

Interview from Segovia Prison with the Autonomous Groups.

On the problem of armed struggle, the reactionary function of the CNT, & possible future developments of the anti-capitalist struggle.

By the comrades of the Spanish Federation of Anarchist Groups (F.I.G.A.)

Why not go back to the rich moments of the past four decades? The moments of violent class clash and rupture. How have the experiences of the mass insurrectional struggle in Turkey, Portugal, Spain, and Iran, among countless other places in the 1970s, been buried and ignored so completely? It's in the spirit of unearthing these moments practically that we present this interview.

We obviously couldn't give a fuck if some professional historian validates this or that revolution or further sanitizes and conceals their truths by presenting them in a textbook; we want to know how comrades have wrangled with these central questions: of organization, of the always-reformist Left and the fascist Right, of violent struggle and criminality, of how to relate to the wider class, and of solidarity.

Those imprisoned in Segovia obviously do not have the final answers to these questions; however, their responses reflect not only their own lives (made clear from the very first line), but the breadth of the autonomous struggle in Spain which had already been underway for more than a decade at the time of this interview in 1979. Their positions strike us as incredibly lucid- unsurprising given the constant necessity to untangle themselves from the Left (both democratic and armed) and various factions' attempts to contain and manipulate the wildcat movement.

From this text, we hope to take several things: to clarify our understanding of history from outside the confines of the academy; to remind ourselves to take our comrades in prison seriously, both as combatants and as thinkers; and to always further articulate and substantiate our distance from the Left.

What do you mean by ‘Autonomous Groups’ and what, in the last analysis, is your ideological position?

Before anything else, we must point out that we don't represent the whole of Autonomy, but only ourselves, through our own experiences. We consider ourselves to belong to the area of Autonomy.

Up until the Spanish State murdered Salvador Puig Antich¹ in March 1974, people who were acting independently, rejecting parties and trades unions and called autonomous in certain circles, had not yet worked out wider coordination to obtain greater effects. Around the time of this murder there was an unleashing of armed actions which brought with them a project of coordination with other groups of a similar character in the Madrid area.

As far as Barcelona is concerned, at the end of 1969 Autonomous Groups already existed, some of which evolved to the Autonomous Workers' Groups, falling into a narrow workerist dimension. On the other hand there were some young comrades who really engaged themselves in armed struggle, and later on formed the MIL.² In the first place we started off from a series of minimal agreements, as opposed to the classical organisations of the past which usually needed some very schematic theory to apply at all levels. In Barcelona these minimal agreements were simplified in the theoretical and practical development of the 'Platform of the Factory Workers' Commissions', an organization created at the beginning of the 70's, which united a whole series of organizations that rejected the CP's³ patronage, it defined itself anti-capitalist, autonomous, anti-syndicalist, anti-authoritarian and clandestine.

Up until then the Autonomous Groups had recognised themselves in the 'Independents' of Madrid, the MIL, and to a lesser extent, the GOA, having already formed an organisation with its own practical/theoretical plans and integrated in the 'Platform'. In the middle of 1974, internal disputes concerning the 'Platform' led to a number of people joining parties or unions. Others stuck to it, but with ideological nuances: anti-authoritarianism, antisindicalism, etc. They ended -up uniting with what remained of the Barcelona groups, then with those of Madrid and Valence.

Now we are all united by minimal agreements that can be summed up in what we have already said. We refuse to establish or develop a

1. A member of the MIL, executed by garrote in 1974 by the Francoist regime after being found guilty of murdering a police officer. His execution set off demonstrations across Europe and S. America.

2. *Movimiento Ibérico de Liberación*, an armed Catalan leftist group active from 1971-1973

3. Communist Party

new 'ideology', the ideology of autonomy. We are struggling against capitalism globally, and our coordination starts from a minimal agreement for action: Abolition of salaried work and merchandise; Destruction of the State and any form of power; Destruction of prisons and all the State's repressive apparatus.

We conceive of organisation as only for concrete tasks. Our practice is our theory, and we put our theory into practice. We are against ideologies, elements of separation within the real communist movement. It would be absurd therefore to make an ideological opposition, as we are against all ideologies. What we can do is elaborate a theory of the development of capitalism today, the present state of the communist movement, our work, our successes and relative failures. We see the autonomy of the individual as the refusal of any delegation of responsibility at any level: organisation, action, propaganda, etc. All delegation of responsibility generates power, because any delegation hands in its bill sooner or later. Individual autonomy, and that of a group or class, is realized by taking on one's own revolutionary responsibilities, one's global responsibilities in the face of capital.

One could say then that you are against the State?

That's the least one could say. Obviously it is impossible to imagine a State without authority.

Do you think it will be possible to re-organise life, one way or another, on the basis of anarchist principles?

One of the first points we all agree on is that, with the aim of coordinating groups, we put ideologies in second place and give priority to practice and our needs on the basis of certain minimal agreements. An anarchist can therefore agree perfectly well on that basis. There are in fact people among us who define themselves anarchists. That doesn't mean to say we support the anarchist ideology, but that, as well as being in agreement with the first definition, we are against parties, unions and salaried work.

How do you envisage the re-organisation of society then, for example' human relations and those of production?

We think there shouldn't be the separation that exists today between work and study, but that a whole series of activities should exist through which work would be done. This should not be paid of course, and should be linked to the needs of the community, aiming at use and rejecting pure consumerism. We don't see work as necessarily something that has to be done in eight or five hours; by work we mean creativity, not the pure slavery that takes place at the present time. We see it as something based on the needs of society, not on economic benefit.

So, one couldn't say that the Autonomous Groups are a specifically anarchist organisation?

No, not specifically anarchist, nor specifically Marxist. For us the coordination of autonomous groups is an organization defined by its concrete tasks. We have already said we are leaving ideology aside in favour of a practice suited to the present social situation. We don't want to spend years dissecting things so as to give birth to a dazzling political theory then set to work from there. We reject the alienation caused by adopting a precise ideology; and we are trying to avoid a centralisation of tasks. Each individual in any group must be responsible at the level of the coordination for action, propaganda, etc. We never delegate responsibility to anyone else, each person must accept his own full responsibility. We met and organised on the basis of concrete tasks; when these tasks disappear as such, the organisation will announce its dissolution.

What do you think of the CNT?⁴

Well, to be clear, we'll answer that question in two parts.

Historically, the CNT had the possibility of bringing about the revolution in 1936 after crushing the military uprising almost single-handed. Four months later it entered into the formation of a non-revolutionary, or should we say counter-revolutionary, government with four ministers. We don't agree with the idea of personal error on the part of Montseny or Garcia Oliver, but consider it was the organizational structure of the CNT that allowed such a situation. The CNT, which went from union to revolutionary organisation before and during the coup d'etat, did not know how to come out of such a situation, congealing at the decisive moment. After that it

4. Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labor.)

was towed along by a government that was almost as reactionary as that which brought about the coup d'état. At first, the re-constitution of the CNT revived the argument within the Autonomous Groups. Some found the possibility of change represented by the CNT valid; others thought it was a political mistake favoured by the mirage that things change with democracy. They also thought an analysis of the evolution of Spanish capitalism and the workers' and social movement was necessary before giving the CNT the green light. Those who believed the CNT to be a valid choice did so on the following analysis: it would assemble all the distinctly anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist tendencies, thus galvanising all the forces that aspired to social change over the whole country. They participated in the reconstruction of the CNT on the basis of that analysis, without for that abandoning the Autonomous Groups.

Today, after four years' experience of the CNT in the social movement, our critique is the same as that which can be made of any syndical organization or party as an element of integration that capitalism uses to maintain its equilibrium. We also think that there are revolutionary nuclei within the CNT, but that, obviously coming into contrast with the syndical bureaucracy, they cannot evolve towards a clear position.

Can we say in that case that you are against the CNT?

Yes, in as far as it is a syndical organisation. Very well, but we must point out that we don't have any particular phobia against the CNT; it simply enters the critique we make of unions and parties, to the extent that we do not consider them adequate instruments for a social revolution.

Without doubt it has happened that some of those among us have belonged to the CNT at individual level, and connections and responsibilities have been drawn from that. In fact, when the Barcelona ones fell, both the police and capital's propaganda apparatus did all they could to make them into the 'armed wing' of the CNT; the thing was repeatedly denied in front of both the Guardia Civile and the judges, and in communiqués later sent out of prison. At most the police found some CNT membership cards at some of our homes because some joined at the beginning; but what the police presented as a 'find' doesn't correspond to reality.

What do you think of the FAI?⁵

Which one? Because there are a number of them, aren't there? The only element we have to judge is the meeting that took place at the beginning of 1977. Our critique of them is that it doesn't seem right to us for people with no real base to meet with a view to building point blank a complete organisation, given that if the base groups that they claimed to represent existed, they evidently didn't have any concrete practice. But, in the end, we don't believe that the FAI exists at the moment. Now, if it's a question of the historical FAI, things become more complicated. Our critique of the historical FAI is the following: although a revolutionary situation had been made possible by the use of armed struggle, we believe the FAIist movement began from the spontaneous organisation of the workers to physically protect themselves from the *pistoleros* of the bosses at the beginning of the 20's, but that, in establishing itself as a permanent organisation, it reached the point of substituting itself for the working class in the field of its own tasks. We recognise that it created a revolutionary situation, but we maintain that they were just as incapable as the CNT of making the revolutionary perspective triumph. We believe that this lack of initiative is the logical consequence of a lack of clear ideas on the way in which the working class must take on its tasks, without ever delegating its responsibilities to anyone.

The other fault we see in the FAI is that it takes on the role of ideological management of the anarchists, which has favoured the entry of intellectuals; and it is these groups of intellectuals who have always prevented things reaching a revolutionary outcome.

You are continually evoking armed struggle, but, as you know, there are other organisations that practise armed struggle, for example the ETA⁶ or the GRAPO⁷. What do you think about that armed struggle and its organisations?

For us revolutionary armed struggle is the radical contestation of capital. It is the only form of coherent struggle against the institutionalised repression of the State; we don't see why proletarians shouldn't use it. We have a different opinion of the armed struggle carried out by these two organisations.

5. *Federación Anarquista Ibérica (Iberian Anarchist Federation)*

6. *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Homeland and Freedom), an armed Basque nationalist group.*

7. *Grupos de Resistencia Antifascista Primero de Octubre (The First of October Anti-Fascist Resistance Groups), a Spanish clandestine maoist organization.*

In the case of the ETA, we agree if it is a question of a strategy for struggling against the State; now, if it is to edify the Basque 'socialist' State, then we don't agree. We think that the ETA should clearly expose their social project; as far as that is concerned the military ETA seem to be more coherent to us, even though still very vague on this subject.

As far as the GRAPO is concerned, the first inconsistency we notice is that they are struggling with arms for a republic; because even Manuel Fraga Iribarne could fight for a republic, and even without arms. The second inconsistency that we see is that the GRAPO appeared precisely at the time of the transition from dictatorship to 'democracy', and appeared with *anti-fascist* projects; while in reality a coherent project of armed struggle at that time was only possible on anti-capitalist bases that go beyond the evolution of the State. Fascism and democracy are two forms of capitalist dominion. The third inconsistency is that no one, especially ourselves can understand the majority of their actions, given that only a minute part of them can be justified from a revolutionary point of view.

What do you think of the FIGA?⁸

Well, first of all, we lack information given that we got to know each other in prison and haven't really gone into deep discussions. Moreover, we don't remember any of your actions that would give us an idea where you are going. In spite of that, you give us the impression of claiming to take the place of the historic FAI.

How many individuals belonging to the Autonomous Groups are there in prison at the moment?

About thirty.

Do you identify with any movements in other countries?

We identify with the autonomous movement; concretely, with those in France, Italy, Germany... The Autonomous Groups are not a nationalist but an internationalist movement; finally, it is practice that identifies us with other groups and organisations.

8. Spanish Federation of Anarchist Groups

How do you think prisoners' struggle should be at the present time?

We have often said that we don't want economic solidarity, for people to send us clothes or food, etc. We understand solidarity as being in action. We understand by prisoners' aid actions going towards their liberation, as well as the global attack on the capitalist system.

Have you received aid from the CNT?

Some of us at the start of our imprisonment and during the first months, constantly received economic aid from the CNT. Still now we get money orders now and again from some unions such as the Chemical of Barcelona. But, on the other hand we must add that the CNT has also boycotted demonstrations or meetings organised for our support such as the Manlleu one in 1978.

Have you received any other kind of aid from other organisations?

Some of us, from the Association of Prisoners' Families and Friends, and, at the beginning of our imprisonment, from Madame 'J.'

What do you think of the youth of today?

In the present youth there are new aspects to take into consideration. Vast sectors of this youth are refusing to take on their roles of exploiters, exploited or intermediaries in this kind of exploitation; in a word, they are refusing salaried work. Today capitalism can give itself the luxury of leaving certain sectors of youth on the margins of the production circuits, but not on the margin of the circuits of consumerism. This marginalisation has shown capital's true nature very clearly, giving rise to a generalised refusal, and a revolutionary consciousness in the same sectors of youth. The direct recuperation of clothing, food, books, etc has become a generalised practice among the young to supply their daily needs. In this way they are taking back a minute part of all that capital steals from us.

What do you think about drugs?

That they are very good. But we don't attach enough importance to

them to adopt an agreement at organizational level on the subject. In any case, the problem is how and why one uses them.

How do you envisage daily life in the street?

Well, apart from the fact that we enjoy ourselves more there than we do here, daily life conditions your social position. For us, armed struggle is the struggle against a society that doesn't allow us to develop as whole individuals.

Do you consider hold-ups as a means of subsistence?

The coordination of groups, in as far as it is a project of action or joint action, requires certain economic means in order to function. For the moment we have nothing against having recourse to expropriation to cover our personal needs when necessary. Of course we don't live from expropriations as a group, because some of us work and others don't. In other words, each one organises his life as he can and as he likes.

Obviously, we don't devote all our efforts to that, although the actions we have done have been in that area. There are some we don't want to disclose for obvious reasons, and others again that have been claimed by groups like the GRAPO or the FRAP,⁹ who have even been sentenced for them. Well, they must have their reasons ...

Are you following the preparations for the next CNT congress with any interest?

Yes, we have read something on the subject, but we're not very up to date. We only know the items on the agenda a little.

So, if you have seen the agenda, what do you think will come out of it?

Our first impression is that it's 'wild' because of the assortment of themes, and we think that it would take a long time to discuss them all conscientiously. But above all we note the absence of a profound critique of the CNT's interventions during the Spanish revolution, a self-criticism of the ideological positions and organisational structure that allowed so much personal failing. One thing we want

9. *Frente Revolucionario Antifascista y Patriótico (Revolutionary Anti-Fascist Patriotic Front) a spanish marxist-leninist group active in the 1970's.*

to point out - although out of the question at the moment - is that, although we are against unions and parties that doesn't mean to say we are against intervention in the factories and workplaces. In other words all workerist positions seem bad to us, but it seems right that the workers should meet and organise in meetings to decide on their struggle. What we don't like is institutionalized union practice.

You don't think that in the last analysis it is the workers alone who must emancipate themselves, and no other social class?

Yes, of course, because in spite of the fact that some of us are not salaried workers, we consider ourselves to be an integral part of the proletariat. Without being exploited in a factory, we are nonetheless oppressed in social relations mediated by power and money. Our concept of proletarian considers 'all those from whom capital has taken the means of production.'

Do you think the revolution is viable today, bearing in mind above all the macro-structure of capital and the means of communication, etc?

We think the French movement of May '68 demonstrated clearly that conditions for a social revolution were really present, with a greater possibility in the countries where capitalism is more developed. It seems to me that there is a contradiction in what you are saying, because over-developed countries such as the United States are further away than ever from revolution. That's how I see it at least. What do you think? None of us know the United States, but we do know countries like Italy, France, etc, and we think the conditions for a revolution exist.

You don't think that May '68 was a failure in as far as nothing concrete crystallized, and that nothing of the possible conquests has survived?

We absolutely don't consider it to have been a failure, but quite the image of a revolution possible in a developed country. There was equally a rupture with the traditional left which was framing and capitalising proletarian revolt and which it then became a mecha-

nism within the capitalist system. What we did find negative in the revolutionaries of the French May was their incapacity to take advantage, as they could have done, of the fact that the trade unions and parties showed themselves up as elements of capitalist integration. The parties and unions are the left and the extreme left of capital. Their programmes are purely those of capital; they only want to improve its management, not reject it. Only the situationists drew the right theoretical conclusions at that time. May '68 was the seed, not the death, of contemporary revolution.

Well, you say you are making the revolution by yourselves; and for the moment?

But of course, we are certainly not irrational. And at least we are working out an analysis of the environment we find ourselves in, of all the forces that are intervening, in order to act accordingly in a determined way. We believe that it is in analysing the enemy that you find your allies.

So you will agree with Bakunin's formula when he says, 'The freedom of others is the condition of my own freedom.'

Of course! You've said it, well done!

Do you think that with your structure you will succeed in the subversion of the capitalist social order and the base that supports it?

Yes. But we repeat that the coordination of the Autonomous Groups was created for the organisation of concrete tasks and, in some way, as the only means that will lead us to revolution. Given that the coordination of Autonomous groups is not a traditional organisation, in the face of a concrete situation different to that of the present time, we are ready to reconsider our form of organisation.

At the moment would you have no confidence in any organisation other than the Autonomous Groups?

First of all, we don't claim revolutionary exclusiveness. In fact, we think one can disagree with an organization at theoretical level and, on the contrary, be in complete agreement with its practice. All that

is relative. In the same way we believe that an organisation will reach one end or another, according to the means it uses.

Do you think you will get out of prison thanks to a pre-revolutionary situation, an amnesty, or rather that you won't be out for a long time, given the heavy sentences the procurator is asking for? And, do you think a revolution is possible today?

In reply to the first question, would say we are trying not to forecast the future, but to transform it. As far as the second is concerned, who wants to say 'today', with ten or fifteen years' delay? Yes, then, and the sooner the better. We think the objective conditions already exist; only the subjective ones are lacking.

Good, but do you think that a revolution is possible at national level?

No, we don't think that in absolute. We think it would take at least the participation of half of Europe for there to be a certain chance of extension at world level, and for it not to end up like Russia, China, Algeria, Cuba, etc.

Let's come back to amnesty. Do you think there will be some kind of struggle in prisons, especially now that here is talk of a possible amnesty for the Basque prisoners?

Yes, we see the possibility of a struggle for amnesty inside the prisons, but linked to a context of generalized struggle in the streets. It has been demonstrated that alone, we can be kept quiet as soon as they want us to.

On the other hand, if there were an amnesty, but with the present level of repression still existing, the prisons would fill up again in no time and probably with some of us again. Consequently, such an amnesty is a pure illusion.

Do you consider yourselves political prisoners?

No, we consider ourselves prisoners of the system.

What do you think of common law prisoners?

What one calls common law or ‘social’ prisoners are a consequence the capitalist system’s irrationality and antinatural character. It’s no coincidence that the majority of them come from the proletariat. They have tried to escape the poverty capital as it has sentenced them to, without taking account of either social or production relations. Some have acquired a revolutionary awareness through the struggles in the prisons. We have had both positive and negative experiences with them, just as with those who call themselves political prisoners. We think they have the same revolutionary possibilities as a worker and, like him, everything depends on what he does about it.

What do you think of the prisoners who find themselves in prison for having tried to get into capitalist roles?

We refuse prison, even for a bourgeois; it only makes sense in the capitalist system. We think that in a communist system, all anti-social habits should be discussed by all the members of the affected community and an adequate solution be found for each individual case.

Prison, and this has been confirmed, gives no positive results. It only exists in so far as the capitalist system is not capable of resolving its own contradictions.

Including the fascists that are locked up at Ciudad Real?

We repeat, each concrete case must be studied and find its solution through the community. We think that in the case of the fascists of Ciudad Real, they would get a bullet through the head, and that they will get it!

Have you anything to add to this interview?

Of course, we have a lot of things to say, but we’ll wait for another occasion so as not to exhaust you.

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