

SINEWS No. 9

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VITORIA SIX GO FREE!

Against all the odds, the members of the CNT-U who were accused of attempting to assassinate Snr Casanova, the chief of personnel at Michelin in Vitoria, were found not guilty by the Audiencia Nacional on December the 21st, 1987.

This is almost unbelievable, as the Audiencia Nacional was originally set up by Franco (although it had a different title in those days) and the 3 judges who hear cases at this court are still drawn from his original list of names. In the end though, even this could not compensate for the prosecution's case, which was a shambles, based solely on 'confessions' tortured out of the accused in police custody. (See Sinews no.8).

An illustration of the almost farcical nature of the proceedings is given by a charge brought against one of the six at an earlier hearing on October 28th, in which the prosecution accused him of 'robbing a bank somewhere in San Sebastian, sometime in the Summer of 1980, with help from...someone else.' Similarly, it was claimed that the accused had not only menaced the management at Textil Vitoriana, but went so far as to put the frighteners on the works committee as well... despite the fact that the whole of the committee was at that time made up of members of the CNT-U.

An earlier sentence against Vicente Alvarado of 4 years for armed robbery is now under appeal and the defence is confident it will be quashed. The CNT-U is in the process of filing a case against the police for mistreatment of its members and is claiming compensation for its costs.

This is obviously an excellent result, in which the demonstrations of solidarity which were organised for the accused (including petitions and financial help from the CNT-AIT in Tarragona, Esparreguera and Salamanca) played an important part. There were demonstrations outside the court in Madrid each day and telegrams, etc were sent from all over the world, including a petition with over 430 signatures from S.I.N.

BACKGROUND DETAILS:

The six accused were: Guillermo Guerrero, Santiago Abad, Vicente Alvarado, Jose Collado, Guillermo Argos and Andres Sanchez.

The CNT-U comrades were not the first to be accused of assassinating Snr Casanova - in 1982 Vicente Senar, who has no connection with the CNT, 'confessed' to the same crime in police custody. Unfortunately for the prosecution it turned out he was at work at the time, so that made it a bit difficult for them to proceed with their case against him...

When the police turned their attention to the CNT-U they also credited them with support from one Jose Merino, an ex member of the CNT, who is in jail for assassinating a PSOE senator, Enrique Cases, after leaving the organisation. This was presumably an attempt to deflect any solidarity from the left by associating the CNT-U with the murder of a member of the socialist party, even though the senator in question was extremely unpopular. Merino was meant to be the professional hard man behind the mythical group of CNT-U members which terrorised Vitoria in 1979/80, though he always denied this.

THE FIRST TRIAL:

From the original charges, which numbered roughly 100, the first trial on October 28th handed down the following sentences to the five accused. (Guillermo Guerrero was not involved in this stage.)

Jose Collado, Guillermo Argos and Santiago Abad went to Miranda on January 28th, 1980, to see a notorious blackleg in relation to the confrontations going on at Michelin during this period. (see Sinews no.8). As it was not unknown for scabs to carry guns at this period, a fight broke out when he reached into his inside pocket. As a result all three were found guilty of assault.

Collado and Andres Sanchez supposedly threw a molotov cocktail through the shop window of Galerias Preciados, a retail chain which had sacked one of its employees for joining the CNT-U. Sanchez admits smashing the window of the shop, but says he only tried to set light to the curtains with a lighter. They were found guilty of arson.

Between December 1980 and 1982, Vicente Alvarado and Jose Merino supposedly stole 1½ million pts (£7,500) during 3 bank robberies in San Sebastian. They were finally found guilty of one of these robberies.

The accusation that Alvarado, Collado and Abad sent threatening letters to the management at Michelin was not proved.

Alvarado received a sentence of 4 years (which will probably be quashed on appeal).

Argos and Abad received 1 month and 1 day.

Collado and Sanchez were given 2 months and 2 days.

THE MAIN TRIAL:

Vicente Alvarado was not involved in this trial, which began on December 1st. The other five were accused of attempting to assassinate Snr Casanova on May 16th, 1980, with help from Jose 'Durruti' Merino. The six men faced a total of 90 years in jail. After a trial lasting 20 days all the accused were found not guilty.

This result has obvious implications for the workings of the Spanish legal system and the conduct of its police.

Page 16 of the final judgement specifically acknowledges that Collado was '...not in a fit state to answer before his (initial) interrogation' when the 6 were taken to Madrid a few days after their arrest. The CNT-U is taking out a prosecution against the police - though it has taken 10 years for the case of Augustin Rueda (an anarchist beaten to death in police custody in 1978) to finally come to light. In that case massive areas of bruising on the dead body were originally explained by the police as the effects of shadows caused by the camera flash!

The case has also strengthened calls for an accused person to have their right to remain silent in police custody protected and has gone some way to undermine the present legal system in Spain which is based on non-jury courts (some of them, like the Audiencia Nacional, almost military tribunals.) It is obviously another nail in the coffin of the notorious Anti-terrorist law, which looks likely to be repealed at some point as part of the governments attempts to alienate moderate Basque nationalists from ETA's armed struggle.

DOCKERS WIN. FINAL SCORE - 2:0.

Spain's 'socialist' government has finally thrown in the towel and accepted that they won't be able to privatise the docks... at least not in the foreseeable future. According to a prominent member of the OEPB (the Barcelona section of the dockers' co-ordinadora) the government has agreed to all the workers demands in negotiations which took place over the new year.

As explained in Sinews nos. 7 & 8, following on from the defeat of Contenemar, the main threat to the dockers' working conditions and future solidarity became the government's plan to introduce 22 regional 'state councils' which are meant to replace the OTP, the national body which runs the docks at present. The government was hoping this would mean 22 different negotiating bodies, signing 22 different agreements with dockers in different parts of the country, and declared that it was going to impose this new structure without any interference from the dockers. This is where they were wrong...

On the 28th of December 1987 there was a one day national strike of all the country's dockers, which was to be followed by a 1 week strike seven days later, then an indefinite strike seven days after that, until the government agreed to negotiate about the nature of this new structure.

After the first day's strike the government caved in and in subsequent talks has agreed to the creation of a national council for the 22 state councils (ie the OTP by another name) which will sign agreements which apply to all dockers on a national level. So much for that attempt to divide and rule.

The docker in question also made the comment that Spanish legislation is always drafted in an extremely vague way, which means that everything depends on how it is applied at a later stage. (It also explains why I have so much trouble trying to figure out what is going on over there.) In this context, though the state councils ('consejos estatales') will still come into existence, they will not create any real changes. The dockers carry on being one of the most united and militant workforces in Europe, whose vital importance in the Spanish economy means they have now been able to beat off two-all out attempts by the country's ruling class to break them. There is no doubt that the state will come back for another try one day, but till then the dockers can celebrate... and so can we.

PSOE CONGRESS:

Spain's 'socialist' party, the PSOE, celebrated it's latest congress in January, and by all accounts it was a classic bit of stage management. The only interruption to all this came at the end when Nicholas Redondo, general secretary of the UGT (the trade union associated with the party), turned up like the bad fairy to tell Prime Minister Gonzales that his policies were favouring the rich at the expense of the poor. For a leader of the UGT to bite the hand that feeds him like this is quite something, so given the popularity of programmes such as Dallas and Falcon Crest in Spain, this one should run and run.

BROKEN PROMISES:

Spain's official unemployment figure rose to 3 million (21%) in January, despite the PSOE's election promise to bring the number down. They are also contemplating the integration of their air force into NATO in contradiction to a promise made before the referendum on NATO membership in '76. (Source: The Guardian 25 & 26, 1, 88.)

CNT-U'S TENTH CONFERENCE:

Further details to supplement those given in the last issue of Sinews about the conference which was held on the 2nd - 5th of July.

Black Flag have acknowledged in issue no.178 that the article which they originally claimed came out in La Vanguardia after this congress giving details of the CNT-U's 'rejection of anarchism' actually came out before it as a piece of speculation. There may be some truth in the idea that it was floated by some of the reformist elements in the CNT-U's national committee, but if this is the case their ideas were decisively rejected by the congress which followed.

They are correct to say that Marcelino Camacho, general secretary of the CCOO (communist trade union), was invited to speak at the congress and certain delegates left the hall, though not the organisation, in disgust.

Apparently a group of delegates from Vitoria were near the entrance to the conference hall when Camacho arrived and gave him a very unfriendly welcome, which is not surprising when you consider the role which CCOO has played in the disputes at Michelin. (See Sinews no.4) However the delegation from Madrid arrived at this point and welcomed him into the hall. When he began to speak he was greeted by cat calls from several delegates who then left in disgust. This group apparently included delegates from the following cities:

GALLACIA, THE BASQUE COUNTRY, ZARAGOZA and SANTANDER.

These sections can be seen as forming the radical wing of the CNT-U, along with several others such as:

BURGOS, TRANSPORT* and the neighbourhood of SANT ANDREU in BARCELONA, ALICANTE and METAL in VALENCIA.

However, it would be wrong to see this as representing a split in the CNT-U, as some quotes from recent copies of 'Oveja Negra', which is published in Vitoria, will show.

'These days you can attend a congress of the CNT at which there are lively and important, even highly charged debates, without anyone forgetting that we are still all in the same boat...The old ghost of splits in the organisation is a thing of the past.

Vitoria is the first section which would disagree with some of the things done by the Secretariat in Madrid. We've made this clear in public and we'll carry on doing so, thanks to the opportunities we have in this organisation to criticise our 'bosses'. However, Jose March was re-elected at the last congress and, whether we criticise him or not, he remains our general secretary.'

Examples of such criticism are common in Oveja Negra. The postal workers section in Irun describes the campaign organised from Madrid to support their efforts in the elections to works committees as having '...ignored completely agreements and decisions taken at a meeting of unions for each province, with the result that they simply put out the kind of propaganda which they saw fit to produce.'

This presumably refers to such things as the notorious 'Vote CNT' stickers, etc. In contrast the postal workers in Barcelona put out a poster with a picture of an ostrich saying 'Would you vote for someone who was going to ignore you?' 'Vote for yourself - support the CNT: Independence, Participation and Accountability'

* 'Transport' includes postal workers as well.

CENTRALISATION: The changes in the CNT-U's national structure mentioned in No.8 may also include the regional secretaries, who have a seat on the national committee, being chosen centrally 'so as to ensure the CNT has a national team that can work together effectively.' However, this idea flies in the face of the CNT's traditional regional autonomy and is sure to be strongly resisted.

UNION STRATEGY: On the 19th and 20th of September, 1987, the CNT-U held a further meeting of unions as part of its tenth congress to discuss union strategy (ie elections to the works committees, etc) in San Fernando de Henares. (Wherever that is...)

When the discussion got round to social contracts, the vast majority of the delegates were obviously against these, but some unions from Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia were not, seeing them as a form of collective negotiation. In fact there is an obvious difference between agreeing to call off a specific strike in return for certain points conceded by the bosses, and agreeing to give up the right to strike for a period of months or even years in return for concessions (such as a fall in inflation or the number of unemployed) which in many cases are never delivered anyway. For these reasons the CNT-U remains opposed to all social contracts.

ACROSS THE NORTH EAST CORNER...

Spain is not only a very big country, it also has all its main cities spread out near the coastline. For that reason it's best to think of it as a collection of regions rather than just one country... unless you want to spend all your time on a train. In early January I was able to cover the north east corner, from Barcelona to Vitoria, most of which is really Catalonia and the Basque Country, rather than Spain.

BARCELONA: The most interesting part of my stay in Barcelona was a visit to the CNT-U's postal workers' section. (See Sinews no.4 for background on strike in '85). The first national elections to works committees for 'functionaries' were held in the winter of '87, with functionaries including any government employee (ie some teachers, postal workers, railway workers, etc) as well as civil servants - though some of these had their elections along with everyone else in late '86.

Anyway, the CNT-U did very well in Barcelona province, increasing its share of the seats to 30% which is second only to the CC00, who got 50%. There was a less dramatic, but very promising, improvement in the CNT-U's strength amongst postal workers on a nationwide basis, with the original 3 centres where they had delegates before the elections (Barcelona, Tarragona and Madrid) being expanded to 27. This has had the important effect of giving them more than 5% of the vote on a national basis, which means they will be able to attend national negotiations in this sector - though without being able to have a vote at this level until they reach 10%.

The comrades in Barcelona did not see this inability to vote as a significant loss. Their strategy in relation to the committees is mainly that they use them to get information which they can take to open assemblies of all workers. As well as this, the 40 hours a month paid leave that each delegate gets comes in useful, though it is only used for doing the 'paper work', not for taking decisions. They have always shared this free time out amongst whoever happens to have clerical work to do, rather than seeing it as belonging to certain individuals.

Up till now this has been done on an ad-hoc basis as the CNT-U was previously not recognised as a 'representative' union in negotiations because it had less than 10% of the seats on the committee in Barcelona. Now that this hurdle has been cleared the branch intends to call a meeting towards the end of January and organise this use of it's 'horas sindical' on a formal basis.

Generally speaking, I was very impressed by the open atmosphere at the postal workers' branch in Barcelona. For example, shortly after I arrived there they asked me what I thought of the CNT-U having seats on the works committees, then agreed whole heartedly when I said that they could be useful, but they were also very dangerous, and some people in the organisation seemed to be forgetting this. One interesting statistic is that the turnout in these latest elections was over 70%... not an easy thing to ignore if you're trying to get through to ordinary workers.

The postal workers seem to be doing especially well in Barcelona, even producing a bulletin, 'El Correo Libertario'. One reason for this may be the virtual absence of CNT-AIT members in their workplace, which means there is none of the usual confusion and futile confrontations which arise from two groups both claiming the initials 'CNT'.

ZARAGOZA: This part of Spain is the CNT-U's main centre for 'globalism' (ie involving ecologists, feminists, etc in the organisation) and has experienced an amazing level of growth in the past few years.

Before the main elections to works committees in late '86 they had only 16 delegates - as of January '88 they now have 65. The minimum number of members required to form a local federation of the CNT is 50 (ie at least 2 union branches) and the CNT-U recently achieved this in Huesca (the second town in Aragon, the region around Zaragoza) when it added a teachers' union to the union of mixed professions there. The CNT-U also won 4 of the 7 seats in a bank in this city, compared to having none previously. In another city, Teruel, the organisation won its first two seats recently.

Three different bulletins are produced here, two for teachers and one, 'La Voz Libertaria' which has a print run of 5,000 a month, produced by members of the CNT-U at the General Motors plant in the city. They won 4 seats on the committee at the last elections, where previously they had none.

There are collectives for women, students and a general group concerned with libertarian alternatives, as well as 3 co-ops which are totally or mainly made up of CNT-U members. There are also plans to renovate some houses in Ruesta, an abandoned village near Pamplona, so that they can be used for Summer schools, etc.

The reason I have all this information is that the comrades in Zaragoza are into computers in a big way and gave me a detailed print out of their present and past situations... in English. (Let me know if you'd like a copy). They also teach evening classes 5 days a week in computing and running a co-op, thanks to finance from the EEC, via INEM, a government body which in this case is more like the WEA than MSC, in as much as all the teachers are CNT-U members and the union has total control over how the courses are organised. (This contrasts with the CNT-U in Madrid, where they pay a body of professional outsiders to run the courses.)

The CNT-U in Aragon will be meeting on January the 14th to discuss the relationship between collectives and unions in the CNT. At present collectives are allowed to be part of the CNT-U in Aragon with the same rights as union branches, but this does not apply nationally.

VITORIA: As well as celebrating the results of the recent trail I was able to get some interesting information about how the CNT-U works in Michelin.

First though, some general data: The CNT-U in Vitoria has about 700 affiliates in roughly 120 firms, in 50 of which they are represented on the works committee. (Some branches choose not to stand in the first place, which is perfectly acceptable.). Their most important industries, apart from the Michelin plant, are metal, cleaning, banks and transport.

In Michelin they have 5 delegates on the committee and about 200 members, out of a workforce which has been cut from 4,400 to 3,800. Their main opposition on the committees now comes from the CCOO as many scabs have deserted the 'independent' union in the past few years when they saw what a good job the CCOO was doing, eg. selling jobs for wage stability, etc.

One aspect of the CNT-U's structure within Michelin of which I was previously unaware is the amount of rotation they have been able to implement. As a result of this they have been able to continue as an effective branch even though every one of the original 'leading militants' from '76 have by now left the company for one reason or another. As the practical implementation of a genuine system of rotation is something which is rarely achieved (even in organisations which claim it is one of their aims), I think it would be worthwhile detailing here how this is organised at the Michelin factory and further information will be given on this topic in future issues of Sineus

When the CNT-U stood for the latest elections to works committees, in December '86, it had to put up a minimum of 21 candidates. In fact it put up 32 candidates, in contrast to the CCOO who had to do all sorts of shady deals to get enough people to temporarily stand under its name. In the end they won 5 seats, which will not come up for election again until December 1990.

The CNT-U split its 32 candidates into two teams of 16, each of which covered 2 of these 4 years. The first 16 were organised into 2 'regulars' who would be permanent members of the committee for the first 2 years, leaving 3 seats which were rotated amongst the remaining 14 and changed every 3 months. In December '88 the other 16 will take over this process.

The 40 hours a month of free time given to them for union business is pooled and used collectively, so that one individual may get 50 hours in one month while another gets 30. (The reformist unions use this same system to make some of their members full time officials by returning others to full time working in the factory.)

As well as these 32 delegates, the union is given 3 more, who also get 40 hours a month paid leave but are attached to the union branch rather than specifically to the workplace. This time is used by whoever has the most work to do in the union local.

When I arrived in Vitoria Jose Collado was just off to address a meeting of Michelin workers in France to get home the message that the CNT is a trade union, not a terrorist organisation. There will also be a campaign to get him his job back with the company. Two of the others accused with him (Vicente Alvarado and Andres Sanchez) have found work down in Andalucia, while Guillermo Guerrero has opened a bar in Vitoria. Guillermo Argos may be about to be suspended from the CNT for refusing to resign from the works committee at Rio Tinto Explosives after signing an agreement on behalf of the union which accepts redundancies there in return for improvements for those who remain. That the organisation should consider taking this kind of action despite his involvement in the trial shows how seriously they take the principle of not selling jobs. I'm not sure what Santiago Abad's doing.

CNT-U 'OFFICIAL' :

The long running legal battle over which of the two CNT is the real one (initiated, it should be remembered, by the CNT-AIT, despite its claims to anarchist purity) seems to have been finally settled.

Last December a court decision declared the Congress of Unification official and as a result made the CNT-U the official CNT in the eyes of the law. The CNT-U is appealing against the fact that the Congress of Valencia (which initiated an earlier split) was declared unofficial, and the CNT-AIT is appealing against the final judgement.

Nevertheless, this decision should have some significant effects, mainly that the CNT-U will receive some of the money paid to Franco's sham union, the FNS, during the 40 years of his dictatorship (The 'patrimonio historico'). This is particularly timely in Barcelona, where they recently found they could no longer pay the rent on their offices in one of Barcelona's smarter business quarters. The government has now agreed to cover this until they move into the rooms that have been allocated them on the 1st floor of the old AISS building in the centre of the city - a much more appropriate setting for a trade union. The only thing holding up the transfer is that the CC00, which has the 2nd floor, has objected on the grounds that its members may be confused by the proximity of two unions with the same first letter. This is obviously a very patronising attitude towards their members, but possibly justified as they have for years been used to buildings where ordinary members must use a separate set of stairs to those reserved for the union's officials and are no doubt by now completely unable to use their initiative in such matters.

The CNT-U has absolutely no plans to try and reclaim the buildings presently used by the CNT-AIT, and have regularly said they consider these legal wrangles unhelpful and inappropriate.

CNT-AIT 'OLIVE BRANCH' :

In a communique sent from their new national secretariat in Granada on October 30th, 1987, the CNT-AIT recognises that '...the split contains a group of comrades with anarcho-syndicalist intentions', adding that '...experience has shown they are deluding themselves, but it is easy to make mistakes.'

A reply in Oveja Negra for December '87, while expressing the authors appreciation that the comrades from the CNT-AIT have allowed him the right to make mistakes, points out that it would be even better if they allowed yourselves the same right, instead of never dirtying their hands on the real world.

In this context, it would seem that members of the CNT-AIT do on occasions stand for election to the works committee, but do so as nominal 'independents'. This has apparently occurred in Puerto Real, Cadiz. In fact the CNT-AIT is generally less dogmatic about these matters in those sections where it has a significant trade union presence (eg in textile, teaching and metal working), though a comment in the communique that the CNT's day was about to dawn 'on a global scale' is not a hopeful sign.

The fact that Vitoria was not able to accept it's nomination as the location of the national committee for '87-'89 may turn out to be a positive development in terms of relations between the two CNT, as it could make it easier for less dogmatic elements in the CNT-AIT to form unofficial links with them at grassroots level.

WOMEN IN THE CNT-U:

Several reports sent to the CNT-U's tenth congress lament the lack of participation by women in the organisation. Even though 21% of the delegates at the congress were women (which is relatively high) there is no doubt that women's issues are only given lip service in the CNT with one obvious result being a very serious lack of women in the organisation.

A move to allow 'Mujeres Libertarias' (the network of women's groups within the CNT) to affiliate to the CNT, thus giving them equal rights with union groups, was rejected at the conference. Partly this was because it would have set a precedent in terms of the CNT-U's relationships with other non-union collectives, and also because even people sympathetic to the ideas behind the report in question accept it was not well drafted. It is however significant that, even in the '30s, Mujeres Libres was denied affiliation when groups such as the FIJL (Libertarian Youth) were not. Basically, very little gets done on the subject, apart from occasionally passing well meaning resolutions, and many CNT members still effectively see the union as a kind of men's club.

Mujeres Libertarias was originally reformed in 1981 and presently has small groups in Barcelona, Zaragoza, Vitoria, Madrid, Valencia and Granada, though the women involved often put most of their efforts into working as individuals in their various union branches.

ALL CHANGE IN ASTURIA?

It looks as though the CNT-U's section in Asturia (ie, Gijon and Oviedo) is going to be expelled from the organisation, though not necessarily for the right reasons.

Asturia has always had an uncomfortable relationship with the rest of the CNT-U. They did not attend its congress of unification, or the tenth congress and opposed the CNT-U's opposition to NATO on the grounds that it would give comfort to the Warsaw Pact! This anti-communist paranoia, based on their experiences with the CP in 1934, has led them to remain aloof from the many bitter struggles which have taken place in their region against the restructuring of heavy industry, on the grounds that they are all manipulated by the CP. As a result their industrial prescience is virtually nil, for example they won only 8 seats in the 1986 elections to works committees for the whole region. They produce a monthly paper of which literally 95% refers to events which happened before the Civil War!

Few in the CNT-U would be unhappy to see them go, especially as it is possible that the CNT-AIT's section in Asturia, which has close links with the CNT-U in Galicia, may be interested in taking their place. However, it does seem that they are going to be thrown out for the wrong reasons, ie, criticising the changes brought about in the organisation's national structure by the latest congress - albeit in public and maliciously.

In common with other groups (such as the one which publishes 'Polemica' in Barcelona) the content of their politics is reformist/syndicalist, but the form remains decentralised and anarchistic in the sense that they defend the CNT's traditional principles of federation and autonomy against the new 'yuppy' image of streamlined efficiency being pushed by Madrid

REPORTS FROM ANDALUCIA: Freedom magazine regularly carries reports from Brian Bamford who lives in La Line, near Gibraltar, about politics and everyday life in Spain.

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