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## 100 years of anarcho-syndicalism in Spain

CNT

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by Pat Murtagh.

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On November 1, 1910, in Barcelona's Círculo de Bellas Artes, the CNT (National Confederation of Labor) was constituted. This organization, heir to the Spanish region of the 1<sup>st</sup> International (1870), was born from within the labor movement itself as the first independent trade union in this country.

Assuming the international slogan "the emancipation of the workers will be the work of the workers themselves, or it will not be," the CNT made itself the repository of that popular rebellion which, like a subterranean stream, opposed power over the length of time, to emerge triumphant at specific times, from the Egyptian Middle Kingdom to the French Revolution, the origin of the unique historical processes in which humanity obviously advanced along the path of freedom, justice, equality, dignity and progress.

Upon the simple agreement to create a labor organization independent from the political, religious and economic powers as a prerequisite for improving the living conditions of the workers through to the end of exploitation, the CNT began its anarcho-syndicalist activity. In a few years it brought together most of the la-

bor movement with significant social and economic advances that are now an invaluable legacy for today's society.

The work day of eight hours, the work week of thirty-six hours, the elimination of child labor, equality of women and incorporation into daily life of values such as solidarity, federalism, ecology, feminism, free love, anti-militarism, atheism ... so in vogue today, are part of that legacy that reached its zenith in the Social Revolution of 1936, when the utopia – libertarian communism – transformed everyone's daily life in all the liberated territories.

The reaction of international capitalism enabled Franco's fascist army to turn that revolutionary dream into a nightmare of hundreds of thousands of people persecuted, murdered and disappeared after the victorious coup in 1939. But not one of the culprits – all known, some active politicians – of that regime of terror, one of the most murderous in history, was even publicly reproved, thanks to the shameful impunity pact with Franco, which the national democratic left (PSOE, PCE, UGT and CCOO – the “socialist” and “communist” political parties and their respective affiliated union centers, ed.) sealed in its surrender agreement with capital, known as the “Spanish Transition” (1977).

Nevertheless, the people continued to defend, often with their lives, the simple principles of anarcho-syndicalism: independence, autonomy, federalism, self-management, assemblies, solidarity and direct action, i.e. self-organization, to reject any interference by political parties or other institutions, economic, religious, etc., in labor affairs. Strikes, demonstrations, repression and torture were the daily chronicle of the dictatorship (1939–1976), until their disappearance when the labor movement thrillingly came back to rebuild their beloved CNT (1977).

We live in new years of incessant labor conquest. The days of Montjuic, or San Sebastian de los Reyes, marked the powerful rebirth of the confederation in the 1970s. The progress of the labor movement, again self-organized by the CNT, through examples like the strike struggles of gas stations in 1978, prompted the re-

action of capitalism, this time supported by the democratic state and its institutional apparatus (governments, parties, judges, trade union bureaucracies, ...).

The successful union of the CNT was suppressed by the police (Case Scala, 1978) and, with the silence and propaganda campaigns of defamation in the media, this has generated disastrous consequences for the labor movement in this country.

The weakening of the anarcho-syndicalist presence in the labor movement made possible the loss of rights acquired after a long and bitter union struggles, by deregulation and labor precariousness implanted with the worst of the corruptions plaguing the country: union corruption. An officially silent corruption, which corrupts the union movement in general in the eyes of workers, but mainly it stars institutional unions – the CCOO and the UGT, whose unionist “yuppies” acquire grants and amounts in the millions from governments and businesses as payment to their treason, for accepting whatever measures are taken in defense of capital accumulation and rising profits (EREs, labor reforms, lay offs, etc ...).

Despite all that, thousands of workers now follow the genuine labor organization which we call the CNT, keeping it exclusively their own, making it the only living example of class unionism, capable of dealing with oppression and social control, ecological destruction and over-exploitation of the world economy, all aspects inherent to capitalism.

2010 has for us a special connotation: it marks a century of existence of the CNT. It is the centenary of a people and the invaluable struggle of thousands of people over the last hundred years has provided us with a shining blueprint, to be followed by the world's working class, by their own culture, self-organizing capacity, radical struggles, popular spread and revolutionary achievements in order to build an anti-authoritarian society based on solidarity.

These ideals form the noble cause to which we invite you here and now.