

Grupos de Resistencia Antifascista Primero de Octubre

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## Interview with Spanish Political Prisoner

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### A PCE(r) Prisoner For 22 Years

*Question: Could you first tell us about your political development up until the point of your arrest?*

I have always thought of myself as a communist. I think that the conditions under which I spent my childhood and my youth made it natural for me to have the thoughts and aims which directed my later steps in life. On the one hand, I witnessed the very difficult daily lives which my parents led, working 10-12 hours every day for minimal pay to feed and educate the kids. And on the other hand, I realized that my parents weren't the only ones in such a situation. All the people in the working class neighbourhood where we lived were in the same predicament. Later, when I grew older, I concluded that economic poverty was not the only suffering which the working families had to endure, rather there was also oppression, ignorance, and the lack of freedoms. Those who worked for a living were in difficulty, whereas the powerful were all rolling in money.

When I heard reports of wars and brutal repression from my parents and other families, I began to realize that there was a system behind this situation. I also understood that this suffering was not caused by some supernatural force, rather it was the product of a particular social system, namely capitalism, and that this system created and perpetuated this suffering. Because there are rich people, there must also be poor people: A handful of individuals enjoy privileges and freedoms, but the masses of workers who produce the wealth are denied these. I also realized that those in power could only maintain their power by means of repression, and for this they needed their army, their police, their judges, their lackeys in the press, their prisons, and, last but not least, their state.

Because of these realizations, I finally made up my mind to join together with others and struggle against this system. So I joined leftist organizations at a very young age. The struggles were not only directed against the state as the cause of oppression, rather also against the state's allies within the working class, against all forms of reformism, against people who had sold themselves out to capitalism. In 1973, I joined the Organization of Marxist/Leninists in Spain (OMLE), which had taken up the task of re-founding the Communist Party in Spain which had been destroyed by the Carrillists. Since 1975, when a congress was held as the first step towards re-establishing the party, I have been a member of the PCE(r). In 1976, I joined other communists and anti-fascists in the armed organization GRAPO, in order to close the gaps which the repression had created in the guerrilla and to continue the struggle in an armed manner.

*Question: You went into prison during the so-called "transition" dictatorship to democracy. What was the situation like at that time, both in the prisons and in the society? How much did your prison conditions change following your transfer to Herrera de la Mancha?*

It's correct when you speak of a so-called "transition" period. Because in reality there was no real change, only the facade was changed in order to maintain the system of exploitation and oppression which we had struggled against for so many years. The background to this manoeuvre by the fascist regime was the rise in the forces of the working class and the popular sectors all across the state. These mobilizations led, in the end, to some improvements, which we had to win from the capitalists with force: the right to strike, higher wages, and the right to organize workers. But these things threatened the continuation of the regime, so the fascists were forced to turn to the reformists of the Carillo Party, and, with economic aid from the German oligarchy, they created the Socialist Workers Party of Spain (PSOE) out of thin air. They legalized this party and linked it with the workers movement in order to manipulate it and prevent further gains. That was the essence of the "transition". Some people swallowed this bitter pill, people who, after so many years of open fascism, saw some opportunity to improve their own lot in this new situation. But there were other people who continued to wage resistance, who took to the streets to continue the struggle. The police, the Guardia Civil, and the army, who were said now to be democrats, acted just as their predecessors had done, and did what they were paid to do: murder, spread terror among the people, and flatten anything which raised its head. During these prosperous years, youths, workers, anti-fascists, and communists were gunned down with democrat bullets. During that time, the economy was restructured and thousands of workers were tossed from their jobs, while at the same time the prisons began filling up with people whose only crime was to remain true to their class and to have struggled for a society without exploiters and the exploited.

Inside the prisons, conditions became increasingly harsh and repression increased. A wave of prison uprisings swept the country in 1977. Many prisoners were conscious of their situation and decided to fight for their rights. The political prisoners, who had led most of the earlier prison struggles, intensified their struggles. The radicalization spread among the social prisoners as well, however. The foundation of the COPEL organization played an important role in advancing that development. As the resistance grew, so did the repression. The head of the prisons at that time, Mr. Galavis, announced one day that he

would build cement bunkers for prisoners, and he kept his word. In 1979, the first of a series of destruction prisons was opened, Herrera de la Mancha. These new prisons were designed to crush the prison resistance. The prisoners kept there faced a brutal regime of continual beatings, long periods of isolation detention, and a lack of medical treatment.

All of this was cold-bloodedly calculated to bring their lives to an end. Herrera is a symbol of the “transition” period. It represents, on the one hand, those who refuse to give up their honor and who struggle for freedom and justice in the face of physical violence and psychological pressure, and, on the other hand, those who obey the new ruling democrats in return for breadcrumbs and who say that struggle leads only to misery. But things were not over yet. These new developments simply gave us new arguments for justice and showed the necessity of our struggle. It’s important to remember the long history of strikes, uprisings, and clashes in the prisons during all those years.

*Question: The struggles against prison repression have a long and hard tradition. Can you briefly inform us about the major activities during the struggle for the re-groupment and the freedom of the prisoners, especially during the hunger-strikes of 1981 and 1989-91?*

Yes, there is a long history of resistance in the prisons. In reality, it could hardly be otherwise, since prisons are a reflection of the society to which they belong. Where there is repression, there is also resistance. Our peoples have a long tradition of struggles, and the barbarity which they suffered daily at the hands of the ruling powers were never left unanswered. During my 22 years as a prisoner, I have participated in more than 20 hunger-strikes and countless protest actions. But it would be wrong to imagine that we revolutionary prisoners can only mobilize against directly experienced aggression. That means that our struggle is not just to improve our living conditions or to protest the repression which we face. All the strikes and struggles which I participated in were also in solidarity with those people on the outside who were struggling for their rights as well, or they were in support of the struggles by other prisoners, or they were in protest of the repressive and exploitative character of the regime in general.

Our political duty does not end or become less once we enter prison. Even in prison, we are part of our class, and we think that we are part of a broad front which is struggling against a common enemy. For that reason, much of our energy was always devoted to developing activities in order to participate in the struggles on the outside. In the years during which we were able to organize as a collective inside the prisons, we developed an intensive labor. Our activities included publishing articles, making handmade items, and developing relations with hundreds of groups and individuals all across the state and in other countries, in order to exchange experiences and to learn from various people.

This situation lasted until 1979, at which time the government began its policy of dispersing the political prisoners. The escape by five prisoners from Zamora was used as an excuse to take revenge. But the dispersals had already been planned and prepared before that. The main aim of this policy was to undo the activities which we as revolutionary militants had developed in the prisons. I stress this point, because it’s of vital importance and helps explain

the dimension of our hard strikes for regroupment later on. The fascists were determined, on principle, not to back down. All these struggles for re-groupment were and still are based on our self-understanding as communist militants, and it is one aspect of our participation on the path to the destruction of the capitalist state and the progress of the people as a whole toward a just society.

*Question: What was the situation like inside the prisons during the hunger-strikes? What sort of support did you receive, and from whom?*

When we decided that it was now necessary to go all the way, in order to advance the push for re-groupment, we were aware of the fact that it was going to be an especially difficult hunger-strike. We were clear, however: We had to give our all, since the planned action was the most difficult and most risky one which we had ever undertaken. We also knew that our struggle in the prisons alone would not achieve much. Without the support of those outside, without a movement to support the strike, without a strong protest campaign to publicize our issue, and without broad social sectors standing up in opposition to fascism, our action would be a vain effort, determined and courageous perhaps, but with little results. We figured that activities on the outside would develop in time, and this eventually proved correct. In addition to the actions by GRAPO in support of the hunger-strike, various organizations, including our party, developed a strong campaign. We received messages of solidarity from all over.

In Euskadi, the organization 'Gestoras pro Amnistia' and other Basque groups in the MLNV were active in the campaign. The steady information work carried out by AFAPP all across the Spanish state raised awareness about our struggle. In Switzerland, France, Germany, Belgium, and in some parts of the Americas, demonstrations were held at Spanish embassies, and some were even occupied for several hours. The Spanish state was being called upon to fulfill our demands. In Germany, the prisoners from the RAF started a chain hunger strike to support us. At the international level, anti-fascist, anarchist, and communist groups gave us solidarity, as did other solidarity organizations, political groups, workers, and individuals.

*Question: The hunger strike which you all began in 1989 lasted for 435 days, more than a year and a half. Why did that struggle last so long, and what was the health condition of the prisoners like following that long and difficult struggle?*

As I said before, we realized it was going to be a long and hard strike. But even we could not have imagined that we would be forced to strike for 435 days, our lives fading as we endured torture at the hands of the guards in the prisons and the police who kept watch at the hospitals where we were taken. But that's how it ended up. The government tried a thousand ways to break us, they spread false information, mixed aggression with attempts to sway individuals with false promises of improvements if we would just end our strike. They tried to divide our unity, but they didn't succeed. Because they were uneasy about our strike, and facing protest from all sides, their fascist character became increasingly clear to see. So finally they opted for forced feeding. Because they couldn't break our resistance, they decided instead to physically break us: All that was to be left of us was a pile of bones, our vital organs destroyed, our bodies permanently damaged. They chained us to beds for weeks on end, they

injected fluids into our bodies without our knowledge, and later, when we were out of immediate danger of dying, they would release the chains for a few weeks, only to repeat this entire procedure of forced feeding again. This is how things went until the end of the hunger-strike.

*Question: What were the results of the hunger-strike?*

It's obvious that we did not achieve re-groupment, despite our efforts and the damage to our health which many of us suffered, and despite the death of Sevillano, and despite the broad campaign which was waged both here and abroad on our behalf. In the end, we had to end the struggle. But the conclusion from this experience should not be that we were defeated. The conclusion is that, when faced with such a brutal enemy, the movement in opposition to it must become broader and better organized. The conclusion is that, on the path to the destruction of the fascist capitalist state, it is sometimes possible to push it back and force some concessions from it. Because despite everything we did achieve some short-term goals which were very significant to us. On the one hand, we were able to stop the wave of repression against the prisoners. For a time, they left us alone, afraid that we might once again launch a strike. On the other hand, during the 435 days of the hunger-strike, we maintained a protest campaign which was supported by so many people whom we never knew before. Since then, we have built up many new, mutual ties, and cooperation has expanded in many areas. Although we didn't achieve regroupment, we did manage an important political victory against the reactionaries, we exposed their true fascist character, and it was made clear that, despite absolute brutality, it is possible to make a front against it. Resistance and the advance of the organized forces of the people are possible under these conditions.

*Question: In reference to the struggle against repressive prison conditions, the prisoners from GRAPO and the PCE(r) have expanded on their previous protest and resistance actions. For example, they took up the call against the FIES Conditions, and they supported the struggle for the transfer of Basque political prisoners to Euskal Herria. Does this represent a new quality of struggle? On the basis of what analysis did you take up these demands into your struggle and join in actions together with Basque and social prisoners?*

I think I partially addressed this question already. Our activities in the prisons aren't so different from those on the outside, with respect to the breadth of their goals. So during the years we have, on several occasions, acted to defend and support other collectives who are also fighting against Spanish fascism. That is the case with our solidarity with the Basque comrades, who are fighting for their right to self-determination and independence, and the social prisoners, who face daily repression in the prisons as they demand their right to be treated as human beings and defend their honour in the prisons. For example, during the prison uprisings in the summer of 1977, our imprisoned comrades fought on the front-lines alongside the members of the former COPEL organization. Later, when we were dispersed to various prisons, we got to know some of social prisoners who had a fighting spirit better, and our comrades joined them in their struggles (for example, in Badajoz, Jaen, and Meco). The demand to abolish the FIES Conditions is no different from our previous stance, rather it is the logical continuation of it. Apart from that fact, we political prisoners are also considered FIES inmates, so we are also affected by the same brutality and harshness. Our position can

be well understood by anyone who is struggling against the same enemy. Our conviction is to destroy fascism and advance to a free and just society based on solidarity. Every step on this path can only bring greater unity among the forces which have the same goals. Uniting forces, broadening resistance, and bringing a higher level of organizing is what we aim to do, and I am sure that we will meet many other people along the way who are seeking the same aims.