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Francisco Ascaso
Union Independence?
19 March 1933

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Union Independence?

Francisco Ascaso

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One of the most pressing questions in our organization at the moment pertains to the anarchist's influence in the unions. I remember past times when anarchists, who shunned rather than sought organizational posts, were seen as the best guarantee of revolutionary success, thanks to their moral solvency and especially their *revolutionary intransigence*. But apparently things have changed and now it is that very intransigence that is attacked most harshly.

“We defend the CNT's independence,” they tell us, but then carry on about the so-called dictatorship of the FAI. The debates in the last meeting on this topic show how foolish the idea is. A speech was made, there was talk, all in the most purely demagogic terms, but nothing was proved. While this demagogy may make an impression on those uninformed about these matters, when it is examined calmly, it does nothing more than incriminate those who employ it.

In the first place, no militant would participate in union meetings as a representative of the FAI. For example, I work in the textile industry and belong to the Manufacturing Union: I take part in union assemblies as someone exploited by the industry in question and as a member of the union. The same is

true for the other militants, whether or not they belong to the FAI.

If we acknowledge that the CNT was inspired and built by anarchists and that anarchists act inside it, with the rights accorded to any exploited worker, then the so-called campaign for “union independence” cannot be accepted without renouncing the anarchic origins of our organization, denying its ideological goals, and reducing its efforts to simple struggles for economic defense. But if one agrees with the CNT’s libertarian communist aims, then it is absurd to resist the presence of anarchism within our unions. If we want to be consistent with our own aspirations and ideas, we should support and encourage any degree of anarchism that manifests itself in the Confederation.

“We accept,” they’ll tell us, “that anarchists belong to the organization, but we can’t permit the Iberian Anarchist Federation to shape the CNT from the outside.” Here the problem is proving that the FAI has ever attempted to influence the CNT from outside, although it would be easy to prove the damage done by the “independents.”

All organizations tow a great deal of dead weight behind them, and that is something that the CNT cannot avoid. That dead weight, due to its natural character, does not have the courage to express itself openly but simply lurks, waiting for the right moment to act.

That is why some CNT members have slipped towards those who raise the flag of independence. They are obstacles to and interfere with the organization’s revolutionary work. Indeed, they are reformist by nature and meekly hope to avoid the dangerous struggle implied by the anarchist influence in the unions. And those raising the flag of CNT independence do not really want independence, but to fight against anarchism inside and outside the CNT. This is undeniably a direct attack on the organization’s principles, which ironically even they

claim to embrace at times. Union independence? Yes, but respecting the Confederation’s principles, tactics, and aims.

The FAI’s field of action and propaganda is well defined and delimited. The anarchists’ activity within the unions is also well defined. But how can we accept organizations like the Libertarian Syndicalist Federation, which says that its goals are identical to the CNT’s goals and yet exists outside the Confederation, apart from it, and tries to exercise an external influence on it?¹

Clearly anyone who accepts the CNT’s principles and goals would insist on its independence, but it must be from within it, in the respective unions. It is totally unacceptable that those who protest against the so-called dictatorship of the FAI set themselves up as guides to the CNT or that they try, by creating another organization, to impose their dictatorship on it. We have to be logical and consistent, comrades. Otherwise, we will have to assume that anyone demanding union independence is only launching a concealed attack on anarchism and thus the CNT’s ideology. Neither the organization nor its militants will tolerate such affronts.

¹ Translator’s note: Disgruntled CNT members founded the Libertarian Syndicalist Federation in 1933. The organization returned to the CNT in 1936.