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Francisco Ascaso

Not even if they order it, Captain!

3 March 1933

Durruti in the Spanish Revolution by Abel Paz.

Written in response to Captain Rojas, who when asked why he carried out the Casas Viejas massacre, responded that he was following orders. Originally published in *Solidaridad Obrera*.

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Captain, I've seen my comrades fall in slow death throes and then collapse on the ground, blood pouring out of their mouths, while life flees through small holes in their foreheads. These holes of death crush the skulls of their victims and comprehension in those who reflect upon them. Anido and Arlegui ordered it.

I've seen kicks destroy teeth, eyebrows, and lips; men fall unconscious only to be revived with pails of water so that the beating can begin again and then drop, shattered, once more. I've heard—this is worst—those being tortured shout out in pain. I remember a story that an old friend told me when I was in Chile. “We Spaniards,” he said, “who boast so much about bringing civilization to the Americas deserve the hate that these Latin Americans feel for us.”

Captain, I saw a painting in a museum when I was in Mexico. It was a representation of Hernán Cortés and his followers' historic achievement: Montezuma and one of his chiefs were being tortured with fire so that they would reveal the location of the Aztec treasure. While Cortés's bearded men burned those Indians' feet, the latter smiled contemptuously, knowing that the Spaniards would

discover nothing. Captain, in Tacuba [Mexico] I saw the giant and millennial “tree of the sad night,” where Hernán Cortés went to weep in impotence after his inquisitorial achievement. And I also saw in Villa Cisneros—this wasn’t long ago—how a poor black man, a friend of comrade Arcas, was tied to four stakes driven into the ground and given fifty whip lashings for stealing a plate of food from the local air force sergeant. I’ve seen so many things, Captain, that the wickedness of men no longer frightens me. I have suffered terrible things as well, but we don’t need to speak of that. I have seen many things, I repeat, but I never imagined that someone could embody them all. I always thought that each instance belonged to a time, to particular circumstances and latitudes. Never did I dream that you could incarnate them all, Captain!

Casas Viejas! Casas Viejas! You’ve shared out kicks, whippings that tear men’s limbs and elicit horrendous screams of pain and rage. You’ve burned human beings alive, even an eight year old girl.

You shackled them, since it wasn’t enough to rip them from their mothers’ arms, and later crowned them with macabre holes from which life flees, leaving little red flowers, a crown of torment.

And all of this, you say, because ‘they were orders.’ Do you have no dignity, sensitivity, or manliness? Do you belong to race that isn’t human? Is that why the pain of others has no echo in you? Have you seen men slowly fall on the ground in death throes, as blood gushes from their mouths? You had the sadism to ask for, to order: “More! More!” Don’t you feel any of the cold steel that pierces the hearts of the tormented?

Because they ordered it... Because that is what they ordered... Not even if they order it, Captain!! Not even if they order it!!

Hernán Cortés found a tree to hear his cries in Tacuba. You, if some day you feel the need to cry, won’t even find a tree that will listen to you.