spanish anarchists have made the odd mistake, having collaborated with the government and with politicians is not one of them. The mistake was in not keeping that collaboration going."

⁷ See *Le Libertaire*, nos 574 and 55 (4 and 11 November 1937)

⁸ On 18 June 1937 the UA organized a rally at the Veldrome d'Hiver in Paris, at which Federica Montseny and Juan Garcia Oliver both spoke. At that rally the Trotskyist Union Communiste group distributed a "Manifesto" that César Martínez Lorenzo mis-characterized this in his book as a "Communist Union Manifesto" from the Friends of Durruti and the POUM. No such manifesto existed.

⁹ Cachin was a leading light of the PCF and Jouhaux was the secretary of the CGT union confederation.

Likewise and more tersely, Saïl Mohammed, referring to the Spanish anarchists departure from principles, stated:

“I’d have made all sorts of concessions in return for a rifle.”

At the close of the congress’s first session, Ridel’s motion was rejected: it had called for factory groups to be able to be represented with full rights and endorsed the motion that such groups should be regarded as potential recruits without representation. Meaning that French anarchism was declined to organize soundly in the factories an opting instead for a local type of organizing better suited to the pursuit of philosophy than to pursuit of the class struggle.

The second session was given over entirely to discussion of Spain. Frémont’s address which was extremely understanding about anarchist principles having been set aside in favour of collaboration with the government, drew from Daurat this retort regarding the key issue of taking power in a revolution:

“I believe that the question ought to be posed in political terms. Is the establishment of libertarian communism unfeasible? Between taking power and participating in a Negrín or Caballero government, there is a minimal stand [on principles] for anarchists namely sending out an appeal to the trade union organizations, setting up a coordinating committee to devise some rational revolutionary formula to cover the period of transition and [capable of] organizing the dictatorship of the proletariat along democratic lines by means of a government of the unions¹⁰. However, the objection will be raised that there are political parties in existence with which we have to fellow travel part of the way. I think we ought not to delude ourselves and keep it in sight that the bourgeois parties have no purpose other than the aborting of the revolution. As a result, that part of the journey has to end at some point. Let us remember that May Events and the imprisoned anarchists. Is the situation so hopeless that we have to look to Paris and London for an honourable peace?

“Or should anarchists try to resuscitate the revolutionary situation? In a recent article in *Le Libertaire*, Gaston Leval makes excuses for compromises [collaborationism] and declares that there was no prospect of anything other than a government of synthesis (anarchists alongside authoritarian socialists and republicans). Would it not be better to organize peace? Or to overhaul our doctrine from top to bottom? It looks as if there is to be no talk of anarchism in what has come to be referred to as the Spanish Revolution.

“What actual Spanish achievements have there been? The collectivizations in Catalonia and Aragon? But these are subject to the bourgeois government (with Ascaso behind bars) they are actually nothing more than straightforward cooperatives. The principle of worker democracy insisted that CNT-UGT workers’ committees be set up following 19 July. But the answer came: “We are against the

¹⁰ This appears to be an argument in favour of the Revolutionary Junta suggested by the Friends of Durruti. Even though the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat was acceptable (a democratic dictatorship, ruled by the proletarian organizations and engaged in a war against the counter-revolution embodied by the bourgeois and Stalinist parties), this was not construed as the worker power’s being based on the revolutionary committees thrown up by July 1936, but, instead, as a trade union-based government in tune with anarcho-syndicalist ideology.

taking of power”: that falls short and anarchism should not be jettisoned in favour of dictatorship of the proletariat. Government of the trade unions needs establishing.”¹¹

Ultimately, what Lucien Feuillade (aka *Luc Daurat*) was championing was an anarcho-syndicalist stance by way of an alternative to government collaborationism.

Guyard too took issue with the congress majority which was endorsing the Spanish anarchist leaders’ collaborationism.

“The CNT’s sharing in ministerial power in Spain was ill-fated and there were anarchist ministers even as there were anarchists in prison. There was a lack of energy from the minister of Justice who could have acted otherwise, had he had the backing of the trade union organizations.”

The contribution from the delegate from “Paris 14” was very interesting: after stating that anarchist participation in the government was damaging and criticizing the stands on the USSR and the Stalinists that *Solidaridad Obrera* and *Catalunya* had both had been defending, he noted that the FAI had turned into just another political party. In his criticisms targeting sundry organizations and leaders, he expressly omitted the Libertarian Youth and the Friends of Durruti.

After a long, muddled and heated debate in which the majority of the congress laid out its arguments at length, Carpentier and Ridel piped up to sum up the stances vis a vis the Spanish situation that had been expressed. For a start, they spelled out their right to voice what they regarded as fair and timely criticisms of the FAI and CNT, whilst having no intention of attacking or betraying anyone. They highlighted the existence of opposition to collaborationism within Spain itself as embodied in the Friends of Durruti. Secondly, they stated that it was reasonable to tell those fighting Franco that they had to see the fight through to a finish and also that they had to combat the republican government. Contributors from the majority had gone so far as to state that there had been no revolution in Spain. Finally, they laid out their criticisms of the disastrous tactics of the FAI which had agreed to share governmental responsibilities on an equal footing with the political parties, in spite of its outnumbering them. They placed on record the CNT-FAI’s lack of preparedness and the divorce that there was between the rank-and-file and the leadership. Moreover, the existence of anarchist ministers stopped troops on the Aragon front from coming down to Barcelona in May 1937 and the lack of cooperation from the Stalinists had resulted in military reverses in Aragon.

Ridel offered a scathing criticism of the Spanish anarchist movement:

“A critique of the Spanish [anarchist] movement is called for because it highlights the shortcomings of the anarchist movement as a whole: lack of economic planning, lack of program. Collaboration

¹¹ Again we have the close-minded defence of anarcho-syndicalist postulates. The alternative to collaborationism that was being advanced was that of a trade union government, a CNT-UGT alliance, ignoring the fact that by 1938 and in Catalonia especially the UGT was nothing but a Stalinist organization. As against the initial contention of a discourse favouring a dictatorship of the proletariat (meaning a class dictatorship turned against counter-revolutionary organizations and not the dictatorship of some dictatorial (Stalinist) party but one wholly democratic in its dealings with revolutionary workers’ organizations), there was now an antagonism between dictatorship of the proletariat and anarchism.

between the classes and with the government has proved its ineffectuality and Durruti's threat "to grab the Bank of Spain's money" ought to have been carried out."

Ridel expressed his agreement with Daurat in rejecting the label antifascist in favour of anti-capitalist. In his address Ridel rejected both the collaborationists and the purists. According to him, the CNT could join forces with other political parties in the fight, but never with bourgeois parties and never from inside a bourgeois government. And he closed with the assertion:

"If it proves that the working class on its own cannot make the revolution, then revolution is impossible."

That session closed with several contributions from the majority, including the following arguments in favour of Spanish anarchism's collaborationist policy:

1. We cannot, nor should we, set ourselves up as a court to sit in judgment of the Spanish comrades.
2. Arms shortages and the weight of circumstances imposed the need to collaborate with other parties and the bourgeois government in the fight against fascism.
3. Had libertarian communism been proclaimed in May '37, the anarchists would have finished up crushed by the other organizations and by the republican government.
4. There had been no abandonment of principles on the part of the CNT and no treachery by anarchist ministers: what was done was the only thing that could have been done.
5. The fall-back espoused by Spanish anarchism was preferable to its being crushed: it allowed for the collectivization of firms, testifying to the value of anarchist revolutionary ideas.

At its third session, the congress debated the activities of the Committee for a Free Spain that the UA had launched for the purpose of extending and bolstering international antifascist solidarity. Guyard and Ridel endorsed the Committee's efforts, with the reservation that it did not sanction the brand-new agency that was being planned (the SIA or International Antifascist Solidarity) and deploring the fact that the rallies at the Vélodrome d'Hiver had proceeded in the absence of a shared watchword. The debate ended with the creation of the SIA being endorsed.

That afternoon attention turned to the matter of the UA's organization. Frémont was entrusted with opening the proceedings. In his address he attempted to silence the criticisms from the opposition by asserting that the organization was always right and that petty quibbles regarding certain aspects had to go, in the face of the adversary.

"Even in the event of disagreement, solidarity and the organizational spirit prompt us to justify the FAI's stance in public."

So the congress closed with a complete victory for the theses backed by the congress majority, albeit marked by the staunch defence put up by Ridel, Daurat, Guyard and Carpentier of their criticisms of the Spanish anarchist movement's collaborationist policy, a policy now backed by the UA's French congress. At least open criticism of the ideological stance of State anarchism had been feasible in France and the existence of a libertarian opposition to the breach of anarchist principles and of the CNT-FAI's collaborationism brought to light. That had not been feasible inside Spain where the

leadership committees had tried to expel the Friends of Durruti group and had at any rate ensured that it had been ostracized and driven underground. In France the debate was only possible once the anarchists had been ousted (as Ridel was during the proceedings) from government office. But, be that as it may, the upshot amounted to the same in Spain as in France: dissenting voices were utterly marginalized by the majority which supported collaboration with the bourgeois parties, from within a capitalist government, no less.

In February 1938 Charles Ridel (Charles Cortvrint) joined with Luc Daurat (Lucien Feuillade) in launching a review entitled *Révision*. In this theoretical and analytical anarchist review the positions of the Friends of Durruti were laid out and defended and the dissenters from the congress were able to expand upon their analysis of the international situation alongside interesting matter of political theory – essentially the matter of the State.

The launch edition of *Revision* carried a manifesto signed by Marie-Louise Berneri, Suzan Broido, Luc Daurat (Lucien Feuillade), René Dumont¹², Greta Jumin, Marester, Jean Meier, Jean Rabaud, Charles Ridel (aka Charles Cortvrint) and Sejourne, setting out the reasoning behind the appearance of the new review. The review was regarded as a shared platform for young revolutionaries who, albeit subscribing to a range of political creeds, be they marxists or anarchists, were agreed upon the need to review and criticize outmoded positions – opportunistic or narrowly purist ones – associated with the anarchist movement, socialist or Stalinist sectarianism or the hypercritical views of the various communist oppositions. Although it professed to be libertarian, the review was independent of any organization or party and thought itself open not just critiques and analyses of current realities, but also to the building of theory around the Russian and Spanish revolutionary experiences, as well as the phenomena of fascism in Italy and Germany.

Issue No 3 of the review, dated April 1938, was published as a single-themed edition, a collective study of issues relating to the State and Revolution. There was a rigorous and highly interesting look at the matter of the State and the issues raised by proletarian revolution, with a critical exploration of socialist, Stalinist and anarchist theses. That study carried over into issue No 4. By way of an added-on part of the study of the State and Revolution, it laid out the program of the Friends of Durruti which, due to its overwhelming interest, we shall reproduce in its entirety:

“Due to the practical trial by fire to which the entirety of anarchist doctrine has been subjected by the Spanish experience, one Catalan organization – the Friends of Durruti – has been presented with the opportunity to arrive at a straightforward, detailed program that raises the issue of what the agencies are that should answer the needs of the civil war. That program comes very close to the syndicalist way of thinking: on the other hand, for the very first time in libertarian ideology it offers the hard and fast notion of a centralized body tasked with handling the most pressing dangers.

This is it, as published by the Friends of Durruti¹³:

¹² No relation to the other René Dumont who wrote many books about economics and demography, not least *L'Utopie ou mort!* (Utopia or Death!)

¹³ Published as a pamphlet by the Friends of Durruti Grouping and drafted by Balius, as *Towards a Fresh Revolution*. This fragment comes from the section dealing with “Our Program.”

- I. Establishment of a Revolutionary Junta or National Defence Council. This body is to be made up as follows: members of the Revolutionary Junta are to be democratically elected inside the trade union bodies. Account will be taken of the numbers of comrades away at the front as they will necessarily require representation. The Junta is not to meddle in economic matters, which will be the exclusive preserve of the unions.

The Revolutionary Junta's functions are as follow:

- a) Directing the war
- b) Watching over revolutionary order
- c) International relations
- d) Revolutionary propaganda

Posts are to be reassigned from time to time to ensure that nobody grows attached to them. And trade union assemblies are to monitor the Junta's activities.

- II. All economic power to the unions. Since July, the unions have demonstrated their enormous constructive capabilities. Had they not been relegated to a second-rate role, they would have delivered great benefits. It will be the trade union organizations that structure the proletarian economy.

Bearing in mind the industrial union and industrial federation models, a Council of Economy can also be established for the purpose of better coordinating economic activities.

- III. The Free Municipality (...) The Municipalities are to look after those social functions that are outside of the remit of the unions. And since we are going to build a society unmistakably of producers, it will be the trade union bodies themselves that staff the municipal centres. There being no disparity of interests between them there will be no possibility of antagonism.

Municipalities are to be organized into local, comarcal [county] and peninsula-wide federations. The unions and the Municipalities will liaise at local, regional and national levels.

The Friends of Durruti also call for a series of other measures such as: campaigns against bureaucracy and abnormal pay rates; the introduction of a family wage; social ownership of distribution and rationing; trade union oversight of the militias; union organization of the police; agrarian socialization; an international policy based of workers' centres abroad and in their activity; an alliance between labour unions of differing persuasions, eliminating bureaucrats, parvenus and union posts for political parties; collaboration with bourgeois and State forces is to be rejected, as will be any sort of strengthening of them.

It is our belief that this is the very first concrete program advocated publicly by any anarchist tendency, as applicable to an actual situation and offering detailed guidelines."

It is worth pointing out that Charles Ridel was emphasizing the trade union, or, if you prefer, anarcho-syndicalist, character of the Friends of Durruti's program. Moreover, when Ridel came to allude to trade union alliances, whether in his addresses to the UA congress or in *Révision*, he seems to have had the UGT in mind. In which he was misconstruing Balus, because the Friends of Durruti, after

May '37, knew that the UGT in Catalonia was a Stalinized trade union organization with which no alliance was possible. When the Friends of Durruti spoke about trade unions they usually had in mind the CNT's various sectoral (metalworkers', textile workers', foodworkers' etc.) unions rather than the UGT.

In the very same issue of *Révision* there was the announcement that on Wednesday 6 April 1938 Ridel would be giving a talk in Paris on the topic "The position and program of the Friends of Durruti". So we can assert that Charles Ridel, following the UA congress in November 1937, had become a propagandist in France endorsing the stance and program of the Friends of Durruti.

Issue No 5 of *Révision* was published in June-July 1938, before failing to appear for a year due to rising printing costs, an ebbtide in the French labour movement and the weakening of its publishing team.

On 26 January 1939, Barcelona fell to Francoist troops. That February hundreds of thousands of Spanish exiles crossed the border into France. Among them was Jaime Balius who lost a suitcase full of documents whilst escaping from the concentration camp in La Tour de Carol.

In August 1939, issue No 6 of *Révision* carried a number of texts bearing the signature of the French-Spanish Chapter of the Friends of Durruti. This group had the support of the dissenters from the UA congress and the publishers of *Révision* who were sympathetic to the Friends of Durruti's stance, even as they were very harshly critical of the official anarchist movement. The most active and prominent members of this group were Lucien Feuillade and Charles Cortvrint and they also the backing and solidarity of *L'Espagne nouvelle* managing editor André Prudhommeaux.

Issue No 6 of *Révision* carried the sub-title "Mail from the Concentration Camps" and published several statements from the French-Spanish Chapter of the Friends of Durruti. In actual fact, the entire issue was given over to matters Spanish, the living conditions for the Spanish exiles in the concentration camps and gestures of solidarity and support from the publishing team for the program that the Friends of Durruti had championed during the civil war. The review picked up on the discrimination that members of the Friends of Durruti were facing from the SIA just because they had dared publish an article in *Le Réveil syndicaliste* critical of Spanish anarchist leaders.

The documents endorsed by the French-Spanish Chapter (or *Agrupación franco-española*) of the Friends of Durruti were the following:

1. "The evolution of French democracy" (in French)
2. "A new phase. We are who we always were" (in Spanish)
3. "The Spanish Tragedy" (in Spanish)

Also published in the same issue was a "Document that the Concentration Camps' Acting Liaison Commission has addressed to the Standing Deputation of the erstwhile Spanish Republican Cortes"; it was published in Spanish and was endorsed by the Friends of Durruti Grouping; in addition there was a series of notes, news items and brief articles written in Spanish but carrying no signatures.

The most significant aspect of that issue of *Révision* which was dated August 1939, was the report that the French-Spanish Chapter of the Friends of Durruti had been set up in exile in France,

although the formal declaration of war on Germany and the resultant general mobilization at the beginning of September rendered the Chapter's continued existence impossible.

Elsewhere, André Prudhommeaux decided to publish a triple issue of *L'Espagne nouvelle*, with the sub-title "L'Espagne indomptée" (Spain Unbroken) and dated 'July-September 1939' it carried two articles by Balius. In that same edition of *L'Espagne nouvelle*, there were some interesting articles signed by A.P. (André Prudhommeaux), Ridel, Hem Day, Malander and Ernestan which were very close to the Friends of Durruti's critical stance. Also published, in English, was an article entitled "The Friends of Durruti Accuse", signed by "The Franco-Spanish Group of the Friends of Durruti"; it appeared in the June-July 1939 issue of *Solidarity*, the organ of the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation (APCF).¹⁴ Publication of this Friends of Durruti article was probably due to Jane Patrick and Ethel MacDonald who had, ever since their time in Spain between October 1936 and 1938, been critical of the CNT-FAI's governmental collaborationism.

In France and in the United Kingdom alike, the war in Spain breathed new life and a measure of growth to the anarchist movements there, but it also triggered conflicting political stances that forced them to choose between the collaborationist reformism of the official CNT leadership and the radical revolutionary criticisms voiced by the Friends of Durruti. We have already seen that in France this had led at the UA congress to the expulsion of the critical faction made up of, among others, Ridel and Carpentier: in the United Kingdom the same process led the anarchist faction inside the APCF to break away and form the Glasgow Anarchist-Communist Federation.

In both countries, André Prudhommeaux acted as guarantor and peddler of the Friends of Durruti's critical analyses. It was André Prudhommeaux¹⁵ that forwarded copies of *El Amigo del Pueblo* to "Chazé"¹⁶, who then translated from them and published them in the mouthpiece of the Union Communiste group, *L'Internationale* (which also carried texts by Josep Rebull who spearheaded a leftwing position inside the POUM). And it was most like André Prudhommeaux that sent his friend Ethel MacDonald¹⁷ the Friends of Durruti text that was published in *Solidarity*.

BALIUS'S THOUGHTS FROM EXILE, 1939

Once in exile, Balius had two articles published in the French anarchist review *L'Espagne nouvelle*.¹⁸ The first was a commemoration of the third anniversary of 19 July and the second was devoted to May 1937.

Both articles were the products of lengthy and mature reflection on the part of Balius who signed both pieces as "secretary of the Friends of Durruti".

¹⁴ See *Class War on the Home Front*, a Wildcat Pamphlet, Manchester 1986 which also carries the same article.

¹⁵ See A. Prudhommeaux's letter to "H. Chazé" (G. Davoust) in H. CHAZÉ *Chronique de la Révolution espagnole. Union Communiste (1933-1939)* (Spartacus, Paris 1979) p. 116

¹⁶ Political dealings between André Prudhommeaux and Gaston Davoust, as well as the trading of the newspapers of their respective groups, predated the outbreak of the war in Spain, as is plain from the 25 May 1935 letter from André Prudhommeaux to Gaston Davoust, kindly furnished to us by Henri Simon.

¹⁷ For Ethel MacDonald see Rhona M Hodgart's pamphlet *Ethel MacDonald: Glasgow Woman Anarchist* (Pirate Press/Kate Sharpley Library, no place or date cited), photocopies of which were kindly supplied to us by Paul Sharkey)

¹⁸ "L'Espagne indomptée" in *L'Espagne nouvelle*, Year III, Nos 67-69 July-September 1939

Both stand out because of the precision of the terms used and their central focus on the fundamental issues raised by the Spanish revolution. Thus we are offered an extremely clear exposition of Balius's thinking regarding the issue of power, the indispensable function of a revolutionary leadership and the need to dismantle the State and erect a brand-new structure in its place (in earlier writings the talk had been of a Revolutionary Junta), one capable of repressing counter-revolutionary forces.

In the item entitled "July 1936: Its Meaning and Potential", he challenged those who were arguing that the events of July had been merely the result of the fight against the revolt of the military and the fascists, which is to say "but for the army revolt there would not have been any popular armed uprising". Balius countered with the assertion that such an outlook was Popular Front-ist in its thinking, the result of the working class's being subordinated to the republican bourgeoisie that had been the chief reason for the proletariat's defeat. Balius recalled that the republican bourgeoisie had refused to arm the workers so that they might stand up to the fascist revolt:

"In Barcelona itself, we had to put up with the Transport Union's being attacked by the Generalidad's goons who, only a few hours prior to the decisive battle, were still out to strip us of the rifles that we had seized from on board the *Manuel Arnús* and which we were going to be using in the fight against the fascists."

According to Balius, victory over the military was achieved only in locations where the workers, weapons in hand and without any sort of compacts with the petite bourgeoisie, confronted the fascists with determination. In places like Zaragoza where the workers dithered or came to such arrangements, the fascists carried the day."

The most important issue posed in July 1936 was not – in Balius's estimation – that the military had succeeded in some parts of Spain. The most important issue had been posed in the republican zone: Who was taking power? Who was directing the war? There were only two answers: the republican bourgeoisie or the proletariat.

"But the most important issue was raised in our zone. It boiled down to deciding who had won. Was it the workers? In which case, it was up to them to direct the country. But what about the petite bourgeoisie? That is where the mistake was made."

Balius argued that the working class, in spite of everything, ought to have taken power in July '36. That would have offered the only guarantee, the only chance of winning the war."

"The CNT and the FAI, who were the soul of the upheaval in Catalonia, might have been able to paint July in its true colours. Who could have stood against them? Instead, we allowed the communist party (PSUC) to marshal the opportunists, the bourgeois right, etc.. on the terrain of counter-revolution.

At such junctures, it falls to an organization to take the reins. There was only one qualified so to do: ours.

[...] Had the workers achieved mastery of antifascist Spain, the war would have been won and the revolution would not have been afflicted with so many deviations right from the outset. We might

have won. But what we managed to win on the strength of a handful of pistols, we lost when we had arsenals packed with weapons. For those to blame for our defeat we need to look past Stalinism's hired killers, past the thieves like Prieto, past the scum like Negrin and past the usual reformists: we were to blame for failing to have put paid to all this trash [...]; but whilst we all bear some of the blame, there are some who bear a particularly heavy burden of blame. I mean the CNT-FAI leaders who, with their reformist approach in July and, above all, their counter-revolutionary meddling in May '37, barred the way to the working class and dealt the fatal blow to the revolution."

That was Balius's way of resolving the thousands of doubts and objections that the anarcho-syndicalist leaders had had to grapple with in July '36 regarding the anarchist presence outside of Catalonia being a minority, about the need to preserve antifascist unity, about the constant retreats that the war was imposing upon the revolution. Balius argued that the anarchists' victory in Catalonia could have led to a swift crushing of the fascist uprising all across Spain, IF THE PROLETARIAT HAD TAKEN POWER. According to Balius that was the mistake made in July 1936: the failure to take power. And out of that mistake grew the swift decline in and difficulties of the revolution. Because of that mistake the counter-revolution's rise was made possible, with Stalinism as its chief architect. But Balius pointed out that the blame belonged, not to the Stalinists and republican bourgeoisie, but to the anarchist leaders who shied away from proletarian revolution, plumping instead for antifascist unity, meaning collaboration with the bourgeoisie, the State and capitalist institutions.

In the article devoted to the May Events in Barcelona and entitled "May '37: an historic date for the proletariat", Balius described the two years after May '37 as merely the consequence of those revolutionary events. According to Balius, May '37 was not some protest, but a consciously revolutionary uprising by the Catalan proletariat that achieved a military victory and a political defeat.

"But lo and behold, the CNT-FAI's reformist wing turned traitor. Repeating the dereliction manifested in the events of July, they sided with the bourgeois democrats again. Issuing the cease-fire order. The proletariat was reluctant to comply with that watchword and, with furious indignation, side-stepping the orders coming from lily-livered leaders, it carried on defending its positions."

Balius portrayed the part that the Friends of Durruti had played in May this way:

"We, the Friends of Durruti, who had fought in the front lines, were out to prevent the disaster that would inevitably have befallen the people, had they laid down their arms. We put out a call for the shooting to start up again and for there be no further interruption of the fighting unless certain conditions were imposed.

Unfortunately, the attack mind-set had by then broken down and the fighting was wound up without its revolutionary aims having been achieved."

Balius very tellingly stressed the paradox whereby the proletariat was triumphant militarily, only to be defeated politically.

"In the history of ever social struggle, this was the first occasion on which the victors surrendered to the vanquished. And without preserving so much as the slightest guarantee that the proletariat's

vanguard would respected, the barricades were dismantled: the city of Barcelona recovered its normal appearance, as if nothing had happened.”

Balius, moving on from the stage where the leaders were being insulted, as that offered no explanation, analysed the May Events as a fork in the road: either the revolution was given up on once and for all, or power was taken. And he explained away the anarchists’ unremitting retreats since July as being the fruits of the dire Popular Front policy of alliance with the republican bourgeoisie. And also as the outcome of the rift that existed within the CNT between a counter-revolutionary leadership and a revolutionary rank-and-file. May ’37 failed BECAUSE THE WORKERS FAILED TO COME UP WITH A REVOLUTIONARY LEADERSHIP:

“The proletariat had arrived at a crucial crossroads. There were only courses from which to choose: either defer to the counter-revolution, or prepare to impose its own power, proletarian Power.

The drama of the Spanish working class centres upon the comprehensive gulf between the rank-and-file and the leaders. The leadership was always counter-revolutionary. The Spanish workers, on the other hand [...] have always far outstripped their leaders in terms of their vision of events and how they are to be construed. Had those heroic workers discovered a revolutionary leadership, they would have impressed the entire world by writing one of the most significant pages in its history.”

In Balius’s estimation, in May ’37 the Catalan proletariat had ENJOINED THE CNT TO TAKE POWER:

“the quintessential aspect of the May Events is to be found in the proletariat’s unbreakable determination to put a worker leadership in charge of the armed struggle, the economy and the country’s entire existence. Meaning (for any anarchist not spooked by words) that the proletariat was fighting for the assumption of power that might have been accomplished through the destruction of the old, bourgeois instruments and the erection in their place of a brand-new social structure rooted in the committees thrown up in July and swiftly stamped out by the reaction and the reformists”.

In those two articles, Balius had broached the fundamental issue of the revolution and the Spanish Civil War – the issue of power – in the absence of which what was happening was unfathomable. And he was also pointing out the agencies that had to embody that power and, above all, recognizing the need to dismantle the capitalist State apparatus in order to build up a proletarian alternative in its stead. Moreover, Balius was pointing to the absence of a revolutionary leadership as the reason for the Spanish revolution’s failure.

After a reading of those two articles, one is forced to acknowledge that the evolution of Balius’s political thinking, based upon analysis of the rich experiences garnered during the civil war, had prompted him to pose matters that were taboo in anarchist ideology:

1. The need for the proletariat to take power.
2. The ineluctable destruction of the capitalist machinery of State for the purpose of building up a proletarian alternative;
3. The crucial role of a revolutionary leadership.

The assertions above did not rule out other facets of Balius's thinking, which may well have been secondary and not dealt with in those articles, which stayed faithful to traditional anarcho-syndicalist ideology:

1. The economy being run by the unions.
2. The committees as the organs of proletarian power.
3. The administration, etc., being brought under municipal control.

There is no question but that Balius, operating on the ideological basis of Spanish anarcho-syndicalism, had made a tremendous effort to digest the brutal experiences of the civil war and the Spanish revolution. The merit of the [Friends of Durruti] Agrupación is actually rooted in that effort to assimilate reality and assimilate the lived experiences of the Spanish proletariat. Being an anarchist minister was more convenient than being a revolutionary anarchist. It was more straightforward to abjure one's own ideology, meaning the principles "of the day", when push came to shove, and then revert to them once defeat and history had rendered the contradictions irrelevant. Which is what Federica Montseny and Abad de Santillán did, as did many others. It was easier to champion antifascist unity, partnering with the capitalist State when it came to the business of governing, and embracing militarization in order to fall in line with a war led by the republican bourgeoisie: than to grapple with the contradictions and argue that the CNT should take power, that the war was only winnable if directed by the proletariat, that the capitalist State needed dismantling and, above all, that there was a need for the proletariat to erect its own power structures and employ force to crush the counter-revolution and that none of that was feasible in the absence of a revolutionary leadership. WHETHER THESE CONCLUSIONS WERE OR WERE NOT ANARCHIST MATTERED A LOT TO THOSE WHO NEVER QUERIED WHETHER IT WAS ANARCHIST TO BE SHORING UP THE CAPITALIST STATE.

Between 1936 and 1939, anarcho-syndicalist ideology was put to a series of very stringent tests of its capability, coherence and validity. The thinking of Balius and of the Friends of Durruti Grouping was the only sound theoretical attempt¹⁹ by a Spanish anarchist group to resolve the contradictions and departure from principles that characterized the CNT and FAI. Whilst Balius's and the Friends of Durruti Grouping's venture into theory led them to reach conclusions that might be described as alien to anarcho-syndicalism, it might be necessary to acknowledge anarchism's inadequacy as a revolutionary theory of the proletariat. Balius and the Agrupación never took that final step and always thought of themselves as anarchists, albeit that they stood by their criticisms of the CNT's collaboration with the State and always opposed attempts by the CNT leadership to have them expelled. They avoided stepping outside of the CNT at all costs.

Let us dare to characterize that stance as either coherent or contradictory. Stalinist repression battered upon all revolutionaries in the wake of the events of May '37, but it did not focus on the

¹⁹ Collaborationism triggered huge unease within the Catalan libertarian movement. In the wake of May 1937, not only did *El Amigo del Pueblo* surface, but so did a number of underground libertarian publications such as *Alerta*, *Anarquía*, *Libertad* and *Liberación*. In Catalonia there was de facto split inside the Libertarian Youth with two opposing and separate organizations. In the minutes of the (Barcelona) Local Federation of Anarchist Groups, the opposition to the so-called "higher committees" had the majority and there was a genuine rift, even though it never came to anything.

Agrupación as such, albeit that its social premises were shut down by the police and its press driven underground; instead, it targeted all revolutionary CNT militants.²⁰ And that, no doubt, was a factor in preventing further theoretical clarification and an organizational rift, which we in any case do not think would ever have come about.

However, We will concede that our analysis is overly political, unduly subtle, uncomfortable and problematical: it is a lot slicker, more arbitrary, academic and akin to the trends in novels and comics, to fall back on the “deus ex machina” ploy of Trotskyist inroads into and influence upon Balius and the Friends of Durruti. It is also simpler and more comfortable to level charges of treachery at the leadership and to accuse the CNT’s rank-and-file with being simpletons incapable of resisting such treachery “which accounts for everything”. Ridel was able to lay out his own disappointment in an article entitled “Starting Over” which offers an outstanding summation of his criticisms of anarchist officialdom and his revolutionary stance. It was published as “L’Espagne Indompté” (Spain Unbroken) in the triple edition of *L’Espagne nouvelle* (Nos 67-69), July-September 1939).

This was the start of a promising reconsideration and fruitful assessment of the reasons behind the defeat of the revolutionaries in the war in Spain, which Ridel had acknowledged in that article could not be carried out by leaders who had shown themselves to have no principles: it had to come from the rank-and-file fighters. The military mobilization that followed the declaration of war and some months later the Nazi invasion of France, scattered across the globe exiles who lacked either the means or the resources to publicize or pursue their assessment of the defeat. And the apparatuses that triggered that defeat were never going to do so.

Which accounts for the significance of the articles carried in *Révision* or in *L’Espagne indompté*, articles by Jaime Balius, Charges Ridel or André Prudhommeaux. They constitute the only attempt anarchist revolutionaries ever made to assess the defeat during the few months between the ending of the Spanish Civil War and the opening of the Second worldwide slaughter. And no one tried any such evaluation exercise later.²¹

Agustín Guillamón

10. THE FIGHT FOR HISTORY

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

²⁰ From within the PSUC Gero had driven a discriminating policy of repression that spared collaborationist CNT members whilst going after critical and revolutionary anarchists See the reports from “Pedro”, forwarded to Moscow in “The NKVD and SIM in Barcelona. Some of Gero’s reports on the War in Spain” in *Balance. Cuadernos de historia*, Cuaderno No 22 (2001)

²¹ For one attempt at reaching just such an evaluation, see Agustín Guillamón, *Barricadas en Barcelona. La CNT de la victoria de julio de 1936 a la necesaria derrota de Mayo de 1937* (Ediciones Espartaco Internacional, Barcelona 2007). See also Article 10 in this collection: “Eleven Class-based theses ...”

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 Villarroja in the book *Víctimas 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, 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 smooths 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 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.

11. Eleven Class-based Theses on the Revolution and Counter-revolution in Catalonia between July 1936 and May 1937. Towards an Anarchist Theory of Revolution, from the Vantage Point of a Materialist Analysis of the Historical Facts

Consciousness is a by-product of being. But for some attempt to weave a theory around the proletariat's historical experiences, there would be no revolutionary theory and no theoretical advancement, or at any rate, it would be a lot poorer, less complete and ineffectual. Collective, anonymous and class theory, achievable only as the ripe fruit of an historical process of making ready for taking a hand in upcoming battles in the current class struggle. The workers' battle to discover their own history is not mere theory, nor is it abstract or banal, because it is part and parcel of class consciousness per se and might be described as a theorization of the world proletariat's historical experiences and, in the case of Spain, ought to entail an understanding, digestion and unflinching 'owning' of the anarcho-syndicalist movement's experiences in the 1930s.

Ninety years on from the outbreak of the civil War, these eleven theses below theorize about the proletariat's experiences in the 1936-1937 revolution.

THESIS No 1

Between 17 and 19 July 1936 there was an army revolt against the government of the Republic; that revolt had the backing of the Church, most of the Army, fascists, the bourgeoisie, landowners and right-wingers. The preparations laid for this coup d'état attempt had been tolerated by the republican government that had won the February 1936 elections thanks to the Popular Front coalition.

Republican or monarchist, left-wing or right-wing, the democratic parliamentary parties pursued the policy that best suited the Spanish bourgeoisie and its preparations for a cruel coup d'état.

The army revolt failed in the main cities and, by way of a backlash (in republican-held territory), triggered a revolutionary uprising that successfully mounted an insurrection against the army. In that successful insurrection, an overwhelming role was played in Catalonia by the Cadres and Defence Committees of the CNT-FAI which had been making painstaking preparations dating back to 1931.

IT WAS NO SPONTANEOUS UPRISING

The revolutionary uprising on 19 July 1936 came about as a backlash against an army revolt. Ever since October 1934, and throughout the February 1936 election campaign, both the CNT-FAI and the POUM had seen a clash with fascist forces as inevitable, knowing as they did that the latter had been hatching a coup d'état and they had diligently made preparations for an armed confrontation, albeit that at no time had they ruled out liaison and collaboration with the bourgeois republican parties or with the Generalidad government. That victorious armed insurrection by the proletariat in the republican zone implied the neutralization of the capitalist State's machinery of coercion and thus the neutralization of its powers of repression. This uprising also entailed a series of socio-economic "revolutionary gains". The republican State disintegrated into a host of local or sectional authorities and a lot of its functions were "usurped" by the workers' organizations.

THERE WAS A VACUUM OF STATE POWER

Fragmented and weakened, the republican State witnessed the advent of autonomous regional authorities that were wholly independent of the central State, which itself looked on (as the Generalidad government did) as its authority was undermined. The various revolutionary committees – local, sectional, ward-based, factory-based, defence-focussed, supplies-focussed, trade union and party political, orchestrating people's militias and rearguard militias – performed the functions that the government could not, due to the loss of its machinery of repression and the arming of the workers' organizations.

In many places, the revolutionary committees, which Munis theorized amounted to governing committees, wielded all the power at local level, but there was no coordination or centralization of such local committees and there was a vacuum in terms of central or State authority. Neither the republican State nor the regional home rule governments (such as the Generalidad) wielded central authority, but neither did the local committees.

We might speak of authority having been atomized and of there being a revolutionary situation wherein the proletariat was threatening to supplant the State.

THESIS No 2

The revolutionary committees – defence committees, factory committees, barrio committees, workers' control committees, local committees, defence committees, supplies committees, and so on – were the working class's organs of power in embryonic form. They embarked upon systematic expropriation of bourgeois assets, launching the collectivization of industry and agriculture, raising popular militias that traced out the military front lines during those early days, organizing control patrols and rearguard militias that enforced the new revolutionary order by means of a violent crackdown on the church, the bosses, fascists and former trade unionists and gunmen from the [Sindicato] *Libre*. But they proved unable to coordinate with one another and when it came to establishing a centralized workers' power.

Through their initiatives and actions, the revolutionary committees swamped the leaders of the various traditional organizations of the workers' movement, including those of the CNT-FAI. There was revolution on the streets and in the factories and there were potential organs of the

revolutionary proletariat's power: committees that no organization, mastermind or vanguard was able or willing to orchestrate, strengthen and convert into authentic organs of worker power.

The bulk of the leadership echelon of the CNT plumped for collaboration with the bourgeois State for the purpose of winning the war against fascism. García Oliver's catchphrase on 21 July 1936 about "going for broke" was just a Leninist proposal that power be seized by the CNT bureaucrats: moreover, García Oliver himself was aware that it was unfeasible and nonsensical, when a phoney choice was raised at the CNT plenum between "anarchist dictatorship" as against antifascist collaboration. This "extremist" phoney choice cited by García Oliver, Abad de Santillán's and Federica Montseny's timid words of caution about the dangers of isolation and foreign intervention, and Durruti's preference for biding time until such time as Zaragoza might fall, ensured that the plenum came down on the side of "temporary" antifascist collaboration. At no time did the higher committees entertain the revolutionary option of dismantling the republican State and turning the revolutionary committees into a workers' power and the Militias into the army of the proletariat.

It cannot be argued that there was a dual power situation in place between the Central Antifascist Militias Committee (CAMC) and the Generalidad government at any point, because at no time was there a pole for workers' power to centralize around: there can, though, talk about a chance (missed during the first few weeks after 19 July) to introduce a dual power situation between those revolutionary committees and the CAMC. Some of the trade union, local and ward committees made no bones, right from the outset, about their mistrust and fears regarding the CAMC, because they sensed the counter-revolutionary role that it might play.

There are lots of protagonists and historians as well who speak of a dual power situation existing between the CAMC and the Generalidad government. However, it would be a grave mistake to think that the CAMC was anything other than an antifascist compact between the workers' organizations, the bourgeois organizations and the institutions of the State, which is to say, it was a class collaborationist body.

The leaders of the CNT were wary of the revolutionary committees because they did not fit with their organizational and doctrinal frameworks, and at the same time, as bureaucrats, they themselves felt overwhelmed and threatened by what they were achieving.

In Catalonia, the CAMC differed from other such bodies that had emerged elsewhere in Spain, by virtue of the predominance of the CNT and the fact that the CNT owed its strength to those revolutionary committees, the majority of the members of which were CNT members. It was in Catalonia that those committees had the longest reach and longevity. Within bodies akin to the CAMC that had surfaced elsewhere in Spain, the resonance, depth, reach and longevity of those revolutionary committees were much less and survived for just a matter of days or weeks.

The revolutionary committees were the form of self-organization with which the working class had equipped itself in a revolutionary situation and they were also the organs of the power of the revolutionary proletariat in embryo. But we need to be cognizant of their shortcomings and remember that they were above all incapable of coordinating with one another, for the purpose of imposing their own authority and dismantling the bourgeoisie's State. What was missing was an

organization or vanguard capable of turning those committees into workers' councils, characterized by delegates democratically elected at meetings and subject to recall at any time, and able to coordinate with one another regionally and nationally.

The CNT and FAI offered their members no guidance until 28 July, at which point they threatened to shoot out of hand any "uncontrollable" that persisted in expropriating the bourgeoisie and in taking fascists, bourgeois, priests and former members of the *Sindicato Libre* (the employers' hired guns) "for a walk". In July 1936, the workers proved capable of taking action without leaders and they proceeded to expropriate the bourgeoisie and dismantle a number of the assets of capitalist State rule (the army, the Church, the police) along lines that not only swamped State structures but also those of their own political and trade union organizations: but they proved incapable to taking action against their leaders and did not tinker with the machinery of State and its officials and in May 1937 they reluctantly agreed to defer to the class enemy.

Besides, the revolutionary committees, though potentially the organs of workers' power, were heavily influenced by the antifascist unity ideology and many of them quickly switched to being antifascist committees, made up of workers and bourgeois, working on behalf of the petite bourgeoisie's program. The entry into the Madrid government of anarchist ministers and of anarchists and POUMists into the Generalidad government ensured that in October 1936 greenlighted, without any hint of armed resistance, the dismantling of local committees and the transition to antifascist municipal councils. The defence and factory councils and some of the local committees resisted their final extinction although all they managed to do was postpone it.

THESIS No 3

There can be no talk of proletarian revolution in the absence of the dismantling of the State.

One can talk about a revolutionary situation, a revolutionary uprising, a successful insurrection, the bourgeois State's losing "in part" or "temporarily" certain functions, or about political chaos, or loss of authority on the part of the republican administration, or a vacuum in terms of centralized authority and of the atomization of power: but not about proletarian revolution.

In Barcelona, there was no proletarian revolution, because no organization, vanguard or group broached the matter of political power. The CNT had no plans to take power so as to deepen, expand and prosecute the social and economic revolution that was being enacted on the streets. After seventy years of exposure to libertarian education, Catalonia's anarchist workers, bereft of any guidance from their leaders, proved capable of turning the defence committees established in 1931 into volunteer worker militias which, by the second fortnight in July were in Aragon marking out the battlefield against the fascists: they managed to turn themselves into revolutionary barrio (or local) committees that took over all of the functions of the State and encouraged the expropriation of factories, workshops and bourgeois assets through the industrial unions. This thoroughgoing social and economic revolution mounted by committees and unions was bereft of political power, because of the CNT-FAI's lack of a theory about power and its cluelessness as to what should be done in a revolutionary situation spearheaded by the rank-and-file anarcho-syndicalist membership. We need to be clear as to what distinguishes the socio-economic revolution that was already in progress on

the streets, factories, inside the city, on the front lines ... and the anti-fascist unity compact between the anarchist leadership and the Stalinists, republicans, POUMists and the Generalidad government through State institutions, for the sole purpose of winning the war on fascism, even though that implied the surrender of any revolutionary ambitions, starting with the coordination, expansion and bolstering of those revolutionary committees and unions overseeing the expropriation effort.

At no time did the July 1936 revolutionary situation ever look to establish a worker power inimical to the republican State: so there was no proletarian revolution, in the strict, rigorous sense of the term. And, in the absence of proletarian revolution, the revolutionary situation shifted quickly into consolidation of the republican State, the undermining of revolutionary forces and the final success of the counter-revolution in the wake of the May Events of 1937, complete with the outlawing and political persecution of the POUM in June 1937, as well as the Friends of Durruti being forced underground.

Likewise, there can be no talk of a dual power situation as there was nothing around which a worker power might rally that might seek to destroy the capitalist State: it would be closer to the truth to talk about – in the instance of Catalonia, a duplication of powers between the Generalidad and the CAMC. The CAMC was a class collaborationist body that served as a buffer and mediator between the myriad revolutionary committees and the broken-down capitalist machinery of state. But the CAMC was primarily the only antifascist front instrument capable of neutering, channelling, curtailing and stemming the popular revolutionary initiatives that were emanating from the revolutionary committees by means of assimilation of them into ambiguous (and CAMC-dependent) bodies, the features of which were deference to the antifascist program and the Generalidad government.

That is what happened to bodies such as the Central Supplies Committee, the Council of Economy, the Control Patrols, the Courts Office, the Investigations Committee, etc., that were set up in order to replace, dismantle or tamper with the class nature of the popular, worker initiatives that were revolutionary in character: but which, after a two- or three-month transitional period, during which they operated as ancillary agencies of the CAMC, were drawn into the orbit of the Generalidad government, only to be disbanded or replaced later by agencies of the republican state apparatus. Moreover, the CNT-FAI's higher committees sought to operate with sufficient skill and strength to manipulate the State as a technical tool in their service. On 11 August 1936, the CNT and the POUM were serving on the Generalidad's Council of Economy, the task of which was the coordination and planning of the Catalanian economy.

The participation of the CNT (as well as the POUM and the FAI) in bourgeois institutions, with the accompanying offer of public positions, together with a massive trade union recruitment drive, coinciding with the departure of their finest militants – the ones best versed in the social struggle and with the most advanced grounding in theory – to the front lines, fuelled an accelerated process of bureaucratization of the CNT.

By the spring of 1937, revolutionary militants were finding themselves isolated at meetings and outnumbered, a position from which they absolutely could not escape. Anarcho-syndicalism's fundamental principles snapped and made way for opportunism disguised as an ideology of antifascist unity (abjuring the revolution for the sake of "winning the war") and the pragmatism of

true loyal cooperation with the republican bourgeoisie's parties and the Generalidad government, for the sole purpose of pursuing that bourgeoisie's own program. The CNT's trade union bureaucracy revealed its counter-revolutionary mettle in May 1937. The fight against fascism was the fig leaf covering a retreat from destruction of the bourgeois republican State that was championed by the counter-revolutionary forces of the PSUC and ERC. The clash between the revolutionary proletariat and the CNT bureaucracy, which was already in the counter-revolutionary camp, was inevitable.

THESIS No 4

Rather than boosting the revolutionary committees as the organs of a brand-new workers' power, the CNT and the POUM felt as if they were being swamped and threatened by "uncontrollables", for which reason they failed to issue any guidelines regarding coordination; instead, their earliest guidelines issued and the first actions they took actually related to threats against and disavowal of "uncontrollables". With or without acts of vandalism, those threats translated into summary shootings (of José Gardeñas, from the Construction Union, and of Fernández, the president of the Foodworkers' Union) in obedience to "anti-uncontrollables" watchwords issued by the CNT's higher committees. Months later, by which time the counter-revolution was well advanced, it would be the Stalinists and republicans that would hang that label "uncontrollables" on the POUM and the CNT, in the aim of wiping them out physically and politically.

Not only does the received version of history fail to consider this revolutionary situation with tensions between two opposing alternatives – the revolutionary committees and the CAMC – but it speaks of a dual power situation between the CAMC and the Generalidad government!

The capitalist State was not dismantled and it retained its functions (albeit in "stunted", "nominal" or "partial" versions). Moreover, the machinery of repression – the Civil Guards, the Assault Guards and the Carabineers – had not been disbanded, but had been confined to barracks pending better times ahead, which were to follow a few months later. Capitalism's economic internationalization since the First World War, had rung down the curtain on the age of bourgeois revolutions and ushered in the age of proletarian revolutions.

In the absence of a revolutionary vanguard capable of seeing the antagonism between the proletariat and the capitalist State through to the destruction of the capitalist State and the installation of the revolutionary power of the proletariat, any revolutionary movement, no matter its proletarian composition, was doomed to fail.

Given the inability of the workers' organizations to take and wield political power, and given their ineptitude when it came to coordinating and centralizing the power wielded locally by the revolutionary committees at regional and national levels until it added up to establishment of workers' power, there was no other course available other than collaboration with other bourgeois political organizations and with the capitalist State and the only purpose could have been to restore and strengthen the republican State. The resources of the counter-revolution were substantial enough to foster a swift recovery on the part of the capitalist State which had soon recaptured all of its functions and, in the wake of the "inevitable and necessary" bloody defeat inflicted upon the proletariat in May 1937, it decapitated any revolutionary threat posed by the workers' movement by

means of a two-pronged policy of cracking down on the “usual uncontrollables” (the revolutionaries) and the social democratization and absorption of the workers’ organizations into the machinery of the capitalist State, through co-opting of the trade union and political bureaucracies into the State bureaucracy.

THESIS No 5

There was no prospect of further development of the collectives unless the capitalist State was destroyed. In fact, the collectives ended up servicing the over-riding needs of a war-time economy. Circumstances evolved along very varied, rapid and unstable lines, between the revolutionary expropriation of factories from the bourgeoisie in July 1936 through to the militarization of industry and work, which was prevalent by 1938. There was and is no way of divorcing political revolution from social and economic revolution. Revolutions, as The Friends of Durruti concluded, are always totalitarian in both senses of the term: all-encompassing and authoritarian. All-encompassing because there was no way for them to be merely social and economic, but were also political, cultural, sexual, educational and so on, until they embraced every facet of human life. There is nothing as authoritarian as a revolution: expropriating a factory from its owners, or a landed estate from its owner is always going to amount to the imposition of authority. And can only be pulled off when the bourgeoisie’s organs of repression, the army and police, have been routed by a revolutionary army that imposes its new revolutionary legality by means of authority. Anarcho-syndicalism and the POUM, due to the theoretical deficiencies of the former and the numerical flimsiness, palaver and lack of daring on the part of the latter, never grappled with the issue of power, leaving it to the care of the republican bourgeoisie’s professional politicians and to socialists like Azaña, Giral, Prieto, Largo Caballero, Companys, Tarradellas, Negrín ... or played along with them whenever their participation was required in order to head off a shift in the direction of some revolutionary alternative.

In terms of the economy, the historiographical myth wrapped up under the generic description of “collectivization” broke down into four stages (in Catalonia):

1. The workers’ confiscation drive (July to September 1936)
2. The adaptation of collectivizations to fit in with the Collectivizations Decree (October to December 1936)
3. The Generalidad’s drive for direction of the economy and monitor the collectivizations, as opposed to the attempt – driven by the radical faction of the CNT membership – to bring the economy under social ownership (January to May 1937).
4. The (central government’s) creeping interference and State centralization imposed a war economy and a militarization of the workforce (June 1937 to January 1939).

The revolutionary committees of whichever sort – defence, workers’, firm’s, local, supplies, ward, rearguard militias’, etc., – had the potential to grow into agencies of workers’ power and on many an occasion wielded the only real local, or sectoral power in July 1936. But these were quickly converted into antifascist committees, trade union committees running firms, or slipped into lengthy hibernation (as in the case of the CNT defence committees), or were – like the Control Patrols – turned into State agencies which, in addition to cracking down on the Fifth Column, also kept a

watchful eye on “uncontrollables” (revolutionaries or radicals) and on the defence committees, ward committees and rearguard militias (albeit that the same time they constituted the new organization that stood in for government oversight of public order).

The ambiguousness and ambivalence of the Control Patrols, collectivizations, Militias, defence committees and, ultimately of the “Revolution of 19 July” were direct consequences of the same ambiguousness and ambivalence in the far left organizations within the Popular Front (the CNT and the POUM) that were not only incapable of taking power and championing the proletariat’s historic program of emancipation against the counter-revolutionary forces, but which additionally plumped for collaboration with the bourgeois parties, the Stalinists and the capitalist State, with no aim beyond the singular aim of defeating fascism. The ambiguity came from the CAMC’s being the product of the victorious proletarian insurrection of 19 July, but also from the political set-back of 21 July, when class collaboration was embraced.

THESIS No 6

May 1937 signalled the political defeat of the most advanced proletarian revolution that required a counter-revolution to mount a counter-offensive. The roots of May can be traced to the rising cost of living, the scarcity of basic necessities, resistance to the disbandment of the Control Patrols and the militarization of the militias and the constant striving by the workforces of collectivized firms to hold on to control of production in the face of the growing encroachments of the Generalidad, furthered by implementation of the S’Agaró Decrees. It was no accident that the May events began in a collectivized concern, the Telephone Exchange, due to the armed opposition put up by grassroots CNT workers to a take-over of the premises by the Generalidad’s forces of repression. The swift spread of the fighting through the whole of Barcelona city was the handiwork of the defence committees and ward committees which liaised over the phone and operated heedless of the CNT’s higher committees, side-lining them.

On one side of the barricades were the forces of public order, the PSUC Stalinists, and the Catalanist Pyrenean Militias under the direction of the Generalidad government. On the opposite side of the barricades were the workers from the CNT and POUM. The anarchists from the Friends of Durruti Grouping and the Trotskyists from the Bolshevik-Leninist Section of Spain were the only ones to try to graft revolutionary aims on to the barricade fighting.

The CNT membership, however, was incapable or clueless when it came to defying the collaborationist guidelines issued by the CNT leadership and its higher committees. Shots were even fired at the radio stations broadcasting the conciliatory speeches of García Oliver and Federica Montseny, but in the end, they abided by those guidelines. The Friends of Durruti classified the activities of those leaders and higher committees as “huge treachery”.

In the aftermath of May 1937, attempts by the higher committees of the bureaucratized CNT to have the Friends of Durruti expelled foundered as there was no ratification forthcoming from any union assembly. Yet no split followed that might have been likely to clarify the different, irreconcilable approaches that existed inside the CNT.

Subsequent historiography either downplayed or was ignorant of the significance of the Grouping's role and the CNT bureaucracy was even successful in retrieving a "measure of revolutionary prestige" for itself, a prestige borrowed from a Grouping that it had persecuted and attempted to have expelled from its ranks. Ambiguity always works to the advantage of the counter-revolution and today we can see how the CNT and the FAI have "inherited" the revolutionary prestige of the Friends of Durruti Grouping and no one turns a hair. There is nothing that the bureaucrats and capitalism cannot re-purpose, including what was, back in the day, slandered and persecuted for trying to construct a revolutionary alternative inimical to bureaucracy and capitalism.

THESIS No 7

Institutionalization of the CNT has significant implications, impacting upon the CNT's very organizational and ideological character.

The entry of its most prominent militants into the various levels of the State administration, ranging from town councils up to ministerial office in the government of the Republic and incorporating Generalidad Departments or brand-new and fairly autonomous "revolutionary" institutions like the CAMC, the Central Supplies Committee and the Council of Economy conjured up brand-new functions and requirements that had to be covered by a limited number of militants equipped to hold down such positions of responsibility.

The appointment of such post-holder militants providing advice and oversight was done by the higher committees which in turn conjured up other internal positions of responsibility within the Organization. This was how the higher committees were constituted, being made up of the CNT National Committee, the Regional Committee of the Catalanian National Confederation of Labour, the Local Federation of [CNT] Unions, the FAI's Peninsular and Regional Committees, the Barcelona Local Federation of Anarchist Groups, the FIJL, the Libertarian Youth of Catalonia, councillors, Generalidad department heads, ministers (when available), delegates from the CNT Columns and a number of prestigious militants.

The leadership and power roles played by those higher committees, which involved a very tiny minority of persons qualified to exercise them, conjured up a series of interests, approaches and aims that differed from those of the CNT rank-and-file. Hence, on the one hand, the decline in mobilization and the widespread disenchantment to be found among the membership and grass roots who were grappling with food shortages and repression and were left entirely to their own devices by the higher committees. Hence the emergence of a revolutionary opposition, essentially embodied by The Friends of Durruti, the Libertarian Youth of Catalonia, a few anarchist groups from the Barcelona Local Federation of Anarchist Groups and, above all, the barrio and defence committees in Barcelona's wards.

The singularity of the historical circumstances, as well as the urgent need for decisions to be made, precluded the Catalan CNT from operating along horizontalist and assembly-based lines. The Committee of Committees led the Organization from 23 July 1936 until June 1937. The Policy Advisory Commission [CAP] ran it from June 1937 through to March 1938. Meanwhile, in June 1937, the FAI was converted into just another antifascist party, capable of furnishing and training whatever

bureaucrats were needed to fill positions of responsibility and power. In the end, against the backdrop of shambolic collapse of the front lines, the elitist and self-appointed Executive Committee of the Libertarian Movement of Catalonia ran the Organization along dictatorial, hierarchical lines from April to November 1938, looking no further than militarizing the workforce and society, as well as the Organization itself.

By the start of December 1936, the higher committees had come to see the barrio-level revolutionary committees as their worst enemies and they made up their minds to clip their wings and bring their defence sections under trade union control, effectively consigning them to hibernation, until, in March 1937, the establishment of the Unified Security Corps (made up of Assault Guards and Civil Guards) and the threat to abolish the Control Patrols, necessitated the reactivation and arming of them by way of preparing for the inevitable show-down that culminated in the May Events.

The antifascist unity ideology, embraced and absorbed by the higher committees, generates a commonality of interests and aims across those committees and the remaining antifascist organizations. Those higher committees abjured all anarcho-sindicalist revolutionary principles, the sole focus now being the winning of the war.

Institutionalization of the CNT and the higher committees' embrace of the ideology of antifascist unity turned them into the number one enemy of the (minority) CNT revolutionary opposition, which came very close to triggering a split, although ultimately none came to pass due to the physical elimination, imprisonment or obligation to go underground that the State and Stalinist repression targeting that opposition imposed. That repression was discriminating, in that it targeted the revolutionary minority, even as efforts were under way to copper-fasten the institutionalization of the higher committees.

There should be no talk of treachery on the part of the higher committees as it explains nothing; what there was, was a class conflict between higher committees that had become the State and a number of revolutionary minorities that faced repression and persecution. There was no betrayal; there was a class struggle pitting leaders against led, between rulers or would-be rulers and the ruled, between bureaucrats and workers.

State anarchism put paid to the revolutionary theory of the proletariat as well as demonstrating its own inability when it came to championing workers' short-term interests.

THESIS No 8

The militarization of the Antifascist Militias, together with the Collectivizations Decree and the disbandment of the local committees signalled the beginning and the direction of the bourgeois counter-revolution and its recapture of the machinery of State, which had not been dismantled.

Militarization of the militias on the front lines not only entailed loss of workers' direction of the war effort and the discarding of any revolutionary purpose, but also entailed a militarization of the rearguard, meaning, of Public Order.

And such militarization of the rearguard wrought a change in all social relationships and power policies, because violence and power were one and the same. Militarization of Public Order also implied a process of ongoing social, political and revolutionary de-mobilization of workers.

Outstanding in the opposition to militarization of the People's Militias (a militarization decreed in October 1936) was the 4th Gelsa Agrupación of the Durruti Column; after surviving a suggestion of armed confrontation with other forces from the Column that did back militarization, it made a decision to quit the front lines (in February 1937) and head back to Barcelona, taking their guns with them. Those eight hundred deserters spearheaded one of the most splendid instances of revolutionary defeatism the history of the proletariat has to show.

Together with other radical CNT members committed to the campaign for socialization within firms, those militians launched the Friends of Durruti Grouping in March 1937; it amassed between four and five thousand members and in Catalonia it constituted a revolutionary alternative to the (collaborationist) higher committees of the CNT-FAI.

After a transition that lasted for a few months, there was a shift away from the revolutionary violence of the committees – regarded as disorderly by the Catalan bourgeoisie and the Stalinists – into the “usual” bourgeois order, wherein violence was a monopoly of the “usual” anti-worker agencies of repression: the Assault Guards and the Civil Guards which had been amalgamated on 4 March 1937 into a single Unified Security Corps. Viewed in this light, the May Events of 1937 represented an inevitable and crucial stage in the machinery of State's securing its unchallenged monopoly on violence.

There was a move away from the committees' revolutionary violence directed at the bourgeoisie, the clergy and the fascists, towards the repressive violence exercised by the capitalist order's bourgeois forces and targeting revolutionary minorities. Such a crackdown on the revolutionary CNT opposition (and other revolutionary minorities) went hand-in-hand and consonant with the absorption of the higher committees into the machinery of the State (in government as well as outside of it.) There was no question here of the leaders betraying the rank-and-file; there were the two obligatory aspects of a single counter-revolutionary process: persecution of revolutionaries and institutionalization of the higher committees.

Antifascist public order was rooted in the antifascist unity between all organizations subscribing to a single purpose: the winning of the war. Such a military victory entailed and pursued the militarization of the Militias, the forces of public order, the workplace, social relations and politics. The war devoured the revolution.

THESIS No 9

In December 1936, resistance to the disarming of the barrio committees prompted the Barcelona Local Federation of [CNT] Unions to put them into cold storage: but when an order on 4 December amalgamated the Assault Guards and Civil Guards into a unified corps under the control of the Generalidad government, the unions reacted to that threat by resuming funding, arming and reactivation of the barrio-level defence committees. The onslaught by the Stalinists, Catalanists and the Generalidad had solidified and looked unstoppable. The famished populace had made no secret

of its unhappiness in the women's demonstrations on 14 April in various marketplaces around Barcelona. From 12 to 24 April, the Local Federation of Anarchist Groups, the Libertarian Youth and the defence committees in the barrios, girded their loins for an uprising that might halt the ongoing creep of counter-revolutionary repression. In mid-April, Herrera and Escorza negotiated a new government line-up with Companys and a resolution of the government's crisis. The very first criminal investigations were opened into "clandestine burial grounds" and this prompted the indictment and jailing of members of the committees dating from the revolutionary events back in July 1936. On 27 April, the authorities in Bellver, with Generalidad government backing and emboldened by the growing influx of Carabineers into the Cerdaña, laid an ambush designed to murder Antonio Martín, triggering a repressive onslaught targeting anarchists in that comarca. The higher committees reckoned that all it would take was for them to "bare their fangs" to the PSUC, ERC and Generalidad and the latter would call off their wave of repression. The defence committees in the Barcelona wards side-lined the higher committees and on 3 May unleashed a revolutionary insurrection that slipped out of their control.

After June 1937 and following the disbandment of the Control Patrols, there had been a rolling recapture of different localities and comarcas by Assault Guard and Civil Guard forces which deployed a brutal crackdown on CNT personnel and most especially on former Patrols personnel and most prominent militants. In many locations, the CNT organization vanished.

This crackdown on the anarcho-syndicalists was married to a passivity on the part of the higher committees which plumped for ad hoc legal defence for prisoners rather than any collective, political advocacy. Thousands of anarcho-syndicalist prisoners demanded greater commitment and solidarity from the higher committees; all that achieved was that the CNT Regional Committee and the FAI Regional Committee agreed to produce underground newspapers which campaigned on the prisoners' behalf.

On 9 June 1937, Campos and Xena were embroiled in a byzantine debate as to whether the so-called Committee of Committees was or was not still in existence. Within days, on 14 June, the Policy Advisory Commission (CAP) was formally launched: it was nothing but a resurrection and updated version of the Committee of Committees that had surfaced up back in July 1936. The motives were the same – the requirement for an executive body to reach the most significant and pressing decisions at speed. This time, though, there was an additional consideration: ensuring that the defence committee would NEVER AGAIN sideline the higher committees as had been the case in May. And in order to monitor and thwart a further potential sidelining by the defence committees, a so-called Liaison Committee was established: it was answerable to the CAP.

THESIS No 10

The essential issue in July 1936 was not the taking of power (by a minority of anarchist leaders), but how to orchestrate, propel and pursue the demolition of the State via the committees. The ward-based revolutionary committees (and some of the local committees) failed to prosecute or stopped prosecuting the revolution: and they were the revolution. Even as the higher committees were turning the CNT into just another antifascist organization, committed to the resurrection and

bolstering of the republican machinery of State, the revolutionary committees were tending to get to grips with the task of dismantling the State and supplanting it in all its functions.

Maybe the role of the CNT as a trade union should have been temporarily restricted to running the economy, whilst deferring to and melting into the new organization that was sprouting from the barrio, local, factory, supplies, defence, etc. Committees. A massive influx of workers, many of them previously unconnected with the organization, introduced a brand-new reality. And the reality conjured up by the revolution was not the same reality as had existed prior to 19 July. The old organizations and parties were still, in practical terms, on the outside of the brand-new reality that had been created. Having become widespread at every level, the revolutionary corpus of revolutionary committees should have been representative of the whole of the revolutionary proletariat, without the need for nonsensical bickering over initials that had had some meaning prior to the uprising in July but not after it.

The CNT-FAI could have been the yeast raising the new revolutionary body, marshalling the committees and then melting away into the process of revolutionary ferment per se (even as the other organizations and parties were melting away).

In the wake of the workers' victorious uprising and the defeat of the army, with the forces of public order restricted to barracks, the demolition of the State was no longer a futuristic, abstract utopia.

The dismantling of the State by the revolutionary committees was a very practical and real assignment, whereby those committees took charge of all of the functions previously delivered by the State prior to July 1936.

What was missing was a vanguard ready to champion such proletarian autonomy and capable of orchestrating, expanding and bolstering those revolutionary committees: the Friends of Durruti referred to it as a Revolutionary Junta, but were clueless and incapable when it came to implementing it, even though the poster distributed in Barcelona in late April 1937 emphatically called for the Generalidad to be replaced by that Revolutionary Junta.

THESIS No 11

In 1930s Spain, bourgeois ideology, faced with a choice between capitalism or anti-capitalist revolution, was always able to counter with phoney bourgeois options that put it to the proletariat that there was no revolutionary alternative and no chance of one developing:

In 1931, it offered a choice between monarchy or republic. In 1934 it offered a choice between right or left. In 1936 it forced a choice between fascism or antifascism. The proletariat's embrace of antifascist ideology entailed a defence of capitalist democracy as it declined to assert itself as a revolutionary class.

The bourgeois alternative ... fascism or antifascism? ... was not merely phoney but it also entailed the immediate defeat of the revolutionary, anti-capitalist alternative.

Only a number of minorities, with scant influence, were so bold as to denounce antifascism as a bourgeois, counter-revolutionary ideology.

ADDENDUM The text that follows does not appear in the book cited above, but, given its date (May 2026) and theme, deserves to be included with the rest.

THOUGHTS ON HISTORY AS THE THEORIZATION OF THE PROLETARIAT'S HISTORICAL EXPERIENCES

What is History?

History is not some neutral narrative, nor is it an accumulation of dead facts: it is a battle-field and, as such, riddled with interests, silences and misrepresentations. Anyone out to tackle it honestly cannot do so from the comfortable remove of a scholar classifying documents, but should have the critical awareness that every archive is of itself a trench as well.

In recent years there has been an escalation in an operation out to make cosmetic changes to the past, especially where 20th century revolutionary experiences are concerned. These are being drained of content, whittled down to picturesque anecdotes or, worse still, absorbed into the official narrative as merely inevitable episodes incidental to a progressive trend that always culminates in the State and the market. That process is not innocent: it reflects the need to de-fuse any memory that might call the established order into question.

Take social revolution, for instance. Not as an abstract notion but as a concrete practice lived out on the streets and in the workplace, in the collectives. Wherever workers stopped obeying, where private ownership was effectively done away with and where day-to-day life was reorganized on fresh foundations, something surfaced that did not fit in the usual categories of institutional politics. Which is precisely what the prevailing historiography find intolerable: evidence that society can be organized without the need for imposed hierarchies.

That memory, however, lingers, albeit fragmentary, it is stubborn. It crops up in forgotten testimonies, in underground newspapers, in the minutes of meetings, none of which was supposed to survive. Adding up to an inconvenient recall in that it offers no slick solutions, no spotless heroes. It is riddled with contradictions, defeats and mistakes. But that is the very thing that renders it profoundly human.

The problem is not that history is complex, but that there is this drive to simplify it until it becomes unrecognizable. In the face of that trend, the task of the critical historian is neither to embellish nor condemn, but to understand. Understanding implies a restoration of frictions, affording a voice to the defeated and standing fast against the temptation to ring the curtain down on the past by means of definitive interpretations.

Ultimately, what is at stake is not just how what happened is to be construed, but the sheer possibility of alternative views. If we stand still for a domesticated history, we are also countenancing an unblemished present and a walled-off future. If, on the other hand, we rescue the fractious side of the past, we are opening the door to the imagination – and quite possibly the construction – of other ways of living.

Because, when wrested from the grasp of the powers-that-be, history stops being a museum and become a tool. And, in the right hands, any tool can be turned to a use other than contemplation: it can become a tool for change.

Critique of the dogmatism of *Programa Comunista*

Far from applying historical materialism as a concrete investigative approach, *Programa comunista* turns it into a **closed doctrinal system**. The Spanish War is not analysed as an actual, contradictory, dynamic historical process, but as an instance that must – of necessity – conform to a pre-existing theoretical model.

In that sense, there is no investigation involved, just **ideological verification**.

Anything that does not agree with Bordiguist dogma is automatically dismissed as unreal. The upshot of this is a radical one: whatever does not conform to the theory **never was, is undeserving of analysis and is regarded as an irrelevance**.

Thus, decisive phenomena from 1936 like:

- The revolutionary committees
- The collectivizations
- Forms of local workers' power
- The initial breakdown of the machinery of State

are stripped of their revolutionary import or, straight-out, ignored, not after critical scrutiny, but because they contradict the underlying premise that in the absence of a party, there is no revolution.

This approach turns historical materialism entirely on its head. Rather than starting from the facts in order to devise theoretical categories, the starting-point is rigid categories, with the **facts being denied should they not fit in**.

From a materialist point of view – as set out by Agustín Guillamón in his *Theses on the War in Spain*, this approach is not just inadequate, but is profoundly problematical. Historical materialism does not consist of the application of universal models, but of analysing **concrete social relationships, actual conflicts and specific historical processes**.

Reducing the Spanish Revolution to a “non-revolution” on the grounds that it does not fit in with the ideal party model and the seizure of State power is tantamount to replacing history with political theology.

When all is said and done, Bordiguism lapses into what it is out to combat; a form of idealism. Not a democratic or antifascist idealism, but an **upside down idealism**, wherein the idea (the program) overrides the historical reality.

A CRITIQUE OF *PROGRAMA COMUNISTA* TEXTS ON THE SPANISH WAR (2016-2026)

The texts published by the so-called “International Communist Party” in the issues No 53 to 56 (2018 to 2024) of *Programa Comunista*, regarding the war in Spain amount to a paradigm example of how a petrified political doctrine can substitute ritual rehearsal of ready-established ideological models for

concrete historical analysis. We are not dealing here with original historical inquiry, not the signalling of relevant documentation, nor even a critical rewriting of the classical writings of the Italian Fraction back in the 1930s. What we have here is a catechistic reading of the Spanish Revolution, wholly obedient to contemporary Bordiguists' need for doctrinal self-reassurance.

It looks as if there was a foregone conclusion even prior to any examination of the facts: the Civil War was just an imperialist war waged between two bourgeois factions; the proletariat was incapable of acting as an autonomous class: antifascism was utter bamboozlement right from the outset; and the absence of a revolutionary communist party made defeat inevitable. The whole historical complexity of the Spanish revolutionary process boils down to an educational illustration of a thesis already known.

That model is not marxism. It is scholasticism.

It is not the function of historical materialism to do injury to the facts to make them conform to abstract categories; its function is actually to understand the contradictory unrest of social classes in concrete historical settings. And the 1936 Spanish Revolution was a concrete historical context that cannot be boiled down some mechanical model having to do with the "rush to imperialist war".

The Spanish proletariat was not a passive mass swept along by antifascism right from day one. The workers' uprising on 19 July 1936 partly dismantled the machinery of the State in lots of cities; it seized factories and workshops, raising militias, setting up barrio-level revolutionary committees, overseeing supplies, transport and production. For a matter of weeks, there was an actual revolutionary situation.

Denial or down-playing of that amounts to ignoring the Spanish proletariat's actual historical experience. The main theoretical shortcoming of the Bordiguists' texts consists of their inability to understand the dual power that emerged following the military defeat inflicted upon the fascist coup in Barcelona and other republican areas. Whilst the republican State did formally survive, real power lay in the hands of the workers' committees. This paradox sat at the very heart of the revolutionary process. The crucial issue was not just the "absence of a party", which Bordiguists have turned into an all-purpose explanation for every historical defeat, but the concrete issue of utter destruction of the capitalist State and centralizing revolutionary proletarian power.

Belatedly (in the summer of 1937) the Friends of Durruti caught on to that need when they proposed that the Central Antifascist Militias Committee be replaced by a Revolutionary Junta capable of orchestrating and centralizing the power of the workers' committees.

Programa Comunista's texts ignore that practical issue almost in its entirety. They constantly speak of the "proletariat", but pay hardly any heed to the concrete forms of proletarian organization that surfaced in July 1936. They speak of "imperialist war", but have nothing to say about the revolutionary experience of defence committees, control patrols, collectivizations and the barricades in May 1937.

Living history vanishes, overlaid by doctrinal abstraction.

And there is another fundamental problem: the utter inability to distinguish between State anarchism and revolutionary anarchism.

To Bordiguists, the entire libertarian movement seems to constitute a single, undifferentiated phenomenon. The ministerial CNT, Garcia Oliver, Federica Montseny, the higher committees, the barrio committees, the Libertarian Youth and the Friends of Durruti are lumped together in a vague, all-encompassing condemnation of “anarchism”.

That approach is not historical analysis: it is ideological simplification.

The CNT's partnership in government did effectively amount to a counter-revolutionary policy. But for that very reason, up popped revolutionary libertarians who fought against that policy on class grounds. Turning a blind eye to that internal split is tantamount to a failure to grasp anything about the real dynamics of the Spanish revolutionary process.

Contemporary Bordiguists are still hostages to a teleological view of history. Everything is retrospectively explained in terms of the final defeat. Since Franco won and the revolution failed, the deduction is that all was lost from the word go. But that is not how history works. Revolutionary defeats are open-ended processes fraught with contradictions, alternatives and actual possibilities.

The Spanish Revolution was not some petit-bourgeois dream, nor some mere overture to the Second World War. It was the last great attempt at revolution by the European proletariat prior to 1939.

That it was defeated does nothing to invalidate the fact that it happened.

The main historical lesson of 1936 remains, to this day, the need for the utter destruction of the capitalist State by means of revolutionary bodies emerging from the working class itself. And precisely because that revolution actually happened – albeit that it was defeated – it remains vital that it be studied without any dogmas, catechisms or doctrinal blinkers.

Revolutionary history has no use for preachers of orthodoxy.

What it needs is critical understanding of the real experiences of the proletariat.

Agustín Guillamón

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Texts translated by Paul Sharkey for the Kate Sharpley Library <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/>