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History/Chronology of the struggle of Political Prisoners in Spain

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[EROL Note: *Arm the Spirit* was a Canadian Toronto-based autonomist anti-imperialist journal, 17 issues were published 1990 – 2000. The author described as a US Political prisoner was charged with the 1983 U.S. Senate bombing claimed by the Armed Resistance Unit.]

The 50+ political prisoners of GRAPO and the PCE(r) represent a fraction of an estimated 1000 militants of revolutionary organizations in Spanish prisons. The majority of these political prisoners are from the Basque struggle (Euskadi) and its armed organization ETA. There are also many prisoners representing the Catalan and Galician nationalist movements. The struggle for amnesty for all political prisoners has its roots in the Popular front that fought to defend the Second Republic from Franco and the fascist counter-revolution at the outset of WWII. The character and demands of this broad-based movement have changed with the ebb and flow of the national, working -class and popular struggles of the past 40 years. At the core, however, there is the mass demand for real democracy against fascist social and political structures institutionalized by Franco and continued in revised forms by his political successors into the current period.

The 1960's in Spain saw a revival of the mass movements that paralleled similar developments in the rest of Europe and the US. By the mid-70s the Franco government was facing a rapidly developing crisis born of this mass struggle and the increase of revolutionary armed resistance. The reaction was one of open terror: in the summer of 1975 seven people are murdered by the regime and 3000 more are arrested. Franco's government declares the first "anti-terrorist laws" (which have remained intact and useful for each successive regime, including that of the ruling Spanish Socialist Workers Party – PSOE). These laws are used to conduct a series of summary trials which end in the execution by firing squad of 5 anti-fascists on September 27, 1975. On October 1st, as Franco publically celebrated the executions, 4 of his henchmen were assassinated in four different places in Madrid. GRAPO

– los Grupos Revolucionarios Anti-fascistas, Primero de Octubre – takes its name from this date. These actions put a brake on the remaining executions Franco had planned.

After Franco's death and the coronation of King Juan Carlos, a "pardon" is granted to some political prisoners but it excludes the majority, particularly ETA combatants. Those who remain in prison are considered "criminals and terrorists." This manoeuvre gives rise to the first "Gestoras Pro Amnistía" in Euskadi. These are independent mass organizations based on popular assemblies whose main objective is to struggle for the prisoners' liberation. The underground organization Socorro Rojo (*Red Aid*) also comes into existence which grew to have an important role in the solidarity and support movement for all political prisoners in the Spanish state. The pro-amnesty demonstrations at the end of 1975 are the largest ever organized against the fascist regime.

July 18, 1976 On the anniversary of fascist rising against the Second Republic GRAPO bombs 30 different targets across the Spanish state, destroying government buildings and fascist monuments.

September 27, 1976 7 general strike takes place in Euskadi demanding Total Amnesty. From this moment on, the struggle for amnesty is totally integral to the mass political movement and armed resistance.

December 11, 1976 GRAPO "arrests" State Council President Jose Maria de Oriol y Urquijo, demanding in return the liberation of 14 political prisoners. One month later Lt. General Emilio Villaescusa Quilis, President of the Military Justice High Council is also "arrested". The regime that said that there were no political prisoners has to retreat and publically promise new measures of reform in the conditions of the political prisoners. Pro-amnesty demonstrations of tens of thousands take place; demonstrators are murdered by police.

March 1977 The government announces a new pardon which solves nothing as many fighters remain in prison. In one week in May, 7 people are murdered by police in Euskadi fighting for amnesty.

October 1977 Under popular pressure, a broader amnesty is granted by the regime. GRAPO and PCE (r) militants and guerrillas remain inside. Days after the last of the Basque patriots are released, others are re-arrested, others are murdered by the government's clandestine death squad, the GAL operating in Spain and France.

1978 The government sets up special prisons for the political prisoners in reaction to their organizing social prisoners around their own demands for pardons and humane conditions. Inside the special prisons, the GRAPO and POE(r) militants collectivize themselves to achieve dignified conditions of life. They organize political study, education, crafts and work. The government seeks to eliminate this mode of living through various means including dispersal of the prisoners' collectives and the use of isolation. Hunger strikes become a weapon of protest and collective self-defense.

March 1978 A political prisoner is murdered following prolonged torture in Carabanchel prison in Madrid. Days later, GRAPO assassinates the General Director of Penitentiary Institutions.

August 1978 GRAPO/PCE(r) political prisoners go on hunger strike at Soria against isolation. At the same time guerrilla organizations carry out armed actions in solidarity,

including the execution of 2 policemen. The government temporarily reverses itself. In 1979 isolation is attempted again and met with hunger strikes and resistance.

End of 1979-80 Following the escape of 5 GRAPO leaders from Zamora prison in 1979, the regime takes the opportunity to once again enforce dispersal and isolation of the political prisoners. Many are sent to the notorious prison at Herrera de la Mancha, built according to the “Stammheim model” of West Germany.

1981 Protests and struggle reach a climax in the Long hunger strike that ended in the death of communist militant Juan Jose Crespo Galende. Guerrillas execute an army general and 3 policemen. The strike ends with an important victory for the prisoners in terms of their regained political status and radical improvements in their conditions including their return to collectives. During this period there were also numerous struggles by the Gestoras Pro-Amnistia in Euskadi on behalf of Basque militants in Spanish prisons and against the extradition of others from France. As the Gestoras proliferated in Euskadi, the supporters of the GRAPO/ PCE (r) prisoners consolidated the AFAPP-ACPG (Families and Friends of the Political Prisoners – and Galician AFAPP)

In recent years the Spanish PSOE government has followed the initiatives of other NATO states such as Italy and the FRG in escalating repression against the prisoners and their supporters while trying to induce defections from the rank of the political prisoners under a policy of “social reinsertion.” “Amnesty” is offered for those who renounce their politics and associations. All but a tiny minority of the political prisoners have refused these terms and their movements on the street reject the entire premise.

End of 1987 PSOE moves to break up collectives at Soria (the “Karl Marx Commune”) and Carabanchel prisons dispersing 18 prisoners to other prisons around the country. The prisoners respond with a hunger strike. The government relents by agreeing to maintain some of the collective living conditions and improving other areas of prisoners’ existence.

October 1988 The government breaks its agreements. Gains from the ’87 hunger strike are withdrawn at Almeria. Women prisoners are beaten at Castellon prison; conditions worsen at Carabanchel and Soria. The regime tries to pressure all political prisoners to accept their policy of “social reinsertion”.

August 21, 1989 GRAPO members Fernando Hierro Chomon and Antonio Pedrero Donoso at “El Acebuche” prison in Almeria begin a ‘chain’ hungerstrike against isolation and for collective living conditions for the political prisoners. Prisoners at Almeria had been held in isolation cells for over a year. Visiting was reduced to 10 minutes a week with family members only

GRAPO, PCE(r) and BMA political prisoners are dispersed to 83 out of a total 87 prisons in the Spanish State.

September 5, 1989 GRAPO / PCE(r) prisoners at Soria and other prisons join the hunger strike in solidarity with their comrades at Almeria.

September 21, 1989 PSOE government faced with elections, promises to allow the hunger striking prisoners to maintain collective living conditions.

November 9-10, 1989 Following elections the government denies the existence of any agreements. All 16 prisoners who participated in the 30-day hunger strike are dispersed to other prisons. When Carmen Cayetano arrives at Seville II Jail she is tied to a bed and forcibly stripped by guards. Others are beaten.

THE CURRENT HUNGERSTRIKE

November 30, 1989 GRAPO / PCE(r) political prisoners at Soria prison declare themselves on hunger strike demanding a return to dignified, collective living conditions.

December 1, 1989 All GRAPO/PCE(r) prisoners across the country join the hunger strike except for those who are sick or infirm.

December 16, 1989 Basque political prisoners around the country declare themselves on hunger strike, demanding reunification in one prison in South Euskadi.

December 17, 1989 70 – 80 former ETA political prisoners begin a solidarity fast in a Cathedral in Bilbao.

December 23, 1989 Mothers of 6 political prisoners sit in and occupy the offices of the Red Cross in Madrid to call attention to the situation of their children. At this time 16 of the prisoners are in critical condition. Controversy builds in the judiciary over the Ministry of Justice's actions of ordering prison doctors to force-feed the prisoners. Two judges will not permit it so long as the prisoners are conscious. Many prison doctors and technicians will not go along with the force-feeding.

December 29, 1989 GRAPO assassinates 2 Spanish Civil Guard in Gijon, demanding that the political prisoners be returned to collective living conditions.

December 31, 1989 In a demonstration called for by the Basque Gestoras Pro-Amnistia, 10,000-12,000 people march on the maximum security prison at Herrera de la Mancha near Real. They demand amnesty/reunification for the Basque political prisoners and declare solidarity with the GRAPO/ PCE(r) hunger strikers.

January 10, 1990 Lawyers for the political prisoners file a petition with the European Parliament requesting that it intervene and mediate between the government and the prisoners. They specifically ask that the E.P. pressure the Spanish government to desist with force-feeding, calling it torture and an attack on one's dignity and physical integrity. In the FRG, the Relatives Committee (Family and Friends of the political prisoners of the RAF and Resistance) occupy the information office of the European Parliament in Bonn. They demand that the E.P. intervene on behalf of the GRAPO/PCE(r) and Basque political prisoners. This continues a solidarity campaigns initiated by the RAF prisoners themselves when 2 began a solidarity fast.

Many small demonstrations are organized and carried out by the Gestoras Pro-Amnistia and AFAPP in cities across the Spanish state during January and February. The Ministry of Justice explicitly asks the major Spanish newspapers and electronic media not to cover the strike or the solidarity activities. The press generally refuses and the request itself becomes a minor scandal. The PSOE regime is intransigent; they order force-feeding of the prisoners which is carried out by strapping the prisoners to their beds, sedating them with drugs.

As of mid-January the mothers continue their occupation of the Red Cross' offices in Madrid. The Director of the Prisons refuses to see them. The AFB- PP is accused in the media of instigating the political prisoners to continue the strike. Lawyers for some of the prisoners are prevented from seeing their clients because the debilitated prisoners cannot walk to the visiting room under their own power.

February 12, 1990 Four prisoners are in a coma. All of the 58 prisoners on hunger strike are in life-threatening condition with a very high likelihood of irreversible damage. They are being force-fed with liquids for 3 or 4 days and then the force-feeding is interrupted. Many doctors and medical personnel are refusing to participate in this kind of torture.

Beginning of March 1990 After 92 days of hunger strike, all of the prisoners have been force-fed. They are moved back and forth between the prisons and the hospitals according to their condition.

The PSOE regime maintains its hard-line stance: no negotiations. The Spanish "democracy" has no political prisoners.

SUPPORT THE G.R.A.P.O. HUNGERSTRIKERS

Forty-two political prisoners in Spain are currently on hungerstrike to demand release from isolation units and an end to a campaign of repression aimed at them. The prisoners, mostly members of GRAPO (October 1st Revolutionary Anti-Fascist Groups) have been on strike since November 30. Thirty of them are currently in critical condition and may have mere days to live.

GRAPO prisoners are inside for acts of resistance against the so-called social-democratic Spanish state. GRAPO began fighting in 1975 in response to the execution of anti-fascist prisoners by Franco's dictatorship.

Inside prison these guerillas maintain a collective life, conditions gained through a 1981 hungerstrike which left one GRAPO member dead. The Spanish state has been taking that away with transfers and isolation tactics, to which the GRAPO prisoners and others responded with a renewed hungerstrike. Although the government agreed to the demands last fall, they quickly reneged after election time and began a renewed campaign of torture and harassment. The hungerstrike resumed. The demands of the current hungerstrike include an end to the repression and dispersal of prisoners, and an end to force-feeding.

We're demonstrating today because as people who share what some might call 'revolutionary' ideals like justice and self-determination, we can't allow those in power to quietly destroy people who've fought for these ideals. Regardless of what tactics we may choose to pursue these ends, we need to support each other in times like these. Spain is renowned for its 8000 political prisoners and the brutal treatment they receive. We want to stop the crime being committed by Spanish prisonrats and all their collaborators.

If you want to help stop this extermination, phone or write the people below or find other means of putting pressure on them to meet the GRAPO demands. Thanks.

Please write to:

Antonio Asunción
Dirección General de
Instituciones Penitenciarias
Ministerio de Justicia
Calle San Bernardo / 47 Madrid
28015 España

Wimmin Prisoners' Survival Network
Anarchist Black Cross (Toronto)
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