

That 19th July in Spain in 1936

FdCA statement on the 70th anniversary of the Spanish Revolution and Civil War

Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici

19th July 2006

Seventy years from that date.

Seventy years that have not been able to wipe out the memory of or the intensity of feelings when one thinks about the victory of the Spanish workers in 1936 in most parts of the country over the military and fascist coup and the start of the biggest mass social revolution in western Europe.

Seventy years that must force us to reflect on (and not only commemorate) the political significance of the events that were sparked off by the outcome of 19th July and the Spanish Revolution. And two views come into play: one positive, the other much less so.

What was extraordinary was the enormous collective struggle (influenced to no small degree by the propaganda and example of several generations of anarchist communist revolutionaries rooted amongst the working masses) to build a new world, a free stateless society which would abolish the exploitation of one person by another through wage-slavery, which would organize society from below by means of an effective system of direct democracy, and which would socialize both production and distribution.

The Spanish revolution bore the hallmarks of anarchist communism, being the work of the Spanish people themselves and not the invention of some higher authority.

The driving force behind that explosion of popular energy was the dream of building a new system based on respect for the individual, for the individual's rights and the individual's needs. This dream was enacted by the Spanish workers, men and women alike, who set about self-managing transport, factories, militias, farms, schools. And this self-management was enormously successful. It was the only time in history when a similar experience took place, when society was at the service of the people and not at the expense of the people.

Extraordinary too, in those difficult times, was the way people freed their consciousness and their intelligence, undoing the work of the priests, noblemen and bosses who had oppressed the people with their prejudices and authoritarian chains. And the dream was defended to the bitter end by the many comrades who came from all over the world and sacrificed their youth and their lives to fight against everything that was freedom-killing and backward about *España negra*, everything which lay at the root of the political, social and economic oppression. But

they were unable to defeat this cancer, that was already spreading throughout Europe and would contaminate the whole world.

While some of the causes of the defeat are physiologically present in any social revolution and should therefore be taken as granted in advance (such as the counter-revolutionary intervention of foreign forces or the creation of counter-revolutionary alliances within the composite anti-fascist front with the aim of re-establish the previously-existing status quo at the end of the civil war), we need to concentrate on how the revolutionary organizations dealt with these factors.

While grassroots militants and most people were busy with the war and the revolution, the political choices of any strategic relevance made by the revolutionary organizations contributed to the failure of the very revolution they had been preaching for decades.

In the CNT (*Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*) and in the FAI (*Federación Anarquista Iberica*), it became dramatically evident that there was a total lack of a strategy and tactics, or even an awareness of the political task of libertarians in a situation (a useful one, objectively speaking) where the State structures were in a state of total collapse and there was a widespread mobilization of the proletariat, even though the international context had been marked by a series of painful defeats for the workers' movement.

The libertarian communist programme that Spanish anarchists were proposing became a reality above all thanks to the collective efforts of the proletarians who carried out the greatest spontaneous, libertarian, social revolution of the 20th century, despite the fact that, at the crucial moment, those organizations that had been preaching revolution for decades found themselves without any idea of what to do in order to usher in libertarian communism and ended up making decisions that were not consistent with the popular revolutionary experimentation in progress.

There is much to learn from that great revolution. For example, the need for members of organizations who (as in Spain) have a sufficient level of economic knowledge (above all with regard to the globalized context) and who study the mechanisms which are essential to the running of capitalist production and distribution, with the double aim of being able to provide the correct answers to the problems these areas create, and of enabling the change from the capitalist management of the economy to the revolutionary management of the economy to take place in as smooth a way as possible. The revolution is by no means just around the corner, but that is no excuse to act as if it will never come.

With this in mind and in our hearts, in memory of all those comrades who struggled and who, for three long years, engaged in the revolution, we have celebrated this anniversary in the best possible way — by publishing new and old material about the war in Spain, some of it never before published in Italian: “Towards a Fresh Revolution” by the Friends of Durruti, who tried to oppose the insipience of the old and new bureaucracies and the Stalinist violence which preferred to fight the anarchists and the revolution rather than the fascists and the bourgeoisie; “*Mujeres Libres*”, a pamphlet on the women of Spain who, with their intelligence and physical presence sought to give birth to a new Spain and who demonstrated that freedom can only be conquered day by day, women and men all together; finally “Libertarian Communism & Other Writings” by Isaac Puente, a clear outline of what needed to be done for the revolution.

We have also dedicated the seventh issue of “*Antipodi*”, our magazine of culture, politics and art, to the subject of Anarchist Communism and revolutions, including the Spanish Revolution.

Because each revolution grows thanks to the mistakes and thanks to the conquests of the previous ones. And the next revolution is no exception.

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