The Two Anarchisms

Legalism and Illegalism in the Libertarian Movement in Late Nineteenth Century Spain

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Two false views have dominated libertarian historiography to this day. The first considers Spanish anarchism between 1868 and 1910 to be a kind of pre-history of the CNT. Manuel Buenacasa invented this notion in 1927 and Juan Gómez Casas gave it its finishing touches in 1968. According to this view, the triune CNT-FAI-FIJL was the culmination of a movement that had followed a linear course of development since Fanelli's mission to Spain. The second view posits the allegedly unique character of the Spanish case and its particular genealogy; this view was the product of the administrative imagination of the Urales family and of Santillán. For these dignitaries, Iberian anarchism is an almost racial phenomenon, more the offspring of Pi y Margall than of Bakunin; it would thus seem to have originated with Anselmo Lorenzo, Farga Pellicer and Serrano Oteiza, was then taken up by Llunas and Tárrida, and culminated with Mella and the editors of *La Revista Blanca*. All of them were old republicans and representatives of legalist, doctrinaire and liberal tendencies who were practically always in the minority and were frequently repudiated by the revolutionary workers. Thus, the anarchism of action is left out or almost entirely ignored: the anarchism of González Morago, Salvochea and Vallina, an anarchism that was based on illegalist and conspiratorial affinity groups and which was dominant in the libertarian milieu and exercised an enduring influence on the workers movement. Concerning this kind of anarchism, little is said; concerning the other kind of anarchism, the peaceful and bureaucratic anarchism of the congresses, epic tales are spun. We can begin to unravel this contradiction by way of solid historical research that will put everyone in their proper place, but its main cause was never the absence of critical investigation but rather the inertia of a movement that had never drawn up a balance sheet of anything. Few periods of its long history have been addressed with rigor, passion and objectivity; most studies of this topic have been cooked up in the kitchens of the universities. It must be rescued from such a fate.

The most surprising fact about nineteenth century anarchism is its transformation from a tactic of mass insurrection into an ideology separate from and external to the working class, which took place between 1877 and 1889, between the Congress of Verviers and the International Anarchist Congress in Paris. If there is anything special about the Spanish case it is the fact that, due to Spanish anarchism's closer links with working class organizations, this transformation took two or three years longer than elsewhere to reach its culmination. This development re-

flected the problems that had arisen with regard to praxis in a context of the decline of the workers movement, mainly problems of organization, action and the formation of revolutionary consciousness. The unsatisfactory solutions proffered for these problems caused the social influence of anarchism to diminish and its revolutionary capacity to dwindle. As a result, trade union and political reformism gained ground and exacerbated the parlous situation of the anarchist movement, which had in the meantime split along the lines of two narrowly circumscribed and irreconcilable positions. On the one side were the supporters of organization at any price, which was to be sustained exclusively by oral and written propaganda; on the other side, the unconditional advocates of violent agitation, who identified organization with authority and put all their faith in the exemplary nature of propaganda of the deed. For the former, once the majority of the population was convinced and organized, the revolution would automatically take place in peace and glory; for the latter, acts of violence carried out by small groups or even by individuals would suffice to unleash spontaneous uprisings that would usher in the revolution amidst catastrophe. The two positions, once petrified, mutually reinforced one another, since each one was a reaction against the other, and they degenerated after 1890 into a state of scholastic sclerosis, on the one hand, and an amoral and aggressive individualism, on the other. The appalling repression inflicted on the anarchists by the State achieved what the most lucid anarchists were unable to accomplish, that is, it put an end to such sectarian madness, but exacted a very high price: the sacrifice of a generation of fighters. The theoretical and practical dead end in which anarchism found itself could not be escaped with mental leaps forward which, by ignoring action—from the everyday struggle to so-called "expropriation"—indulged in speculation about the future society and expressed the view that anarchy would be the product of an ineluctable evolution that depends more on scientific progress than on the will of individuals (all of Kropotkin's and Mella's works express this tendency). Nor did mindless activism help free anarchism from the pedagogical and contemplative pacifism in which it had become mired; and the last outburst of individualism, expressed in the fashionable popularity of Nietzsche and Stirner and the intellectualist and elitist rejection of the class struggle, was even less capable of providing an impetus that could help anarchism break free from its stagnation. Anarchism really only reappeared on the stage of history when it entered the trade unions and began to advocate sabotage and the general strike, thus bringing its worst period of confusion to a close.

Working class anarchism was born in the IWA as an anti-authoritarian current that proclaimed the immediate possibility of social revolution by way of the destruction of the State and classes, in accordance with the example set by the Paris Commune. It soon clashed with the authoritarian currents of the IWA, from which it split, and remained united as a separate current until 1878. After 1878, due to persecution, the failure of various insurrections, and the decline of the workers movement, anarchism was reduced to a minority faction and was isolated from the proletarian milieu, while the "workers" parties, often led by exiles, underwent a period of rapid growth. The revolutionary awakening of the masses did not take place and the anarchists subjected their tactics to reexamination. Workers struggles for partial improvements—"the economic struggle"—were looked down upon, because they were considered to be manifestations of egoism that diverted the class from its revolutionary mission. Yet the anarchists nonetheless cherished a blind faith in the revolutionary spontaneity of the working class masses, which was assumed to be an easy matter to provoke with a few exemplary acts. Any other kind of propaganda was held to be ineffective. The organization—previously the cornerstone of internationalism—came to be considered to be a hindrance to freedom that, furthermore, led to moderation and the cul-

tivation of a leader-follower mentality. Small affinity groups were supposed to be sufficient for action; any attempt to organize beyond such groups fell under the suspicion of authoritarianism. The London Congress (1881) confirmed this radical change of perspective. There was a general uproar in favor of freedom whenever anyone spoke of organization, as if the two things were incompatible. Even the very fact of holding Congresses, electing delegates and deliberating resolutions appeared to be an obstacle standing in the way of the free initiative of individuals and a restriction on the free impulse of the masses. There was a suspicious insistence on the manufacture of explosives—it was later confirmed that agents of the French police were behind these proposals—and "revolutionary morality" was subjected to ridicule. The conclusion: tactics based on mass organization and education by way of propaganda and "economic disturbance" were discouraged in favor of the simpler method of propaganda of the deed and insurrection.

Here on the Peninsula, things took a different turn. When Fanelli arrived, he found a working class that had reached such a degree of maturity that it had separated from the bourgeois radicalism represented by the republicans in order to elaborate its own goals and ideology. This task was carried out by the Federación Regional Española de la Internacional [the Spanish Regional Federation of the International]. The FRE sought to organize the workers by way of "resistance" and "cooperation" for the social revolution, and the adequate weapon was the "scientific strike", but the latter demanded an organizational level and a clockwork execution that were truly unrealistic. At that time the idea of organization was preeminent; it was the cornerstone of the internationalist tactic, the embodiment of class solidarity and the womb of the future society. One could say that when the organization was perfected, the revolution would begin. The revolution does not have to be bloody: the internationalists said, "Peace to men, war on institutions". Nonetheless, the outlawing of the FRE because of the events of 1873 compelled a radical change of tactics. On the one hand, the insurrections of Sanlúcar, Alcoy and Cartagena had exhausted the organization, and had also strengthened the position of the legalist tendency of some members of the resistance societies. On the other hand, the old landowning class and the industrial and commercial middle classes had formed a united front in defense of private property and religion. The proletariat had to confront the united bourgeoisie, which was ready for Europeanization at least with respect to the strengthening of the repressive apparatus of the State. The Madrid Congress (1874) did not advocate "resistance" or the strike, and declared its support for insurrection and "reprisals": "The situation is such that political action can no longer take any other form than conspiracy and violent revolution." The FRE went underground, declaring that it would not recognize bourgeois legality—"The International is above the law"—and it became a "secret" organization; its sections and associations dissolved into "revolutionary action groups" and it adopted a Bakuninist program. Because it did not have sufficient forces, the Federal Commission of the FRE sought to take advantage of those of the republicans, and attempted to persuade the latter to join an uprising, to no avail. The contrast between the revolutionary will of the internationalists and the cold and passive condition of the masses was insurmountable, thus facilitating the emergence of a reformist fraction among the internationalists' ranks. In 1881, the FRE was exhausted and those who advocated a return to legality, an opportunity which had arisen because of economic prosperity and the new liberal government, won the support of the majority of the organization. As a result, the Federal Commission was deposed and the FRE itself dissolved and replaced by another organization, the Federación de Trabajadores de la Región Española [the Federation of Workers of the Spanish Region].

The tactics of the FTRE may be defined as complete legalism and bureaucratism: Taking advantage of all legal means, rejection of action outside the law, consideration of action as the exercise of a right and of reforms as a step forward. It condemned violence—"Progress, not violence, is the teacher"—and any disturbance of order: strikes, for example, were supposed to be subject to such complicated rules as to render them practically impossible. A gradual improvement of economic conditions was sought by way of the "practice of legality", cooperatives and contracts with tenant farmers, not discounting alliances with other parties "to defend liberty", and not disdaining associating with "all educated persons" of bourgeois origin. It was therefore not at all unexpected that the new organization should have refrained from disseminating the declarations, which were so contrary to its own project, of the London Congress. The "destructive policy" of the FTRE, inspired by "Progress" with a capital "P", was "as variable as the circumstances would permit and as the needs require", and actually constituted an attempt to restore the political conditions of the First Republic, that is, the most favorable kind of bourgeois legality, upon the basis of which the FTRE would be able to win an escalating series of reforms. Calling for the modification of the economic conditions of the proletariat by way of legislation, and refusing to support any revolutionary movement or even victims of repression, it professed that it did not aspire to put an end to bourgeois rule, but to play the role of social democracy. The contradiction between its policies and the anarchism proclaimed in its statutes was merely an apparent contradiction, since that anarchism was merely a formality. Separated from the nourishing pragmatism of workers struggles, it was an "ideal", contrived far from the class, taught by intellectual members of the organization. It was not, as in the times of the International, the result of the everyday experiences of the workers, the crystallization of their social experience, but the product of the speculation of a handful of ideologues. The legalists were the first to separate theory and practice, relegating anarchism to the status of a "philosophy".

Both the reformism of the FTRE as well as the decline in the revolutionary spirit and activity of the working class favored the development of a bourgeois anarchism, an anarchism that claimed to be above classes. Bakuninist ideas were abandoned, thus breaking down precisely the bridges to philosophy, history and dialectics. The Bakuninist critique of bourgeois culture and of the fetishism of science was ignored with Olympian confidence, and bourgeois thinkers such as Büchner, Comte and Rousseau were consulted in order to concoct a positivist ideology that could be passed off as anarchism. This kind of anarchism did not perceive any specific movement or historical initiative that could be attributed to the proletariat, and sought in scientism, anthropological optimism and nature itself, the social laws that would create the material conditions for emancipation. In order to study the social question, it was necessary to imitate the way entomologists study butterflies, that is, it must be treated as a biological fact. Ruling out the historical determination of society—and of the individuals who live in society—and ignoring the relation between the production of means of life and forms of social organization, the new libertarian ideology conceived of social facts as the results of natural laws that could be interpreted by science. These laws were timeless; in order to achieve anarchy it was merely necessary to discover these laws and for society to allow itself to be guided by them. Anarchy was nothing but nature governing itself by its own laws, which may be reduced to a single law: the law of progress. Progress and freedom were therefore synonymous. Independently of the will of individuals, progress implied continuous social development until the attainment, by virtue of a law of nature, of anarchy. The eminently bourgeois belief in progress was so strong that, for an ideologue like Mella, the revolution was simply the concluding stage of evolution, a process that

takes place in society and in history, morality and art, as well as in nature. Revolution and evolution were convergent realities. In short, this was a vulgar anarchism that idealized the economic and social development of the bourgeoisie and which fit the reformism propagated by the FTRE like a glove. The distance between the real bourgeoisie and its ideal version was so great that it permitted any sort of philanthropic liberalism to pass itself off as real anarchism.

Isolated from the workers movement in many countries, anarchism ceased to be the most radical expression of the historic movement that dissolves the existing conditions. With the path of action practically blocked, it was hardly capable of developing on the theoretical level, if we except the formulation of libertarian communism and the Kropotkinist studies of a naturalist bent. There were major contradictions between theory and practice, as was demonstrated by the paltry results garnered by the proclamation of propaganda of the deed and insurrection; in fact, the anarchists were divided with respect to every issue. A failed attempt to establish unity at the Geneva Congress (1882) caused one of the participants to exclaim: "we are united in our division." A similar attempt at the Barcelona Congress (the "Cosmopolitan" Congress of 1885) was even more of a fiasco, "due to the intemperance of some of the delegates, who with their protests constantly interrupted the debate".

The predominant sentiment—especially in France—was an anti-organizational state of mind that Malatesta dubbed "amorphous". A true Bakuninist, Malatesta was one of the few anarchists of his time who was convinced that the success of the revolution hinged upon the existence of internationally organized forces. Most anarchists had reservations about the legitimacy of a congress for establishing a line of conduct, and were even less enthusiastic about it if it were to promote some kind of reorganization, at a time when even the least attempt at coordination was considered to be coercive. For many of them, the congresses were pointless and had no reason to exist, but for others they were necessary in order to prevent the isolation and marginalization of the movement, and there were even those who wanted to attract people from the socialist congresses. It was only when Clement Duval and Vittorio Pini proclaimed the right to theft at their respective trials, however, that the process of ideological decomposition in anarchism reached its high point. The International Congress in Paris (July 1889) was a sounding board for this decomposition. Anarchism hit rock bottom: the social question was transformed into an existential question. The individual replaced the class as the revolutionary subject. The world and the individual were no longer understood in tandem, as related to one another; the social conflict was not interpreted as a class struggle but as a struggle between the lone individual and bourgeois society. The masses were of no account because they were not revolutionary. The movement had proceeded, without any transitional stages, directly from spontaneist optimism to defeatist pessimism. If we read *The Thief*, for example—the novel by Georges Darien—we see the masses described as cowards, imbeciles and servile lackeys, eager to toil to enrich the exploiter, to offer their services to the ambitious, and to bow down before the powerful. The enemy was no longer institutions, but men; all the bourgeoisie, even the most insignificant, and all the slaves, all of whom were worthless. No respect was due to Humanity because there were no more men. It was no longer necessary to observe any norms of conduct. Whoever could violate the most such norms was more revolutionary than anyone else. Arising from an inverted morality, the illegalist mentality perceived all morality as just so many prejudices and as a sign of weakness. The figure of the outlaw, the man who seized by force what bourgeois society had denied him, as in the romantic epoch, was the object of admiration. Even a simple act motivated by self-preservation such as theft was elevated to the category of revolutionary deeds. In vain did Kropotkin plead

that theft or "individual expropriation" did not abolish, but rather reinforced, private property. Because the amoralists blamed everything on society and because they restricted themselves to making their own individual revolutions, they did not acknowledge any contradiction between ends and means. The means they used were, moreover, consistent with the ends they sought.

The particular characteristics of the Spanish case would make the illegalist psychosis commence with a reaction against the legalism of the FTRE and a radical questioning of its organizational conception. The FTRE had hardly been established before the first dissident faction arose, that of "The Disinherited", which called for a return to the tactics of the FRE, that is, a decentralized, secret organization, insurrectionary revolutionary action and calls for reprisals. The police responded with the affair of "La Mano Negra" [The Black Hand], which led to the imprisonment of hundreds of Andalusian workers. When the Sagasta government took advantage of the opportunity to outlaw the FTRE, the FTRE's Federal Commission condemned the crimes allegedly committed by the phantom organization of La Mano Negra without expressing even the slightest doubt concerning the police account of the affair, thus handing over its Andalusian militants to the torturers and hired thugs. Then the local federation of Gracia held a secret congress (1884) where it was decided that the FTRE should be dissolved and that the organization's members should go underground (the "Aventine Secession"). The confrontations between the old leaders ("sellouts" and "traitors") and the "Aventine" dissidents ("Jacobins", "troublemakers" and "charlatans") would be repeated at the "Cosmopolitan" Congress in the following year. The Madrid Congress of 1885 was able to prevent the dissolution of the FTRE but only in exchange for the resignation of the Federal Commission and the incorporation of less hierarchical statutes. The new equilibrium between the tendencies proved to be too tenuous, however, and the new orientation of the Catalan sections decided the fate of the entire Federation. All the proposed resolutions were directed against the foundations of the bureaucratic edifice erected in 1881. They called for the dissolution of the Federal Commission, the abolition of congresses and statutes, permission for more than one section of the same trade or local federation to operate in the same town, the elimination of the requirement that prospective members of the Federation should express agreement with its principles, the renunciation of the imperative mandate of the delegates, etc. The Conferences for Social Studies held in Barcelona (in 1887 and 1888) even recommended the rejection of the section structure itself, the cornerstone of the entire working class organizational system (which would later be called the *sindicato* [trade union]), because its creation expressed the desire to obtain immediate improvements in working conditions which, because such improvements were almost impossible, must be concentrated instead on the realization of revolutionary ideals. The sections therefore had to be replaced by groups of workers without regard for trade or occupation. "Resistance" as a product of a perfected organization looked good on paper, but proved to be impractical in reality. "Spontaneous and natural" resistance was preferable, without rules, in the heat of an unpremeditated solidarity that was not affected by considerations of self-interest. The most adequate organizational form for the new perspective could not be the FTRE, but a federation in which individuals, associations and sections would be completely autonomous, that is, one in which each one of its constituent elements would preserve its specific ideology, its particular goals and its independence of action. Rather than a new federation, this described a kind of ad hoc agreement for joint action without any statutes, or leadership, or reciprocally binding commitments. The new system liberated strikes from all bureaucratic encumbrances but did not envision means to transform them into either weapons of revolution or schools for anarchism. The revolutionary question therefore remained

unresolved: those who conceived the Pact of Union and Solidarity sought to address this problem with a kind of anarchist party (the OARE), thus separating the "resistance against capital" from the "struggle for anarchy". Anarchism removed itself from the social battle because it had its own separate struggle, one that was at a higher level. It thus came to the same conclusions as the reformists: the proletarians were incapable of going beyond "resistance", unless they adhere to an ideology that is expressed in a fragmented manner by groups external to the class.

The second factor that paved the way to illegalism was the theoretical battle unleashed concerning the distribution of the product of labor in the future society. The clash between collectivism and communism was superimposed on the major disagreements with regard to organization and action, which were the real bones of contention. What was actually at stake were two opposed concepts of anarchism. The formula of "to each according to his needs", which summarized anarchist communism, appeared in 1876 in Italy and was adopted by the majority of European anarchists a few years later. Repression in France and Italy—especially after the Lyon Trial in 1883—forced many anarchists to go into exile, some of whom took refuge in Spain and established themselves in Barcelona, where they made contact with the dissident sector of the FTRE and propagated communist ideas. The anarchists of Gracia were the most radical and immediately echoed the new ideas in their paper, *La Justicia Humana*, edited by Emilio Hugas and Martín Borrás, initiating a debate with the supporters of the collectivist formula, "to each the entire product of his labor", which was the slogan of the old International. The works of Kropotkin, however, were beginning to be translated and had a major impact, and the collectivists retreated to take refuge in the compromise slogan formulated by Tárrida at the Second Socialist Congress of Reus (1889): anarchism "without adjectives", or "straight" anarchism, or to express it more accurately, "undefined" anarchism. Malatesta's pamphlet, *Between Peasants*, which advocated the communist position, was also published in Spanish, and five years later all Spanish anarchists were communists. The differences between communists and collectivists were not limited to hypotheses about the future society. The Spanish anarcho-communists rejected organization, in agreement with Kropotkin and the French (and in opposition to Malatesta): sections, federations, mandated delegates, voting, minutes, majorities, elected officers, etc. They only accepted the existence of informal groups, without any commitments on the part of their members. They claimed that fraternal contact between comrades, more effectively than any regulation or circular, would suffice to create the relations necessary for propaganda and action. Their point of departure was the idea that, in order to carry out the revolution, neither accords nor rules were needed, nor any kind of strategy, much less any organization; the revolution was an explosion of popular fury that would take place spontaneously, thanks to the fact that certain violent acts will have awakened the smoldering spirit of the oppressed masses. Thus, "instead of repudiating personal acts in which the individual pays with his life for carrying out a heroic action for the cause of justice, we should to the contrary praise them so that they will have emulators, and these acts, becoming generalized, are the acts that can lead the spontaneous revolution" (*Tierra y Libertad*, Gracia, 1899; this was the paper formerly known as *La Justicia Humana*). The way to cause the revolution to break out could not be more simplistic: instead of preparations, which, of course, implied organization, the hypertrophied exemplary nature of impressive personal acts. Violence was cheerfully exalted: "Force is repelled with force. That is why dynamite was invented" (motto of *The Victim of Labor*, 1889). Action and propaganda of the deed were the same thing, as they both implied violence and illegalism: "take advantage of every occasion … to provoke the people to attack and seize property, to offend authority and to scorn and violate the law…." (in *The Social*

Revolution, 1889, edited by Francesco Serantoni; the same newspaper printed a eulogy for Pini). The effectiveness of these methods with respect to awakening the spirit of revolt in the workers had yet to be proven, and indeed the opposite conclusion seemed to have more evidence in its favor. The fireworks had been exploding since 1886 in sympathy with the labor conflicts of the period, without a major increase in working class combativity and without anyone even asking if all the bombs were worth the risk and the trouble they caused. This was the weakest point of the spontaneist tactic: the unrealistic evaluation of the utility of violent actions and the callous disregard of their foreseeable consequences. Without being aware of it, their refusal to draw up a balance sheet of their words and deeds drove the most resolute Spanish anarchists down the slope of ideological chaos and irresponsible adventurism, a slope down which their European counterparts had already plummeted.

The workers movement experienced a brief resurgence with the May Day demonstrations and the struggle for the eight hour day, but was almost immediately suppressed. Then, for the first time, anarchist individualism made its debut in its ultraviolent version in the publications, *El Revolucionario* and *El Porvenir Anarquista* [The Anarchist Future] (Gracia, 1891), in proclamations written by Paolo Schichi, Paul Bernard and Sebastián Suñé. Malatesta, who visited Barcelona around this time, was given a cold reception by the communist sector, especially by Schichi, who had recently published a paper with an unambiguously significant title (Pensiero e Dinamita [*Thought and Dynamite*]), and was compelled to complete his Spanish tour with an escort of collectivists. As a result of the bomb attacks at the Plaza Real the group influenced by Schichi and Bernard was imprisoned, but others took up where they left off. Every nuance and variety of illegalist anarchism were propagated in ephemeral publications: amoralism, "to attain our goal, all means are good" (*La Cuestión Social*, 1892, written in Valencia by refugees); unrealistic optimism, "since no one respects it anymore, authority is collapsing" (*La Revancha* [Revenge], 1893, edited in Reus by Bernard); triumphalist individualism, "individual propaganda is and always will be the most vivid kind and will yield the most results" (*La Controversia*, 1893, also written in Gracia by refugees); the cult of violence, "science has placed at our disposal what is necessary to cause the most solid fortresses to fly into the air" (*El Eco de Ravachol*, Sabadell, 1893); organizational phobia, "organization engenders submission" (*La Unión Obrera*, Sant Martí de Provençals, 1891), "organization and revolution are two words that are like cat and dog to each other" (*Ravachol*, Sabadell, 1893), "The organization is the offspring of authority" (*La Controversia*), "[organization] is the school of laziness" (*El Eco del Rebelde*, Zaragoza, 1892), etc. The draconian repression of the riot at Jerez (1892) would be echoed by the sentencing of Ravachol in France, a personality who had been praised so often that he had been turned into a victim of society and a martyr for the idea on both sides of the Pyrenees. The thirst to avenge the cruelty displayed at Jerez found a model in Ravachol's bombs, when the climate was already ripe for terrorism. For many people, the sadism of bourgeois repression legitimized any act, regardless of how fearful and bloody it might be. Thus, a yearning for vengeance against the bourgeoisie and its executioners found expression in the failed assassination attempt of Pallás against general Martínez Campos and Salvador's bombs at the Liceo. These were no longer instances of propaganda of the deed; they were desperate acts that sought to "teach a hard lesson" to the ruling class, to show it that its victory was not complete, that from now on it was war to the death. Unfortunately, the anarchists were never aware of the fact that they were confronted by a reactionary class entrenched in *caciquismo* and religion, a class that would not allow even the most trivial reforms, and that in order to prevent the loss of its privileges and its property it was capable of decimating the work-

ing class without batting an eye. To terrorize it without really causing it any serious harm was the worst kind of mistake because the repression that it unleashed in response to these attacks struck far beyond its ostensible targets, and even had an impact on its own more progressive sectors. The State promulgated two laws against anarchism while simultaneously creating the police force—the "political-social brigade"—responsible for enforcing them. Nor was that all, because the State also resorted to the suspension of civil liberties and to provocations. The police, by means of agents infiltrated into the libertarian milieu, arranged an attack in which only innocent people would die: the bomb thrown at the procession of the Corpus Christi in Barcelona as it passed down the street of Cambios Nuevos (1896). Suddenly it was open season on all anarchists, regardless of how peaceful they may have been; then, the repression was turned against the militant workers, regardless of whether or not they were anarchists; and finally, the persecution was extended without much of a display of logic to journalists, republicans, intellectuals and even modest bourgeois liberals. This wave of repression concluded in the Montjuich Trials, frame-ups that became symbols of the criminal injustice and boundless cruelty of the bourgeois inquisitors. With regard to illegality, the Spanish bourgeoisie had outdone anarchy. The execution of Cánovas in 1897, who was the mastermind behind the drama of Montjuich, was a paltry moral compensation.

Returning to the "affinity group" concept upon which the agitation of the period between 1890 and 1897 was based, we see that the absence of ideological controls, responsibilities and rules exposed the groups to the machinations of criminals and opportunists who were attracted to the groups by the prospect of the possible rewards of illegal action, and opened up the door to frauds and infiltrators who employed violent language. It was not without reason that the peaceful anarchists accused the illegalist milieu of being full of ignorant bums and fanatics who were working hand in hand with thieves, provocateurs and informers. Their unrealistic idea of revolution might at first have been nothing but a harmless sentimental peccadillo of the revolutionaries in their struggle with the reformists, but once it reached a certain threshold, the idea cannot be understood as anything but a culpable lack of consciousness. The immediate results of this puerile tactic were confusion and disaster. The workers resistance societies were broken up, lives were thrown away for no purpose, and part of the population sided with the government. The numerous groups and newspapers disappeared without a trace, leaving a vacuum that would be filled by the political parties. Many militants permanently distanced themselves from anarchy and those who remained were too few to work alone, and had to collaborate with republicans and philanthropic bourgeoisie. The campaign for new trials for the victims of Montjuich, Jerez and La Mano Negra succeeded, but the revolution was more distant then ever. Fatally lacking a strategy, anarchism had lost the social war in its first skirmishes. It would recover historically with its entry into the trade unions, but it never regained its old vigor. All too often was the word "freedom" used to sabotage efforts to make it a reality, and all too often were "circumstances" used as an excuse for capitulation: voluntarism without ideas and unprincipled opportunism were always its chronic illnesses.

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