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The Making of the Spanish CNT-IWA (2010–2024)

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should take their own balance of how they started and where they are. The question of acronyms still remains to be resolved. For the IWA this whole issue is existential, as you might deduce.

So, long gone are the days of a CNT won by sectarianism and paranoia that was more concerned with principles than with developing a useful alternative for the proletariat. There is nothing attractive in a purist, sectarian and dogmatic anarcho-syndicalism.

This change of mentality has led us to have more members in some provinces and regions than the CGT itself, and the progression indicates that this trend will sharpen. There is no point in complaining that your rival or opponent is reformist, bureaucratic, bad people or anything else, but that the important thing is to build one's own union model and put everyone to work, without getting caught up in excuses.

victimhood and demagogy? What can we expect from supposed comrades who validate the slanders of the CNT-IWA, and throw them in our faces? What kind of movement do they want to build with that? And finally, ‘ideas come before acronyms’... Such cynicism is spectacular, why didn’t they choose another name and look for other premises and save themselves the lawsuits? It was a decision from 1989.

It is highly unethical and disconnected from reality to lose a congress by a landslide, not recognise the agreements, make internal noise to shameful limits, leave or be expelled, and still claim that you are the legitimate party and those who won the congress by a large majority are not. And not only that, but they enjoy premises that belong to the organisation that they have left. They also complain about being denounced before the bourgeois justice for usurpation of identity, when it was this sector that did the most against the CGT in the 80s, and in recent years they have not been afraid to deal with the same bourgeois justice at least a dozen times to denounce the CNT.

Whether by the overwhelming victory of the majority sector or by the grouping of the unions opposed to the majority line within the new CNT-AIT, the end of the conflict meant a significant reduction of tensions. Divorce is often the solution to a bad marriage.

Once the CNT-CIT was able to implement the congress agreements, it began to grow and develop rapidly. Its membership had doubled between the Congress of Cordoba and the Congress of Zaragoza, and it doubled again between the 2015 Congress and the 2022 Congress of Canovellas and continues to grow sharply. The CNT’s current dynamic is to downplay the importance of other organisations and focus on implementing its own trade union model and empowering the union as much as possible.

This does not mean that some IWA unions are not doing any kind of unionism and have overcome that decade-long struggle that many of their new militants have probably not experienced. It is positive that they do. Seven years after their founding they

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was noted that, in many places, if the IWA group survived, it was because it could make use of a premise (an office or an apartment) of the Confederation. The decision was obvious: if the premises are not controlled, they will have to be sold. There will be no need to revive the pathetic routine of fighting over the premises. There are 20 or 30 premises occupied by the defederates and self-defederates, which, if we add up the cost, amounts to 2 or 3 million euros or even more. The split is small numerically but extensive territorially.

At the moment all the legal claims are being resolved favourably for the CNT and that is the origin of the international IWA campaigns, like the current one, criticizing the CNT. As the CNT decided not to defend itself in public, many people are hallucinating about what happened. But there is a reason behind it, as we have seen.

Conclusions

Through the defence of the IWA's position, we can see what the basic ideas are: *[...] We are the ones who know that to confederate is not to open a franchise, that agreements are not orders, that strength is in trust and that ideas come before acronyms [...]*. Perhaps they are talking about a 'franchise' because of those pseudo-unions of 5 people or less that they have all over the territory, which when they were federated voted in plenary sessions whatever their leaders told them to do by telephone. The part of 'agreements are not orders' is simply glorious. If they are not willing to accept decisions they don't like in the first place, why are they organising? Notice how different this sentence is from the spirit of the old CNT of the 30s and 40s, which in its confederal card explicitly said that decisions were taken by majority, and that you had to respect the committees and not express criticism in public and that not complying with it meant sabotaging the Confederation. But what confidence can there be in the face of constant baseless accusations, slander,

Zaragoza. They found out where they were and in time they proposed the return of Granada to the CNT. And as often happens, people who hadn't been in the union for years came to that assembly. They just went to vote. And even then the proposal to return to the CNT fell one vote short of the 75% majority required by the CNT-IWA statutes to make a decision like this. Eventually they decided to leave anyway and in a few months they formalised this decision by creating a new CNT in Granada. In just two years it was already a bigger union than the one they had left.

Since the Zaragoza Congress, the CNT shielded itself from the split of the IWA. That is why it has two reasons for expelling unions:

1. The use without confederal agreement of premises of confederal patrimony, especially if there is a refusal to hand over keys, documentation and, in short, to make a premises of confederal patrimony available to the Secretariat in the case that it is established that it has access to the use of the same without confederal agreement to back it up.
2. To collaborate in the usurpation of the organisation's acronyms by defederal unions, in joint campaigns, posters, social networks or other media, in which the acronyms of the CNT, CNT-CIT are used together with these unions, indistinctly and indifferently, conveying the idea that they belong to the organisation.

The CNT decided to go to court and ask that the pro-AIT unions not be allowed to call themselves CNT. The fact that there are many local CNTs which are not affiliated to the official CNT increases the confusion, as has been seen in recent years with legal complaints against the CNT for acts committed by the CNT-AIT unions (campaigns, pickets, or posters against employers which they denounce by mistaking them for the CNT, non-payment of electricity or water bills of the premises occupied by AIT unions, etc.). Moreover, it

It is about 7 years since the Spanish CNT-AIT organisation came into existence. Despite its name, which claims a historical trajectory, it is a split from the CNT. A split of almost an entire internal current which fought for control of the Confederation by all possible means, and eventually failed. In short, this is why it ended up outside. This (rather incomplete) article resumes the story of that conflict as seen through the eyes of what is now the CNT (CIT).

The Cordoba Congress, 2010

If we trace back the origins, some can go back to the debates at the Cordoba Congress in 2010. Other people might consider that the position of what would become the CNT-AIT was that of 'CNT the 90s', that was a position centred on rather ideological or aesthetic questions and on calling everyone 'reformist' in an arrogant way, without showing any revolutionary praxis anywhere in Spain, as stated in the Congress of Granada (1995). This view can be confirmed by all the movements and organisations that were related to the CNT in those years. It was not always easy to coexist with our organisation. Others, on the other hand, could point to internal conflicts in the Seville Local Federation or other unions during the 2000s.

Anyway, those sectarian dynamics had changed by 2010. By then a more anarcho-syndicalist current was dominant, which had clear that to make the revolution you had to have strength. And that strength begins with having enough people... and that people comes through proper union action. That is why the various examples of strikes at that time (Tomares, Mercadona...) had marked a path that some cenetista unions began to follow. As they started a trade union practice and grew in membership, they soon gained internal power as well. In addition, the existence of conflicts and union sections in companies forced the union action groups to update their legal and strategic skills. It was vital to stop improvising

and blundering around. We could not go through reinventing the wheel in every area, but we had to look for a common system for the whole Confederation.

However, every advance in one direction implies a conservative reaction in the opposite direction. In this case, a climate hostile to change was created. According to present day CNT-AIT, the syndicalist sector of the CNT in 2010 wanted to move away from principles in order to drag the Confederation towards bureaucratism and who knows what other bad things. For that conservative or orthodox sector, it was a betrayal to propose changes to the CNT's way of acting at the time.

This led to the Congress of Cordoba, which approved by a majority to create a Confederal Technical Cabinet, as a reinforcement of the legal action of the local unions. The aim was to have a structure in which to accumulate the knowledge gained through union action. This Cabinet was not intended to replace the typical union lawyer, but to have the capacity to propose strategies to win, legally and union-wise. This was an important decision. Another one was to hire the workers of the foundation, the FAL. In other words, the union was once again employing people, as it had done decades before (in 1918–23, in 1931–39, in the french Exile, and also in the 70s).

Anyway, the most important decision from Congress was to change the vote count for the unions, making it proportional to their membership, giving greater strength to the unions with more membership.

These decisions took place in a climate of tension, protestation and shouting, culminating in the (in)famous banner reading 'CNT-RIP' and a banner with a circled A, waved by some people from SOV Madrid and other unions while chanting 'A las Barricadas' [Note: SOV is the acronym of General Membership Branch]. The Congress was contested by that union a few months later, without receiving enough support. Those who lived that congress remember that the losing side was lavish in its attempts to block the

fore they had to become a liaison of the nearest union, which was Olot. One of its militants refused to follow this path and, citing personal reasons, joined Pineda de Mar. The real reason was ideological or tactical disagreements and personal antipathies towards Olot. As Pineda was far away, he could do what he wanted, which he took advantage of to create a liaison of Pineda in Gerona. This new entity soon had as many members as Pineda and demanded to be recognized a federated union. But as in Olot they could already smell the move, and as many people in the catalan Regional already knew the person, he was prevented from prospering. Without informing his Pineda mother-union, he had already legalised the Gerona union. And in 2021, convinced and tired that Gerona would never be admitted to the CNT, they joined the IWA. He immediately filed lawsuits with the CNT on the grounds that he was also the secretary of CNT Figueras. This person was indistinctly both the secretary of CNT-AIT Figueras and Gerona, so that we can see the level. He had several trials for the same cause until 2024, when the justice system warned him that he had had enough of wasting their time and that it was not his place to be the CNT in Figueras or Gerona. Unfortunately, during these years he occupied the Figueras premises on several occasions, preventing any CNT activity in that municipality.

Finally, let us return to Granada. We had left it in 2017, when they passed without trauma to the IWA. With the nature of the city, that CNT-AIT had been filled with a new generation of newcomers who had not been there at that time. These people got involved in doing syndicalism and soon they were the second largest union in the whole of the IWA. In fact, at that time (2018–19) the only unions with union activity in the whole IWA were Albacete, Madrid, Granada and Cartagena.

The people who really ran that CNT-AIT Granada realised one thing: in all the plenaries and plenaries of delegates they were going to they only heard about Madrid, Levant and a few other places. They never heard about the Basque Country, Barcelona, Seville or

is being attacked by the CNT'. The SOV supporters took back the premises by force, breaking down the door and emptying a fire extinguisher to the horror of the neighbours. Several people were treated for inhalation of fire extinguisher dust and contusions.

SOV Madrid challenged in court (and lost) the plenary session that expelled them. But in the meantime it joined temporarily the IWA, backed by the Madrid Metal and Education unions. From then on, Toledo was the only voice of this tendency as long as it held out within the CNT. The only new groups that have been created in the IWA are from the Community of Madrid (Alcalá, Colmenar...).

For its part, the new SOV of the CNT of Madrid (CIT), moved to another space, leaving the dispute in the courts for the Tirso de Molina headquarters, which have eventually given the reason to the CIT.

A different matter was that of Oviedo. In 2018, one of its most representative militants published some posts on the union's blog with a sexist and misogynist slant that generated great outrage and indignation. We were in the midst of the influence of the first International Feminist Strike (that it worked quite well in Spain), so many unions demanded the expulsion of this union or even the entire Asturias Regional if the post was not removed. Finally the union expelled the author, but the evil was done and Oviedo could not withstand that internal storm and became a confederal nucleus or liason, without activity for years. In Gijón and León there were some people who were close to the new IWA, in the first case some were expelled and others left. They spent months sabotaging the ringbells, the alarm and the mailboxes of the union. The fact is that these childish attitudes totally discouraged the Asturian unions from approaching the IWA, beyond the obvious sympathy (or connivance) of Candás towards that organisation, today the only case in the whole CNT.

Another front in this kind of cenetista civil war was in Figueras, in Catalonia. This union had become a nucleus in 2018. It had done so because of its inability to continue doing union activity. There-

congress tables, in unnecessarily long interventions to delay agreements aimed to 'win through fatigue', in intimidating the rival by shouting, raising the tone, appeals to principles, emotional blackmail, and all kinds of tasteless tricks.

'Talibanism'

The outcome of the Congress brought together a number of CNT unions which gradually became part of that minority camp, which the anarcho-syndicalist sector contemptuously called 'Taliban', due to its insistence on principles and a dogmatism inherited from the 1980s; or worse, from that CNT of the French Exile which reinterpreted the history of the CNT to its own liking, ignoring that the strength of anarcho-syndicalism laid in plurality and in being the living expression of the proletariat, and not of a small group. The continuous references to the Principles, Tactics and Aims, or PTF (acronym in spanish) for short, had become a kind of dogma set in stone.

Beginning with the internal conflict that began in 2010, the Taliban sector launched a public offensive throughout social networks that lasted for years. Blogs and Facebook pages proliferated, spreading defamations full of disrespect, personal attacks, conspiracy theories, memes about the people in secretariat and, incidentally, networking with like-minded people in order to organise a kind of 'anarchist' union opposition (note the inverted commas). This kind of 'anarchism' arrogated to itself the right to look down on the rest of us just because 'we were not anarchists'. Needless to say, those facebook posts and memes often contained macho, racist, classist and homophobic undertones, and not infrequently, when they weren't talking about how bad the majority of the CNT was, they were spreading any kind of conspiracy theory found on the internet.

Talibans argued that the CNT unions should behave like some kind of anarchist collective that (sometimes) did some syndicalism. In practice, therefore, the CNT was seen as a specific organisation (or anarchist organisation) rather than a trade union. The regional committees or the confederal committee were mercilessly attacked as bureaucratic bodies which dominated the debates and the basic agreements of the organisation in an authoritarian way. The alternative was for the unions to decide everything as if they were a coordinating body, outside the committees. As these committees were accused of wanting to live off the organisation, it soon came to personal attacks. The insults grew in the following years, making the atmosphere unbreathable in some places and, of course, preventing any substantial growth in such significant years as those that followed 15th of May, 2011.

Another situation to bear in mind is that, as happened to the CNT in exile or in the 80s and 90s, there were many small unions (in previous decades they were called 'pressure unions'), of 5 people, which had 1 vote at the plenary sessions of delegates. As there were several of these in each regional, those small unions could win the Plenaries of Delegates (in those plenaries each union has 1 vote; it doesn't matter if you have 5 or 500 members), while the anarcho-syndicalist unions (which used to have more than 100 members) could win the Plenary sessions (in those, each union have votes proportionally according to its membership, so the big ones get more votes than the smaller ones). It goes without saying that in most of the sessions (both plenary of delegates and regular plenary sessions) there were very tense situations and the Confederation's intranet could testify a neverending exchange of insulting documents.

places, and their successors were not interested in the IWA, as the CNT-Joaquín Costa occupying that space, as mentioned above.

As for CNT-Joaquín Costa, it should be remembered that they sued CNT over the name, presenting themselves as the legitimate CNT. At that moment they wanted to control the Salamanca Civil War Archives that were going to be returned to the organisations after 80 years.

In Madrid the situation was much more tense. The atmosphere had been worsening for years and the disconnection was total within the Local Federation between the SOV, Metal and Education on the one hand, and Graphic Arts and Transports on the other. Within the Central (Castile and Madrid) Regional, Valladolid or Villaverde took the side of the latter, making the syndicalist current the majority over the other, which was only defended by Toledo and sometimes Salamanca or Zamora. In June 2018 Graphic Arts proposed the defederation of the Madrid Local Federation and the reconstitution of a single SOV based on all the reunited Madrid unions, except for the SOV and Metal affiliates. The reason would be multiple disrespect, attacks and misbehaviour and constant violations of the estatutes and agreements, protected by their unions.

The July 2017 regional plenary of delegates accepted this proposal from Artes Gráficas. This was voted on at a regional plenary, which was held in Villaverde in October. The proposal was approved. About 40 SOV Madrid observers went to witness this votation, denouncing ideological persecution, and hurled insults such as 'fascists' and 'social democrats' at those present, generating a climate of threats of physical violence.

At the same time, knowing the result of the plenary session, other like-minded militants of Graphic Arts and Transports changed the locks on the Madrid premises, occupied by the now defederates SOV and Metal. They let those who were there to leave without further incident. But the people of the SOV, on learning of this move, circulated by whatsapp the news that 'the CNT-AIT

In September 2017 Granada joined painlessly the ‘CNT Congresos de Benisa y Villalonga’. Another departure towards the IWA, was that of Toledo (2019): it was defederated for not contributing to the CNT for more than 6 months. And another departure was that of Fraga, the only union of the Aragonese Regional that ended up in the IWA.

On the other hand, Badalona would remain in the organisation until July 2021, leaving it after finding itself in an absolute minority in the catalan Regional. The truth is that by then the situation in Barcelona had calmed down in this respect. The reason was the entry into the IWA of the CNT-Joaquín Costa (aka CNT-Catalunya; Joaquín Costa is the street of its headquarters in Barcelona), that defederation of the 1990s. The leaders of CNT-Joaquín Costa always knew how to play their cards. For example, in 2010 the Centenary of the CNT was celebrated jointly between the two CNTs. After the centenary the Barcelona assembly of Joaquín Costa voted that the organisation would join the CNT, bringing this split to an end. But its leaders overruled the assembly and this did not take place. Eventually the whole assembly members either moved to CNT or abandoned anarcho-syndicalism, leaving the CNT Joaquín Costa as an empty shell for years, until it was refilled again years later with new membership. Anyway, in 2019 this union joined the IWA. It is paradoxical that shortly afterwards, Badalona followed Joaquín Costa. It should be remembered that it was this Badalona union that led the orthodox position in the 1990s, which would expel Joaquín Costa and others.

In Barcelona, in the conflict of 2015–16, a commission of enquiry of the Regional intervened, which demonstrated the relationship between certain militants and the split. A plenary session approved the expulsion of these militants. But as they were not named with names and surnames, the unions that had them did not act in any way. However, with time the most pro-IWA people inside the CNT Barcelona union left, leaving for other

The defederations (2011–2015)

Andalusia was the first region to experience conflicts. During 2011, the Cadis union began to accuse some unions like Seville, Malaga, El Puerto de Santa Maria and Jerez for acting against certain people who were close to the Cádiz tendency, which, as we have seen, was headed by the SOV Madrid. The fact is that the big unions (such as Seville), which had a considerable amount of labour disputes on their hands, got tired of the insults in the Andalusian regional and expelled the unions in Cadiz and Motril. These expulsions were contested internally by the SOV Madrid, Sagunto (both from outside of Andalusia) and other smaller unions in Andalusia. It has to be said that Seville had already had problems a few years before with some people inside, so it had no patience.

The situation worsened when an attempt was made to repossess the Cadis premises by changing the lock and taking some of the material there (books, documents and some other office stuff). This was presented as an intolerable attack by the members of Cádiz and their supporters, while the rest saw it quite normal wanting to recover their own patrimony. A new and very important front was opening up, the premises (the buildings, apartments and offices of CNT). Some may see here the same pattern that took place in the 1980s, with the split of what would later become the Spanish CGT. Something similar had even occurred in the defederation of the CNT-Catalunya or Joaquín Costa in the 1990s. It should be noted here that the direct ‘heirs’ of those who are now complaining about the trials were protagonists of those ‘recuperations’ of premises in the 1980s.

A few years later, the situation in the Andalusian regional CNT shifted towards the, let’s say, ‘officialist’ side, and the unions in Chiclana (2013), Camas (2014), Huelva and Vélez (2015) were defederated (expelled).

The tensions then shifted to the regional unions in Galicia and Levant and to the local federation in Madrid.

Although the conflict dates back to 10 years earlier with some expulsions of people of the syndicalist sector by the orthodox, the definitive problems in Levant originated when a regional secretariat was set up in 2014. It was challenged as inorganic as it did not comply with the regulations of internal statutes. The April 2014 plenary sessions had appointed a general secretariat admitting the vote of Utiel-Requena, which by then had dissolved as a union, and therefore it should not have voted. This situation was denounced by Valencia to the confederal committee, which agreed with it. Then, the regional committee had to be rebuilt with Valencia as the general secretary, given that it was by far the largest union in the Levant Regional. Then the smaller unions, such as La Safor, proposed the defederation of Valencia.

In this interim secretariat, the treasury of the regional had been left in the hands of the Sagunto union, which, in order to facilitate its accounts and reduce expenses, as they claimed, put the balance of the Regional into their own local union account. Some time later, the unions in Valencia and Elche demanded to see the bank statements, which were not presented to them in conditions.

This was brought to the attention of the confederal secretariat, which demanded that the Sagunto union submit the accounts. When it failed to do so within the deadline, the Elche union called for the defederation of Sagunto. Sagunto was accused of allowing other unions of its current not to pay dues to the Confederation. Sagunto was supported by other small unions in the Regional, all aligned with the orthodox or Taliban line, creating a situation of total rupture. Both sides called for the expulsion of their opponents.

As anyone can see, the situation was seriously deadlocked. It was impossible to do any kind of constructive work in these conditions. It came unstuck by force, in 2015, when the Secretariat of the Confederal Committee sided with Valencia and Elche. In a confederal plenary session, the Confederación of Levant was urged to defederate the unions of La Plana, Sagunto, La Safor, Marina Alta,

conference and the founding congress of the International Labour Confederation (ILC), held in Parma, 11–14 May 2018. At that time 6 unions united: CNT, FAU, USI, FORA, ESE from Greece and IP from Poland. But the agreement was to re-found the IWA and not to create a new organisation (ILC). As a result, there were new controversies within the Confederation.

The present day IWA has developed thanks to the incorporation of new sections in America and Asia, which take it out of the traditional European endogamy. This is the International's greatest success in decades. The size of the unions were so tiny that when the spanish CNT-AIT was formally admitted it became the biggest section with a few hundred members. For its part, the ILC has admitted the powerful IWW sections in Britain and North America, each with thousands of members.

In 2017 was held a conference in Perpignan (south of France) presenting a book called "When CNT cried Independence", showing the links in 1920s of anarchosyndicalists with Macià and its catalan nationalists subversive groups. In this conference, it also participate the general secretary of the CNT region of Catalonia and Balearic Islands. He was there to explain the position of the union on the (failed) self-determination process that was going on in Catalonia. The IWA secretary, Akai, promoted by facebook a concentration against this act. The small group outside the library, held a banner that said "Viva la CNT Congreso de Benisa", and the CNT militant was insulted by them.

The last expulsions and abandonments

All this review of the recent history of the IWA and the ILC serves to frame the last phase of the internal conflict, which took place mainly in the Barcelona and Madrid unions. But first let us look elsewhere.

took root among the cenetista militancy. This was the reason for deciding to leave the IWA in 2015, at the CNT's Congress of Zaragoza.

In the IWA there were grotesque situations, such as national sections of just 3 or 5 people. They accused the big sections of being reformists when sometimes those same militants were also members of the social democratic unions. Some of them were even people unable to do any kind of tradeunionism and were able to make decisions that affected a whole workers' international. All of this produced a lot of resentment among the big sections.

When the CNT announced its withdrawal from the IWA, other organisations dealt with the issue (FAU in Germany, USI in Italy and SolFed in Britain) or it was a point for their regular congresses (FORA in Argentina, Rocinante in Greece). The CNT was invited as an observer to the congresses of USI, FAU and Rocinante (all held in 2016). CNT sent a letter inviting all IWA sections to bilateral contacts, but some sections (ZSP from Poland, PA from Slovakia and ASF from Australia) did not respond. From the FAU and USI congresses came the idea of a joint meeting between the three organisations. This was the origin of the Milan meeting (25–26 June 2016) and the Barakaldo Conference (26–27 November). At this conference no firm decisions were taken yet and it was all about information exchanges. IWW from USA and Canada, IWW from UK and Ireland, FAU and IWW from Germany, IP from Poland, USI from Italy, ESE and Rocinante from Greece, CNT-GAP and CNT-Vignoles from France and FORA from Argentina participated, as well as we received messages of support from the Sociedad Obrera from Paraguay, FOB from Brazil and CNT-STCPP from France. At this conference the support of several organisations for the re-foundation of the IWA was shown.

At the IWA Congress of Warsaw, therefore, the CNT, USI, FAU and FORA were expelled. Thus the IWA was left without the largest organisations of the international and the largest remaining union was the Polish ZSP and the British SolFed. The process culminated in further meetings between the expelled sections: the Frankfurt

Alcoy, Elda and Albacete. They were given 30 days to fulfill the agreement. As it was not convened, the Confederal Committee disbanded the entire Regional, reconstituting it the next day with the unions of Valencia, Vall d'Albaida, Elche and Alicante. As can be seen, the problem was solved in an expeditious manner. The expelled unions complained of inorganic defederation, but the fact is that they were already out.

In Galicia something similar happened, with the small unions attacking the big ones. In that case the blocs were Coruña, Vigo, Arousa and Lugo against Compostela and Ferrol. The conflict, although it had been simmering for a long time, escalated in 2014 when the Lugo union accused Compostela of buying votes and rigging to win decision power. According to the accusation, it paid large sums of money to make it appear stronger than it really was. Lugo also warned of a 'nationalist infiltration' in Compostela. Compostela asked for an audit to be carried out, as they had nothing to hide, and the other accusations were dismissed as absurd, as workers of all ideologies were affiliated to it. Something similar happened in Catalonia, when some unions supported declarations or acts in favour of the right to self-determination without abandoning the anarchist movement (and in 2017 most part of the catalan anarchist movement was doing the same).

Then the defederations began. In the case of Pontevedra, it was for not paying dues for more than 6 months. Subsequently, the unions in Vigo and Lugo were defederated for making accusations without evidence (defamations). For its part, Arousa did it on its own, leaving the organisation. Lugo launched the idea of creating its own regional union. They held some meetings in 2015, but nothing practical came out of them. Coruña took part in those meetings, leaving the CNT and changing its name to Union Anarcosindicalista de Coruña. There were important differences between the escissionist unions, as they could not build anything solid.

Originally, it was SOV Madrid the union that led all this escissionist process. However, in 2014 this union accepted a mass lay-

off in Marsans (a big travel agency) and lost quite of its legitimacy. It was signed by one of the visible heads of its current. Also in Madrid, the IT union, called STSI, left the Confederation. They did not want to join the Taliban camp, which already saw itself in the minority, and, speaking out of weariness, they sent a paper to the next congress under the title 'dissolution of the CNT', arguing that it was not that they wanted it but that it was already de facto dissolved and that they were leaving because they wanted to see an 'anarchist CNT' in order to revive the CNT.

From some nearby unions (Toledo, Madrid, León), in that time, it was reported that 20 unions had already been expelled or had left and that this was a full-blown crisis situation. At that time, personal attacks, insults through social networks, memes and in several unions the atmosphere became unbearable, given the threats and aggressive manners (and at the same time victimizing themselves) that constituted clear cases of harassment. Individual perpetrators of such practices sometimes had to be expelled, contributing to a worsening of the climate, as other unions portrayed them as 'martyrs' who had been retaliated against for 'thinking different'.

Anarcho-syndicalist Defence and COA and the Zaragoza Congress, 2015.

Faced with this situation described in Andalusia, Levante and Galicia, the sector in favour of the defederated built a structure to coordinate a response. As said before, in Levante and Galicia there were already, at this time, formal meetings between the expelled unions, but this was not yet the case in the rest of the Spanish regions, since there were still unions of their current inside CNT. Therefore, there was a situation of instrumentalisation of some federated unions (Candás, Toledo, Alicante, Almería...) in order to transmit internally documents with the positions of their whole tendency.

said anything, so this is probably the first account you've ever read on this issue.

In view of what was happening with this IWA, the CNT decided at the Congress of Zaragoza to stop contributing to the IWA, which was like demanding to being expelled. This meant that it was no longer dependent on an international to which it had been linked since 1922. However, its defence was that 'this is not our IWA'. Let us see why.

Three months before the IWA Congress of Porto (2014), the secretariat decided to 'provisionally suspend' the German FAU. It was thus deprived of a vote at that congress. The CNT protested arguing that in the statutes of the IWA there was no such figure of 'suspension' and they said that they were de facto removing the FAU from IWA because of problems between the German and Polish sections (the one with the General Secretariat of the International). This de facto expulsion was based on agreements emanating from the FAU Congress, which allegedly contravened those of the IWA by voting (but not approving) a proposal to leave the IWA. According to the FAU, its new membership did not understand the enormous voting power that the small sections of the International had over the big sections, which had real workplace conflicts (let's note this parallelism with the situation in Spain). In return, the Eastern European sections accused the FAU of collusion with 'enemy' unions of the IWA, such as the Swedish SAC, the Polish IP or the Spanish CGT.

At the same Congress of Warsaw (2016), the CNT again asked for an increase in section dues. CNT was the organisation that contributed financially the most to the IWA. On its defense, the Secretariat questioned how decisions were taken in the CNT. At this congress it was again noted that the small sections – real propaganda groups of very few people – dominated the international organisation over the big ones, which were proper national trade unions with thousands of members. This feeling, that the IWA was a useless body which the CNT financed to be attacked in return,

‘CNT-Congress of Benisa’ and left the decision to a future congress or conference.

These unions that sent their adhesion to the IWA were: Almería, Granada, Puerto Real, Guadix, Candás, León, Oviedo, Lanzarote, Barcelona, Tarragona, Construcción Madrid, Metal Madrid, SOV Madrid, Alacant, Cartagena and Torrelavega. In this list it can be seen some unions that are still in the CNT today, while the rest moved to the new CNT-AIT. For example, Puerto Real communicated its abandonment of the CNT in January 2016. There was also an entire Regional, Murcia, which left in that year, as people from Lorca, Murcia and Cartagena had participated in the COA.

At that time these unions held a new congress in Villalonga (Valencia), with the intention of drafting statutes ‘clean of articles that have given rise, or could give rise, to authoritarian practices, top-down structures and executive committees’. Another of its priorities was to formulate the proposed definitive and unified accession of this CNT to the IWA. However, apart from trying to join IWA, those unions didn’t have much in common and were very diverse.

The IWA and the ILC

Laure Akai, general secretary of the IWA since 2014, was always very active in promoting the split. She visited like-minded unions and liaised with others. Her personal blog served to unify a version of events and articulate a strategy of attack. And from her’s and other blogs, fakes and accusations were made against the committees, bordering on conspiracy theory, in order to justify their actions. They drew a victimised account of events, when they explained what happened to them for trying to ‘save CNT’ when the majority of the Organisation responded firmly. Akai also wrote in all kinds of internet forums, in Spanish, English and German, spreading their version of events. And the other side never

On 25 July 2015, a meeting was held in Madrid to set up a new organisation:

Under the name of Defensa Anarcosindical (D.A.) we built a confederation of Regional Anarcho-Syndicalist Federations that have as their ultimate aim the realisation of Libertarian Communism and as priority objectives:

- To stop and reverse the process of degradation of the historical principles, tactics and aims of the CNT.
- To prepare the structure of a new anarcho-syndical organisation if we see that this process is irreversible.

This organisation was structured territorially, with militants in both federated and defederated unions. Their aim was to ‘recover the CNT’ or, at least, to ‘save’ what they could. In their subsequent meetings they elaborated a tactic that involved boycotting the participation of the unions in the 11th Congress in Zaragoza (December 2015) and delegitimising it. This would be completed by promoting the payment of the minimum possible dues (5 affiliates) in order to bleed the organisation financially.

This D.A. did not include entire trade unions, but only certain militants who held power positions in the local committees. From that position, when handling internal or external discourse and communication, the impression was always given that the whole union was behind it, as a bloc. Due to the influence of these militants, for example, some important unions (SOV in Madrid or Barcelona) did not go to the Congress.

This structure was succeeded in time by the Coordinadora Obrera Anarquista (COA), created at the beginning of 2016, which had more or less the same components. So, militants from Almería,

Oviedo, Candás, Barcelona, Tarragona, Torrelavega, Lorca, Murcia, Cartagena, Madrid, Lanzarote and Granada formed part of this entity. It was a kind of specific organisation that articulated a tendency that intended some local unions to leave the CNT.

This whole affair ended up alarming the Confederation, which reacted by setting up a confederal commission of enquiry, or research. Following its work, it published internally the e-mails that those unions threatening to leave had been exchanged. Often from the main mailbox of the union itself, the DA or the COA talked openly about breaking the CNT and the mails were sent to many other places.

Ironically, militants from those escissionist unions, who did not agree with the position of their union in this matter, had sent the mails to the regional or confederal committees, giving them the necessary proof. Therefore, the organisation had reliable evidence of who was behind the split, with names and surnames.

The case of Tarragona was an example. Officially it was expelled for not paying the Catalan-Balearic Regional 6 monthly dues. But the disconnection had been going on for a long time. To avoid defederation, several meetings were held, in which militants from other unions, who did not want them to leave, took part. And after the defederation they were asked for the premises, which they refused to leave. When the organisation put it up for sale, the real estate company was given by the defederated a document stating that a secretary general of the Regional had ceded it to all effects and purposes to the Tarragona union. The document was fake, which has criminal consequences in Spain.

One person of the Tarragona members also participated in the Barcelona union. There he coincided with other militants from the collective *Acció Llibertària de Sants*, along with other comrades, and they could managed the union around 2015. At this time (2015–16), they tried to make the Barcelona union to leave the CNT, but they did not succeed because the assembly did not see it as appropriate. In any case, by controlling the Barcelona committee, the

Tarragona committee and later also the Manresa committee, they fought the ‘battle’ throughout the catalan Regional, with the occasional support of Badalona, Cornellà, El Prat, among others.

Faced with the CNT’s refusal, approved at the congress, to stop contributing to the IWA, these unions decided to contribute on their own to the IWA. Their intention was to contribute jointly as the CNT-AIT and to pay as a block. If they had contributed each one on their own, they would be listed as a split, and if they were admitted to the IWA then IWA would be openly taking part in the split of a national section. Thus they sorted out the problem. A de facto CNT-AIT was born. We will see this later.

A not minor matter, approved at the Congress of Zaragoza (2015), was the rise in the minimum membership to become a CNT union, from 5 to 15. Likewise, the minimum for branch unions was to be raised to 50 members. This measure put a stop to ‘pressure unions’ which, without any verifiable union activity, acted in CNT internal sessions (plenaries and congresses) according to the political criteria of a particular current. Some small unions, unable to reach 15 members, took the opportunity to leave the CNT. Others, such as *Construcción de Madrid*, simply dissolved.

The breakaway unions promoted a new congress, held in Benisa in November 2016, which would structure them at national level. This congress was proposed by Albacete, who proposed the re-founding of the CNT, using the DA/COA as a link between unions. They also promoted a particular conference for Levant. However, that tendency was not mature enough by the time of the Benisa congress and only 7 unions attended in person (almost all from Levant), with 5 other liasons and unions sending support.

In December 2016 the Warsaw Congress of the IWA took place. Two delegations of the Spanish CNT could be seen there: one was going to communicate the result of the Congress (which implied their expulsion), while the other (composed even by people who were in unions still federated) assured that they would continue to be the Spanish section of the IWA. The IWA did not admit this