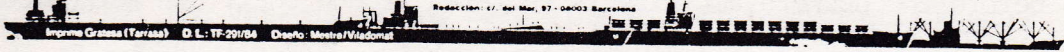


LA ESTIBA

VOZ DE LOS PUERTOS

BOLETIN DE LA
COORDINADORA
ESTATAL DE
LOS
ESTIBADORES
PORTUARIOS



6933
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SPANISH DOCK STRIKE 1986

ESTIBADORES PORTUARIOS EN HUELGA

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INTRO. FIRST BULLETIN. BM BLOB. LONDON WC1N 3XX.

The Spanish dockers are on strike once more. They last struck in 1980/'81 and were successful in preventing large scale redundancies. This time the dockers are resisting a proposal put forward by the " socialist " Ministry of Labour which will effectively amount to half of Spain's docks being sold off to maritime multinationals who can meet the cost of the renewal of docklands infrastructure. As before the dockers activity is centered around their own autonomous organization the Co-ordinadora.

Anybody wanting to help can contact the OEPB (Estibadores Portuarios de Barcelona) Calle del Mar, 97, BARCELONA 3.
or, FAC (Federacion Autonoma de Colectivos), Calle Rec Comptal, no 18, 1.^o 1.^a. BARCELONA.

Two of the following texts were taken from the March '86 strike issue of La Estiba (The Docker), the Co-Ordinadora's bulletin. This paper must rank as the most advanced example of its type in the world and the texts reproduced here do show that the Spanish dockers are keenly aware of the difference between the autonomous movement there and the rank 'n' file movement here.



IN THE BLEAK FORM OF A QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questionnaire was addressed by us to any member of the autonomous federation of collectives (FAC) who may have been interested in replying. References as to how this unitary body, with a covering address in Barcelona and loosely associated with the paper " Todos A Una " (Altogether) may have come about, are to be found in the article dealing with the rank 'n' file movement in Spain. As it turned out the questionnaire was answered by a member of the Barcelona dockers' organization, the OEPB. Firstly though we reproduce below, part of a letter from a comrade in Barcelona, associated with the OEPB, who is somewhat critical of FAC.

"...with the end of the '72/'76 autonomous movement (Vitoria, Roca) and the coming of democracy some factory groups with more experience of autonomous struggle resisted union manipulation and continued to push for decision making assemblies electing revocable delegates on a show of hands. Overall the union apparatus (above all the Communist party's CC.OO. and the Socialist party's UGT practically solely through cadres and the more combative CNT) managed to monopolize the shortcomings of a workers' movement. The few assembly led collectives which still continue to carry some weight in the factories are uniting and beginning to coordinate a little ----- . Prompted by the dockers' strike ('80/'81) a federation of collectives was set up which dwindled bit by bit until practically it came to rest at a much reduced level. Just at that moment some tried to make the federation more cohesive which couldn't be anything other than voluntaristic and bureaucratic. This is I think the truth of the matter even if we use their place and stamp to do things - for example a thing we did on the miners' strike in Britain and the accompanying leaflet as you can see....."

1. Why does the FAC collective use the term " union " activity? Do they still have illusions about unions (e.g. " independant " unionism) or is it merely a question of semantics because FAC lacks a more appropriate term.
 - a. It is a serantic question but in reality it does occupy the area of trade unionism.

2. If the FAC is all for " todos a una " (Altogether) why do they not simply join with a general union like the CNT which appears to have the same aim? Does their refusal to merge or join the CNT imply a criticism of the theory and more especially the practise of anarcho-syndicalism?
 - a. There has been no merger with the CNT on account of its historical encumbrance (although this may seem nonsensical) which makes it very rigid when it comes to union matters (for example they won't agree to participate in TU elections to factory committees).

3. Though the FAC have been outspoken in their condemnation of the majority unions (CC.OO./UGT) they have said little about the CNT. Did they reject the criticisms of the CNT made by the OEPB (which evidently played its part in the formation of FAC) or regard it as of little consequence faced with the threat posed by the UGT/CC.OO?
 - a. The damning judgement passed on the majority unions has come about on account of their pursuit of agreements with the government and the bosses (the Moncloa pact, A.N.E., A.E.S.) They arrogate to themselves a right of representation they don't possess (in Spain only 10% to 15% of workers are unionized) and sign agreements in sectors where they are not represented. They are able thus to become the country's official unions. Moreover the leadership of these unions respond more to political parties (CC.OO. to the Communist party, the UGT to the Socialist party) than to union concerns. The parties use the unions as the basic levers of power and because of their pyramidal structure, the membership is prevented from exercising its rights other than through an initial petition and on questions of no importance.

4. Do you think the FAC represents a more coherent theoretical exposition by workers of the assembly movement than existed between '72/'78 when the assembly movement was much broader based and elemental than it is now?
 - a. The FAC does not represent them but its theoretical and human basis resides in in the assembly movement of '72/'78.

5. Does a confusion exist in the collectives as regards regional and nationalist movements? It would appear the FAC supports the aims of CANC (the Canaries' collective) viewing it as a class rejection of Spanish exploitation. Can this be true?
 - a. The FAC does not have a nationalistic basis.

6. The FAC continually emphasize the necessity of being more than a " worker " in the sense of only being concerned with one's particular trade. The tacit assumption here is the need for a total revolution. However right the FAC is to insist on the centrality of the assembly form when it comes to criticizing the totality of social relations they can go sadly amiss. For instance in Todos A Una (Premier Trimestre '84) they reproduce verbatim the " Greenpeace ", " Declarat-ion of Interdependency " without a word of criticism. Although the ecological critique must be an essential part of a revolutionary critique, " Greenpeace " is decidedly not the friend of the autonomous movement. The attitude of " Green-peace " to trade unions is to say the least extraordinarily complacent, not to mention its addiction to the media. And in an otherwise interesting article on TV (same issue) Cousteau's voyages are cited as having a " formative " and

culturally beneficial influence on the collectives. A naive remark which is much inferior to the preceding paragraph commenting on how the UGT/CC.OO. used TV in 1983 to negotiate an agreement behind the backs of the workers in the Banking sector.

- a. The FAC insists on the need to be something more than a worker belonging to a particular trade union because FAC in the beginning was formed out of a series of collectives organized around a particular trade possessing as a result a corporatist tendency. The final aim is total revolution. The organizational principle behind FAC is the assembly and therefore we don't believe the assembly makes mistakes if it is in possession of sufficient information and does its job systematically. As far as Todos A Una is concerned, this is not FAC's paper so therefore the articles and reports that appear in it are not connected with FAC.

7. This brings us to the difficult question of culture. The FAC collective want access to educational and cultural facilities but what in practise does this mean? Universal, free education can scarcely be proclaimed as a class victory, nor can taking time off work to attend University classes. The little value it can have lies in exposing these dreadful places - but that's all and so often access to " educational and cultural facilities " is a prelude to rising in the trade union apparatus, management, the State etc.

- a. We regard the right of access to culture as fundamental. Official culture is in the hands of the State and conservative bodies (the Church and the Bourgeoisie) but in spite of this we hold access to culture is fundamental to workers.

8. The FAC sponsor lending libraries. What books are available in these libraries and are they widely used? Also does watching films and documentaries get anywhere in view of the fact there are scarcely any revolutionary films?

- a. FAC does not possess a library. Some FAC collectives possess books and whose orientation is exclusively working class. The act of watching documentaries carries no weight in itself. What matters are the discussions that take place afterwards.

9. Apropos of the last question do you think a revolutionary critique of culture is lacking in Spain?

- a. If a revolutionary critique of culture is lacking it cannot ensue from near illiteracy. So in order to be able to criticize it, access to culture comes first.

10. Do you know anything about the activity of the " uncontrollables " and how the FAC views their activities? Recently we heard about non-unionised metal workers making a mock tank for a demonstration. Finally can you give any indication about the present movement in Spain?

- a. The need to break out of a Mediterranean orientation constantly generates movements which arise and then disappear in response to the existence or otherwise of a problem. On occasion groups which are more or less stable remain in existence. These attempt a regroupment and from this there comes about experiments like FAC in Barcelona, CANC in the Canary Islands, the national Co-Ordinadora of dockers etc.

If you find this questionnaire too detailed, boring and impossible to deal with (as questionnaires have a habit of being) ignore it and perhaps give some general idea about the collectives and what is happening now in Spain.

THE RANK AND FILE MOVEMENT AND THE AUTONOMOUS WORKERS' MOVEMENT

What you might find possibly highly surprising is the notion primarily of a trade union rank 'n' file movement. It occasions surprise possibly because it is contradictory - especially if we are constrained by the notion of existing trade unions. The latter have been converted into capitalist institutions possessing managerial and organizational techniques that hardly differ from those of the State bourgeoisie (burocratization, hierarchies, professional cadres). In this sense trade unionism far from being an instrument of emancipation for workers appears as a machine whose job is to discipline and subject the working class to the norms that regulate the exploitation of wage labour. It's enough to remind ourselves of the big unions in N. America, England, France and even Spain to realize they are totally conformist and have abandoned any pretence to settling accounts with the capitalist system. Yet we cannot confuse trade unionism with the workers' movement; nor can we regard the institutionalized trade unions as the only organized reality in the conflict between labour and capital.

On the contrary what we want to call attention to - and encourage discussion on - are precisely those other expressions of the workers' movement which occur at the base. The struggles stress the workers own interests and are nearly always in open conflict with the institutionalised trade unions. This is what is known as the autonomous workers' movement. It is autonomous because it's not under the tutelage of any institution whether trade union or political party and because actions are undertaken by the workers themselves (assembly) giving rise to what they contemptuously refer to as "wildcat strikes" as opposed to domesticated strikes controlled by union officials.

In reality this tendency amongst workers to engage in struggle on their own behalf is as old as the workers' movement. The First International did not proclaim in vain "the emancipation of the workers will be the work of the workers themselves". But once unions reached a particular degree of degeneration (burocratization) and integration into the capitalist State, the autonomous movement began to openly confront official trade unionism.

Once this happened a trade unions primary function was maintaining control over the workers - in other words preventing the unpredictable autonomous movement. And the more a trade union can guarantee this control over the working class the more it is recognised as an institution useful to the capitalist system even receiving financial support from the State (subsidies) to that end. Hence one might say the interests of union officials (burocracy) supplants workers' interests. And this becomes a new source of conflict. Historically from Germany 1918, Spain 1936, upto the present there have been numerous struggles between autonomous tendencies and the trade union burocracy and the State.

Whatever the case, what always characterizes the autonomous movement of the workers everywhere are precisely those aspects which most contradict institutionalized trade unionism. Hence as a form of organization, assembly democracy is counterposed to the hierarchical organization of unions. Hence direct action and the revocability of delegates who confronted with the mediation of professional trade union representatives become instead spokespersons for decisions taken in the assembly. The former are burocratic salaried trade union officials who negotiate "in the name of" the workers without being workers themselves. Yet a third general characteristic is radicalization - that's to say as assembly democracy express workers' interests in their most direct form, the confrontation with capital appears as a direct response clearing aside obstacles to the spontaneous expression of struggle. Because it does this, the autonomous workers' movement receives a "bad press" in trade union and political media. Its radicality disturbs the "social peace" unions are pledged to maintain. In addition, direct assembly led democracy converts burocrats into becoming enemies of the rank 'n' file

once they claim to mediate and reconcile opposing forces in a conflict.

The conjunctural character of autonomous forms of expression is another feature. Basically this occurs at critical moments in conflicts where what's at stake is too important to be left to trade union bureaucrats. Thus we may say the autonomous workers' movement is a constant tendency that manifests itself within the official trade union (c/f La Estiba No 13 on the mining industry) and is characterized by a permanent tension between union leaders attempts at control and the undisciplined action of their membership. Given the mistrust extensive workers' collectives feel towards the unions as presently constituted, it is a tendency which becomes manifest above all outside the unions. And on occasion it leads to an attempt to set up union organizations which affirm the same principles of assembly democracy as in the Co-Ordinadora's case.

From the beginning of the 70's, the succession of strikes, demonstrations and various conflicts in Spain were a representative expression of the autonomous workers' movement. The scant growth at that time of the majority unions rendered possible the opportunity for workers to express themselves freely through the assembly process. It was the period in which the most radicalized cycle of stikes (Vitoria, Valencia, Valladolid, Roca etc) in the recent history of the workers' movement took place. And it was also a period of apprenticeship in the practical means of intervention, which in spite of the subsequent eclipse has not disappeared from the collective memory of workers.

Once an agreement had been reached on a democratic transition between the Francoists and the political parties belonging to the opposition and a formula for social peace accepted by the unions, the restoration of the capitalists interests required liquidating autonomous tendencies in the workers' movement. This task subsequently fell to the majority unions. Hence the example of workers' collectives who were not prepared to accept " sacrifice " and the Moncloa pact. They began to look for ways of lodging claims outside the sphere of constituted unions and on occasion, in open opposition to them. The need for something more permanent began to be appreciated because the autonomous movement had previously always been limited to a particular conflict, like for example, negotiating an agreement. So workers' organizations began to appear like the Co-Ordinadora and others akin to it. These arose out of particular conflicts and came to embody as part of their internal structure, the principles of assembly democracy.

It is in this sense one can speak of a rank 'n' file unionism possessing a permanent organizational form that belongs to workers. Attempting all the while to avoid the pitfalls of official unions, struggle takes place through it. The revocability at any moment of delegates and representatives and their non-official status is insisted upon as is the discussion of problems and the need for decisions to be taken in the assembly. Thus delegates are spokespersons for the assemblies and as workers are tied to the job on a daily basis. They are not " free floating " bureaucrats in the pay of an organization. Maximum transparency as regards information obtains as does unimpeded participation in and access to committee meetings. It amounts finally to putting rank 'n' file democracy above everything. However it must be combined with everyday activities and struggles because without it, the relative informality of a non-hierarchical organization implies a lessening of its effectiveness.

Analytical text from the
strike edition of the
Spanish dockers' bulletin,
La Estiba, No 15, March 1986.

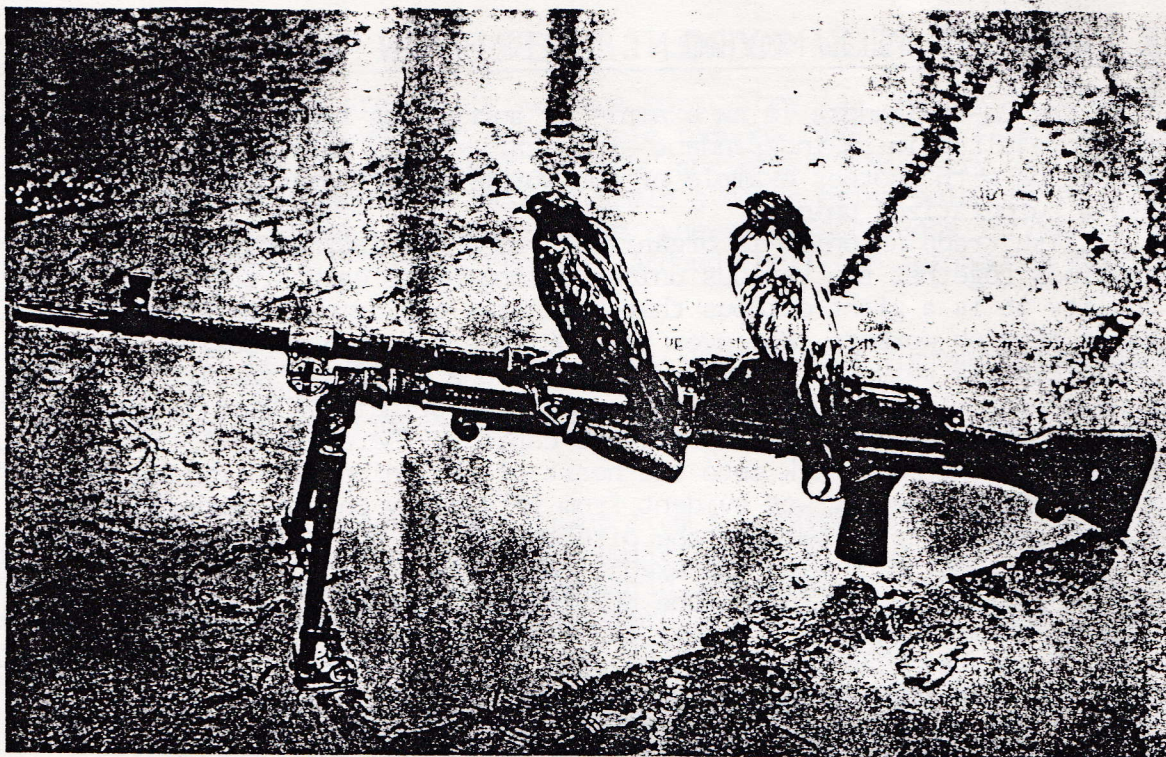
THE RANK 'N' FILE MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN

If the Co-Ordinadora is an example of autonomous rank 'n' file unionism that has resulted in an independent organization, the past miners' strike confronts us with another example of the workers' self organized activity within a bureaucratized union.

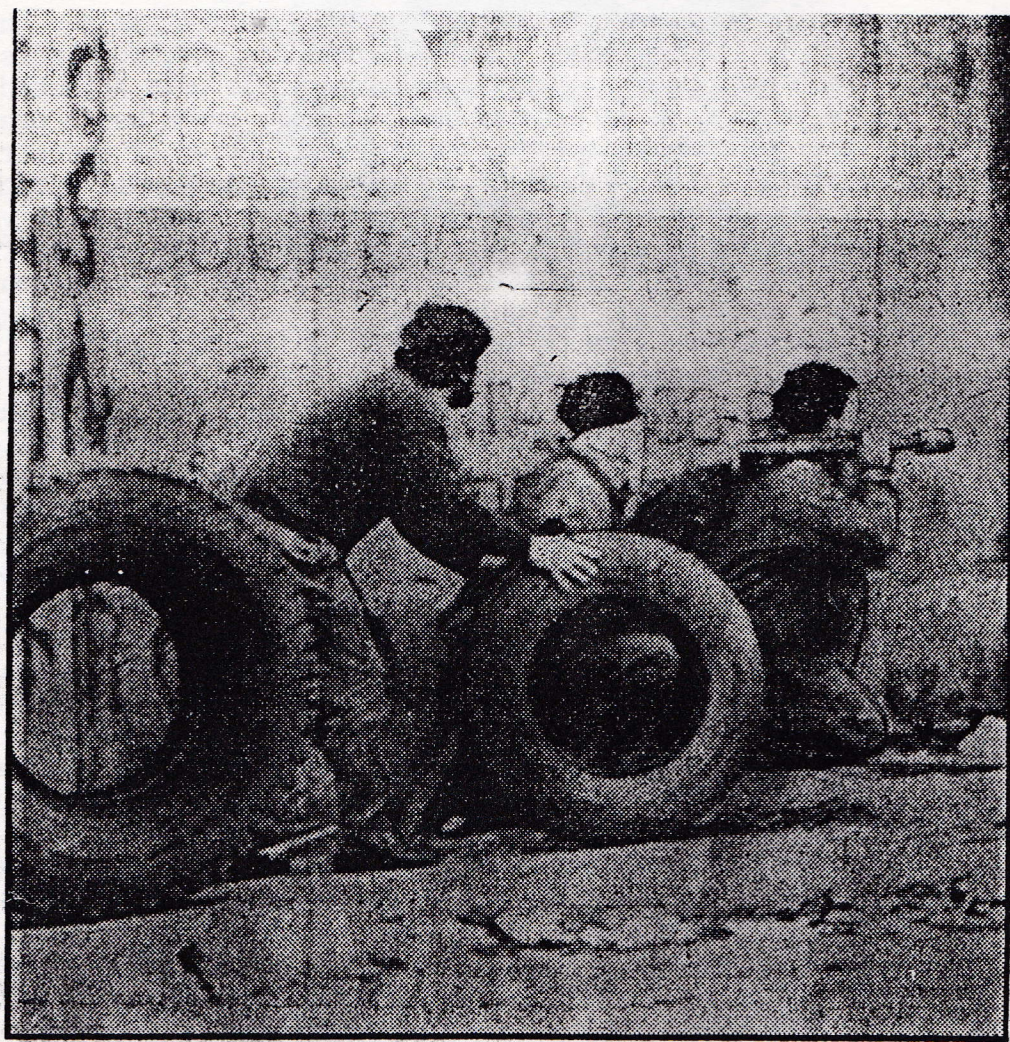
British trade unionism is organized around the TUC, a big institution which binds together the various unions belonging to each branch of industry. In reality it is a giant octopus that regulates employment contracts and wages of British workers. Moreover the TUC is a hierarchy chockful of bureaucratic officials paid for out of union subs. One could say the TUC is a big company of organized trades that conform to the principles governing employment agencies exploited by private capital. Therefore each time conflicts break out they rebound back into the heart of the union. Thus during last years miners' strike, it was evident from very early on the leadership was left with nothing to do because the director of the NCB rejected every demand. On the other hand with the excuse there was a danger the British government would freeze NUM funds, the NUM leadership sort to save the funds by depositing them abroad. As a result the strikers were left to their own devices. So starting, as it were, from each pit and mining village a solidarity network was organized throughout Britain and abroad. Once the rank 'n' file assemblies had been set up the strikes existence centered on the actions they undertook. With their backs to the wall, the NUM leadership had then to negotiate with the NCB - or at least try to in terms laid down by the workers' autonomous movement. Either that or risk being scorned or even threatened by their members.

Furthermore but for British workers rallying in a self organized capacity around the miners, it is inconceivable a strike involving 100,000 miners and their families (which presupposes nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ million people were affected) could last an entire year. Between workers and bureaucrats there was a practical rupture: concretely present in the rank 'n' file coordination of the strike movement this constituted its essential characteristic. Links were established between the various representatives elected in assemblies held in each village and pit (this is what rank 'n' file means) duly becoming the strikes real protagonists. But of even greater significance has been the intervention of " support committees " which meant not only miners but all workers, neighbours etc in the mining regions were able to participate in the strike. This is what the miners' rank 'n' file movement was made up of - and still is a year after the strike ended. Barcelona dockers have continued to keep in touch with it, ever since shortly before the end of the strike two delegates from Hatfield Main visited us. That it is a self organized movement possessing its own representatives and paper within an official union does perhaps appear strange to us if we judge it from our own perspective. But the weight of trade unionism in the consciousness of the British proletariat figures very large and has a long historical trajectory. For all intents and purposes workers and trade union can be mentioned in the same breath. With us it is different. The history of the Spanish proletariat has always been marked by interruptions (the latest being the Francoist dictatorship) to the normal course of events effecting the consolidation of the organized workers' movement. Here, in contrast to the English workers' movement the establishment of a monstrous bureaucratic organization has not proved possible. Hence also the lack of discipline born of habit and obedience to officials all of which grants to workers greater opportunities. Starting from their everyday existence in factory assemblies, once workers decide to confront capital here they do so according to their own criteria.

From the first strike
edition of La Estiba,
No 15, March 1986.



Poetic anti-military photo under a " No to Nato " text in La Estiba, No 14, February, 1986.



Striking Spanish dockers roll out tyres to form a barricade at Gijon (Asturias) on May 23rd '86 as two mates prepare to fire a home-made grenade launcher at police.

ANTI - STOP PRESS. ANTI - STOP PRESS.

The present dockers' strike which began on May 18th '86 is set to last 10 days. Earlier this year strikes took place in March and April lasting 10 and 5 days respectively. As in the '80/'81 strike, the favoured tactic appears to be that of the "rolling" strike rather than indefinite all out strike action. However this strike takes place under a "socialist" government and as a consequence, can expect to receive even harsher treatment in the press and the media in general - especially in view of the coming general election in June. A scandalous editorial in the lib/lefty "El Pais" (El Piss, May 21st) maintained the docks were a curious amalgam of old style anarchism and falangism that were identical as regards the near absolute control they had for decades exercised over the docks "recalling on too many occasions mafioso practises". Harping on the same old shit it recalls, to be precise, a similiar infuriating accusation levelled against the dockers during their last major strike by the liberal editor of "Cambio 16" (c/f "International Dockers' struggles in the 80's", BM Blob).^{*} In an incident on the second day of the strike (May 19th) three tobacco containers were burnt out in Cadiz and the Headquarters of the local Socialist party bricked during a 700 strong demonstration by dockers and others. The pro Socialist party union, the UGT, came out against the strike and UGT "militants" have had their cars burnt out and been subjected to death threats. Hostility to the UGT especially amongst dockers is scarcely new but the past few days does appear to have witnessed a sharpening.

The dockers' strike has coincided with a wave of strikes in Spain. Inevitably they are viewed with alarm by the pro-Socialist party press given the closeness of the general election. The day after the commencement of the dockers' strike, busses and metro were at a standstill in Barcelona over the attempt to reduce services at off peak hours. Whether this means lay offs or not it certainly amounts to a greater flexibility in rostering schedules. On the same week Air Iberica pilots reached a truce of sorts after a series of disruptive strikes to do with payment for rest periods between flights. Statisticians and deputy inspectors belonging to the Treasury were also on strike which has hindered the gathering of facts and figures relating in particular to the retail price index. There was also a sit-in on the stairs of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs while on the same day several pits came out in Asturias in support of a face worker who was prevented by a pit head doctor from going sick because of an ankle injury.

By thursday May 22nd the dock strike was clearly biting when after some wavering, dockers in Galicia opted to join the strike. A "state of emergency" was threatened in Tenerife in the Canaries because essential supplies were being held up and 1½ million kilos of bananas bound for the Iberian Peninsula were in danger of perishing. A Civil Governor in Tenerife, complaining of a "climate of fear" sent evidence to the Dept of Public Prosecution accusing pickets of intimidation. These bullies had just unloaded a ship containing medical supplies. On the same day barricades were erected and set light to in Gijon (Asturias) by shipyard workers belonging to the threatened Cantabrica and Riero shipyards (in passing British Shipbuilders would think twice about the closure threat to Smith's Dock if the same thing were to happen on Linthorpe Road in Middlesbro'). The UGT had refused to participate in the demonstration on the grounds it was too close to the election although the Communist CC.OO. had initially done so. Meanwhile in El Ferrol (Galicia) more than 6,000 metal workers from the Bajon factory stopped work for 3 hours in the morning and 2 in the afternoon, approving in an assembly a plan of action involving partial and total strike action covering the election period.

* In an article in El Piss (May 26th), a member of the Co-Ordinadora answered this calumny. More on this later.....

THE FOLLOWING EXTRACT IS AN AMPLIFICATION OF VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THE LETTER ON PAGE 2.

..." Firstly I think it has to be made clear ---- FAC is not something homogenous and its views are not internally homogenous either. Basically it amounts to a group of collectives (some composed of only a few individuals others like the dockers composed of many*) and more or less in agreement concerning the kind of struggle and the manner of conducting it through assemblies.

Some are content to remain at this level whilst others want a more permanent kind of organization along the lines of a trade union, competing with other trade unions. As regards unions I don't think FAC has an anti-capitalist/communist critique and so the English comrades wonder why they don't become part of the anarcho-syndicalist camp and merge with the CNT (the CNT faction - CNT/V - that split away from the historic CNT - it was clear from the Madrid conference they were not going to merge with the CNT/AIT).

There does not exist today an assembly movement like that which existed between '70/'78 and FAC I believe has been unable to draw any lessons from this. There was at that time already a confusion between the autonomous movement and trade union self-organization. Critique was basically more anti-bureaucratic than anti-capitalist hence the limits to a theorization of the movement at that point (in " Etcetera " in " Critique of politics no 6 ", we published a critique we did on this period of the autonomous movement in Barcelona.)

Today there is a hint around of an assemblyist movement and current resistance to the exploitation and domination of capital takes on less political forms springing from immediate needs outside of political illusions - new forms that FAC does not analyse judging them uncritically to be a contemporary version of the old reformism - things like ecology, pacifism - falling I also believe into the nationalist trap!".....

* - "(this is very important because if in a meeting of delegates a decision is taken in respect to a conflict this will apply to all dockers on strike for example. On the other hand for a small collective from a factory or a hospital a struggle only furnishes an occasion for propaganda). "

July '85.



A woman (doing her bit for Sports Aid?) jumping across the side of a burning barricade built by shipyard workers in Gijon, May 22nd, 1986.