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New rupture in Spanish anarcho-syndicalism

Ariane Miéville and José Luis García González

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Spanish anarcho-syndicalism has suffered a new rupture. The crisis had been brewing for a long time. It came to an end between 2015 and 2017. The CNT-AIT and the CNT-CIT (or CNT©¹) are now two separate organizations. In the international libertarian movement, this conflict is little known, or is observed with irony and condescension: a ridiculous battle over the CNT's acronym, when there are many other more urgent battles to fight.

Its not that easy. The CNT-CIT, which has registered the acronym CNT as a trademark, hence the ©, is waging a rarely violent legal battle against the CNT-AIT. At the time of writing these lines, the CNT© is taking eighteen CNT-AIT unions to court, demanding compensation of 50,000 euros each for the use of the CNT acronym; the premises and other resources of these unions could be seized (even if they change their name) as “property” of the CNT; several members of the CNT-AIT could be imprisoned as a result of these lawsuits.

¹ The acronyms CNT-CIT and CNT© will be used interchangeably to refer to this organization.

The undertaking to raise the assets of the CNT-AIT is the result of long-term maneuvers, to which we will return later. What we must know from the outset is that the operation has acquired an international dimension with the process that led to the creation of the International Confederation of Labor (ICL) founded in Parma (Italy) in May 2018.

Let's take a step back. In December 2015, at the CNT Congress in Zaragoza (known as the Congress of Empty Chairs, because many delegates did not attend), the men and women who were going to lead the future CNT© raised the idea that it was necessary to review the IWA. What they did not like about the anarcho-syndicalist International was the excessive number of small sections, particularly those of the former Eastern bloc.

Due to the federalism that prevailed in the International: one organization = one vote, they considered that the Spanish section was at a disadvantage. In their opinion, the CNT, which paid a fee for several thousand members, should have had more weight and power than sections with only a few dozen members.

Without a mandate from its unions, the Confederal Committee of the Spanish CNT stopped paying its dues to the ILO (although each member, when paying its dues to the organization, paid a part to the International) and took the initiative to create another international in his own terms with the sections that were favorable to then, such as the German FAU and the Italian USI, as well as some other organizations.

At that time, the Spanish promoters of the future ICL were convinced that they could put an end to the IWA simply by ceasing to contribute financially to it. Their calculations were as follows: the IWA-AIT secretariat spent at least 1,000 euros a year on photocopies alone; The Spanish CNT was going to deprive them of around 30,000 euros; If the withdrawal of the FAU and the USI were added to this, the International would be deprived of 90% of its contributors. Thus, without sources of financing for its propaganda and activities "it would transform into a purely testimonial

On the one hand, there would be the “immobilists”: the CNT-AIT, on the other the promoters of a “new unionism”:⁸ the CNT-CIT. Let us not forget that before becoming the CGT, this organization was called “CNT-rénovée,” what a coincidence! Therefore, it is worth making the comparison with what happened forty years ago.

So, to defend the CNT-AIT, they called us “ayatollahs” and “inquisitors”!⁹

But despite all the anathemas, intransigent anarcho-syndicalism refuses to disappear, and even seems to rise from its ashes on several continents!

noticiasayr.blogspot.com/2016/12/mas-alla-de-la-ait-2-parte.html (accessed on 08/06/2023).

⁸ “Building the new unionism” was the motto of the CNT© Congress held in Canovelles in December 2022. cnt.es/noticias/construyendo-el-nuevo-sindicalismo (accessed on 08/06/2023)

⁹ Frank Mintz, “Contre la théologie anarchiste,” IRL no. 82, summer 1989.

and completely inoperative organization”² — by the way, they already accused it of that.

This tyranny of numbers was a constant among the promoters of the CNT-CIT. In Spain, they had already excluded unions from their own organization that did not “communicate” with them. One of the criteria for these purges was the size of the groups. An example: two Andalusian unions had been expelled for organizing joint actions with other CNT unions that had previously been excluded. In reality, there were four unions that had committed this “misdemeanor,” but only the two smallest were expelled. Get rid of the dissatisfied: yes, but without losing too many members.

The twenty-sixth Congress of the AIT was held in Warsaw from December 2 to 4, 2016. On this occasion, the congress decided to disaffiliate the Spanish, German and Italian sections (CNT, FAU and USI) for their failure to comply with the statutes and his refusal to pay the dues. In its final statement, the IWA congress also noted that it had received statements of support from Spain from almost forty local unions (members or former members of the CNT) and that several members of these unions had attended the congress as observers.

At that time, two meetings were held in Spain. The first in November 2016 and the second in April 2017. It was a “CNT-AIT restructuring congress” held in two phases, which brought together unions that had abandoned the CNT, others that had been expelled from it and others who continued to be part of it, although with a critical point of view.

The participants in these sessions denounced scandalous situations: breakdown of federalism; lack of solidarity; lack of transparency — in relation to a theft of 20,000 euros committed by a national secretary — but also authoritarianism on the part of the

² Love and Rage, “Beyond the AIT,” part 1, December 25, 2016. noticiasayr.blogspot.com/2016/12/mas-alla-de-la-ait-1-parte.html (accessed on 07/31/2023)

committees and even attacks. The delegates confirm that this drift has caused a weakening of the organization. The absence of militants justified the remuneration of permanent staff. In their sights was a legal cabinet (also called technical-confederal cabinet) created by the leaders – instead of the occasional recourse to lawyers – which absorbed most of the resources: not only the sums that should have been paid to the AIT, but also the part of the “prisoner” fees that went to imprisoned comrades paid by the CNT.

The delegates adopted new statutes, eliminating the articles that allowed authoritarian practices, and decided to rejoin the AIT, with an internationalist perspective and not the “colonialist” one (at the service of the Spanish CNT) that those who had caused the split had wanted.

A repetition of the process that gave rise to the CGT?

For their part, the artisans of the CNT-CIT stated at the same time (at the end of 2016) that their split had nothing to do with the one that took place between 1979 and 1983 and gave rise to the Spanish CGT. They explained: “the CGT was betting on a model that renounced anarcho-syndicalism, while today we find ourselves facing a situation of paralysis that prevents the practical development of a truly anarcho-syndicalist model of implementation and growth. It is not a problem of ideological differences, but of attitude and state of mind.”³

Should we believe them?

Of course, unlike the CGT, the CNT© – like the CNT-AIT – did not participate in the union elections. However, we have the right to imagine that the CNT© has embarked on a slope towards reformism and integration. Why else would there be talk of unity and a probable unification of the CNT© with the CGT and the Solidaridad Obrera (SO) union?⁴

³ Ibid.

⁴ Union formed from a split of the CGT, active mainly in the Madrid metro.

In the statement announcing this convergence, published at a press conference on April 10, 2023, the CNT©, the CGT and SO presented themselves as “three organizations that recognize themselves as heirs of the anarcho-syndicalist labor tradition.”⁵

So the CGT, which was not anarcho-syndicalist in 2016, would become anarcho-syndicalist again in 2023! Now that’s surprising...

An element that goes in the same direction is the current media interest in the CNT-CIT, obviously presented as “CNT” for short, and the invisibilization of the CNT-AIT in the media. In an article published in January 2022 by the newspaper Público about unionism in Spain,⁶ the space dedicated to the CNT© is as large as that dedicated to the majority unions CCOO and UGT, which each claim close to one million members, or the one assigned to the CGT, which claims to have more than 100,000 members. Why give so much space to an organization that claims to have... 8,000 members?

Why give it so much publicity? As for the expert consulted by Público: Beltrán Roca (professor at the University of Cádiz), he is a member or former member of the CNT ©. He is never so well served...

Another clue: the arguments used by CNT-CIT spokespersons to denigrate CNT-AIT and AIT activists are very similar to those used at the time of the birth of the CGT. They are accused of being “ideological purists,” without “own union achievements,” their existence “virtual” due to their rejection of the “new strategic approach to union action [of the CNT-CIT].”⁷

⁵ [cnt.es/noticias/a-la-clase-trabajadora-por-la-mobilacion-y-la-confluencia](https://www.cnt.es/noticias/a-la-clase-trabajadora-por-la-mobilacion-y-la-confluencia)

In French, article by Christian Mahieux entitled “Accord between the anarcho-syndicalist organizations of the Spanish State, CGT, CNT, Solidaridad Obrera: historique?” which presents the statement and the press conference that appeared in *La Révolution prolétarienne*, June 2023.

⁶ publico.es/economia/paradoja-sindicalismo-espanol-siglo-xxi-fuerte-fracturado.html#analytics-fecha:listado (accessed on 08/06/2023)

⁷ In the words of the members of the CNT© secretariat in the interview conducted by Amor y Rabia, “Beyond the AIT,” 1st part, art. cit. and 2nd part noti-