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# Anarchism, anthropology and Andalucia

An analysis of the CNT and the 'new capitalism'

Beltrán Roca Martínez

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Seville CNT has begun to confront its weaknesses, to neutralize the threats, to build on its strengths, and to seize opportunities. If this experience is repeated in other unions, the CNT will begin to challenge the hegemony of the official unions.

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agement of knowledge: for example, organizing courses, seminars or workshops – so every militant could take every post, previously receiving the proper preparation.

## ABSTRACT

Systems theory can show us how organizations develop, allowing them to survive changes in their environments. Such analyses also demonstrate why the CNT is passing through such a profound crisis: it is a trade union which is completely excluded from the world of work. The CNT began in a society very different from today. Despite the many significant changes which have occurred since 1910, its organizational structures and ideological assumptions have remained practically unchanged.

The need for change has not met with a common response from its militants. The CNT is currently split between two tendencies, which we will term 'anarchist' and 'syndicalist'. Despite a general consensus around the principle of non-participation in trade union representation structures, both tendencies compete for control of the CNT. We end this paper by presenting some examples from the Seville CNT, which can be classified as following the 'syndicalist' tendency: it has had some success in the context of the 'new capitalism'.

## INTRODUCTION

This article presents an analysis and a diagnosis of the CNT in Andalucía, using some theories and concepts of social anthropology. The CNT is a Spanish trade union organization inspired by anarchist ideas. Its ultimate objective is the radical transformation of society through a revolutionary process, but what really distinguishes it from other revolutionary organizations is its strategy: it aims to unite workers through the fight for better working conditions, to encourage awareness of different forms of domination – particularly of the exploitation of the working class – and thus to create a situation of social polarization which leads to a

social-revolutionary general strike. These are the basic precepts of anarcho-syndicalism.

In the sections which follow I will explain how the CNT works and how it is organized, considering its actions in the context of the work-place, the local environment and the international context (through the AIT [International Workers' Association]).<sup>1</sup> I will concentrate on the CNT in Andalucia, but I consider that my analysis can be applied to almost any branch of the CNT. Next, I will use some elements of systems theory to show how organizations establish links with their environments, and I will demonstrate that the recent transformations in the social context have led to a profound crisis within the CNT, which has shown a clear inability to adapt. Its successive congresses are little more than reaffirmations of ideas and organizational structures which may have worked in the past, when the CNT offered solutions to the workers' real problems. Here, we will conduct a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats): a device which may provoke a much-needed debate.

Lastly, I will show how the CNT Local Federation in Seville has been able to adapt partially to the new circumstances, despite many obstacles. The CNT could have a promising future, if it allowed the necessary revision of the presumptions which currently limit its potential.

My main aim is to demonstrate how an anarcho-syndicalist organization can act to resolve the tension between – on the one hand – the heritage of modernity and industrial capitalism and – on the other hand – the need to survive in the context of flexibility, fragmentation and insecurity. I will also show that this 'new capitalism' may give the CNT an unprecedented opportunity to recover its strength. To a great extent, everything depends on the

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<sup>1</sup> In the UK the Solidarity Federation is affiliated to the AIT: despite certain historical, cultural and social differences, it can be seen as a sister organization.

by some angry clashes. The strikers confronted the police, some of them went on hunger strike, they began many costly legal actions, they organized numerous protests, they held meetings, they set up benefit events for the families across the whole of Spain. In fact, the town was never so clean as it was during the strike: the municipality and the sub-contracted firm hired scab labour to clean Tomares. Nonetheless, the strikers won, and a new collective contract guaranteed them better conditions. There was enormous media interest in the event.

After the Tomares events, the Seville CNT organized three further strikes concerning similar issues: strike of AVE air-stewardesses, a cleaners' strike in Seville University, and a strike by the workers on AUSSA, a firm running some transport services in Seville. In all three cases, the workers won, and in each case a new CNT section was formed.

Furthermore, in recent years the Seville CNT has actively supported strikes organized by other unions, and has organized a weekly advice centre for workers. The union's records indicate that membership has increased by 300%. If this tendency continues, the Seville CNT will soon represent a real social force.

This is not an example of a lucky set of coincidences, but the result of several factors. One of the most important is that the CNT organization in Seville is led by workers, and the number of students and young people is relatively small. But perhaps most important is the quality of the leadership, which is far closer to the 'bureaucratic-administrative' model than to that of the 'charismatic'. The Seville CNT is led by a small group of militants, the majority of whom are well-experienced in running a union. They are well acquainted with legal questions, which are central to the union's activities. In other words, they have developed a 'professionalization without professionals'.<sup>12</sup> In terms of my analysis, the

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<sup>12</sup> Here, I am referring to unwaged experts. The growth of such sectors implies a threat: the rise of expert power. This can be countered by the proper man-

## **DEVELOPING OPPORTUNITIES AND ORGANIZATION IN THE SEVILLE CNT**

Early in 2002 a group of workers approached the Seville CNT. They wanted advice. They worked for PILSA, a firm contracted to the public cleaning department in Tomares, a town near Seville. They lacked all job security: they were paid less than five hundred euros per month for a forty-hour week, with delays in payments, and poor health and safety conditions. The CNT held several meetings with the entire workforce of 25 employees, gave them legal advice and, finally, created a CNT section including almost all the workforce. An indefinite strike was called in April.

During the strike, all the forces of the CNT Local Federation concentrated on publicity, contacts with the media, organizing pickets, legal action concerning infringements of the right to strike, and so on. The CNT organized support from its regional and national federations. Many clashes followed but after a 22 day strike, the CNT signed a contract with the FERROSER firm and the Tomares municipality, and the dispute ended. The new contract guaranteed improvements for the workers: many saw their wages double, and they were given continuity of employment even if different firms were contracted for cleaning services.

The Tomares strike made the Seville CNT re-consider its role: it was a moment when it stopped being an ideological group to become a proper union. They were forced to stop talking about ideas and abstract issues, and to confront the real problems of real workers. They had to propose viable, immediate solutions. This led the Local Federation to re-think its strategy radically.

The next year the Tomares workers began another strike, because much of the signed contract was being flouted by the employers, and the most militant workers were being threatened with dismissal. This second strike lasted four months – it was actually the second longest strike in Seville since 1975 – and was marked

CNT militants being able to accept changes and to resolve conflicts and dilemmas.

Most of the information for this study has been gained from my own experiences as a CNT militant for over ten years (in El Puerto de Santa María, Granada and Seville), and from a range of CNT publications: pamphlets, books, internal bulletins, magazines, journals and web-sites.

## **ANARCHIST ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF ANARCHISM**

If we define anarchism as an extremely heterogeneous socio-political movement whose ultimate aim is the elimination of all forms of social domination, then anthropology can be a valuable instrument in this task. Anthropology may make contributions in two distinct but complementary areas: anarchist anthropology and the anthropology of anarchism.

The roots of anarchist anthropology lie in the works of Kropotkin, and take as their starting-point the diversity of the political and cultural systems that exist and that have existed. Through the study of other cultures, it is clear that the state, the most sophisticated instrument of social domination, has not existed in all societies: indeed, for most of history, most societies have developed without the state, even against the state (Clastres, 1974; Barclay 1982). David Graeber's discussion of a counter-power develops this point (2004). He argues that a counter-power becomes a hegemonic force in societies without states, which are structured in such a way as to prevent – or at least to obstruct – the concentration of power. In other words, anarchist anthropology shows us the diversity of existing worlds in order to invite us to construct other worlds. An increasing number of anthropologists are working on such themes. Another great contribution of anarchist anthropology – although this

insight is not limited to this field – is the unveiling of the manner in which social domination works. Here there are a great variety of studies from different disciplines and authors, many of whom do not identify themselves as anarchists, but who have still made significant contributions. I am thinking of, for example, the works of Michel Foucault (2000) on the prison system, of Pierre Bourdieu (2002) on masculine domination, of Felix Talego (1996) on the power of the leaders of an Andalusian labourers' organization, and of Fernando Ventura (2004) on state trade unions.

The second contribution made by anthropology to anarchist theory is in the analysis of anarchist and popular movements, particularly in relation to the internal distribution of power: this constitutes an anthropology of anarchism. Anthropological research methods such as participant observation, semi-structured interviews, discussion groups, etc, are above all suited to researching organizations and movements, and – in particular – to researching processes like decision-making, power struggles, the construction of social links, symbolism, organizational culture and examples of what James C. Scott terms 'public transcript' and 'private transcript' (2003). An anthropology of anarchism would aim to develop alternative movements' self-knowledge and – through this – to transform their practices, discourses and structures, so becoming more coherent and effective. This paper on the CNT is a good example of such an investigation. Other examples include the work of Paco Cuevas (2003) on libertarian pedagogy, David Graeber's article on the 'new anarchists' (2002), Maple Razsa's film *Bastards of Utopia*, Gavin Grindon's current research on contemporary social protests, or the classic work of Irving Horowitz (1975), a follower of C. Wright Mills.

A third opportunity for the CNT is 'democracy fatigue' and the 'participation syndrome'. At least in terms of public debate, many people are calling for a fuller form of democracy. In most cases, such calls are not presented as part of a programme of rupture with representative democracy, but as a means to complement it. Such movements do not call into question the mechanisms of social hegemony, but they have led to the so-called 'participatory syndrome', in which ideas such as 'participatory projects', 'participatory research' and 'cooperation in participatory development' circulate. Now is the right moment to exploit this old theme in the CNT's political culture, and to propose a 'participatory unionism' in response to the vertical hierarchies of the official unions.

Lastly, the growth of critical thinking and new social movements, linked to the previous factor, is a great strength for the CNT. The deepening of north-south inequality, the USA's invasions and the world-wide ecological threat have all provoked the emergence of new forms of critical thinking and of global citizens' movements. The CNT must make contact with all these initiatives, building up a real flow of exchanges: it must communicate its values and its experiences of participatory democracy, direct action, selfmanagement and so on; it must learn new values and new sensibilities from the other movements.

Some have argued that the single distinguishing mark of the modern era is the development of dispersed, fragmentary networks (Hardt, 2002: 140). In the CNT, social action appears as a marginal, rarely-discussed activity. Thus, for example, there is no social action secretariat in Seville. But it is clear that no contemporary socio-political project can be effective today without building up temporary, fluid alliances and links, which require ceaseless dialogue and re-examination. The feminist movement was the first to recognize this point (Haraway, 1995). Thanks to the feminist, ecologist, sexual-minority, globalization movements and to radical academics, we can envision and resist power-structures more effectively.



The real challenge to the CNT is to respond to this sector's needs: to learn how to connect with these workers' fears, wishes and frustrations, and to integrate their interests with those of other sectors of the working class. The opportunity here for the CNT is not that these people are 'unhappy', but that the official unions are less active in such workplaces. As the CCOO (2001) has recognized, the dispersion of work-place negotiations, linked to the neo-liberal tendency to individualize contracts, has created a vacuum in union representation. In the first place, these small sub-enterprises are often ignored by the big unions. Furthermore, most of their workers are not unionized. And yet, they are often extremely concerned by the lack of respect for their rights and by their workplace conditions. In these small firms, communication between employees and unions are very simple: a union branch can be established with just a handful of workers, and it can quickly insist that no negotiations progress without its participation. The CNT's model of union activism, which has largely failed in the big firms, could work extremely well among this subcontracted work force. (We will return to this point below.)

The development and extension of new technologies opens up opportunities for the CNT. These methods could make communication, co-ordination and decision-making far easier for the CNT, which spends so much time and effort on such matters now. The organization has made some advances in this area, but there is still a long way to go. The new technologies should make tasks much easier, they could aid the education of militants – although there is some risk that they could also encourage the formation of a learned elite, benefiting from a certain degree of power. It has to be said that the CNT is still very weak in organizing education and communicating knowledge: training is limited to an ideological indoctrination, ignoring all specialist and scientific issues, such as legal proceedings, information technology, collective negotiation procedures, union activities, accountancy, etc.

## THE CNT: STRUCTURES AND ACTIVITIES

The Spanish Civil War (1936–39) and the long Francoist winter which followed (1939–75) were hard blows to the Spanish anarchist tradition. The implementation of formal democracy in 1977 created great hopes for liberation in much of Spanish society: such expectations were quickly frustrated. The 'Moncloa Pact' of 1977, signed by all social movements except the CNT, created the current system of union representation, with committees in each firm. The CCOO (Workers' Commissions: linked to the Communist Party) and the UGT (General Workers' Union: linked to the Socialist Party) used these structures to divide up worker representation between their organizations. The CNT was bitterly split: one current decided to participate in workplace union elections, while the other current firmly refused to take part. This led to an open rift a few years later, creating the current CNT and the CGT (General Confederation of Labour).

In Spain today several organizations call themselves anarcho-syndicalist: including, for example, the CGT and Workers' Solidarity. The CNT distinguishes itself from them by its absolute refusal to participate in union elections, to receive state subsidies, or to accept in its ranks members of the security forces. For the CNT, the prevailing model of union representation and work-place elections is designed to integrate the unions into the social system, and therefore to control labour conflicts. The official unions – including the CGT – compete for posts on workplace committees, the official representative organ for the entire work-force, based on structures of representative democracy. The CNT, on the other hand, defends direct democracy: it only recognizes a workers' assembly as having the right to represent the workforce. If the workers wish to negotiate with the bosses, then the workers' assembly must decide, through a show of hands, who is to be the delegate for this role, and what demands are to be made. The official work-place committees were created to free up trade unionists by allowing someone to be

paid by the firm to be a full-time trade-unionist, and then to negotiate on behalf of the workers. The CNT argues that they will finish by becoming instruments by which the management will control and limit the workers' demands. According to the CNT, only its structures represent the anarcho-syndicalist principles of selfmanagement, mutual aid, federalism, direct action and internationalism (Federación Local de Seville CNT-AIT, 1999).

An organization's structure is the totality of all the forms of the division of labour, whether formal or informal, and all forms of coordination between them. The formal structure is created by the 'official, documented links between the different members of an organization' (Mintzberg, 1988: 34), and the informal structure is made up of extra-official links. Both structures are inter-linked to the point that it is often impossible to distinguish one from another. The totality of both structures constitute the organization's real structure. In the sections that follow, I will analyse both the CNT's informal and formal structures.

The CNT's structure is supposed to reproduce a model of direct democracy. Its basic unit is the local union. To qualify as a 'Various Posts' (or 'Various Trades') branch, at least five members were needed. To be a 'branch union', which is a union of workers in the same field of activity (whether construction, metalworking, transport, communications, education and so on), twenty-five members are needed. Such a union can be divided into sections, each of which represents the CNT members in their workplaces. The union assembly is the supreme decision-making organ, and the unit which supports the whole organization. At regular intervals the union members meet in assembly to take decisions. They debate local, provincial, regional, national or international questions: this is an expression of the CNT's 'horizontal' principles. Before each assembly the members can propose matters to be debated. During the meetings they sit round a table: one member records the agenda, the different interventions, the debates and the decisions. The minutes of the previous assembly are read at the start

contract out, or to sub-contract, activities. Tasks which once would have been carried out within a firm with a vast labour force, are now done by a multitude of businesses around a central firm. In theory, this is a factor which divides the workers, leaving them less protected when facing their employers. However, there is an opportunity here for the CNT. In Spain, the great Fordist firms, with thousands of employees, have union representation committees. With a few exceptions, the CNT sections cannot compete with the other unions which therefore get to represent the workers. But, for better or worse, these firms are in rapid decline (Baglioni, 1992). Most workers with a permanent contract, who constitute a type of 'labour aristocracy', are being paid off into early retirement. The structure of the big firms is changing radically: the old firm is being reduced to a central core within which the residue of the labour aristocracy work, while a network of small, sub-enterprises develops around it, performing specific tasks and auxiliary services. This is the type of structure that Manuel Castells (1997: 269) has identified as the 'network firm'. Such small sub-enterprises, contracted and sub-contracted, have mushroomed with astonishing speed. They usually only employ young people, who work in insecure positions: without protection, on temporary contracts, for extremely low wages, part-time, etc. They suffer from a high accident rate, and are often bullied and harassed. We are seeing the creation of a new sector within the working class: the insecure. It is a highly dispersed sector, spread over wide areas. Continual changes in work patterns, whether in moving from one firm to another or from one post to another, mean that such workers never get to share a common identity. A UGT report found that Spain has one of the highest proportions of temporary work in Europe: about a third of the work force is work part-time, especially the young, the immigrants and women. Political and business leaders claim that this transformation is due to the high cost of pensions. But of all the countries of the EU, Spain has the lowest pension levels and yet has high levels of part-time work.

hierarchies of Marxist organizations, and have adopted participatory structures, which they often consider to be 'new'. Perhaps they are new to activists drawn from tightly-structured political and religious groups, but the CNT has been working with such structures for years. While many people want more participation in their societies, the official unions engage in ever-greater concentrations of power. If the CNT's participatory structure was presented in an appropriate manner – an attractive, non-aggressive manner – it could be seen as an appealing alternative to the dominant unions. However, we must also realize that a structure which appears democratic is not necessarily a structure which functions in a democratic manner. I regret to say that in the CNT frequently decisions are taken on the basis of personal influence or by tiny cliques in strategic positions of power. (We will return to this point.) For the moment, let us simply note that the formal structures of the CNT support the participation of all its members.

The final strength is the high degree of commitment by the CNT's base. In comparison with other organizations, the large proportion of activists among the CNT's members is surprising. It can be explained by the organization's participatory structures and political culture, which encourage activism, teaching members that all of them are important to the organization, that the CNT needs them, and that its collective project is impossible without their cooperation. Its meetings and assemblies all function as more or less explicit appeals to the members for their commitment. The members' passion and engagement are the main reason why the CNT, with all its weaknesses, survives as an organization.

'Opportunities' are those elements in the environment which the CNT can use to solve its crisis. In this sense, the current changes in the work process constitute an opportunity. Here, I am not arguing that the worsening conditions of work, brought about by neo-liberalism, will make the workers more likely to revolt. This is far from certain. Instead, I wish to focus on the tendency of firms to

of the meeting for the approval – or otherwise – of the members. Usually they are accepted without question, but sometimes further issues are raised, or poorly noted matters are re-drafted. It is very rarely that minutes are actually rejected. The assembly takes decisions by simple majority votes: these are registered by a show of hands. The same procedures, in a somewhat more formal and ritualized form, are used in the plenary sessions of the higher regional bodies.

The unions in one place are linked through the Local Federation; the local federations through a Regional Confederation; the regional confederations through the National Confederation, which in turn is federated to the AIT (the International Workers' Association), which represents labour organizations from many European countries, plus some from Latin America. At the same time, the branch unions are – in theory – linked through national trade federations. It should be noted, however, that because of the CNT's small size, there are very few provincial or trade federations: Andalusia has none. Almost all the unions are 'Various Posts' sections. It is in these that decisions are made and that delegates are elected who then attend the regional plenary sessions. Here, all the union delegates from a region meet, usually after presenting a signed authorization from their branch secretary. Some unions, particularly the less active ones, usually send their resolutions – properly stamped by the branch – by fax to the Regional Committee or to the place that the Plenary session meets. Sometimes, when there is more than one union in a town, the delegate of one branch may bring the written resolution of another union from the same town. A secretary is elected at the Regional Plenary to take the minutes. In order to arrive at a decision, there is a system of internal communication known as the 'organic procedure', by which the different committees send printed information to the unions. In turn, the committees receive written communications from the unions or other committees: when they have a sufficient volume of such documents, or when an important matter arises which is to

be discussed in subsequent meetings, the committees then send out collections of documents with an index and notes. The agendas of each meeting, and the explanation for each decision, are transmitted by this internal system. But often the unions do not read these documents: they arrive ‘with a resolution’ at the Plenary Sessions or they are granted a ‘vote of confidence’, which allows delegates to decide *in situ* how they will vote.

In the Regional and National Plenaries, unions are given voting rights proportional to their size.

members	votes
1 to 50	1
51 to 100	2
101 to 300	3
301 to 600	4
601 to 1000	5
1001 to 1500	6
1501 to 2500	7
2501 and above	8

## CNT UNIONS’ VOTING RIGHTS AT PLENARIES

This structure can give rise to anomalies. For example, if there were four unions, each with five members – in other words 20 people – they would get four votes at the Plenary meeting, and could in turn out-vote 299 people gathered in a single union (3 votes). This system benefits the smaller unions at the expense of the bigger formations. Despite this, CNT members consider that it is fair, and cannot think of a better system. Proposals for reform have all

the interests of their pay-masters rather than in the interests of the workers. Many workers have lost confidence in unions for this reason: the massive abstention rates in the union elections are the most obvious sign of this discontent. On the other hand, it must be recognized that the CNT’s autonomy also leads to some major drawbacks, mainly a lack of resources. Its only source of incomes is its members’ payments: as these are few in number, the CNT lacks funds. To organize a union and to keep it running costs money: there must be premises, office equipment, computers, phones, internet connections, cleaning equipment, lawyers, propaganda, etc. Members’ dues are not enough to cover these costs. Many methods are used to raise more funds: material is taken from work, there are appeals for donations, benefit concerts and other events, merchandise (cigarette lighters, badges, calendars, diaries, etc) is sold, particular unions or federations raise their dues, and so on. Obviously, the efforts of members to raise funds must be applauded but, if they have been partly successful, they have not solved the problem. There are many CNT unions without premises, without internet links, without a telephone number. Many are barely able to carry out the most basic tasks of propaganda and co-ordination: it is simply impossible to expect these bodies to engage in significant union activism.

The CNT’s second strength is the flexibility of its political culture, which can be adapted to different contexts. The model of a libertarian society is not fixed and eternal. While some cling to the early twentieth-century plans of Isaac Puente, each social group can redefine a libertarian society according to its particular aspirations and cultural characteristics. Adaptability should be the foundation for the international diffusion of anarchist culture. On the other hand, if – as some argue – anarchism is a rigid socio-political project, rooted in western, Judeo-Christian thought, it is doomed to fail.

Another great strength is the CNT’s ultra-democratic structures. The new social movements have rejected the vertical

ment. The unity of the work force was once a major strength for the unions: today, that unity is seriously threatened.

The growing importance of finance capital over productive capital is also problematic. Economists estimate that more than half of the funds in the world are located in the structures of finance capitalism: from investments that are not directly a part of the production process. The labour movement's one great weapon used to be the strike: its refusal to participate in production. As the global economy becomes less dependent on the production of goods and services, then it follows that the labour movement's ability to influence the direction of the economy is correspondingly more limited than ever.

Lastly, a threat which must be considered is repression. Historical research shows that a favourable legal climate encourages union membership and strike action. Hostile laws discourage union activities. Such points provide some explanation for the decline in unions: for example, from 1991 to 1998 the number of strikes fell from 1552 to 618. The number of workers mobilized by these strikes fell from 3.8 million to 1.9 million.<sup>11</sup> In the 1990s the legal context grew more hostile, as labour reforms were implemented and temporary contracts became more common.

Despite these many obstacles which face all unions, not everything is negative. The CNT possesses a number of significant strengths and opportunities which, if acted on, could greatly benefit the organization. The CNT's great strength is its autonomy from government institutions. It does not need public funding: this is an excellent guarantee of its independence, and makes it far less vulnerable to changes in the wider environment. The other union organizations, whose leaders are paid by the firms and whose huge structures are subsidized by public funds, only present a highly questionable form of independence. They often make decisions in

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<sup>11</sup> *Anuario de Estadísticas Laborales y de Asuntos Sociales* (1998). Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales.

been rejected, largely because the smaller unions fear a loss of influence. It should be noted that most of the unions in the CNT are 'Various Posts' branches with less than fifty members.

The main branches, the unions, local federations, regional confederations and the national confederation are organized by officials. The branches and unions usually need a delegate, and sometimes a treasurer. The local federations – which are usually only formed by 'Various Posts' unions – are run by a number of officials, whose number vary according to the size of unions and the officials' availability: there can be general secretaries, organization secretaries, treasurers and others responsible for press and propaganda, law, union activities and social activities. This is a flexible structure: only the unions themselves can appoint new officials. Sometimes they merge existing tasks into a single post, sometimes they leave posts unfilled. Officials are unpaid. Unlike most other organizations, the CNT is marked by a tendency to discourage the appointment of officials. However, official posts still carry status and power, and so there can be internal struggles around them. As in all groups, in the CNT there are power struggles and contests to impose particular views of the world and of the organization. Competition for official posts, particularly at the regional and national levels, is an example of these types of struggles. Militants judge whether a particular committee is in the best position to defend a particular ideological position. More precisely, it could be said that the CNT is currently split between two tendencies, one concentrating on the CNT's political role, which I will term 'anarchist', and a second focused on its work-place role, which I will term 'syndicalist'. (I suspect that these tendencies have always been present within the CNT.) Almost all the unions in the CNT seem to be loyal to one or another of these tendencies. Their allegiance can be seen

by the decisions they make, and by where delegates stand during meetings.<sup>2</sup>

The principal objective of the ‘anarchist’ tendency is to keep the CNT pure. For them, the main threat to the organization is reformism, represented by the other tendency, which they see as aiming to re-unite the CNT and the CGT, thus leading to the organization’s integration into the social system and to its loss of revolutionary identity. One militant noted that a few marginal articles supporting unification had been published in the *cnt* monthly. He commented:

These proposals seem to come from the CGT, and have met with some response from a few CNT members, as these articles show. This uncalled-for campaign by the CGT in *cnt* must be rejected by all CNT unions: a position which must be enforced by a Confederal ruling.<sup>3</sup>

As can be seen, such writers believe that there is a conspiracy between the CGT and some CNT militants to unify the two organizations, and then to make the CNT contest union elections and so lose its radical transformative character.

This tendency sees a similar move at an international level, in the proposal to create a ‘parallel International’ to compete with the AIT for the international representation of anarcho-syndicalism.

Some organizations, falsely labelled anarcho-syndicalist, simulate fake radical poses against the real anarcho-syndicalists. They have planned a strategy of harassment against the AIT ... Included in this mishmash of organizations with international

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<sup>2</sup> The breaks between meetings, particularly the meals, give excellent opportunities to spot the allegiances and oppositions of the delegates, simple by watching where they sit.

<sup>3</sup> ‘¿Unidad de qué y de quién?’, published in the electronic journal *El libertario andaluz* 12, Winter 1998 ([www.arrakis.es](http://www.arrakis.es)).

The confusion of anarcho-syndicalism with youth sub-cultures – such as punk – often alienates workers.

Another sign of the failure of the CNT’s ‘social marketing’ can be seen in its premises. The organization’s centres are its door to the outside world, and should demonstrate how serious and effective it is. Instead, union premises are filthy and untidy. The worker in a labour dispute who goes to a CNT office will often leave in despair, thinking that these people can never help. Such were my first impressions of – for example – the untidy CNT premises in El Puerto de Santa María, the CNT offices of Seville until a few years ago, and the great cycle of CNT meetings in Granada during my stay there in 1998–2001 – despite the best efforts of one militant to ensure that the premises had an acceptable appearance.

If these weaknesses concern the system’s properties, the ‘threats’ refer to qualities in the environment which may make the CNT enter into crisis. One of the great obstacles to union activity in general has been the loss of prestige in work as a factor in identity formation. Growing social complexity, and a consequent fragmentation, with the division of life into separate compartments, have resulted in the decline of ‘work cultures’ as a key element in personal identity (Palenzuela, 1995). As well as older identity formations – gender, ethnicity, work (and class) – today there a host of other structures: lifestyles, religions, sexualities, youth cults, even football clubs.

Another threat to trade unions is the tendency towards individual negotiations for labour contracts: this is certainly what many managers want. Deregulation and – above all – the stress on flexibility have created conditions which establish direct negotiations between the individual worker and the management. The short-term effects of this cannot be predicted. However, it can only create greater divisions between workers from different sectors – between those chosen by personnel and those from an auxiliary firm, between those on temporary contracts and those who are perma-

words, it might have lost its transformative, revolutionary character.<sup>10</sup>

The CNT's third weakness is excessive bureaucratization. To organize anything more than a small group within an ultra-democratic structure needs incredible strengths. Even more so when officials get no financial rewards. To decide even the most trivial issues through the structures of direct democracy, through the regular publication of 'organic' information bulletins, assemblies and meetings which can go on forever due to militants' lack of knowledge: all this results in a massive workload for the most involved and a consequent 'burn-out' or saturation in the medium term.

The fourth and final weakness is the ineffective forms of publicity, perhaps a consequence of the first weakness. Both the forms of communication – pamphlets, leaflets, spray-painted graffiti – and their content – slogans, speeches, messages – fail to produce the desired effect among those who see them. Perhaps the written word was once capable of rousing the masses to revolution, but this is no longer the case. If we really want to publicize labour conflicts and to circulate a clear message, we must use the seductive techniques of the 'society of the spectacle'. It would be better to draw a few lessons from advertising and 'social marketing', and to question the fetishism of the red and black, and the repetition of coarse, aggressive, out-dated propaganda. The same criticisms can be made for the content of the CNT's publications: they normally address themes which the majority of workers do not find interesting. The leaflets go straight in the bin. In general, CNT members seems to be well-intentioned activists who do not speak the same language as those they intend to motivate and – despite denials – they are not able to recognize the true interests of those they claim to defend.

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<sup>10</sup> On the theme of union elections, the integration of the labour movement and the stifling of workers' revolts, see Ventura (2004).

pretensions are the Swedish SAC, the Paris-based so-called CNT (Vignoles) and the Spanish CGT. These are the main authors of this ghastly error: they represent few workers and no libertarians.<sup>4</sup>

For such writers, the main cause of the CNT's failure is the CGT's split from the organization, from which the CNT has not recovered. This split, they argue, was planned and implemented by the Communist Party and other Marxist and statist groups.

A characteristic aspect of this tendency is its militant refusal to participate in any activity with other organizations. According to one militant:

We could see the CNT – and sometimes we have seen it – with hundreds and thousands of acronyms, such as PP, PRT, IU, SOC, BNG, CUT, CGT, the Students' Union, Alternative Action, LAB, etc ... Trotskyist leaders, marxoids, born-again has-beens, money-grubbing greens ... people who are used to life on a union subsidy, using their accumulated hours to seize the leadership of a section.<sup>5</sup>

Against this tendency, there is the other current that we have labelled 'syndicalist'. These militants are concerned that internal errors have led the CNT to its current position of marginality within the labour force. They argue that the key weakness has been the CNT's inability to campaign as a union. The CNT should make union activities its priority, and leave other issues to better-suited organizations. Anarcho-syndicalism needs to be re-defined for the twenty-first century. In order to win work-place struggles, temporary alliances with other organizations may well be needed.

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<sup>4</sup> '¿Sindicalismo revolucionario o reformismo? La internacional paralela', *cnt*, 275, January 2002.

<sup>5</sup> '¿Unidad de qué y de quién?'

One point which distinguishes the two tendencies is the type of leaders they present. Within the 'anarchist' tendency the 'charismatic' leader is predominant, while the syndicalist unions tend to encourage 'bureaucratic-administrative' leaders. Charismatic leaders have strong personalities and know how to deal with people, but their main distinguishing feature is that they mediate effectively between the members of an organization and the beliefs which hold the organization together. A charismatic leader is someone with a vision of a future society, who is capable of transmitting this vision to the militants: in other words, a 'prophet'. The bureaucratic leader is an 'organization person': someone who can be replaced, as it is the organization that mediates between the community of the believers and the sacred (Talego, 1996). Their power comes from their ability to organize and administer. They are 'priests' rather than 'prophets'. Obviously, both these descriptions are Weberian ideal types: neither exists in a pure state; there is a continuum between the two extremes. Moreover, a single leader can possess qualities of both types, and sometimes one even finds a type of 'mixed leadership', which is probably the most effective. However, it remains true that one is more likely to find the more 'charismatic' leaders among the 'anarchist' tendency and the 'administrative' leaders among the 'syndicalist' tendency. It should also be noted that not all unions have leaders, although in every union there are people with a degree of power and influence, whether this is based on their experience, knowledge, personality, speaking skills, social contacts, dedication, etc. In fact, a well organized leadership is the key to an effective union.

In other words, there is a certain type of power structure within anarchosyndicalism. If this power is properly organized, it is neither anti-democratic nor harmful: just the opposite, it can produce positive organizational effects. Anti-democratic influences from the leadership are only produced in the absence of the proper institutional control mechanisms: a point to which we will return later.

coherent explanations of reality will be capable of changing it. If the CNT does not have the instruments to understand the world around it, it is condemned to fail.

The example of the analysis of power in anarchism is revealing. Modernity's child, anarchism constitutes a specific radicalization of liberalism, and so presents a reductive vision of power, which Foucault terms 'legal-discursive': for anarchism, power is simply repression. Anarchists argue that power is something which simply prevents and blocks, while forgetting that power can also create things, construct and reward. Foucault notes that the concept of power 'as a simple limit to freedom is, in our society at least, the most frequent form of its acceptability' (Foucault 1984: 105). Holding this distorted concept of power leads to an inability to recognize where it is manifested and, therefore, to oppose it.

More concretely: power is a taboo token in the CNT. It is usually argued that there are no power structures in the organization. This is completely wrong: all human groups are constructed through power relations. What is more: the CNT unions function well largely because of the leadership provided by particular militants. To argue this way is not to throw anarchosyndicalist principles overboard, but to recognize that a properly-functioning power structure can be highly valuable if it is subject to popular control and the mechanisms of direct democracy.

The second weakness is the CNT's self-exclusion from the official structures of union representation. As noted above, the CNT does not present candidates to union elections. As a result, it has been excluded from the trade union world. If during the 'transition' (1975-78) the CNT had fully joined these structures, it might have gained a larger membership and greater influence. On the other hand, the organization might have lost its identity and have become integrated into the networks of social reproduction: in other



- Flexible socio-political proposals
- Participatory organizational structure
- High level of involvement by social base and membership

#### *Opportunities*

- Transformations in production process
- New technologies
- Crisis of representative democracy
- Development of critical thinking

In the section on ‘weaknesses’, I have listed those aspects of the CNT which prevent it from accomplishing its goals. There are quite a few of these! The first is the absence of theoretical reflection. The type of analysis presented by the CNT has barely changed from the time when it started: it still uses the same concepts and theoretical formulations. Society, on the other hand, has changed immensely. The gap between the instruments of analysis and the social reality is at the root of a serious inability to recognize changes in the environment and to adapt to them. A clear example of this can be seen in the CNT’s publications, the majority of which concern the history of the workers’ movement, with hardly any analysis of contemporary issues. They continue to refer to Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta, as if their thoughts were immortal, and not produced by a specific historical and cultural context.

The major advances in the social sciences have been largely ignored by anarcho-syndicalism. With few exceptions, anarchism has usually been pushed to the margins of academic life, and it has paid a price for this. David Graeber (2004) explains this marginalization as a result of the anarchists’ antipathy for authoritarian institutions, and the primacy of praxis over theoretization within anarchist political culture. But only those who are capable of giving

The struggle between the two tendencies is present at all levels of the CNT, and is sometimes expressed through dramatic clashes. Both tendencies present their positions as faithful interpretations of the sacred texts (statutes and congress resolutions), both attempt to occupy official posts, both are suspicious of the other, both challenge resolutions, both denounce (in public and in private), insult, disparage ... creating clashes that, sometimes, completely stop the organization functioning. Many militants leave in frustration. The worst aspect of this situation is that both tendencies are living an illusion, as can be seen within the CNT in Andalucia.

## **THE CNT IN ANDALUCIA TODAY**

Before the Civil War of 1936–39, the two regions with the largest CNT presence were Catalonia and Andalucia. While Catalonia was a highly industrialized region with an advanced, skilled working class, Andalucia was an agricultural region, mainly populated by labourers and peasants. Today, the extent of the CNT’s support is still shaped by that past. The regions with the greatest density of CNT unions are Catalonia and Andalucia. The regions with the largest numbers of CNT members are the Centre (Madrid and surrounding area), the North (Basque Country), Andalucia, and Catalonia (including the Balearic Isles): in other words, the most populated areas.

Andalucian towns and cities with CNT unions are: Adra, Almería, Arahal, Cádiz, Córdoba, El Puerto de Santa María, Fernán Núñez, Granada, Huelva, Jaén, Jerez de la Frontera, La Línea de la Concepción, La Puebla del Río, Lebrija, Málaga, Motril, Pedrera, Puerto Real, Sevilla, Úbeda, Vélez de Benaudalla and Villacarrillo. There are also isolated individuals and inactive unions in: Algeciras, Sanlúcar, Torreperogil, Lora del Río, Arcos de la Frontera, Dos Hermanas, Linares, Porcuna and Castro del Río.

Despite the obvious importance of possessing union premises, in many towns there are none. In Córdoba, Sevilla, Pedrera, Arahal and Puerto Real the CNT has offices. In some of these, such as in Seville or Pedrera, the premises have been bought with money from the CNT National Committee, using the 'Historical Heritage' funds.<sup>6</sup> Here, the unions are committed to paying back the funds to the CNT, which will then help other unions. It is understood as an interest-free loan. Unfortunately, the re-payments are often delayed, and some unions simply do not pay.

The CNT in Lebrija, Fernán Nuñez, El Puerto and La Línea all use premises obtained through the 'Historical Heritage' programme. In some cases, these were offices returned to the CNT in the late 1970s. In others, the buildings are still subject to dispute, and have been occupied in order to allow them to be used as functioning union offices, and as a means of putting pressure on the government.

In Adra, Jerez, Granada and Almería the CNT shares 'Collective Union Heritage' premises. These are buildings that were seized during the Civil War, and whose owners cannot be identified. They are therefore available for unions and other labour organizations, and are shared.

In Cádiz and Málaga the CNT rents premises. In both towns, the unions have difficulty in paying the rent, and have recently requested financial assistance from the National Committee. In Motril, Huelva, Jaén, La Puebla, Algeciras, Lora, Linares, Porcuna, Sanlúcar, Úbeda, Vélez, Castro and Torreperogil the CNT does not possess any premises.

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<sup>6</sup> This fund was created by the Spanish government. After the Civil War, many CNT premises were sold. Some were returned to the organization after the 'Transition' of 1975–77. In towns where the CNT no longer had an active presence, the organization chose to sell the premises, and to use the resulting money to aid active unions to buy premises. It should be noted that only a very small part of the CNT's pre-1936 holdings was returned.

## WEAKNESSES, THREATS, STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

A SWOT analysis can help us understand the CNT's situation.<sup>9</sup> It would be useful to research this using participatory methodology, such as PIA (Participatory Investigation-Action), in which militants themselves collectively debate and complete the SWOT assessment. In place of such a full investigation, here are some ideas which may be useful:

### *Weaknesses*

- Absence of theoretical reflection
- Self-exclusion from the official structures of union representation
- Bureaucratization
- Ineffective social marketing

### *Threats*

- Declining value of work in the formation of identity
- Individualized forms of labour negotiation
- Importance of finance capital
- Repression

### *Strengths*

- Autonomous institutions

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<sup>9</sup> Translator's note: the Spanish equivalent to SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) is DAFO (weaknesses, threats, strengths and opportunities): hence the mismatch between the order of the themes discussed in this papers and the order of the terms in the English-language acronym.

Today it is recognized that multiple agents produce social change: individuals, ethnic groups, forces of gender, religious minorities, workers – often in fragmented groups – employees, and so on: in other words, individuals and collective agents, workers and non-workers. The collapse in modernity's pillars has challenged the validity of modern political programmes, particularly those of liberalism and socialism, which must now re-consider their ideas.<sup>8</sup>

For unions, the most significant changes are those concerning production. According to Richard Sennet (2004), we are witnessing the beginning of a 'new capitalism', a step in which the economic system changes its exercise of power radically. The stability and regularity of Fordist labour gives way to post-Fordism, characterized by flexibility. The new type of power is distinguished by three elements: an irregular re-invention of institutions, the flexible specialization of production, and a concentration without a centralization of power. In this context, Sennet considers that irreversible changes take place in the structure of firms, that production becomes orientated towards the more varied and faster creation of goods and services, stressing innovation and technological specialisms, and that the development and diffusion of new information technologies make possible new, more efficient forms of surveillance: in other words, what Foucault terms social panopticonism.

Sennet shows that such changes in the field of production have dreadful consequences for the personality and identity of the workers (Bezos, 2005). Union organizations must, therefore, find new responses to meet these new challenges. The first step is to spend some time and effort in analysing these changes. In this way we can take stock of the situation, and can find the equilibrium point between innovation and tradition.

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<sup>8</sup> Anarchism can be considered as a particular sub-category of socialism.

As well as unions and CNT groups, there are a large number of anarchist groups in Andalucía, many of them formed by young people, and a number of squatted social centres: these are usually in contact with the CNT. It is difficult to keep track of these often-ephemeral groups. For example, in 2000 there were FIJL (Iberian Libertarian Youth Federation) groups in El Puerto de Santa María, Puerto Real, Huelva, Granada and Málaga. They have since disappeared. There are other youth and student groups in Cádiz (the Leviathan group), in San Fernando, Jerez, Granada (La Yesca), Seville and so on. Such activism can also be cultural in character: there are Libertarian Cultural Centres in Granada, Jerez and Seville, plus other squatted centres in Granada, Málaga and two in Seville. These draw in activists from a wide spectrum of groups, from Andalusian nationalists to anarchists more or less linked to the CNT. There is also a bookshop in Seville, and plans for a self-managed library in Granada. Lastly, there are very many small stalls, selling fanzines, books and music, above all punk music: some them distribute anarchist material within small, closed, counter-cultural circuits.

The CNT's links with these networks are very varied. For a while, it was very close to the FIJL and the cultural centres. It could be said these groups gravitate towards the CNT, that they all come into its zone of influence, and that the CNT recruits many of its new militants from these networks. But with some of them, relations are quite strained, and there have been some clashes. This distance has grown in recent years, following the rise of new currents of anarchism such as insurrectionalism, situationism, primitivism, etc, which have all been popular among young people more concerned to identify themselves with a certain marginal lifestyle than to help develop a viable socio-political movement.

Despite the CNT's presence in many towns and cities, it only attracts a small number of militants. For obvious strategic reasons, most Spanish political parties and unions do not publish membership figures. However, one can gain an approximate estimate of the

CNT's strengths from the figures given to the CNT National Plenary: this suggests that there are less than a thousand members in Andalucía. In most of the region's towns, there only exists a 'Various Posts' CNT union, with between five and twenty members. CNT unions in Pedrera, Puerto Real, Córdoba and Adra are bigger, but it is only in Granada and Seville that the CNT has been able to create a Local Federation, formed of different unions, and with more than a hundred members.

In Granada there were three CNT unions: 'Various Posts', Public Services and Education. In Seville, there was just one 'Various Posts' union which also acted as Local Federation. Until recently, it only competed for a few posts on the Regional Committee as it was less concerned about voting power than about the endless costs of union activism. However, the conflicts between the CNT tendencies began to interest the Seville Federation, and it attempted to gather more union dues in order to increase its voting power. Recently this Local Federation agreed an expansion strategy, aiming to form new branch unions, whose composition is still to be determined, in areas such as transport, cleaning, public services, education and so on. The process of forming these new branches has been slower than expected: although some new members joined very quickly, the Local Federation decided to allow them time to learn about the CNT's principles and practices.

The Regional Committee was elected in a Regional Plenary, with voting rights accorded as presented in the table above. The Regional Committee is currently based in Granada. Its election was an occasion for contests between the 'anarchist' and 'syndicalist' tendencies. According to some of the 'syndicalists', the FAI (the Iberian Anarchist Federation) played an important role in these contests. Discussing the FAI is controversial, as it is a secret organization. It is not known exactly who belongs to it: only one or two CNT members in Andalucía openly acknowledge their membership. But this matter is discussed informally among CNT militants: rumours circulate. Most of the boldest militants in the

## FACING AN UNCERTAIN ENVIRONMENT

This essay's central argument is that the CNT was formed in a specific environment – early twentieth-century Spain – and following radical changes in that environment, the organization has not been able to analyse those changes coherently. Therefore, it has been unable to adapt. It has not successfully communicated with its environment, and so has not arrived at its aim of radically transforming its environment in a different direction. It lacks the necessary political concepts to recognize what is happening in its environment. Here, concepts are like glasses: if they are badly adjusted, we will be incapable of noting changes, and so be unable to act.

Industrial societies have experienced two principal types of change. In political terms, we have encountered what Isidoro Moreno (2002) calls 'the collapse of the pillars of modernity'.<sup>7</sup> The first of these pillars is the belief that scientific and technological progress will produce an endless economic development. The environmental limits to that model of development show the hollowness of that Enlightenment myth. The second fallen pillar is the faith in the advance of reason, understood as the progressive decline in the value of religions and theological explanations. The survival of traditional religions, the emergence of new religious movements, and the development of non-religious concepts of the sacred all call into question this modernist illusion. The third pillar was the idea of an increasingly uniform culture. Of course, contemporary globalization does impose a consumer society across the planet. However, it is being strongly challenged by localization and re-affirmations of identity. The fourth and last pillar is the belief in a single motor of social change. For liberals, this is the individual, for Marxists, social class and class struggle.

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<sup>7</sup> On the extended debate concerning the crisis of modernity see: Lyon (1996), Touraine (1993), Giddens (2000) y Beck (2000).

as possible, changes in the environment, in order to reach a new, more flexible form. The more effective the ability to anticipate, the more likely the system is to survive external changes. Finally, the environment also is sensitive: it can adopt forms in response to the system's action towards it.

When one of these four factors changes, the other three must re-adjust. The adapting to these factors is the basis of independence, the key to evolution. Wagensberg (2000) notes that systems tend to preserve their independence in three ways:

1. Passive independence: when the system becomes impermeable to communication with the outside environment
2. Active independence: the system communicates with the environment in order to create a stable, but unbalanced, form. If the environment grows uncertain, the system attempts to retain its independence by increasing its capacity to anticipate, or by influencing and changing the environment
3. Creative independence: increasing the complexity of the system in the face of an uncertainty in the environment. This is evolution.

The system must adapt. If this does not happen the system enters into crisis, in which the system may disappear, or re-organize itself.

Applying these ideas to the CNT allows us to understand its position in the current context more clearly than a focus on external circumstances such as forms of mass communication, splits, consumer society and the loss of workers' rights. It is due – to some extent – to internal characteristics, which the CNT can control, that it has entered into crisis, and become a marginalized union organization.

'anarchist' tendency are assumed to be FAI members. However, it is also said that the FAI has recently expelled the most intransigent supporters of the 'anarchist' tendency, possibly a sign that the suspicions of the 'syndicalists' are false. although it is also said that the FAI has recently expelled the most intransigent supporters of the 'anarchist' tendency, possibly a sign that it is moving towards a more conciliatory position. The key point here is that most of the 'syndicalists' do not oppose the FAI's principles and aims: they actually share them, and they accept the need for secrecy. But the 'syndicalists' do detect a certain ideological pressure. For example, when returning from a Regional Plenary, members of different unions belonging to the 'syndicalist' tendency had the following discussion about resolutions from the 'anarchist' tendency. (All names have been changed.)

*Manola: 'Did you notice how the Cádiz union, the teachers of Granada, the 'Various Posts' of Granada, Motril and La Puebla all said almost exactly the same thing at each point on the agenda?'*

*Ramón: 'My God! That's true. They must have discussed it before the meeting, to arrive a common position.'*

*Eustagues: 'Those FAI people are extraordinary! I can't believe they would have done that!'*

At times of internal conflict and personal rivalry for CNT offices it becomes very easy to see who belongs to which tendency. Some unions are uncertain at first, but eventually they move to one side or the other. The mediating power of these delegates is crucial: the same role is played by some prominent CNT members who are said to be FAI members, and who enjoy prestige and respect among the 'syndicalist' faction.

This polarization is a result of a tension produced by the need to adapt. Organizations are systems in a specific context: they must adapt to the context in order to survive. The need to adapt brings

organizations to crises, in which their members offer solutions. Both tendencies are doing this. Unfortunately, not all solutions are equally viable: some are objectively better than others in the sense that they can aid adaptation and, consequently, further the organization's aims. Other solutions just make things worse.

Fortunately, the ideological polarization in the CNT is not nearly as serious as it seems. It is not really a product of different ideologies, but more a result of personal rivalries and power struggles. The great fear of the 'anarchists' is that the CNT will join the official framework of the other unions and so become an instrument of the social system. The main aim of the 'syndicalists' is to make the organization address the workers' real problems: but at no point have they proposed contesting the official workplace elections. The other great fear of the 'anarchists' is that the 'syndicalists' seek the re-unification of the CGT and the CNT, thus giving them access to the CGT's contacts. The example of the CNT in Andalusia suggests that this fear is entirely without foundation. Neither the leaders, nor the ordinary members among the 'syndicalist' unions are in contact with the CGT leaders, and in most cases they do not even know who they are. Beneath the apparent polarization within the CNT there is a real political consensus that many do not wish to see. The giants really are windmills, not conspiracies. The crisis is only a result of power and a crisis of adaptation.

## **THE CRISIS OF ADAPTATION: ORGANIZATIONS AS SYSTEMS**

The general theory of systems is an extremely useful tool for the study of organizations. It involves seeing organizations as a totality of elements linked to each other, forming a whole. In the social sciences, systems theory has mainly been applied to the business sector and to public administration, but it has rarely been used to anal-

yse alternative movements. Drawing on the insights of Bacharach and Lawler (1980) concerning power, I consider that the principal challenge for both old and new social movements is to synthesize the insights of systems theory and radical politics.

The CNT can be understood as a system created by the totality of links between its various components (militants, members, sections, committees, etc). Its environment is Spanish society, which is in turn a part of a global capitalist environment.

Every system exists in an environment with which it maintains contact through material, energy and information. The survival of any system depends on its success in communicating with its environment. For example, a plant takes in light, water, nutrition, oxygen, carbon dioxide, etc.

It could be argued that the CNT proposes to transform the environment, to revolutionize it, and that therefore its survival depends on the environment's adaptation to its demands. This is completely mistaken. As Panebianco (1990) notes, all organizations must seek a balance between adaptation to their environments and domination over them: if not, they will never achieve their ends.

In the communication between system and environment there are four decisive factors. These are: the complexity of the system; the uncertainty of the environment; the system's capacity to adapt; and the environment's sensitivity (Wagensberg, 1985). A system is complex when it can access several different forms: that is to say, when it possesses several different possibilities of adaptive transformation in response to changes in the environment. But adaptability is something quite different from adaptation. In fact, the more a system is adapted to a particular environment, the less able it is to adapt to changes. The environment's 'uncertainty' refers to the number of forms which could develop within a particular environment. The greater the uncertainty, the more difficult it is for a system to adapt to changes and to reach a stable position of balance: to survive. The next factor, the system's ability to anticipate, can also be understood as the system's capacity to recognize, as quickly