

The Echo of the Crutches: An Essay on Manuel Escorza del Val – Víctor Malavez

1. Introduction

García Oliver's *El Eco de los Pasos* [The Echo of the Footsteps] resounds endlessly for any attempt to write a historical analysis of the Spanish Civil War. And like any autobiographical reconstruction, its only purpose is to serve as a self-interested attempt to cast a favorable light on the cruel trail that our actions inevitably leave in their wake. For the immense majority of mortals, this hardly matters, for few of our actions actually are ever of any historical significance. And our errors, weaknesses and misdeeds can be buried in oblivion and generalized indifference.

García Oliver waited until the late 1970s (just in time, for he died only two years later) to use his book to stage his counterattack on the historical works and memoirs of his contemporaries, and as a platform from which he passed judgments on and pronounced criticisms of everything they did and did not do; and of what they could have done, and what they could have been, in that historical cataract into which all of them plunged in better or worse style. We note in the echo of his words, the battle he waged against various ghosts: against Durruti, for example, and that accursed shadow that was cast by his death that symbolized the death knell of a utopia (whereas he was supposed to have brought it about had he lived). We also note, however, a battle against many of the other leading figures of his time, whom he relentlessly pillories throughout the entire book.

This is the case, for example, with respect to his treatment of prominent members of the organization that he repudiated, the FAI, such as Federica Montseny and Abad de Santillán; and other well-known leaders who were also sucked into the maelstrom of events, like "Marianet", who ended up as the leader of the CNT at the culminating point of its history. But other libertarians were also treated the same way, like Balius and The Friends of Durruti, whom he accused of having entrenched themselves in ideological coherence when it was already impossible to escape from the swamp of the conversion of values. And the same can be said of his treatment of many other persons who are made to run the gauntlet of contradictions of this great anarchosyndicalist who would nonetheless be remembered by history as a former Minister of Justice, no matter how much music he composed to accompany his footsteps. For he projects his self-portrait against the background of all these people at the receiving end of his scorn, casting an historiographical challenge in the face of anyone who would dare to remind him of his own weaknesses, his timidity and his instinct for self-preservation. And we have no intention of probing too deeply into his miserable shortcomings: the reality is that we have not even scratched the surface.

And among all the people from that impassioned historical era who were at the receiving end of his denunciations, all with their good points and their bad points, perhaps there was only one whom he really could have successfully denounced. We are not talking about Durruti, who had the "good fortune" to die before the swamp would have killed

even his enthusiasm. There was another man who was ultimately crucified even more surely than Durruti, because of the difficult job he performed during the rise and fall of the libertarian movement. For if Oliver took it upon himself to play the role of that which he wanted to destroy, that is, by his “conversion” to the State, this other man embraced the role of the sword, that is, he specialized in the arts of repression. If Oliver chose to represent the “friendly” face of a disaster, this other man chose to perform the dirtiest kind of work, the work that any attempt to transform this rotten world will have to face. We are referring to Manuel Escorza del Val, the director of the Investigation Commission of the CNT-FAI in Catalonia after July of 1936. That is, something like the libertarian secret services of the Catalonian region.

Creating an anarchist intelligence agency is by no means a simple task. To descend to the level of the sewers is, first of all, extremely difficult, because that is where the tectonic clashes between the different concepts of society take place. Dirty war, low blows. Lies, betrayals and evil deeds. Filth—lots of filth.

To avoid drowning in this cesspool, information, or, more correctly, accurate information, has a fundamental strategic value. Today, now that we are drowning in our own kind of orgy of information, as suffocating as it is sterile, it seems that information is actually an abundant, not to say over-abundant, resource. Accurate information, however, the kind that has a strategic value, is still carefully concealed, kept secret and encrypted, and above all, it is expensive; very expensive.

Every intelligence agency in the world is well aware of these facts. And so are the big corporations, which are eager for accurate information, and are constantly tempted to indulge in industrial espionage against their most dangerous competitors. To do this, and to do it well, is the sign of power. This is why highly sophisticated espionage and counter-espionage are still crucial in the wars and battles waged behind the backs of a public that is stupefied by spectacles and trivialities.

Accurate information, furthermore, is what allows for knowledge of the movements, intentions, objectives, tactics and strategies of the “enemy”; its possession makes it possible to anticipate his moves, minimize the effect of his attacks and take advantage of his weak points. Information is a strategic resource; without it, other resources are not much use.

For the war of espionage and counter-espionage is part of the dirty, tacit war waged by various social actors (today, for the most part, States, or proto-States, and big corporations, but also on the level of political, trade union, cultural, and sports organizations...), regardless of whether or not they are officially at war. And in this dirty, covert war of low blows and “false flag” operations (that is, the attribution of responsibility for attacks, and even self-inflicted attacks, to innocent parties, in order to justify acts of violence that would otherwise be unjustifiable), the possession of accurate information is crucial. Ultimately, success in this underworld conflict depends on the ability to instill fear in the enemy.

But such dirty warfare inflicts a high degree of brutalization on its participants: rare are the torturers who escape the effects of their own machinery of torture; and rare is the assassin who escapes the gaze of his victims. It is in this sense that we must understand the words of the historian, Pastor: “The author was able to speak with members of various clandestine and official (government) organizations, and in almost every case was able to confirm that the representatives of this dirty, covert dialectic still experience serious remorse which, on the other hand, was not felt—or was felt in a more diluted and moderate way—by those who fought in the air force, the infantry, the artillery and the navy. This shows that the covert, dirty war poisons the soul in a deeper way. The phenomenon is universal....” (2006, p. 186).

Maybe that is why there are no known texts or memoirs of Manuel Escorza del Val, or of any of the other members of the Investigation Commission that he directed. In order to evaluate his actions, to try to discern what he did that was right and what he did that was wrong in what was supposed to be a “libertarian intelligence agency”, and even a “libertarian institution of repression”, no matter how contradictory these terms sound, it is of crucial importance to get to know more about Manuel Escorza del Val and his Investigation Commission. This article is not intended to be a bibliographical inquiry regarding these topics. Its purpose is to expand our knowledge of them as we proceed, as we discover more references, or as we obtain access to documents that were previously unknown. It is most likely, however, due to the very nature of the Commission, that is, the fact that it was a secret service that performed the dirtiest and murkiest functions, that every trace of its activities has been destroyed, whitewashed or distorted. Indeed, this seems to be the case: all the insults and accusations are cast directly at Manuel Escorza del Val. No one else who was a member of the Commission, not even his brother-in-law Liberto Minué, was the target of as much mud-slinging as he was. Perhaps now is the time to begin to take another look at everything that has been said about Escorza and the Commission.... Amidst the echo of his crutches....

1.1 Insults

All those who have had an interest in attributing the exclusive responsibility for the repression unleashed in Catalonia beginning in July of 1936 to the libertarian movement in general, and to Manuel Escorza in particular, have based their principal arguments on statements that have issued from the ranks of the libertarians themselves. The most fruitful sources for these statements are the works of García Oliver and Federica Montseny. And no one can refrain from quoting the words of García Oliver, who branded Escorza as a cripple in both mind and body:

“Manuel Escorza, that lamentable cripple, of mind as well as of body, whom they appointed to lead the regional Investigation Commission, was a member of the Libertarian Youth. Was it Fidel Miró who proposed this appointment? What demons were responsible for this choice that plunged all of us into a bloodbath?” (1978, p. 209).

García Oliver's autobiography was published in 1978, when Escorza was already dead. This leads us to ask: would he have dared to describe him in this way if Escorza was still alive? Then there is this description of Escorza written by Federica Montseny in her book, *Mis primeros 40 años* [My First 40 Years], which is so often quoted: "Even apart from this work [espionage and counter-espionage, which we shall examine in more depth below], there was something about him that always made me feel anxiety, not to say anguish. For many, Escorza was the Dzerzhinsky of the Spanish revolution" (1987, p. 95).

Within the libertarian movement, there are yet other criticisms leveled against him. For example, the one made by Felipe Sandoval, when he was a prisoner of Franco's forces: "Felipe Sandoval, a Madrid-based anarchist with a well-deserved reputation as an assassin, traveled to Barcelona on a mission related to the work he performed for the secret police of the CNT, the Secret Statistical Section of the National Committee, a department that was principally devoted to fighting the communists. For some reason, Sandoval infuriated Escorza in 1938 and had to flee Barcelona, fearing for his life. When he was interrogated by the Francoists, Sandoval described Escorza as a 'twisted figure, physically and morally a monster, a man whose methods disgusted me'" (Preston: 2011, p. 336).¹ The source is the "Report on my activities" signed by Felipe Sandoval, as presented during the proceedings of the *Causa General* [General Inquest and Trial]² conducted by the Franco regime after the war.

¹ Paul Preston's book, *El holocausto español. Odio y exterminio en la Guerra Civil y después* (Random House Mondadori, S.A., Barcelona, 2011, 859 p.), was published in a Spanish-language edition prior to the publication of his English-language volume entitled, *The Spanish Holocaust. Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth Century Spain*. (W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 2012, 700 p.). The corresponding passages from these two books are often quite different. In this translation I will provide my translation of the Spanish edition in the body of the text and append a footnote containing the corresponding passage from the English-language edition when the passages in question are significantly different. Here is the (somewhat truncated) corresponding English-language passage: "The Madrid-based anarchist Felipe Sandoval, a notorious and vicious killer in his own right, described Escorza to his own Francoist interrogators as 'a twisted figure, physically and morally a monster, a man whose methods disgusted me'" (Preston, English edition: 2012, p. 232) (see the bibliography at the end of this essay). The same procedure will be followed below in the case of Antony Beevor's book, *The Battle for Spain*, and the book written by Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, where such discrepancies appear in comparison with the corresponding Spanish editions [Translator's note].

² "The *Causa General* was an extensive and intensive judicial process ordered by a 1940 decree and conducted by the Spanish Attorney General's Office. It collected all possible information related to alleged offenses committed by Republicans—or sympathizers—during the Civil War and led to the opening of tens of thousands of judicial proceedings." Ofelia Ferrán and Lisa Hilbink, editors, *Legacies of Violence in Contemporary Spain. Exhuming the Past, Understanding the Present*, Routledge, New York, 2017, p. 169 [Translator's note].

Josep Batlle Salvat, a member of the CNT, and one of the men appointed to serve on the controversial Judicial Office in August of 1936, described Escorza as “an individual from the FAI, the most bloodthirsty of them all” (Vázquez: 2015, p. 92). Batlle also used these same words in his testimony before Franco’s tribunal after the war.

Outside the libertarian ranks, but still contemporary with Escorza, we find the journalist Manuel D. Benavides, often quoted by anti-anarchist historians, precisely because he offers a schizophrenically tendentious, when not entirely distorted, reading of the civil war in Catalonia (one need only note his interpretation of the Plenum of July 20-21, in which he presents Escorza, Federica and Abad de Santillán as anti-collaborationists...). Benevides said, among many other things that we shall relate in detail below, the following: “Escorza, the most extraordinary figure of anarchism...” (1978, p. 228); “Mentor of the most violent sectors, he often imposed his decisions and, obstinate and tyrannical, ended up pulling the strings behind the scenes of the libertarian revolution.... Who was this man, unknown to his compatriots, hardly accessible to his comrades, who exercised in Catalonia, right up until the May Events, an obscure and mysterious dictatorship?” (1978, p. 230); “There is much about him that is reminiscent of the old, reactionary Spain, the inquisitor, arrogant madness, dramatic tension, a crusade that seeks to storm heaven, bearing in one hand a few shreds of humanity and in the other a flaming torch” (1978, p. 232).³

Dolores Ibárruri (La Pasionaria), whose books are often based on statements made by the journalist Benavides, referred to Escorza with these words: “In Catalonia in ’36 ... no one was in charge except the militias of the FAI led by the anarchist Escorza, who was physically a broken-down wreck: hunchbacked, partly paralyzed, only the flame of his hatred for normal men burned in him. He wanted all of humanity to be paralyzed and hunchbacked, in his own image” (1979, p. 303).

However, the words of Benavides and La Pasionaria should not surprise anyone, since both Benavides and La Pasionaria saw the anarchists as more dangerous enemies than the fascists themselves. And maybe they were.

Outside the Stalinist milieu but still within the confines of the anti-fascist alliance of that time, we move on to Jaume Miravittles, of the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya [Republican Left of Catalonia] (the ERC), who merely repeated the same insults without

³ The author points out that Benavides is “often quoted by anti-anarchist historians”. The name “Benavides” does not appear in the indices of the three books written by English-speaking historians that are cited in this text. But it would appear that his opinions are often paraphrased by those authors without attribution. Compare the passages quoted above with Hugh Thomas’s characterization of Escorza: “... Escorza dominated the discussions within the anarchist movement by sheer strength of will.... While this spirit of a grand inquisitor lived on, the arguments of realism—that is, of alliance with the other parties—were difficult to put with success.” *The Spanish Civil War*, Revised and Enlarged Edition, Harper & Rowe, New York, 1977, p. 406 [Translator’s note].

adding anything new: “The CNT and the FAI, however, must not be confused. The general secretary of the CNT had no jurisdiction, if we may use this word to refer to anarchists, over the FAI. The general secretary of the FAI was a very obscure individual, too. His name was Escorza [sic] and he was handicapped, a cripple, horrible to behold. He used a wheelchair to get around; his arms were half-twisted, as is typical in deformed rheumatism. It has yet to be discovered to what degree his physical condition might have contributed to his moral conduct”⁴ (1980, p. 87).

General secretary of the FAI? Someone was a little confused....

Yet more testimonials issue from other members of the ERC. Pons Garlandí said of Escorza, among other things, that he was a “hunchback and a criminal ... (the mere thought of that person horrifies me)” (2008, p. 85); “the number one monster, both physically as well as morally” (2008, p. 104). And he categorized him, along with Aurelio and Portela, as “vulgar assassins and destroyers of constructive and decent liberalism....” (2008, p. 130). This kind of liberalism, by the way, if anyone has not already grasped this, is the kind that is advocated by Pons Garlandí, of course. Other contemporaries, like the republican officer Vicenç Guarnier, called Escorza “the crippled criminal” (1980, p. 175).

We could certainly cite more insults directed against Escorza. The insults mentioned above, however, were more than sufficient to induce a certain kind of contemporary historiography to accept this general characterization amidst such a profusion of name-calling. Thus, for example, one can hear on a radio program streamed on the Internet, Sentits de Catalunya Ràdio,⁵ the historians Miquel Mir and Solé i Sabaté refer to him as “perfidious” and as “an exterminating angel”. In their published works, however, they put these condemnations in the mouths of the people mentioned above. Solé i Sabaté himself, in the book he wrote with Joan Villarroya, spoke of Escorza in the following way: “Escorza stood up to everyone and everything. This man, imbued with a messiah complex, made an impression on everyone he came into contact with during the course of the war” (1989, p. 112).

For their part, the historians Albert Manent i Segimon and Josep Raventósi Giralt relate that “Escorza [was] one of the most bloodthirsty big shots, concerning whom Miquel

⁴ The translation is ours, as is also the case with all the other books which we have consulted in Catalan editions. However, in order to facilitate the readability of this text, we shall not subsequently notify the reader of these translations. It will be understood that when the book is listed in the bibliography with a title in Catalan, we translated the passage in question. We ask the reader to pardon us for any errors we may have committed in these translations, but we have tried to be as faithful as possible to the meaning of the version of the text to which we have had access. [Author’s note.] [All the following footnotes are also the author’s unless otherwise noted—translator’s supplementary note.]

⁵ <http://www.ccma.cat/catradio/alcarta/saber-la-veritatels-casos-escorza-i-erols/programa-especial-sobre-manuelescorza/audio/683350>.

Ferrer, the Secretary of the UGT during the war, tells us that he filled a pit with corpses in Horta” (1989, p. 112).

On the other hand, the historian José Luis Martín Ramos somewhat more cautiously referred to Escorza as an “apprentice libertarian policeman” (2012, p. 171). And another historian who joined in the festivities is Antony Beevor, a British military historian, who characterizes Escorza, along with Dionís Eroles, as “unscrupulous” (2005, pp. 69-70).⁶ Meanwhile, the historian Hugh Thomas referred to “the crippled figure of the puritanical Escorza” (1976, pp. 462-463).⁷

Our contemporary journalists have also followed suit, as they are more concerned with creating a spectacle than they are with clarifying reality, a tendency that is characteristic of their miserable profession in our times. Thus, for example, we see how Isidre Grau entitled an article, “El cor del Monstre” [The Heart of the Monster], in which he wrote that “during the first few months of the war he [Escorza] ordered thousands of assassinations”—we suppose that Grau was only capable of advancing such a claim because he was totally unaware of the fact that the repression behind the lines in the Republican zone claimed approximately 7,000 victims, and it is doubtful whether even half of these were accounted for by the libertarian movement. Isidre Grau, in only a few lines, related several other nonsensical claims without any historical basis, which we shall not take the trouble to refute.⁸

Likewise, you may find, in any number of blogs, commentaries and insults that repeat verbatim all the above-mentioned accusations made against Manuel Escorza del Val. One thing is clear, however: Escorza made people respect him both within and without the libertarian ranks, and this respect took the form of fear and terror among the enemies of anarchosindicalism. And if this is how so many of his contemporaries viewed Escorza, then it must have some basis.

1.2 Praise

If so many authors quote certain passages from García Oliver and Federica Montseny to slander Escorza, they all refrain from quoting other passages concerning Escorza that

⁶ In the 2006 revised English-language edition of Beevor’s book, *The Battle for Spain. The Spanish Civil War 1936-1939* (Penguin Books, New York), the word “unscrupulous” is used in the context of a discussion of the persons and institutions responsible for the wave of “red” repression, which included “unscrupulous and sometimes psychologically disturbed individuals, taking advantage of the chaos” (p. 85). The whole passage in question is quoted at greater length below [Translator’s note].

⁷ The English-language edition contains two corresponding passages: first, on p. 401, Thomas refers to him as “the crippled FAI leader, Manuel Escorza...”; second, on p. 406, Thomas writes, “The archpriest of opposition to the very idea of government authority was the crippled Manuel Escorza, whose only post was his membership of the peninsular committee of the FAI” (Thomas: 1977) [Translator’s note].

⁸ *El Punt Avui*, January 18, 2013.

appear in the very same books. García Oliver himself, for example, mentions, several pages before his insult that was so often quoted, the “Investigation Commission that was so efficiently directed by Escorza” (1978, p. 467).

The fact that someone like García Oliver, who was as insulting towards Escorza as a person as he was scornful of all other human beings, should admit that Escorza’s work and his Investigation Commission were efficient, indicates two things: first, that this Commission effectively carried out the directives that issued from the libertarian movement in general, and, more particularly, from García Oliver himself; and, secondly, that Escorza’s actions were not determined by personal manias, complexes and perversities, as some people are beginning to suggest, but were rather the result of his compliance with the demands imposed on everyone in the midst of a cruel civil war, as he confronted the problems and the enemies with which all of them had to contend.

Federica, for her part, considered him to be one of the four most important libertarians in the Spanish Civil War: “But we must mention in particular four men who, because of the positions they occupied and because of their youth, possessed special importance during those stormy times. One was Germinal de Souza.... Another was Pedro Herrera.... Another was Manuel Escorza, who was barely 23 years old at the time. An intelligent man, with an alert mind and a perspicacity that naturally inclined him towards occupying a position of great responsibility. And, above all, Mariano R. Vázquez Marianet....” (1987, p. 92).

However, we may even find some statements about Escorza made by his ideological enemies that are even more surprising. Thus, even the journalist Benavides speaks about Escorza in the following terms: “He was not where he was because of gold or the advantages of power. Master of an unparalleled force, this headstrong cripple prepared a catastrophe. There have been attempts to discredit him by casting doubt on his integrity. Escorza is the opposite of Indalecio Prieto. He had no concern for wealth except insofar as it furthered his work. This did not prevent him from paying shrewd bribes, for anarchism did not acquire a reputation for disregarding moral values for nothing” (1978, p. 233). Benavides obviously knows nothing about anarchist ideology.

In other words, Escorza was honest and incorruptible. In fact, this same characterization was also adopted by Federica: “He was an incorruptible and implacable revolutionary” (1987, p. 95). And a former member of the ERC, Jaume Miravittles, called him “the implacable and incorruptible Robespierre of the FAI” (quoted in Preston: 2011, p. 334) (English edition: p. 231).

And then there are historians who seem to want to compile a catalog of all such assessments of Escorza. The historian Hugh Thomas, for example, described Escorza as “honest, implacable, inaccessible, bitter and ironical” (1976, p. 439). [English edition: p. 406]. We are unacquainted with the specific sources upon which these adjectives are based.

Thus, Escorza inspired both enemies and comrades with a formidable respect, both because of his resolve when it came to making decisions, as well as his unbreakable will to resist temptations to which not a few yielded with greater or lesser alacrity during those disturbed times. We therefore see that many things are said of Escorza, some of them horrible, but no one has ever dared to accuse him of using his position for his own personal enrichment (a phenomenon that was very common in situations of that kind, and which more than a few people were involved in during that civil war). No one has ventured to accuse him of stealing anything from anyone for his own profit, an accusation that even dogged the footsteps of Federica in exile.

Finally, we have the testimony of his daughter, Nuria Escorza, a Chilean poet, who was interviewed twice on the Sentits program on Catalunya Ràdio.⁹ She described her father as “the dearest man on earth”, a man with “a very strong personality”, a man who was “up-front”, that is, he told you what he thought right to your face. And her surprise at finding out about her father’s past a few years ago is therefore all the more understandable. And her courage to confront it is admirable, for she went so far as to travel to Barcelona to discover the truth. With this article, we do not claim to discover the truth. But we do intend to shed a new light on Manuel Escorza del Val.

2. *His early years*

Now, however, we shall try to retrace Escorza’s tracks, based on the little that is known about him in the books and newspaper articles we have consulted. As far as we know, he was born in Barcelona in 1912, the son of Manuel Escorza,¹⁰ “a carpenter and trade unionist in Barcelona ... [who] as a representative of the Trade Union of Furniture Workers of Barcelona, participated in the National Workers Congress held in Barcelona from October 30 to November 1, 1910, where the National Confederation of Labor was formally constituted” (Martinez de Sas i Pelai: 2000, p. 502). Manuel Escorza del Val was therefore born and raised in a *cenetista* family.

We know of a sister of Escorza, Dolores Escorza del Val, who would later be the companion of Liberto Minué, and whose career trajectory would be very similar to Escorza’s throughout their lives. For Dolores was mentioned in *La Vanguardia*, in its November 6, 1934 issue, in the Judicial News section, in an article entitled, “Women Sentenced by the Emergency Tribunal”. According to this article, “In Part Three of this Court, yesterday morning, the Emergency Tribunal was convened to examine and to issue

⁹ <http://www.ccma.cat/catradio/alcarta/programa/entrevistaa-nuri-escorza-per-adolf-beltran/audio/634374>.

¹⁰ Several articles possibly related to his father were published in *La Vanguardia*: on March 13, 1924, an announcement that “At the Culinary Arts Society today, at eleven in the evening, Mr. Manuel Escorza will give a speech on the theme, ‘The Cultural Purpose of the Workers Organizations’”; on May 7, 1927 and February 7, 1930, announcements were published concerning the formation of a Directive Committee of the Association of Upholsterers of Barcelona, where Manuel Escorza acted on both occasions as Vice President.

a ruling on the charges brought against Dolores Escorza del Val and Concepción Gallart Lara, accused of possessing explosives. According to the official indictment, the detainees were arrested by a police agent of the Generalidad and three individuals from the *Somatén*, when they exited the stairwell of a house at No. 4 Cano Street at ten in the morning on October 6 of last year, each of them carrying a basket in which two or three grenade-type bombs were concealed. The arrest was made while the police were conducting a search of the trade union offices on Rosal Street, and a few moments before an exchange of gunfire took place between the forces of order and a group of individuals who were assumed to have been associated with the trade union. The evidence proved to be unfavorable for both detainees, who were found guilty by the Tribunal. Concepción Gallart was sentenced to six years in prison, and Dolores Escorza, six months and one day in custody, in view of her status as a minor”.

The earliest accounts we have concerning Manuel Escorza del Val are found in the short biographical section that Benavides devoted to Escorza in his book, *Guerra y revolución en Cataluña* [War and Revolution in Catalonia]. From this book, the following account may be gathered:

His childhood was the cold and lonely experience of the child to whom illness barred the doors of life. The son of a worker, the boy, crippled and hunchbacked, had no other vantage point from which to observe the world than reading. The book, the newspaper and a pair of crutches were his means of relating to the outside world. I will refrain from commenting on the credit that must be granted to any reference to the profound impression made on him by the episodes of the terrorist underworld elements who, when the boy was just entering his adolescence, fought with the pistoleros of Baron Koenig and the generals Anido and Arlegui, and how he celebrated the day when the group of “the nine”, from the Woodworkers Trade Union, gunned down Bravo Portillo.

His youth revealed the man that Escorza would have been had he not suffered from the disease that hobbled his arms and legs: a thin young man, rawboned, with a good skeletal structure and a robust constitution. The harsh affliction of paralysis twisted his hands and withered his legs. But due to the vigor of his mind, this cripple inspired not pity but respect. And this vigor was superimposed on the disorder of solitude that, instead of breaking him, made him stronger. With the passage of time, his gaunt face took on a distant and ironic expression. The precocious maturity of the invalid dispelled the melancholic airs that enveloped his childhood. His life was henceforth a continuous training exercise to shield him against the misfortune inflicted on him by his deformity, and to participate in social conflicts. First, however, he abandoned his monastic existence as a reclusive student in order to take courses at the University.

*Escorza neither smoked nor drank. He was annoyed by the student strikes. He had literary ambitions and a profound psychological intuition. Withdrawn and sensitive, he alternated his studies with articles he wrote for **Tierra y Libertad** and novellas published by the publishing house managed by Federico Urales.*

Since his sensitivity predominated over his intelligence, he was attracted to art, sociology and history. He joined the Freemasons and the libertarian cultural group, "Faros" [Lighthouse].

This man, whose mentality was so grim and so sensitive, who disdained physical activity and would not allow anyone to contradict him, who made speeches and who exercised a great power of suggestion over his audience, who knew how to gracefully insinuate himself into a person's confidence, displayed great powers of self-control and never lost confidence in himself, afflicted by the invalid complex, this man who sought to hold sway over the intelligence of his comrades until he converted them into an echo of his arguments and even of his very words, was devoured by the ambition to command.

When did he really put himself to the test and seriously conceive of the plan to take control of the fate of the libertarians? Probably in July 1936. That was when this formidable and dreadful champion of chaos saw his chance.

Escorza could not be a member of the CNT because he did not have a trade. He was able to develop his aptitudes through the FAI. His anarchism proved to be intransigent, authoritarian and disciplinarian. Because he liked to engage in polemics and to get people to listen to him, he accepted dialogue; he shouted and banged his fists on the table if his opponents were not convinced by his arguments. He expressed his positions clearly, but his interlocutors got the impression that, in his heart, he really did not agree with what he was saying. Even on those occasions when he unleashed his explosive anger, he did not seem to be sincere.

I heard some of his friends who were trying to reconcile these contradictory aspects of Escorza's temperament refer to him as a "Statist anarchist", an unprecedented political absurdity that, if it were true, would place him in the same category with lunatics who want to catch flies by their tails. Escorza is more than that, although his revolutionary castles in the air built on foundations of archives and policemen are somewhat confusing....

It is said that Escorza and Dr. Martí Ibáñez are the best anarchist orators and that Escorza is well-versed in international syndicalism, a specialty that did not detract from his literary ambitions and was accompanied by an aptitude for the most complex intelligence activities. A Catalonia with all its secrets filed in his archives and all his enemies destroyed would have fulfilled his aspirations, and as far as he was concerned, his enemies were those who opposed him, whether they were republicans, communists, members of the UGT, members of the CNT, or fascists....

When, however, he indulged in speculation on the characteristics of a free world, he expounded ideas that were as life-affirming as Spring itself. But then he would come back to his senses and denounce his allies in the government who

complained about the savage violence of the “anarchos”. Escorza loathed Comorera [the leader of the Stalinist-communist PSUC] with an arrogant disdain, which went beyond political differences—affecting not just the parties but also the trade unions that were opposed to the libertarian hurricane—and was projected even further: all the way to the red and black victory of his revolution, which, if it was necessary to bring it about, he would have been capable of setting all of Catalonia aflame and grinding under his crutches both the living and the dead who stood in his way.

The CNT did not support his actions. Nor did the Libertarian Youth.

(1978, pp. 230-234)

Benavides also insists that Escorza was a Freemason: “There were always very close relations, and exchanges of services, between Escorza and the Freemasons. He was an influential Freemason, and Catalanian Freemasonry included not only members of the petty bourgeois republican parties, but also anarchists” (1978, p. 234). *La Pasionaria* also made the same claim, although certainly on the basis of the previous allegations of Benavides: “An important nexus that facilitated the aforementioned links between the Catalanian nationalists and the FAI was Freemasonry: not only leaders of the Catalanian bourgeois nationalist parties, but also many well-known anarchists, such as Manuel Escorza del Val, a member of the Peninsular Committee of the FAI, belonged to the Masonic lodges” (1966, p. 20).

We note that Benavides states that Escorza wrote articles for *Tierra y Libertad*, but after an examination of the issues of this magazine from that era, we were unable to locate even one article signed by Escorza. Others, like Carles Font,¹¹ claim that Escorza was the editorial director of both *Tierra y Libertad* and *Tiempos Nuevos*. As Font also mentions, he was considered to be a very talented orator, and spoke at many mass meetings during the 1930s.

Concerning this period, the 1930s prior to the Civil War, we know, from an announcement published in *La Vanguardia* in its issue of December 24, 1932, that Escorza was notified that he had to present himself for military service, in the following terms: “Fifth District. The Recruitment Section of this District, located at 56 Hospital Street, first, is interested in the presentation of the following young men, whose current addresses are unknown, or of persons who represent them, for enlistment in the army for the year nineteen hundred and thirty three according to quotas established for this Section, on any convenient day between ten a.m. and one p.m., or between four p.m. and six p.m., to proceed to enroll and avoid the consequences: ... Manuel Escorza del Val...”.

¹¹ <http://suite101.net/article/manuel-escorza-luces-y-sombrasde-la-barcelona-revolucionaria-a37644>.

And Carles Font adds more information about Manuel Escorza: he says that he was a member of the Association of the Blind and Invalids in 1933.¹² This journalist did not, however, cite his source for this information.

Nor do we know where Benavides obtained his information about Escorza, and the same could be said of almost all the assertions he makes in his book. It is most likely that they are products of a journalistic treatment of the period, a mixture of gossip and subjectivity, as if, by constructing an image of Escorza, he could conflate it with the image of anarchism as a whole, concerning which he does not bother to conceal his aversion and his hatred.

On the other hand, the short biography devoted to Escorza in the book, *Diccionari Biogràfic del Moviment Obrer als Països Catalans*, tells us that Manuel Escorza was an “an accountant and anarchist leader” (Martínez de Sas i Pagès: 2000, p. 502).

In fact, most of the information we have presented in this bibliographical inquiry into the life of Escorza situates him squarely within the libertarian movement. According to García Oliver, as we pointed out above, Escorza was a member of the Libertarian Youth. Moreover, Agustín Guillamón’s book, *Los comités de Defensa de la CNT en Barcelona (1933-1938)*, includes excerpts from the proceedings of a Plenum of the FAI that took place in June 1936, where, “as the fifth point on the agenda, the ‘Anarchist Interpretation of the Revolution’ was debated” (2011, p. 42). Escorza spoke on behalf of the Grupo Seis Dedos (which, according to the author, was composed of Liberto Minué, Abelino Estrada, José Irizalde and Manuel Gallego, in addition to Escorza). It is perhaps worth the trouble to review his positions at a time when an Anti-Nosotros tendency (“Nosotros” [“We”]) was the group composed of Durruti, Ascaso and García Oliver, among others) had arisen in the FAI over the course of the debates about what should be done in a revolutionary situation. The Nosotros Group advocated the Seizure of Power, which provoked sharp criticism within the Federation, as it was understood to be a decidedly philo-Marxist proposal. Let us see what Guillamón has to say about the positions of Escorza’s group during these debates:

E... [Escorza], representing the Seis Dedos Group, then delivered a long speech, which included considerations on “insurrectionary and revolutionary movements which have taken place in various countries, and their genesis and development”. He cited the Bavarian insurrection, where “anarchist comrades attempted to decisively influence the course of events, from a position of power”. He called attention to several passages from Bakunin in which the latter contemplated “the formation of a Government and the defense of the revolution by means of decrees, if necessary, but always under the control of the people”. He mentioned the assassination of anarchists by the social democrat Noske. He seemed to be defending García Oliver when he concluded his speech by saying that “the work

¹² In the June 17, 1933 issue of *La Vanguardia*, there is an announcement that “the Barcelona Association of Blind and Invalids has elected the following persons to its Directive Committee: ... Assistant Bookkeeper, Manuel Escorza...”.

of the bold and resolute minority [of people] is not that of leading this movement, but of instilling it with a truly anarchist character” (2011, p. 44).

After a series of speeches by the spokesmen for other groups on the question of what should be done about the question of power, we are told that: “The [representative of the] Seis Dedos Group, after confessing his lack of experience, then spoke at length about the positions of the various groups, without actually supporting any of them. The moderator, after this last speech, then requested that the participants in the debate should express their own ideas, and that ‘they should not conduct themselves as if they were in a café” (2011, pp. 48-49). We see that these debates addressed a theoretical problem of anarchism, that is, what should be done in a favorable revolutionary situation, and how to administer anarchist power in the streets. Thus, Guillamón continues: “According to García Oliver, the organization of the defense cadres, coordinated by neighborhood defense committees in the city of Barcelona, was the model that should be followed, and extended to all of Spain, and this structure should be coordinated on a regional and national level in order to create a revolutionary army of the proletariat. This army should be complemented by the creation of guerrilla units of one hundred men each. Many militants expressed their opposition to García Oliver’s ideas, trusting more to the spontaneity of the workers than to a disciplined revolutionary organization. The anti-militarist, and even pacifist, views of many affinity groups resulted in an almost unanimous rejection of the thesis of the Nosotros Group, and especially of García Oliver.”

“The rejection of the proposal he made on July 21, 1936, to seize power, and ‘to go all the way’ after crushing the military uprising, understood by the immense majority of the participants in the Plenum as the establishment of an ‘anarchist dictatorship’, was foreshadowed by that Plenum held in June. Just a few days before the 19th of July!” (2011, pp. 50-51).

After that historical date in 1936, it is likely that, during the July events, Escorza was at the headquarters of the Regional Committee of the CNT performing tasks related to coordination, although we have been unable to locate any references to support this speculation.

We do find some evidence concerning Escorza’s activities at the time of the revolt, however, in the Assembly of Local and County Plenums which took place on July 20/21, 1936 (various authors differ over this date, although it would seem that it was July 21), where he proposed a third option opposed to both García Oliver’s “go all the way” and the collaborationism of Abad de Santillán and Federica Montseny. It is curious how the question is usually posed as involving only two tendencies, as if you had to “go all the way” or else you had no choice but to opt for collaboration in an anti-fascist front. Perhaps the only exception was the proposal made by Escorza: “The third view, proposed pragmatically by Manuel Escorza, consisted in using the government of the Generalidad to legalize the ‘revolutionary conquests’, controlling the Ministries of Defense and of Public Order, and basing the CNT’s margin of maneuver on its indisputable rule in the streets to attempt to ‘crystallize the revolutionary situation’ while awaiting the

development of more favorable conditions for the definitive victory of the revolution” (Guillamón 2007, p. 57).

According to Abel Paz: “Between these two positions (those of García Oliver and of the Santillán/Montseny duo) a third view was proposed, which García Oliver thought was mistaken [according to a letter sent by García Oliver to Abel Paz many years after the Plenum], which, as expressed by its proponent Manuel Escorza, consisted in utilizing the government of the Generalitat to collectivize the countryside and socialize industry, which would make syndicalism the decisive force in the new society. Once these objectives were achieved, and the government of the Generalitat was stripped of power, the latter would collapse due to its lack of real effectiveness. According to this position, no agreements should be made with the government for any reason, since the problem of power had already been practically resolved because it was in the hands of the CNT-FAI. This erroneous position—erroneous from the anarchist point of view—attracted the support of the most radical elements. The delegation from the county of Baix Llobregat, represented by José Xena, declared against government collaboration, but, by not openly supporting García Oliver, implicitly leaned towards the position of Escorza, or adopted a stance of refusing to take a position on a question that demanded a solution” (2004, pp. 504-505).¹³

There can be no doubt that Manuel Escorza played some kind of role during the July days of 1936, since he was chosen to lead the Regional Investigation Commission of the CNT-FAI. And, as we have seen, he was one of the few persons who were capable of articulating a way to deal with this complex historical reality.

Perhaps, before continuing our attempt to retrace his steps, we should address the question of this Investigation Commission, because much of what is said about Escorza is related to his performance of the functions entrusted to him by the Catalanian libertarian organizations.

3. The Investigation Commission

After the July days of 1936, the CNT-FAI acquired political, economic and social importance of the first order, above all in Catalonia. And this is why it created the Investigation and Intelligence Commission: to obtain accurate information concerning the intentions of not only the enemy, but also of its alleged allies in the so-called “Anti-fascist United Front”.

3.1 The purposes of the Commission

It is Federica Montseny who informs us of the functions that were supposed to be performed by Escorza’s Investigation Commission: “On the top floor of the Casa de

¹³ Translated from the Spanish edition published in 2004 (see bibliography). The English edition published by AK Press in 2006 is somewhat different, omitting certain phrases from the Spanish text [Translator’s note].

Cambó ... the offices of what was called the Investigation Services were installed. The mission of these services was the discovery and identification of fascist agents, whether Spaniards, Italians or Germans, who had remained in Barcelona, hidden among the population. At the head of these services was comrade Manuel Escorza, the son of a militant from the Furniture Workers Trade Union, very well-known and much respected in our Organization. Manuel Escorza used crutches and was somewhat hunchbacked, due to having suffered from polio when he was a child. The efficiency of the management of these services by Escorza and his friends was revealed in the organization of the Counterespionage Services in Spain and in other countries. I can attest to the fact that much of the intelligence that was useful for Largo Caballero himself, the Chief of State and the Minister of Defense, came from Escorza's Services" (1987, p. 95). It is interesting to note that she speaks of "friends" when she refers to the Commission's key personnel, which gives us a hint of where to look next, as we shall see below.

The Investigation Commission led by Escorza had certain delegated functions of espionage, counterespionage and the repression of the enemy. This Commission was created very quickly, shortly after the July days (perhaps at the Plenum of July 26, although the minutes of the Plenums of the 21st as well as the 26th of July have "conveniently disappeared") (Guillamón: 2007, p. 65).

The Commission's offices were located on the top floor of the Casa CNT-FAI, on the Via Layetana, in the building formerly known as the Casa Cambó [the former location of the headquarters of the Federació Patronal Catalana, the Catalanian Employer's Association]. The journalist Benavides describes the Commission in the following way: "Installed on the top floor of the building that once contained the offices of the Employer's Association, confiscated by the CNT-FAI, Escorza set up his own independent operation as soon as the revolt was crushed in the streets of Barcelona. That was his world, and he had his own police force and his own separate budget. Only his closest collaborators, Minué and the Portuguese Sousa and his agents, had access to the office of this strange man, who was the enemy of the regular army but who had transformed anarchist groups into uniformed troops, which did not prevent him from espousing a 'militant' anti-militarist line; the enemy of the *incontrolados*, because he aspired to total control, yet a man who could rely on an uncontrollable force; an enthusiast of order and discipline, who nonetheless unleashed disorder and indiscipline.... An odd, silent and reserved figure, who had to deal with people who preferred shouting and grandstanding to silence and reserve!

"He said, 'We shall show no mercy in dealing with fascists and neutrals'. And he said this while also thinking that the enemy must be eliminated quietly, without a lot of fuss. His archival and investigative work performed outside of the jurisdiction of the CNT and the Committee of Militias aroused the jealousy of certain sectors of the CNT. He was opposed by those who feared him as a rival: the famous Defense Groups, the most unruly and immoral units of the Patrols, the Committee of Militias.... Escorza posed a challenge to all of them with his audacity" (1978, p. 232).

In connection with its espionage and counter-espionage missions, the Commission was also responsible for the surveillance and transport of exiles, especially in Paris, where the activities of the various intelligence agencies were largely focused at the time. And there, the Investigation Commission engaged in notorious activities, as we shall see.

On the basis of this mission, which implied a maximum centralization of intelligence sources, Guillamón adds that “Manuel Escorza was also responsible for the screening and approval of the candidates who were nominated for the various responsible positions in the CNT, a function which granted him a great deal of influence within the superior committees of the CNT” (2011, p. 110).

We must also mention, in addition, that Escorza had his own ideas, too, as revealed by the proposals he made at the July 21st Plenum. Guillamón explains them as follows:

“Manuel Escorza del Val was the head of the Services of Investigation and Intelligence of the CNT-FAI, an institution that was not under the jurisdiction of the CCMA, but of the Regional Committees of the CNT and the FAI, that is, it was a libertarian institution that, according to Escorza’s proposal at the Plenum of July 21st, was intended to create an autonomous and independent armed force that would eventually be capable of ‘getting rid’ of the government of the Generalidad” (2007, p. 78).

For all these reasons, the importance of Escorza’s Investigation Commission must not be underestimated, as it was represented at all the important meetings of the time, which Guillamón referred to as packed full of high-level leaders: “The pressing need to make decisions after July 19 implied the breakdown of the horizontal and federal functioning of the CNT and of all practices of direct democracy. The usual practice was to make important decisions at meetings of leaders, of the members of the Regional Committee, the Local Federation of Barcelona, the Peninsular Committee of the FAI, and those who held positions of importance in the CCMA, the Council of the Economy or the Investigation Commission, the Control Patrols, etc. Afterwards, the decisions made by the big shots were ratified at the Plenums, ‘formally’ preserving the appearances of maintaining the traditional procedures of the CNT” (2007, footnote, pp. 51-52).

Any assessment of Escorza, then, must be made in the framework of these objectives that the Catalan libertarian organizations made him responsible for as the chief of the Investigation Commission of the CNT-FAI in Catalonia. But who were Escorza’s helpers in this task?

3.2 The members of the Commission

We will attempt to identify, based on the bibliographical references that we have been able to access, the possible members of this Commission. We must take into consideration the possibility that its staff might have changed over the course of the civil war. Furthermore, it is hard to precisely establish how Escorza structured the entire intelligence network, based on the information we possess.

Thus, first of all, the historian Preston tells us the following: “The regional committees of the CNT, the FAI and the Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth jointly resolved to create an Investigation Commission of the CNT-FAI led by Manuel Escorza del Val, whose purpose was to prosecute those who committed excesses. This joint committee was composed of Abad de Santillán, Montseny, Marianet and Fidel Miró” (2014, p. 334).¹⁴

That is, this joint committee was composed of the general secretaries of the regional committees of the CNT and the Libertarian Youth, and the Peninsular Committee of the FAI. But did such a “Libertarian General Staff” really exist? How did it function? And, if it did exist and function as such, did Marianet maintain his position on this committee when he was appointed to serve as the General Secretary of the National Committee of the CNT? Was another type of Investigation Commission created for the National Committee? As we shall see in future installments of this series, the intelligence services of the libertarian movement were restructured after May, 1937.

According to Guillamón, however, the nucleus of the Commission was composed of the members of the Seis Dedos Group: “many of them constituted the backbone of the Investigation Service of the CNT-FAI” (2011, p. 302). And, as we have seen, the members of the Seis Dedos Group in 1936 were Escorza, Liberto Minué, Abelino Estrada, José Irizalde and Manuel Gallego.¹⁵ These may have been, in the words of Federica, “his friends”.

¹⁴ I was unable to locate the corresponding passage in the English edition of Preston’s book. The page that would seem to be the most likely candidate contains the following passage, however: “The new Minister [of Internal Security—in September, 1936], Artemí Aiguader i Miró of the Esquerra, inherited much of the personnel of the old Department d’Investigació of the CCMA, including Aurelio Fernández, Dionís Eroles, Manuel Escorza and Josep Asens” (p. 242) [Translator’s note].

¹⁵ We do not know whether this was Manuel Gallego Vallecillos. If so, it certainly opens up some interesting connections, because we find Manuel Gallego Vallecillos in 1933, implicated in the famous attack on the restaurant, “Oro del Rhin” in Barcelona, which he managed to escape. He was described in a news story in *La Vanguardia* in its August 13, 1933 edition (<http://hemeroteca.lavanguardia.com/preview/1933/08/13/pagina-6/33188089/pdf.html>) as a photographer, which would imply interesting possibilities for the Commission, such as, for example, the production of false documents.... But even more interesting is his appearance during the Civil War in Madrid, in January 1937, as we read in Javier Cervera’s doctoral thesis, when he was involved in the reorganization of the forces of public order: “The new National Council of Security was composed of the Minister of the Interior, as President; the General Director of Security, as Vice President; and as Ministers, two from the UGT, two from the CNT, and one from each party; a Commander of the Security Forces (from the uniformed groups) and one representative of the Guards; an Inspector (from the undercover units), a police captain and an investigating agent (art. 2).” Footnote appended to this passage: “by Ministerial Order of January 12, 1937 (GACETA, January 13, 1937), revised by another Order

Besides Escorza, Minué and Federica herself, other names appear on a list of the members of the Investigation Services and the Committees of the FAI as of October 1936: “a) For the Investigation Services: José Ardiz, Roberto Canto, J. Erizalde (is this the same José Irizalde who was a member of the anarchist group, Seis Dedos?), Avelino Estrada (Seis Dedos), Manuel Gallego (Seis Dedos), R. Gil, Lucio José Gómez Arnaiz, Ferdinand Götze (from DAS),¹⁶ Arthur Lewin (DAS), S. Lopez, A. Masette, Liberato Minué Franco (Seis Dedos), Carlos Picó, F. Prunera, Pedro Puigvert, Gerónimo Pujol, J. Royo, Blas Santos, Inés Selva, María Zorio; b) For the Committees of the FAI: Francisco Barrubés, Manuel Escorza del Val, and Federica Montseny” (Guillamón, 2014: pp. 550-551).

Also involved with the Commission, but as an external operative, was Justo Bueno Pérez, during the final stage of the conflict (after his escape from prison in January 1938), according to a biographical note written by Guillamón. We have some doubts, however, as to whether he was ever actually a member of the Commission, as we shall see in future installments of this series.

Another name that arises is Hilario Esteban Gil (Guillamón, 2011, p. 260: footnote: “he was a column delegate and an agent of Escorza’s spy ring in France”). Antonio Ortiz said, concerning Hilario Esteban, “I knew him when he was a miner, he brought a whole arsenal of explosives to my house” (Márquez y Gallardo: 1999, p. 121). He held a high level position in the Ortiz Column in “the Sástago sector under the command of Hilario Esteban and Captain Zamora” at the beginning of the war. We do not know whether or not he was a member of Escorza’s network. In March, Ortiz still had him under his command, on the Aragon Front, due to the military expertise of an Italian engineer: “One of the men who were there before we arrived came to meet us. By his profile and his way of walking I knew right away that he was on our level. It was Hilario Esteban, who was previously with the 2nd Column. A veteran militant who was always involved in secret operations of a revolutionary nature. He was not a man of many words, he only slapped me on the back and said: ‘Aixó no són les bombes del 8 de gener!’ [These are not the bombs of January 8] And he was right!” (Márquez y Gallardo: 1999, p. 180). In April of 1937, however, as we shall see in an upcoming article in this series, there is a report that appears to situate him in Barcelona....

issued on the following February 22 (GACETA, February 23, 1937), the Ministers were: Felipe Petral Iglesias and Mariano Muñoz Sánchez from the UGT; Antonio Moreno Toledo and Jose Maria Jareño from the CNT; Manuel Molina Conejedo from the PSOE; Antonio Uribes Moreno from the PCE; Emilio Baeza Medina from the IR; Benito Artigas Arpón from the UR; and Manuel Gallego Vallecillos from the FAI”. Source: the doctoral thesis of Javier Cervera Gil, at:

<http://biblioteca.ucm.es/tesis/19911996/H/0/H0032202.pdf> (pp. 576-577).

¹⁶ DAS=*Deutsche Anarcho-Syndikalisten*: German Anarchosyndicalists [Translator’s note].

In a biography of Illfeld, other names are also mentioned, but it is possible that not all of them were actually official members of the Commission: “Illfeld, with Ferdinand Götze, Arthur Lewin, Fred Hessenthaler, Helmut Kirschev and others, were members of a group that was working under the command of the Committee of Internal Security and Investigation, led by Dionís Eroles Batlle and Manuel Escorza del Val from the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI), which was responsible for searches and confiscations of the apartments, businesses and offices of the German Nazis residing in the Catalanian capital”.¹⁷

According to García and Piotrowski, Lipschulz was another member of Escorza’s team: “... there are testimonials of arrested anti-fascists who managed to escape with their lives from the Stalinist chekas that coincide in their common features, such as mistreatment, lies, threats, torture, blackmail, etc., used by the Stalinists to extort self-incriminating confessions and to induce their victims to provide false accusations against political dissidents. The account provided on May 21, 1937 by a German militant who was a member of the Syndicalist Party, Mauricio Lipschulz, who was also a member of Escorza’s intelligence service, concerning the conditions of his imprisonment and how he was treated, and the interrogations carried out by the Spanish police and agents of the Alfred Hertz Service,¹⁸ offer abundant details testifying to the impunity enjoyed by the Stalinist machinery of repression under the protection in this case of the Valencia Government” (2010, p. 382).

In the biography of Antonio Ortiz, *Ortiz: General sin Dios ni Amo* [Ortiz: A General without God or Master], we discover a few more names, most of them agents in French territory. Some are “code names”: “Everything that was known about Antonio Ortiz and Ascaso was collected in a dossier of 50 folders, on whose cover are the words, ‘To be sent to Portela’ [had he joined Escorza’s network?].... This was all the information on the Ortiz-Ascaso case from July to November of 1938, when it would appear that the case was dropped because it was impossible, or due to a lack of certainty or disagreements among the members of the Network whose main objective was to capture and kill Ortiz and Ascaso. Some of the documents are imprecise with respect to dates and places, unlike other sources of information on the case. This is why it cannot be ruled out that some of the agents of the Network wanted to demonstrate their efficacy in the search for information to their superiors and when they did not find any they invented it or distorted it. Insofar as they made their living from this (espionage) and some of them were living quite comfortably, the search for reasons to gratify their commanders is not so surprising. A certain ‘Manolo’ stands out as a possible ringleader of the network in the Antonio affair. Throughout the various documents, eight more names are mentioned, some of them real names, although there were undoubtedly more persons implicated in this affair. The names are: Luis Larroyo, José (Carlos), Justo Bueno, Nik, Minue, Astur, Lodo,

¹⁷ <http://www.estelnegre.org/documents/illfeld/illfeld.html>

¹⁸ Alfred Hertz was the pseudonym of George Mink, a Comintern agent working in Spain (R. Dan Richardson, *Comintern Army: The International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War*, The University Press of Kentucky, 1982, Lexington, pp. 163-164) [Translator’s note].

Pedro” (1999, p. 250). We think that “Nik” might be the code name of Pedro Campón, as we shall see in an upcoming installment. For now, however, this is only a guess.

Martín Ramos also mentions another collaborator with Escorza’s Commission, at least as of May 1937, “the former sergeant Manzana—the leading figure of the self-proclaimed ‘Committee of War’ during the fighting in May” (Martín Ramos: 2015, p. 108). In any case, over the course of three years of the war, the members of the Commission’s network may have been replaced, or their functions might have been changed. It cannot be doubted that, by discovering its members, and the tasks they performed over the course of the conflict, we would open up a broader perspective and make possible a better understanding of what the Commission did to achieve the objectives assigned to it by the libertarian organizations.

3.3 The Commission: its structure and network

The Commission did not arise out of thin air, however. According to Guillamón, when it was first created it did not have the same functions it later assumed, but emerged as a kind of coordinating committee for the tasks of investigation that were already being performed by the Defense Committees of the CNT. It was based on these defense cadres that had been in existence since 1934 (other authors maintain they had existed since the 1920s) which, at the time, “could be defined as the clandestine army of the revolution, seriously devoted to operations relating to intelligence, weapons, training, strategy and the preparation of the workers insurrection” (Guillamón, 2011: p. 26). Later in the same text Guillamón adds: “The defense cadres, organized territorially in zones that were well-defined with respect to those of other groups, composed of six members each, each with very precise tasks of relating to intelligence, espionage and investigation, were the front-line clandestine armed organization of the CNT.”

“These front-line cadres were supposed to be joined, at the outbreak of the insurrection, by secondary groups of trade union militants, the affinity groups of the FAI, members of the workers’ cultural centers [*ateneos*], etc. After July 19, tasks relating to intelligence, enemy espionage, investigation of the forces and leadership of the class enemy, were coordinated by the Investigation and Intelligence Services of the CNT-FAI, while other tasks were coordinated at delegate meetings—the secretaries of each neighborhood committee met with the Regional Committee, at the Casa CNT-FAI.... Escorza coordinated all the tasks of intelligence and investigation of the various revolutionary neighborhood committees. This Investigation Service constituted an extensive network of intelligence and counter-espionage, in France and Switzerland as well as in Spain. Counter-espionage in foreign countries was under the command of Liberto Minué, Escorza’s brother-in-law.

“The intelligence network was extended and further developed in the investigation committees that existed in other towns, in almost all the defense committees and in the various CNT columns, and also involved various collectives. [Footnote: ‘Given the intelligence-gathering responsibilities and the investigative tasks of the defense cadres ... it was natural that after July 19 the (local and neighborhood) revolutionary committees

continued to perform such missions on a routine basis, submitting reports that Escorza was responsible for coordinating and summarizing at the Investigation Service of the CNT-FAI]. Thus, for example, the group, DAS (German anarchosyndicalists in exile), was authorized by the CNT-FAI Investigation Service to investigate the activities of Nazi groups in Barcelona, and thus became a German investigation patrol for a few months” (2011, pp. 96-98).

During the July Days these defense cadres were transformed into workers militias and revolutionary neighborhood (or local) committees, performing multiple organizational functions (from recruitment of militiamen to searches and requisitioning revolutionary taxes). According to Guillamón, “the activities of the revolutionary neighborhood committees were coordinated at the headquarters of the Regional Committee, at meetings attended by the secretaries of all the neighborhood defense committees. There was also a standing Confederal Defense Committee, whose offices were at the Casa CNT-FAI. For tasks relating to the confiscation of major sums of money and valuable objects, and for all tasks relating to arrests, intelligence and investigation that, due to their scale, were beyond the scope of the revolutionary neighborhood committees, the Investigation Service of the CNT-FAI, led by Escorza at the Casa CNT-FAI, assumed responsibility” (2011, p. 95).

Guillamón adds: “As for intelligence, investigation, pursuit of the fifth column and other armed ‘police’ work, [the neighborhood defense committees] deferred to the authority and experience of the Investigation Service of the CNT-FAI” (2011, p. 96).

The Commission led by Escorza was therefore transformed, as the brain of this whole libertarian paramilitary structure, into a command center for anarchist intelligence. And in view of the importance acquired by intelligence on the strategic level, can anyone still doubt the central role played in Catalonia by Manuel Escorza del Val and the Seis Dedos group? It can almost be said that without an understanding of this Commission, one cannot understand the libertarian movement in the Civil War: what it accomplished, and what it was capable of accomplishing.

3.3.1 The Foreign Section

As we have seen, the Commission was also responsible for the surveillance and transport of exiles of all kinds, especially in France. This is why it is natural to assume that both Escorza as well as Minué, who was in charge of foreign operations, were in direct contact with the groups that operated on the border, such as the one led by “el Cojo de Málaga” [the cripple from Málaga], which monitored the border between Puigcerdà and Bourg Madame. Border crossings are extremely important for every State. This is why they were the principal strategic points that the other “anti-fascist” political and trade union groups (especially the PSUC, but also the ERC, Estat Català...), based in the Generalitat, sought to reconquer by force. They succeeded in retaking Puigcerdà in April of 1937, before launching the “reconquest” of Barcelona in May.

The historian Miquel Mir adds: “Aurelio Fernández and Manuel Escorza organized, outside the framework of the Committee of Internal Security, a network for the activities and investigative work of the FAI throughout Catalonia and along the frontier that controlled all the border crossings with France. They formed detachments of twenty men each, establishing bases at Esterrí d’Àneu, Llívia, Queralps, Motlló-Setcases, Dàrnius, Sant Llorenç de la Muga, La Jonquera and Portbou. These detachments operated with the support of the local committees of Seu d’Urgell, Portbou, La Jonquera, Puigcerdà, and other towns” (2006, pp. 116-117).

The Commission was therefore organized at a very high level for two quite different operations: one in Spain, whose network was directed by Manuel Escorza himself, and the other outside of Spain that was under the command of Escorza’s brother-in-law, Liberto Minué. They undoubtedly formed an extraordinary team, although neither has left any record of his activities, except for rumors (very nasty rumors). And it may be that for each of these two domains, different departments were created, as is suggested by the historian Martín Ramos, who refers to “the SSI (Internal Security Service), the name adopted by Escorza’s investigation group or at least one of its departments” (2012, p. 124). And even the name of the Commission was changed after May 1937, when it became the “Statistics Section”, which was also the name of the intelligence service of the National Committee of the CNT. This change was certainly implemented in an attempt to avoid being incriminated under the Law of Espionage and High Treason, which was frequently used by communists and socialists to attack the libertarian movement and the POUM.

Concerning the Foreign Section, thanks to the biography of Antonio Ortiz written by Márquez and Gallardo, we have somewhat more information. We have already provided the names of some of its agents. They were assigned to at least three different zones:

- a. Zone 1: Paris
- b. Zone 2: Perpiñán
- c. Zone 3: Marseilles

3.3.2 The Investigation and/or Action Groups

However, besides the inner circle (the Seis Dedos Group) and those persons who gathered and reviewed intelligence, some have maintained that the Commission also possessed its own groups for investigation and/or action. Thus, the historian Guillamón says that Manuel Escorza “had under his control several investigation patrols of his own, which were not under the jurisdiction of the Control Patrols” (2011, p. 97).

In fact, there are two, quite opposed, views concerning the question of whether these patrols were under the jurisdiction of the CCMA, and later of the Generalitat, or whether they were under Escorza’s command, and also concerning the nature of the agents who performed these functions. According to Benavides, Escorza had a very small and select group under his direct command: “By means of elimination teams, which spread throughout the counties of Catalonia, [Escorza] hunted down rebels and lukewarm

allies.... His helpers were young and attractive—they looked like traveling salesmen—and carried automatic pistols in their briefcases. No vulgar and taciturn thugs. With an indefatigable attention to detail, Escorza instructed them and did not hesitate to punish them if they did not follow his orders” (1978, p. 233).

The historian Preston, however, considered Escorza’s agents to be pure criminals:

Manuel Escorza del Val, who theoretically was in command of the CNT-FAI counter-espionage service, used his units [the so-called Control Patrols] to eliminate anyone whom he perceived to be an enemy of the movement. Fernández, Asens, Eroles and Escorza had no qualms about resorting to common criminals, whom they considered to be victims of bourgeois society. And in this manner they ended up directing a network of terror that spread throughout all of Catalonia (2011, p. 319).¹⁹

Perhaps Escorza made use of the libertarian units of the Control Patrols, taking advantage of the fact that they were commanded by Aurelio, Asensio and Eroles, to carry out certain “routine” services relating to searches and arrests. For more delicate tasks, however, it would appear that Escorza had his own action groups, which were not under the jurisdiction of either the Generalitat or anyone else for that matter, and were only answerable to him.

Now we are entering purely speculative waters, but perhaps in the “close shave” recounted by Tísner, which he experienced at the hands of libertarian units during the war, we might be able to get some idea of how these units functioned. We cannot be certain whether the group in question was one of Escorza’s groups, or under the command of Eroles, or even whether it was really what its spokesman claimed, a group from the Transport Workers Trade Union. But the story told by Tísner implies that he was under a certain degree of surveillance involving more than just one person arriving incognito from France. Let us read his account, which is lengthy, but all the more interesting for that reason:

The boy from the editorial department, Pla, came in and said:

--You have visitors, Tísner. There are a couple of guys asking for you.

I was surprised that someone would already know that I, who had only just arrived, was at the newspaper offices: a half hour earlier or a half hour later and they would not have found me.

¹⁹ The corresponding passages in the English edition: “Fernández, Asens and Eroles had no qualms about using criminal elements, believing them to be victims of bourgeois society. Together, they presided over a network of terror throughout Catalonia.... Another sinister FAI figure was Manuel Escorza del Val, head of the CNT-FAI counter-espionage service who used his units to eliminate any perceived enemies of the movement” (English edition: 2012, p. 231) [Translator’s note].

--Who are they?

--They didn't say. I don't know them and I don't want to know them, either. They give me the creeps.

There were four of them and they waited for me in the lobby. I asked them what they wanted.... [The man who seemed to be their spokesman] cheerfully explained to me that they were from the Transport Workers Trade Union of the CNT and that they had come to see me because they were looking for a Minerva (a big Belgian model), which was the property of a lawyer named Ernest Puig i Coroleu and that, according to the Trade Union files, I had driven it from the garage on Enric Granados Street after the owner loaned it to me on the pretext that I had confiscated it and, under this simulated expropriation, he would avoid the real thing. It was a fairy tale from beginning to end: I had never heard of this lawyer or his car ... and I told my visitors that they were imagining things, that they were talking a lot of nonsense, I was completely sure, they had me confused with someone else.

They asked me if I was not the person whose name appeared on a document, and they showed it to me, with my name correctly spelled. They told me that it was taken from the files of the Trade Union, from the Transport section. Their spokesman added that the easiest thing in the world would be to go to the Organization, clear up this whole misunderstanding, and then they would destroy the file and they wouldn't bother me anymore....

--Very good, I agree: let's go to the Trade Union and clear this up right now.

--No, we can't go now. The comrades won't be there until four.

Just as they were leaving the man who seemed to be their leader said:

--Just remember that if you are not here when we come back this afternoon, we will interpret it as a sign of bad faith on your part. If you refuse to cooperate it will be a sign of your guilt, don't you think? And it won't do you any good to try to hide, because, if we want, we will find you wherever you go. We're in no hurry. Look, we have been waiting for you for weeks! We're going—goodbye, we'll see you in about an hour or so!

*Some things happen that can even test the nerves of an editorial team as tough as that of **La Rambla**! There was, of course, an intense debate and, as always, a wide range of opinions, from immediate flight to the Party headquarters [PSUC], to asking for help from *Vía Layetana* or the *Generalidad*, and even immediate escape to Paris or anywhere else outside of Spain.*

*We had to forget about going for help to official institutions, since I had come to Spain without either notifying them or asking their permission and, worse yet, I had disobeyed instructions and refused to avail myself of the refuge they offered me in Paris. My impulse to come here on the basis of that report I read in **Le Matin** caused me to stake everything on one roll of the dice; if I lost, I had no right to whine and complain.*

--What are you going to do now?

--I'll go to the Trade Union with this gang. We'll see what this whole gag with the phantom Minerva of the spectral lawyer is all about and then fix up this whole mess if they are serious. And then I'll ask them not to bother me anymore.

--But you said yourself that this talk about Puig i Coroleu and his car is a lot of nonsense. You have to consider the only reasonable conclusion: it's a trap.

--It sure looks like a trap.

--It's the best argument not to go!

--And what will I do? Fly away? For me the main thing is to get out of this shit. I won't be able to do anything until they leave me alone.

--The way they left Planes alone? [Josep Maria Planes, a journalist who, along with Tisner, had written articles attacking the FAI before the civil war; it was Tisner who identified the body of Planes immediately after the outbreak of the civil war, according to Tisner's own account, which caused Tisner to flee to France, but later he returned to Spain to go to the front]—Guasp interjected.... I proposed that two or three of them should immediately go to the Casal Carlos Marx, and if possible explain what is going on to Comorera himself, and request that they resolve the problem right away.

Ernest Guasp and Marius Vives left for the Casal Carlos Marx. But it was too late, and those other guys didn't keep me waiting very long. Pla, the office assistant, gave me a 6.35 mm pistol, a kind of toy. He told me:

--Take this. You never know what might happen. There is a cartridge in the chamber....

They came back about ten minutes later; by then, Vives and Guasp might not have even reached the Paseo de Gracia. In front of the newspaper's offices a black Citroën was waiting for us, it looked like the 1934 model. They made me sit in the back seat, between two men. The one sitting on my right was the one who had been the spokesman and the other two sat up front next to the driver.

I looked in the rear-view mirror and I saw Nuria's friend Batet, a waiter, standing on the sidewalk writing something in his receipt book. We left La Rambla behind and then, on Tallers Street, we drove around the square and headed towards the Plaza Cataluña. This was not the way to the Transport Workers Trade Union offices! I said nothing, and my escorts were silent, too. I slightly tightened the muscles in my stomach, to feel the pistol. We went up the Gran Vía to the Plaza España, and there, in front of the bullring, we changed cars; a 1936 Ford awaited us, the newest model that we had yet seen in Catalonia. It would not have helped if Batet—as I imagined—had written down the license plate number of the Citroën.

Prat de Llobregat, Gavà, Castelldefels, all in silence. The talk—uncontainable, garrulous and humorous—began when we came to the first curves of the Garraf Massif. But what a ghastly sense of humor they had! They began to play a sinister game, a competition in sordidness, as if they wanted to see which of them was capable of saying the most terrifying thing, and telling the most macabre joke. It was obvious that they were going to kill me....

The Ford pulled over at a curve in the road. It was dusk and the car's headlights were on.... They said:

--Look! That's the blood of that guy we poked a few holes in the other day. You think so, Manuelo?

--Sure! What a face he made! I never saw anybody so scared.

--I have: the one we bumped off in El Forat del Vent trembled, he cried, he said he was a leftist, that it was his father who sympathized with the fascists and that if we let him go he would tell us where we could find him.

--Some people are even worse bastards when they're face-to-face with death, huh?

--Remember the guy from the hinge factory? Damn, he shit his pants! That guy was really full of shit!....

--The driver pulled the car over to the curb and parked, and they asked me:

--Would you like to die here?....

--I don't have any choice in the matter.

--But maybe you would like to face the sea.

--No, no: it's all the same to me wherever you do it.

--We just wanted to make you happy.

--Thanks a lot, man!

...

We passed Garraf ..., Vallcarca ... and Sitges Then we stopped at the Plaza de la Vila in La Geltrú. My escorts got out of the car and went into the local offices of the joint Committee of the left wing organizations, and they left me alone, with the keys in the ignition.

--Don't go anywhere. Wait a little while—they told me.

The keys in the ignition!.... My first impulse was to jump into the front seat, start the Ford, and escape.... But I soon realized this was no accident, but deliberate: simply a trap: as soon as I started the car I would be riddled with bullets from the balcony of the Local Committee....

Then they returned: the five men that I had arrived with, and three others; they walked around the car without even looking at me. They crossed Fransesc Macià Street and I lost sight of them. (Later I found out that they had crossed the Rambla and that they had entered the Local Federation offices). I waited in the car for a long time....

At noon (I asked one of them what time it was) my five captors returned. Each of them returned to his previous place in the car and we left the capital of Garraf on the road to Barcelona, but now amidst a silence that was even more horrible than the previous chatter. My inevitable conclusion was: now, at night, they will do what they didn't want to do in the light of day.... The detour to Vilanova must have been some kind of errand for the Organization and maybe my captors had acted as messengers and had taken advantage of this trip....

Not one stop, no comments the whole way. When we passed through Castelldefels I got the impression, for the first time, that nothing was going to happen. I was incapable of any reasonable analysis of what was going on and had to grasp at straws because I was lacking too many pieces of the puzzle.

They made me get out of the car just outside of Esplugues de Llobregat.

Even though I had begun to suspect they wouldn't do it, now—as quick as the blink of an eye—when the time came to get out of the car, that suspicion was suspended. I hesitated a second or two and the man who had always been sitting to my right yelled at me:

--Come on, get out! What are you waiting for?

--You aren't going to shoot me now, are you?

--Come on, animal, get out of the car! You're scared, kid! Let's see if a glass of cognac can bring you back to life!

--OK!

--I got out of the Ford....”

(1989, pp. 118-127)

Several things are noteworthy in this account: the fact that they knew all about Tisner's return to Spain and his exact location; the transfer from one vehicle to another; the claim that they were “in no hurry” to find him again.... Behind this account we can glimpse an intelligence network that extends all the way to the border, and it may be that its information had come from France. But we shall repeat that this is nothing but conjecture, without any other foundation.

In any case, everything seems to indicate that Escorza had his own groups, selected from the Defense Committees, and that, in conjunction with these but separately, he also used the Control Patrols. And one of these investigation groups was composed of members of the German group, DAS, concerning which we possess quite a bit of information about its links with Escorza through some of its members thanks to the book by Dieter Nelles, *et al.*

3.3.3 *The Commission and DAS*

Escorza's Commission was restricted in the scope of its operations. All authors agree that it was under orders not to molest any of the embassies and consulates in Spain. “Therefore, both the Madrid government and the Generalitat tried to preserve normal diplomatic relations with all countries, including the fascist countries, until the latter officially recognized the military junta in Burgos in November of 1936” (Nelles, *et al.*: 2010, p. 224).

This prohibition significantly facilitated the operations of the counterrevolution. Thus, García and Piotrowski quote this passage from Nelles' work about the DAS cited above: “The German consulate, once the revolution broke out, organized, with the help of Nazi agents, a special espionage unit that immediately intervened whenever a residence of a German fascist was raided. The espionage unit functioned so well that in every one of these instances the consulate's car appeared on the scene flying the Austrian flag—they wouldn't dare display the German flag—accompanied by several persons who went to great lengths to prove that the accused were innocent” (Nelles, *et al.*: 2010, p. 238).

Here we shall devote a few words to DAS, the group of German anarchosindicalists associated with Escorza's Commission. Relations between the DAS and the CNT-FAI were so close during the first few months of the war that up until November of 1936 the

offices of DAS were located in the Casa CNT-FAI on Vía Layetana [later renamed Vía Durruti]: “In early November, DAS had to move its offices from the CNT-FAI building at No. 32 Vía Durruti to two confiscated flats on Aribau Street. After the evacuation of the staff of the German Consulate, they occupied the building at No. 132 Passeig Pi i Maragall” (Nelles, *et al.*: 2010, p. 116).

In fact, we have already seen that the Commission’s payroll for October 1936 includes two members of this German group. Let us see what they had in common, according to García and Piotrowski: “The fact is that practically on the very day after the official constitution of the Central Committee of Anti-fascist Militias on July 21, even before the creation of the Control Patrols, on August 8, the militants of DAS occupied several of the most prominent Nazi offices and meeting places in Barcelona. This initiative yielded a treasure trove of documents which, added to what was found in subsequent searches and the information obtained four months later, during the evacuation of the German Embassy, provided information on the scope of Nazi plans for Spain” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 319).

And this was achieved despite the fact, as we have already mentioned, that they had certain restrictions placed on their activities: “The testimony of one of the German members of an Investigation Group is quite revealing in this respect: they had orders not to harass the Nazis too much in order to avoid diplomatic complications” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 247).

Escorza, however, had no direct connections with the CCMA, and it is doubtful whether he would have had any such connections with the Generalitat (although some authors have claimed that he did), which is why his investigation groups operated with fewer constraints. Thus, we read that “the investigation groups of the CNT-FAI, during the period between the military revolt and the evacuation of the [German and Italian] embassies, had accomplished much more than the representatives of the Spanish and Catalanian republicans, whose declarations against fascism were as firm as their handshakes with the Admirals of the Third Reich” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 252). And these same authors quote the words of the German consul himself on this question: “Even the German consul, in a report to his superiors in Berlin, dated August 13, 1936, acknowledged the collaboration that he obtained from certain departments of the Generalidad and thereby revealed the contradictions that plagued the institutions of public order: ‘... the Minister of the Interior, ESPAÑA, has always understood the difficult situation of the Germans and has assisted me, to the best of his abilities, in many ways. The same can be said of the Chief of Police, ESCOFET, and of the other authorities of the Generalidad” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 241).

The Generalitat collaborated closely with the German consulate for months, thanks to which many people who might have fallen into the nets of the anti-fascist repression, in which Escorza had surely proven to be most efficient because he possessed the most information, were able to escape. As Carlos García and Harald Piotrowski explain: “Concerning one thing there can be no doubt, however: it just so happened that, a few days later, on August 18 [1936], 138 German subjects embarked on the German ship, the

Baden, in the port of Barcelona, and when the German anarchists read the passenger manifest they seized from the Nazi agent working for the consulate, Joseph Wurtz, it turned out that most of these ‘Germans’ had names that were indisputably of Catalanian and Spanish origin” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 255).

Furthermore, García and Piotrowski also point out that “the biggest raids of the control patrols and, above all, the Investigation Groups of the CNT-FAI, were directed against individuals and property that were part of the fascist network in Barcelona, in its double Italian and German tendencies” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 260). And in a footnote on the same page, we read: “the Italian anarchists who arrived in large numbers in Barcelona, with Camillo Berneri and the staff of the newspaper, *Guerra di Classe*, first of all, carried out certain missions similar to the ones performed by their German comrades”.

Thus, Escorza’s Commission also made use of foreign anarchosindicalist groups like the German DAS and the Italian anti-fascists, who performed services involving the investigation of their compatriots and the pursuit of fascist elements. The historian Martín Ramos refers to the activities of DAS: “the CCMA explicitly made DAS responsible for acting as a police force for the foreigners in Barcelona ... with a group that engaged in actions and interrogations, in which Ferdinand Götze and Arthur Lewin were involved at one point. The group operated under the aegis of the ‘Department of Investigation’ led by Manuel Escorza and continued its operations after the dissolution of the CCMA, but its principal repressive activity was performed in the summer months of 1936 and its targets were elements of the German community residing in Catalonia that might be connected with the National Socialist Party or with the German Government” (2012, pp. 122-123). According to the same author, the French anarchists who lived in Catalonia also carried out similar operations, but we do not know whether or not they operated under orders from Escorza, like the DAS.

And García and Piotrowski add: “Several of the thirty or so members of DAS, at the beginning of July of 1936, were officially part of the Investigation and Intelligence Groups of the CNT-FAI” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 291). A footnote tells us the following: “We do not know exactly how many anti-fascist Germans participated in the anarchist Investigation Groups, not even with respect to the members of DAS. It would seem, however, that there were others besides the ones mentioned above.... Thus, for example, we have the interesting case of Heinz Rosenstein.... According to his deposition to the Gestapo and the fascist troops who occupied Barcelona ... he was a driver and mechanic for the investigation groups, in direct contact with Eroles, which, along with a document found in his possession ... contributed to his being sentenced to death by a military tribunal of the Franco regime” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 291). Once again, we find ourselves in the diffuse zones of influence of Escorza and Eroles.... Where does one end and the other begin?

In fact, the authors state that: “The orders concerning searches and requisitions of the residences of Germans, issued by the General Commissariat of Public Order of the Generalitat and signed by Dionisio Eroles, as well as the statements compiled by the General Inquest and Trial [*Causa General*] in Barcelona, with respect to actions against

the properties of German subjects, testify to a considerable activity on the part of the investigation groups and particularly those groups under the control of the CNT-FAI, and in the case with which we are concerned, of the German section formed by DAS” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 292).

To illustrate how DAS operated, García and Piotrowski quote the statements of Helmut Kirschey: “We monitored all the mail to and from the German-speaking countries and also Holland.... In our police work we never made any arrests. The Germans whom we suspected of being Nazis were expelled from Spain, but we could not expel the diplomats and we had strict orders not to do anything that might provoke an official intervention by Germany” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p 296). And García and Piotrowski also quote part of the report dated September 14, 1936 which DAS submitted to the Regional Committee of the CNT-FAI concerning its activities during July-August 1936, including the following: “Under the name of the ‘Port Service’, a whole section of the Gestapo was concealed.... Later, the group seized various documents that made it clear that the German consulate had organized the escape of hundreds of Spanish fascists on German ships, and even gave them German passports. Among these fugitives was the Archbishop of Vic, Juan Perelló, who was thought to have been assassinated.

“... In the performance of these tasks it was necessary to carry out many searches of the homes of Nazi fugitives and various businesses. Two of our comrades were appointed by the Investigation Committee of the CNT to carry out this mission.... We spent a lot of time on background checks on the Germans in Barcelona, especially those who wanted to join the CNT, sympathizers, neutrals and Jewish emigrants who wanted us to issue them all kinds of certificates to verify their identity. Each case required a very diligent investigation; for this purpose, we made use of the lists found at the Nazi safe houses” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 298-299).

And among the proposals and recommendations made by DAS in this report, we find the following: “We must carry out a defensive struggle on two fronts: against Nazi espionage and that of other foreign fascists, and against the wave of socialist and communist foreigners who have come to Spain and who constitute an enormous danger for the anarchist development of the revolution. We must undertake, without delay, the following measures:

- 1. Reinforce the CNT-FAI’s dominant position in Perpiñán, La Jonquera, Paris, Marseilles and Toulouse, and improve its organization. Constant communication with these points by way of a special information service.*
- 2. Monitor and establish surveillance over rail stations, airports, ports; constant vigilance over the foreigners, who will have to provide their addresses.... Control over the borders is of prime importance. It is a shame and a scandal that in Port Bou every traveler who comes to Spain must think that the country is in the hands of the Marxists because they have the monopoly control there and exercise their dictatorship.*

3. *Formation of Committees in foreign countries to oppose fascist aggression in Spain.*

4. *Control the supplies of weapons to the left-wing popular front.*

5. *Strict surveillance over the Spanish consulate in Paris [the authors, in a footnote, point out that, “The wife of Álvarez Vayo came from a Swiss canton where a dialect of German was spoken, which they took advantage of in order to transmit confidential information while attempting to evade the monitoring of phone calls by the employees of telephone company, which was in the hands of the anarchosyndicalists”].*

6. *Spanish foreign policy must be conducted under the control of the CNT-FAI.*

(Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 300).

Dieter Nelles adds more information about the activities of this German group following the defeat of the military uprising: “This function [as a police force for foreigners] included control over border posts, the post office, the port and the rail stations. DAS carried out systematic searches of the residences of Germans who were suspected of sympathizing with the national socialists. Ferdinand Götze, Arthur Lewin, Fred Hessenthaler and Egon Illfeld participated in these investigations on behalf of DAS. Hessenthaler and Illfeld were former communists who emigrated to Spain in 1934 and joined DAS after the outbreak of the revolution. Later, the team was also joined by Helmut Kirschey, who arrived in Barcelona in August 1936 from exile in Holland. They were officially working under the orders of the ‘Committee of Investigation and Internal Security’, under the command of the CNT officials, Escorza and Eroles” (2010, p. 114).

The pursuit of German nationals linked to Nazism was carried out without any authorization or orders from the Generalitat and its Ministers. García and Piotrowski explain that “the German consulate had access to a German ship in the port of Barcelona to serve as a refuge for Nazi sympathizers who had attracted the attention of the anti-fascist investigation groups, so that they could stay overnight on the ship” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 264). But once they disembarked in the morning they were arrested and brought to No. 32 Via Layetana, to the German Department, where they were interrogated. And the authors add: “These were not just ordinary German citizens, but agents of the Third Reich, active in espionage and provocations among the emigrants arriving in Barcelona from Germany. The names of the tenants of the apartments that had been searched did not leave much room for doubt concerning their membership in the Barcelona Nazi network” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 269).

However, DAS was also given responsibility for other activities relating to counterespionage: “One important task of DAS was surveillance of, and political control over, the German-speaking volunteers in the CNT-FAI militias” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 118). And it also participated in missions on the French border: “At the border in Port Bou, there is a unit of militiamen of the CNT-FAI, the ‘Border Guards Corps in Port

Bou', which also had foreign members. Eight German volunteers served in this unit in February/March 1937—Helmut and Herbert Aul, Albert Kille, Fritz Kehn, Helmut Klose, Heinz Petry, Philipp Urban, and Richard Winkler—almost all of whom had previously fought in the International Group. Except for Petry, all of them were members of DAS; at the border, only the most reliable comrades could be employed” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 148).

DAS underwent a split in early 1937, and Ferdinand Götze founded a new organization, the SRDF, whose members also included Eugen Scheyer, among others. And it is here that the connections between the Germans and Escorza are most clearly revealed: “Apparently, the grandiloquent plans of this totally insignificant group found support among certain leaders of the CNT-FAI, for in January of 1937 Scheyer was dispatched on a military mission to the Aragon Front. When a letter from Scheyer in which he referred to the International Group of the Durruti Column as a bunch of idiots and cowards was intercepted at the border, DAS arrested him, intending to expel him from Spain. By order of the high-level leaders of the CNT, Eroles and Escorza, however, he was released. Most likely, through his contacts with Gudell, who supported the SRDF, Scheyer worked as a military advisor of the anarchist youth organization, the Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 126).

The decline of DAS paralleled the decline of the CNT-FAI after the “May Events” of 1937. García and Piotrowski quote from a report dated October 3, 1937, written by the propaganda secretary of the CNT, in which the break between these German anarchosindicalists and Escorza is clearly revealed: “This group had many members and it carried out many different activities. After the first few days of street fighting, DAS joined the movement, in which it played a very active part in Barcelona. At first, most of its members joined the investigation service and concerned themselves with the Germans who lived in Barcelona. It is very possible that, during the first period of their activity in the investigation service, they were effective, but with the passage of time, this effectiveness declined, since comrade Escorza had to dispense with their services for various reasons” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 277). A footnote to this passage contains the authors’ commentary: “Unfortunately, the report does not mention the reasons, although they most likely are connected with the need to reach an accommodation on the part of the representatives of the CNT in the Generalitat with respect to matters of public order and, more specifically, with the tensions that such a position provoked within the anarchosindicalist ranks themselves....” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 277). This is only the authors’ interpretation, however.

The reasons for the split between DAS and the CNT-FAI are thus not clear, but it is evident that DAS was increasingly more opposed to the collaborationist line taken by the anarchosindicalist leadership. And the Organization itself was becoming less zealous in its commitment to performing the tasks that it had previously entrusted to DAS, such as foreign propaganda and the surveillance of volunteers, beginning in August 1937, when the power of the CNT-FAI was in decline and when both groups were being persecuted by various parties, by the other anti-fascist organizations and by the institutions of the republic. It is quite clear, in any event, that the CNT-FAI did not do anything to defend

the members of the DAS group who were undergoing harsh persecution at the hands of the republican counterrevolution. According to a report written by the Secretariat at the request of the National Committee of the CNT, dated October 3, 1937, cited by García and Piotrowski, an attempt was made to justify this failure to come to the aid of DAS: "... the report elaborated various accusations and claimed that members of DAS had taken the documentation on the Nazis, seized during the days immediately following July 19, from the Casa CNT-FAI to their offices at 132 Paseo Pi i Maragall, 'without telling anyone', and 'now the police have seized their headquarters and all the materials stored there. In general, the leading members of the DAS group have behaved quite badly, since all these materials, and even the minutes of the group's meetings, are now in the hands of the communists, who are using them to attack DAS'" (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 374).

As it turned out, DAS would soon be the target of very harsh repression. The journalist Benavides gives us a glimpse of the venom that was aimed at this group, and of the repression (and its attempted justification) its members would subsequently suffer after the defeat of the anarchosyndicalists in the "May Events" of 1937:

German and Swiss anarchists—some of whom were informers for the Gestapo—insistently called for a revolutionary coup that would be preceded by several assassinations for publicity purposes. They stirred up the unscrupulous and the admirers of José Antonio Primo de Rivera, like the Hispano-Argentine Santillán, flunkies like Eroles and fire-breathing dragons like Escorza, while the Trotskyists were reaching an understanding with the enemy on the Front. (1978, p. 329)

And we also note that German communists then began to perform the functions that were previously entrusted by the CNT-FAI to the DAS group. Specifically, the spy network that formed around Alfred Hertz, who was associated with the PSUC. García and Piotrowski write: "The intelligence service set up by Alfred Hertz was only a name, since it was never defined as an intelligence service. In fact, the apparatus that formed around Hertz was characterized by its invisibility; it was hard to identify since it was operating simultaneously as a triple agent; for the Commissaria General d'Ordre Públic of the Generalitat; for Gómez Emperador, of the Foreign Service of the PSUC; and for the Komintern and the KPD. The first signs of the activity of the Alfred Hertz Service may be found in the interrogations of foreigners, especially Germans, during July and August of 1936. It was only after September, however, coinciding with the arrival of Alexander Orlov and other Soviet agents, that it began to function in a distinctly sectarian way, as manifested in its harassment of anti-fascist émigrés who did not support the Moscow line.

"For its part, the Generalitat, on September 26, 1936, created the Intelligence Group as a bureau of the Comisaría General de Orden Público, appointing new agents, including Mariano Gómez Emperador, Josep Castellà Esteve and Lluís Fabregat Pinaluba, who would be the close collaborators of Alfred Hertz when the latter was appointed, one month later, to serve as Interim Auxiliary Agent of the Investigation and Surveillance Corps of the Generalitat by the Commissar General of Public Order. In a report submitted by the Special Foreign Service of the PSUC concerning counterespionage, dated June 5, 1937, in the introduction, the authors refer to the spy network of the German Nazis and

the abundant material that had been seized, alluding to the conflicts between the intelligence services of the various organizations. They then explain the need to carry out a two-pronged mission, on the one hand, the defense of the party, and an offensive against the POUM/Trotskyist and anarchist organizations” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 379).

As the fortunes of DAS waned, the influence of these services linked to the PSUC/PCE grew. “Hubert von Ranke ... was a member of the Foreign Service of the PSUC, at the Hotel Colón, where he directed the Department of Defense and Counterespionage. And Alfred Hertz was also stationed at the Hotel Colón. After May 1937, the von Ranke group, now incorporated into DEDIDE (Departamento Especial de Información del Estado [Special State Intelligence Department]), interrogated foreign anarchists and anti-Stalinist communists and militiamen who had been arrested by the police” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 380).

3.4 The Commission's resources

Returning to Escorza and the Commission, we have seen that their work primarily involved strategic Intelligence for the libertarian movement. And we have also seen that they further elaborated the whole intelligence structure that had already been established by the Confederal Defense Committees. The intelligence that had already been secured by the organization would be augmented with the seizure of the archives of both the *Fomento* [Employers' Association] and Cambó, which provided it with priceless information on the members of La Lliga, members of the right-wing parties, prominent members of the employers' association, traditionalist Carlists.... And it did indeed discover a “treasure trove of information” during the July Days: “The Construction Workers Trade Union, the Regional Committee of the CNT and the Local Federation of Trade Unions all had their headquarters at 26 Mercaders Street. Just across the street was the headquarters of the Fomento del Trabajo [the Employers' Association], located at 34 Vía Layetana. In the adjoining building, now 32 Vía Layetana, was the Casa Cambó. Both buildings were occupied by members of the CNT, without a struggle, since they had already been completely evacuated, leaving the furniture and the archives intact. The whole complex of buildings was known as the ‘Casa CNT-FAI’, and was the location until the end of the war of the headquarters of the Regional Committees of the CNT and the FAI, Mujeres Libres, and, among many other groups, the Investigation and Intelligence Committee of the CNT-FAI, led by Manuel Escorza, who, from the top floor of the Casa Cambó, made full use during the following months of the information contained in the confiscated archives of the Fomento del Trabajo and La Lliga” (Guillamón: 2007, p. 32).

This neglect with respect to securing such sensitive information shows just how much confidence people like Cambó had in the success of the coup. While they did not participate directly in the organization of the Revolt, they were fully aware of the intentions of the plotters (who wasn't?), and some of them helped finance the Revolt, and all indications seem to point towards the likelihood that they were just awaiting the favorable conclusion of the affair. And that was not Cambó's only mistake. For it was largely his own fault that so many of his employees and associates were assassinated

because he allowed that informational treasure trove to fall into the hands of the “enemy” that he sought to destroy. This was a mistake that Escorza would make every effort—very successfully, by the way—to avoid repeating when the tables were turned.

Another instrument in the hands of the libertarians that was necessarily crucial with respect to espionage and counterespionage was the *Telefónica* [the headquarters and operations center of the telephone company], which was under confederal control ever since the July Days of 1936. We have no information, however, on the way the Commission used this resource. What is clear is that this communications medium is of fundamental strategic interest, since control over the telephone network is essential in the exercise of any effective surveillance. And Escorza’s network must have penetrated the *Telefónica*. It was not just by chance that the May Events of 1937 began when the police forces of the Generalitat attempted to storm that particular building.

We do not know any more about how the Commission operated. We have no minutes of its meetings, and no documents concerning the Commission or its activities. We do not know whether or not it had a cryptology department for devising and deciphering codes, what kind of espionage and counterespionage it engaged in (and if it was really systematic), what role the confederal personnel at the *Telefónica* played in its operations until May 1937, and finally, its *modus operandi* in the performance of its espionage and counterespionage missions.

But just as no State wanted to sell weapons to the anarchists, not even Stalin’s USSR, we must also assume that Escorza did not possess the modern technology that the States of that time routinely used in the pursuit of espionage and counterespionage. Escorza had to operate with traditional and prosaic techniques. But this, too, is speculation, since we do not know whether or not he was capable of purchasing the necessary technology from foreign sources. But let us first take a closer look at the objectives entrusted to the Commission.

3.5 Espionage and counterespionage

Any attempt to evaluate the success or failure of the Commission with respect to its missions of espionage and counterespionage is fraught with difficulty. We know, for example, as we shall see below, that Orlov received a daily report on the meetings and resolutions of the confederal committees. We do not know, however, whether Escorza ever discovered any of these infiltrated agents, and if so, what he did with them (although we can guess).

In any case, in order to perform its mission of counterespionage, one thing is necessary: espionage on the part of the other organizations, including not only “enemy” forces (the famous fifth column), but also the supposedly “allied” parties and trade unions.

It would appear that Pastor is one of the historians who has probed most deeply into the question of espionage during the civil war. It is striking that he never examines Escorza’s

Investigation Commission. In our view, this leads him to say things that are mutually contradictory, as we shall see below.

It is also true that, at the starting point on July 19, 1936, in terms of intelligence, the situation was just as precarious for the military as it was for those who fought against the coup d'état. Thus, Pastor asks: "How could the rebels have embarked on their conspiracy, first of all, and then staged an armed uprising, without creating an intelligence service? This question is as grotesque and as overwhelming as this other question: How to explain the fact that a modern State, situated in Europe ... possessing all the governmental and military structures of an advanced country, does not have a defensive service to protect it against subversion of every kind? The result: between July and September of 1936, rebels and pro-government forces would present the spectacle of combatants who destroy themselves and attack with extreme stupidity. Stupidity, above all, in the field of intelligence" (2006: p. 84). We do not believe this characterization applies to the case of the CNT-FAI in general, or to Escorza in particular.

3.5.1 Nationalist counterespionage

Perhaps Escorza's closest counterpart on the nationalist side was, during the first few months of the conflict, Bertrán i Musitú and his Servicios de Información de la Frontera Nordeste de España [Intelligence Services of Northeast Spain] (SIFNE). Before discussing SIFNE, however, we must mention its founder, none other than Francesc Cambó. As we have already said, the outbreak of the coup d'état very conveniently "caught" Cambó while he was away from Catalonia. According to Pastor, "while the leaders of La Lliga were aware that the military revolt was going to take place, they did not openly support it until July 18" (Pastor: 2006, p. 129).

We possess some information about SIFNE, thanks to Pastor: "SIFNE was independent of the military command, yet despite this civilian character it was under the tutelage of general Mola. It was formed in September 1936 and remained independent until February 28, 1938.... José Bertrán y Musitú, a former cabinet minister under Alfonso XIII, and his lawyer after the proclamation of the Republic, directed SIFNE. Its operations required an enormous amount of money: the capital that was employed was always private and for the most part came from its founders such as Bertrán y Musitú himself, or also Juan March and Francisco Cambó, who, according to Ricardo de la Cerva, was the real founder of SIFNE.

"It would appear that this Catalanian big shot played a key role in Franco's espionage network outside of Spain (where he had fled at the beginning of the war), and its best team worked in SIFNE: besides Bertrán y Musitú, [its members included] Juan Estelrich, Eugeni d'Ors, Carlos Sentís, José Pla, José Vergés, Miguel Mateu Pla, Octavio Saltor, Carlos Rafael Marés and Juan March and, generally speaking, agents who came from the former Catalanian militia [*Somatén*]. Cambó had the advantage of possessing multiple established connections in Catalonia that he could transform into a dense network of intelligence at the service of Mola and Franco".

And Pastor continues: “From the purely technical point of view, we must admit that Bertran i Musitu had the merit of having created, from scratch, before the loyalists did so, a secret intelligence organization. This organization, SIFNE, would become the intelligence service of the nationalists, that is, of the rebel forces, in February 1938, under the name of SIPM (Servicio de Información Político Militar) [Military Political Intelligence Service]), commanded by colonel José Ungría, with its headquarters in Burgos. For 18 months Bertran i Musitu directed SIFNE, recruiting a broad range of individuals: civil servants, former members of the *Somatén*, Catalan industrialists, politicians from La Lliga, monarchists, right-wing elements in Spain, and all kinds of exiles and fugitives, such as intellectuals and people with no identifiable ideological positions. He combined all of them and entrusted them with various tasks relating to propaganda, intelligence, espionage and counterespionage.

“He started in Saint-Jean de Luz and then went to Biarritz, in a tower called La Grande Frégate, where he constructed an improvised yet complex organization. With this organization, harmonizing its activities with Burgos and Salamanca or Seville, from which he received orders and inquiries, he gave his networks of agents a dual aspect:

1. Fifth Columnists: agents and connections that cover almost all the republican territory, with more or less intelligence being generated depending on the situation and the zone.

2. Covert operatives: undercover agents, propagandists, saboteurs and spies who cover the European countries....

“SIFNE was particularly interested in maritime traffic from European countries that might be likely candidates to offer aid to the Second Republic.... One of SIFNE’s first projects was the infiltration, through the use of fifth columnists, of secret agents in every republican port, and especially Cartagena and Barcelona, but also Alicante, Valencia, Castellón and the coast of Gerona. It was of urgent importance for Burgos, by way of Bertran i Musitu, to be informed of the arrival and departure of ships, with a description of everything that was loaded and unloaded” (2006: pp. 67-68).

Unlike Escorza, who received no help from anyone, like the rest of the libertarian movement, Bertran i Musitu had advisors from the most advanced fascist espionage agencies of the time: “Bertran i Musitu availed himself of the knowledge of police work he acquired during his time in the *Somatén*. Later he received aid, both technical and in the form of personnel, from the Abwehr, the Gestapo, the SIM, OVRA and the PVDE; that is, the first two, Nazi agencies; the next two, fascist; and the last, Portuguese.... On the other hand, it is possible, although by no means certain, that the loyalists obtained aid and technical equipment (radio direction finders, encoding machines, new cryptographic techniques, radio transmitters, etc.) from certain democratic countries, and certainly from the Soviet NKVD, before the end of 1936, and then in greater quantities during 1937-1938” (Pastor: 2006, p. 69).

Pastor also tells us about Cambó's reaction to the defeat of the military uprising in Catalonia: "Everyone knows that Cambó was sailing in his yacht, Catalònia, in the waters of the Adriatic Sea when the military revolt began. And that as soon as he was informed of it, he immediately went to Paris and from there took into his hands the thousands of strings that he quickly manipulated to make them obey his orders or to call for support for the revolt. Cambó installed his base of operations in Rapallo and in Abarria (in Italy) and fully exploited, to the benefit of the rebels, his friendship with Mussolini and with the many politicians he knew all over Europe. His idea of creating a radio station for propaganda against the republican regime was one of the most damaging from the psychological point of view. We do not know how many people listened to Ràdio Veritat" (2006: pp. 130-131).

The financial support contributed by Cambó and his ilk to the rebel officers also demonstrates their economic and ideological involvement with the nationalist side: "It is possible that the nucleus of Catalonians was of greater importance than any other with respect to the amount of money it contributed to the Movement. Besides the million pounds sterling that Joan March gave to Antonio Goicoechea to give to Mussolini (that was the price demanded by the latter for the Savoy bombers) in early August, we have the bank check for 15,000 pounds sterling donated by Cambó to the Burgos Junta in the person of Quiñones de León, in July 1936, in Paris. We do not know how much money was used or donated by Betran i Musitu, Miquel Mateu i Pla, and others" (Pastor, 2006: p. 130).

It seems that Cambó, besides his obvious sympathy with the goals of the rebels, was operating on their behalf outside of Spain at the same time that Escorza was diligently poring over all of Cambó's archives: "As we said above, in our discussion of SIFNE, Francesc Cambó provided assistance to Bertran i Musitu. We must add: he provided lucid assistance, almost instantaneous, impassioned. Some of Cambó's friends have told us how he operated and, above all, the authority with which he proceeded: 'Cambó was a key element in the foreign work of the national uprising. His assistance proved to be of incalculable value, and not only because of his money, which was important, but fundamentally due to his genius for organization'. Other testimonies from people who would prefer to remain anonymous have confirmed this thesis" (Pastor, 2006: pp. 72-73).

And Pastor adds: "Therefore: Cambó not only contributed financial assistance ... but, in close collaboration with Bertran i Musitu and the authorities of the new Government in Burgos, performed intelligence tasks of all kinds [mapping the republican zone...]. The result was particularly precise and destructive aerial bombing missions. The Condor Legion of the Third Reich and Mussolini's Legionary Air Force transformed each bombing mission into a destructive operation of a previously unprecedented destructive power" (Pastor, 2006: p. 74).

But was the role played by SIFNE really that important? Pastor assures us of the following: "In the thousands of documents that we reviewed at the SHM [in the depository of the archives of the Servicio Histórico Militar (Military Historical Service) in Madrid], despite all our efforts we did not find even one reference to fifth columnists,

who existed, as far as we know, as an unknown quantity. SIFNE is not mentioned, either. The constant flood of émigrés, draft evaders and fugitives was always so voluminous that Bertran i Musitu's agents only had to interrogate ones who might know something of concrete military and political value. Andorra was one place where an endless legion of fugitives crossed the border, and there SIFNE had, as it did all along the entire Franco-Spanish frontier, a hard-core remnant of fanatical supporters, devoted to questioning and recruiting people. This is why SIFNE's most abundant source of intelligence was in the regions of Catalonia and Valencia" (2006: p. 146).

And later he stresses the fact that "SIFNE sent a considerable and much-appreciated flood of facts and data ... which the experts of the General Staff could use to discover things they previously did not know, but what Bertran i Musitu could not do was provide intelligence of the highest value, since the intelligence that he did transmit was not generally very substantial. The analysis of the reports compiled by Biarritz allows us to see that they were quantitatively enormous but qualitatively minor or mediocre. This indisputable fact proves that SIFNE had few first-rate spies, and most of its agents were draft evaders; and also that the networks of fifth columnists were incapable of providing data of any essential value" (2006: pp. 199-200).

In fact, Bertran i Musitu's SIFNE was nourished on the information that could be derived from the large number of refugees and exiles from Catalonia, many of whom were able to escape thanks to the invaluable "solidarity" (often at a very good price) that was increasingly being offered by the Generalitat and certain political parties and trade unions.

Most of the information obtained by SIFNE, however, was taken from the republican press itself, which was able to operate with relative freedom during those first few months of libertarian predominance, which, from a military point of view, does not seem to be optimal: "Due to a poorly-conceived, or insufficient, censorship, or a lack of centralization, the press constituted a vast and easily accessible source of secrets. The enemy could, up until May 1937, simply by reading the newspapers, discover the following facts:

1. *Details about war industries.*
2. *Domestic problems such as: political divisiveness, government crises, party struggles, the inability to put a stop to the reign of terror of the Forces of Public Order of the Generalitat, banditry, etc.*
3. *Activities of the agents of Public Order. Daily reports.*
4. *Activities of the People's Tribunals. Daily reports.*
5. *Indirect propaganda concerning the power of the Fifth Column, sowing fear behind the lines contrary to the interests of the Government.*

6. *Open admissions of food shortages, discontent, pessimism and discouragement.*

7. *Identification of the countries that were helping the Republic and those that were not.*

8. *The arrival of ships from foreign countries with food or weapons.*

“Obviously, these eight points (and perhaps others), which should have been top secret intelligence, were extremely valuable for the enemy. Meanwhile, look at the newspapers published during the war in the rebel zone: a strict, intelligent censorship did not permit even one particle of information to slip through that might have been able to help the loyalists” (2006, p. 85).

It appears that as of November 1936 SIFNE was still incapable of creating a strong network of fifth columnists. There can be no doubt that the wave of repression unleashed during those first few months was effective, although bloody. “Nonetheless, in late November 1936 the fifth column in Catalonia was still a very weak adversary. It maintained its presence, but lacked dense connections and any significant impact. It goes without saying that it was always more ineffectual and weaker in Catalonia than it was in Madrid” (Pastor, 2006: p. 62).

This historian allows his imagination to get the better of him, however, when he states that, between July and December of 1936, “there was a dialectic of low blows exchanged between the fifth columnists and the secret counterespionage services of the Generalitat and of the political parties. The fifth columnists tried to bring about a collapse of the forces of government power, and the latter, for their part, hunted them day and night. The struggle became increasingly more cruel and merciless. It would be an impossible task to determine the number of fifth columnists during the first few months of the war. Nor would it be possible, due to the lack of information and reliable testimony, to determine the number of clandestine radio operators who transmitted to, or received information from, Burgos. It is certainly true that many were discovered in Catalonia, and especially in Barcelona; we must nonetheless assume that the number of such agents varied between fifteen and twenty-five. Most of them were located and their operators handed over to the People’s Tribunals. It is understandable that at first almost all of them were caught because of their carelessness. And in this connection we must also mention a group of Catalonians who, from their base in Andorra, facilitated or actively assisted the escape of other fugitives from the country in their attempts to reach France or Burgos after the revolt began” (Pastor, 2006: p. 88).

In fact, however, it would seem that their persecution at the hands of Escorza, among others, made a big impression on them, and their successes were rather non-existent. Nowhere do we see these “low blows” that he talks about, and Pastor himself says: “The number one objective of the fifth columnists must have been sabotage of the war industries, which were so numerous in Barcelona, especially in Poblenou, Badalona, l’Hospitalet de Llobregat, Barceloneta, etc. What evidence exists for this sabotage? The newspapers did not publish any reports ... of sabotage against the war industries, or noted

very few, or else they did not even take place.... Another essential objective of the fifth columnists must have been plastering posters on the walls of the cities and towns of Catalonia. Anti-republican propaganda displayed in the streets would have conferred an obvious advantage to the fifth column. In this respect as well, however, as in the case of sabotage, the frequency of criminal activities was minimal” (2006: p. 162).

The historian Martín Ramos would assert that in May of 1937 the fifth column “was very underdeveloped in Catalonia” (2015, p. 34). Nonetheless, in the same book he would claim: “One of the reasons for the violence of the summer of 1936 was the hysteria of fear surrounding the internal enemy [the fifth column]; this violence, however, besides all the criticisms that it deserves from the moral or political perspective, was inefficient with regard to the repression of this organized fifth column, among other reasons, because it was a new development and it was dispersed among government institutions, improvised to confront this new problem, and parallel groups constituted by political and trade union organizations” (2015, p. 88). If the fifth column was weak in May 1937, upon what basis does this historian claim that it was ineffectively fought prior to that date? This is the same contradiction that haunts Pastor in his research, and neither of them has explained how the imputed fragility of the fifth column up until May 1937 squares with their claims concerning the allegedly successful subsequent repression carried out by the SIM.

In any event, after May 1937 changes took place on all levels, and in the field of espionage and counterespionage the transformation took the form of a dynamic of centralized terror imposed by the State through agencies like the SIM. And although Pastor tends to exaggerate the results obtained by the SIM compared to the previous phase of libertarian control of Catalonia (where fascist espionage and sabotage produced, as we have seen, qualitatively meager results), we see how technological assistance was provided which was denied to the libertarian movement in the domain of espionage as in all other domains. “It seems that the SIM successfully unmasked or broke up almost all the networks or submerged them in semi-paralysis or passivity. How was the SIM capable of such effectiveness? In our view, these are the fundamental factors:

- 1. Incorporation of Russian techniques of identification and arrest, based on psychological studies, police science and counterespionage tactics. It was a cold, cerebral view, the product of pure calculation.*
- 2. The utilization of modern electronics.*
- 3. Screening of investigative personnel, who were subjected to strict discipline.*
- 4. The use of terror: violent interrogations and judicial procedures lacking any democratic safeguards”.*

(Pastor, 2006: p. 148)

And it was not just Russian aid that played a major role. This assistance to the republicans after May 1937 (that is, when the libertarian movement was defeated) was

perhaps also manifested in the attitude of French intelligence when in July 1937 it shut down La Grande Frégate in Biarritz, operated by Bertran i Musitu. As we have seen, the French press exposed the network, leading to several arrests and even bringing to light *affaires* that impinged on the Treaty of Versailles, concerning the fact that Cambó and Bertran i Musitu acted as fronts for German interests in order to circumvent the economic obligations imposed on Germany by the Treaty. As for the French authorities' decision to put the squeeze on Bertran i Musitu's intelligence service operating on their territory, its timing was fortuitous. Or perhaps not.

3.5.2 Counterespionage in the Anti-fascist Disunited Front

Escorza had to deal not only with the official enemy, however. Within the "Anti-fascist United Front" itself, mutual mistrust was the rule long before the July Days. For example, while the Generalidad was discreetly arming its own supporters (the ERC, Estat Català) just before the coup d'état of July 18, it refused to provide arms to the libertarian movement. And when the fighting was concluded in July, many "anti-fascist" sectors began to work to undermine the power of the CNT-FAI by means of all kinds of strategies. And everyone was eager for accurate intelligence.

Thus, in Guillamón we read: "Salvador González established a PSUC prison and a unit for repression similar to Escorza's in the Hotel Colón and the Círculo Ecuéstre, with the help of Joaquín Olasso, África de las Heras and Victorino Sala. Josep Soler Arumí, of the ERC, set up his own prison and hit-squad in the Centro Federal of the Paseo de Gracia, and his unit earned the lamentable distinction of being the first to systematically torture prisoners. After the May Events and the dissolution of the Control Patrols, at the beginning of June 1937, all the anarchist prisons were shut down. In 1938 all the chekas belonged to the PSUC or the SIM" (2011, p. 111).

In a footnote in their book about DAS, García and Piotrowski tell us that "the German CP (the KPD) in Catalonia/Spain had its own intelligence service and agents, although it was at the same time connected with the structures of the PSUC/PCE and the Comintern and even collaborated with the Soviet secret services" (2010, p. 376). And according to Guillamón, the communists had their own strategy, advocated by Gerö, "of implementing a SELECTIVE policy towards the anarchist movement, which consisted in integrating its leaders into the State apparatus, while at the same time carrying out ruthless repression of the revolutionary sectors, invidiously characterized as *incontrolados*, gangsters, assassins, irresponsible elements and agents provocateurs; which Comorera very clearly identified with the defense committees" (2011, p. 176).

However, intelligence departments were also created by the government institutions, as Vicenç Guarner explains: "In August, when I was appointed to serve as the Undersecretary of Defense, I never relinquished my intention to organize a secret service in the best possible way.... In order not to compromise the indispensable discretion required for such a task, I decided to work only with the Minister of Defense and the President of Catalonia.... In the mysterious requisitioned house of the fugitive Señor Sedó, hidden behind the thick vegetation of a carpet of ivy, at the intersection of Bailén

and Diputación Streets, I could finally organize this secret agency, with volunteers who worked with true self-abnegation. In the back rooms of the house there was an enormous network of miniature electric trains, and in the floor below these back rooms a workshop with a printing press, counterfeiting tools, chemical substances, cameras, ink, reagents, etc., was installed. A radio transmitter and a darkroom for developing photographs were also installed in the building. The command over the service was in the hands of Señor Argila, with Señor Meca as second-in-command, both of whom were prominent members of the Catalan Freemasonry, who recruited a large number of the service's personnel from among the former members of the Police forces and various technical specialists.... In October the Soviet ship, the *Zirianin*, arrived in Barcelona, which, much to our dismay, only carried food, but no war materiel for the fronts, and military and civilian observers had also begun to arrive from Soviet Russia, including the famous Alexander Orlov, of the GPU, who later deserted from Stalin's secret services. This technician of the Russian secret services was invited by Díaz Sandino, the Minister of Defense, to visit the headquarters of the secret service we had established, and he was impressed by the results of our improvised efforts.... When the SIM, almost totally controlled by the communists, was established in Barcelona, our agency, in which no elements from the Party played a role, was shut down" (1980, pp. 174-175).

Curiously, however, García Oliver claimed the credit for organizing this intelligence service: "Once the mission of the CCAM was terminated, I thought that it would be useful to create a small Intelligence Service, discreetly attached to the Department of War of the Committee of Militias, which could be entrusted with the performance of intelligence, espionage and counterespionage missions. Jaime Rosquillas Magriñá reintegrated it into the Propaganda Department of the Committee of Militias, so that its mission would not be handed over to Jaime Miravittles. Argila, the Egyptian, was appointed as commander of this Intelligence Service, who was himself under the command of Margelí, and they recruited Meca and other Masons. Its performance, generally speaking, was good" (1978, p. 246). But García Oliver never mentions this Intelligence Service, Argila or Margelí again in his book. Was its performance instead rather mediocre?

There are some indications that Escorza and his Commission were connected with the repressive agencies of the government institutions prior to May 1937: "Later, Escorza led the Special Investigation Brigade, attached to the Security Committee" (Guillamón, 2011: p. 109). We have been unable to confirm this claim (that Escorza led the Special Investigation Brigade attached to the Security Committee). We do not know the dates for the period of his active service on behalf of the Generalitat of Catalonia.

In any event, the historian Martín Ramos provides the following description of the republican intelligence services: "In Catalonia, Joan García Oliver and Vicenç Guarner established a short-lived espionage and counterespionage agency that was absorbed by the apparatus of the Madrid government after May of 1937. Throughout the rest of the Republic—that is, the territory under the effective authority of its government—these tasks were fragmented and dispersed among the 'special services of the Ministry of War', under the ostensible command of Largo Caballero, but really in the hands of the

anarchist, Manuel Salgado, and the various sub-sections of the General Directorate of Security, under the control of the 'Office of Intelligence and Inter-Agency Liaisons' [Gabinete de Información y de Enlace], the most well-known such group being the Special Brigade in Madrid, led by the socialist David Vázquez, with both socialist and communist agents.

“Neither Largo Caballero nor Galarza seemed to be concerned about this fragmentation and its independent dynamics, nor did they show any signs of wanting to rectify this situation, which was exacerbated after the government moved to Valencia. Inexperience, the fragmentation of agencies and the urgency of the struggle against the fifth column created favorable conditions for the meddling of the Soviet advisors and the outrageous conduct of Orlov, Grigulevich and Eitingon. Zugazagoitia took the first steps to resolve this fragmentation and place some limits on Soviet interference on June 12, with the creation of a Special State Intelligence Department [Departamento Especial de Información del Estado] (DEDIDE) ‘to identify spies, traitors and provocateurs’. The creation of this new institution meant that the Office of Intelligence and Inter-Agency Liaisons would be dissolved and its agents dispersed to other departments of the State apparatus; the employees of DEDIDE were directly and exclusively under the authority of the Minister, without the involvement of the General Directorate of Security—and therefore Ortega—which may not only be an indication of the exceptional nature of the new institution, but, even more so, of Zugazagoitia’s lack of confidence in Ortega and the General Directorate of Security. If the Minister wanted DEDIDE to enforce the prohibition of *La Batalla* and the POUM, it arrived on the scene a little late; Ortega beat him to the punch, on June 16, using the agents of the Special Brigade, under David Vázquez, and he did not inform Zugazagoitia in advance of the raids. This was the beginning of the mutual distrust that developed between them, which reached its culmination with the kidnapping of Nin. The creation of DEDIDE did not put an end to the dual structure of the agencies devoted to the repression of espionage. DEDIDE was limited insofar as it had no authority to investigate or arrest military personnel, and the Special Service of the Ministry of War, renamed the Ministry of National Defense, was still in operation. Prieto, however, radically altered the structure of the Special Service of the Ministry of National Defense, dismissed the anarchist Manuel Salgado, and dissolved the Special Service in order to create a new institution, the Military Investigation Service (SIM), by a decree issued on August 6. Just as Zugazagoitia placed DEDIDE directly under the authority of Largo Caballero, Prieto placed the SIM directly under the command of the Minister of Defense. Its purpose was to ‘combat espionage, prevent acts of sabotage and perform functions related to investigation and surveillance in all the armed forces under the command of the Ministry’. The SIM was authorized to arrest military personnel and also to pursue the civilian fifth column, and henceforth every accusation of ‘espionage, sabotage or any dangerous irregularity relating to the armed forces’ had to be referred to the SIM for investigation, and, in cases where this investigation found evidence of wrongdoing, the SIM would transfer the prisoners to the corresponding jurisdiction. The logic of war put an end to this duality, but not immediately; on March 26, in one of his last acts as Minister of the Interior, Zugazagoitia decreed the dissolution of DEDIDE and the transfer of its equipment and budgetary allocation to the SIM. From that time on, the latter organization dominated the entire

domain of espionage and counterespionage, the repression of the fifth column and disloyalty, whether or not the cases involved had any military implications” (2015, pp. 88-89).

Concerning the SIM, as Martín Ramos himself attests, there are many legends but little serious research. Depending on each author’s political tendency, its powers are either magnified or minimized; its horrors are either emphasized or downplayed. In fact, this historian (who is very much concerned with whitewashing the PSUC and the PCE) proclaims not only that the SIM was not an exclusively communist instrument, but even that anarchists were involved in its operations: “First of all, it was not an institution that was in the hands of the communists who used it solely for their own benefit. Its commander was always a socialist, and in the district for which we have the most information concerning its structure, Madrid, we know that after a brief period at the beginning when it was in the hands of a communist militant—Gustavo Durán—it was always under socialist control, and even supported the coup d’état of Casado and Miaja in March of 1939; after the dismissal of Durán the NKVD ‘ceased to have anything to do with the SIM’, as Orlov himself admits in his memoirs. Its agents included not only socialists and communists, but also republicans and anarchists; the documents seized by the victors include numerous lists of job applicants and agents of the SIM who were republicans and anarchists, especially the latter. The SIM repeatedly issued requests for such applicants, but they were not always heeded. In the summer of 1938 the headquarters of the Central Border Patrol Agency of the SIM asked the National Committee of the CNT for 120 of its militants to perform services as adjunct agents in towns on the border, but the CNT would not provide them because it claimed it would only do so on the condition that the Border Patrol Agency must have clearly demarcated functions; however, the Regional Committee of Catalonia provided 70 ‘remunerated adjunct agents’, including Dionís Eroles, which gave the latter an opportunity to extend his field of activity into the region that was of most interest to him” (2015, pp. 90-91).

“And within the libertarian movement itself, the existence of separate intelligence agencies was brought to an end. After May 1937, within the Political Advisory Commission (CAP), an institution linked to the Regional Committee of the Catalonian CNT, Dionís Eroles led the ‘Intelligence and Political Surveillance’ section, in which he could once again perform the kinds of tasks that he considered were his own particular specialties” (Martín Ramos: 2015, p. 107).

And even outside of Catalonia, the CNT also had a Statistics Section in Madrid that was dedicated to the same objectives as Escorza’s Commission, but in besieged Madrid. It is likely that the National Committee had its own network, as well. We have no idea how all these agencies were interrelated, although they probably operated autonomously or independently to one extent or another depending on the degree to which they were institutionally connected with each other. It seems that it was the intelligence service of CAP, directed by Eroles, rather than Escorza’s Commission, that was involved with the SIM. But we would have to see the names of the anarchists who were allegedly involved in this collaboration before we could possibly arrive at any conclusions concerning which anarchist intelligence service collaborated with the SIM, and to what extent.

Thus, various intelligence networks were operating, and in very different ways and for very different purposes. We will run across the tracks of all of them throughout this series of articles.

3.6 *The Escorzian repression*

It is very difficult to identify those who were responsible for the anti-fascist repression in the Catalan zone, although many of its contemporaries, and many historians, are interested in proving that it was almost exclusively attributable to the anarchists. And it is true that, the more we learn about the subject, the existence of a strictly libertarian repression cannot be denied. However, there are some very “discordant” surprises that do not fit with the view that certain persons are stubbornly trying to impose with respect to this repression as a whole. And this is because there is plenty of evidence of individuals and even institutions engaged in repression within all the anti-fascist organizations, a fact that undoubtedly puts the anarchist role in this whole business into perspective.

To cite only one example, we encounter statements like the following by the historian Antony Beevor: “In Barcelona, as well, there were high-priority objectives involving taking vengeance against the employers and business owners who had employed *pistoleros* to assassinate trade union leaders, against the members of the *Somatén* [Catalonian militia], and, of course, against the *pistoleros* themselves of the *sindicatos libres* [yellow trade unions], the executors of the employers’ terrorism that plagued Barcelona during the 1920s. A settling of accounts with strikebreakers was inevitable, especially those who were working in the port and for the streetcar companies, but Catholic workers, technicians and factory managers were also killed. The wave of repression was the work above all of ‘investigation groups’ and ‘control patrols’ created by the Central Committee of Anti-fascist Militias, composed of armed anarchosindicalists led, on occasions, by unscrupulous individuals like Dionisio Eroles or Manuel Escorza who were devoted to ‘social hygiene’, creating their own prisons and drawing up lists of people who were to be ‘taken for a ride’” (2005, pp. 69-70).²⁰ All you have to know, according to this historian, is that the repression was the work of “armed anarchosindicalists led, on occasions, by unscrupulous individuals...” In short, a clear example of an author who imputes all the blame for the repression to the libertarian movement in general, and Escorza in particular.

²⁰ The corresponding passage from the English edition: “In Barcelona the top priorities for revenge (after certain police officials like Miguel Badía) were the industrialists who had employed *pistoleros* against union leaders in the 1920s and, of course, the gunmen themselves. This wave of repression was carried out mainly by ‘investigation groups’ and ‘control patrols’ created by the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias, but also by unscrupulous and sometimes psychologically disturbed individuals, taking advantage of the chaos. There was inevitably a wide-ranging settling of accounts against blacklegs” (English edition: 2006, p. 85) [Translator’s note].

One thing that more or less everyone agrees on is the purpose of the repression. Thus, the historian Preston writes: “In the absence of police and judicial power, and working under the auspices of a rhetoric of revolutionary justice, the acts of violence were not aimed solely at the clergy. The violence was the reflection of the popular anger after the military coup, whose ringleaders wanted to destroy every positive advance achieved by the Republic. The wave of vengeance affected all social sectors that had something to gain from the military revolt. Hatred of the system of social oppression was expressed by way of the assassination or humiliation of the priests who justified it, the police and Civil Guards who defended it, the employers and big landowners who implemented it, and the wealthy who benefited from such a state of affairs.... The targets of ‘revolutionary justice’ were the ‘proven fascists’, a category that included any person with right-wing views upon whom any suspicion of having supported the military revolt fell. As a result, major landowners, bankers, factory owners,²¹ shopkeepers, administrative white collar employees, engineers and industrial technicians, and even workers who were thought to be on overly-friendly terms with the employers and foremen, ran the risk of being sentenced to death by one of the numerous tribunals that proliferated wherever a trade union or a political group decided to create one: factory or neighborhood committees, urban or rural committees, or ‘investigation and surveillance groups’” (2011, pp. 326-327).²²

It is the journalist Benavides, once again, who claims that Escorza’s wave of repression even affected members of the UGT, although his words appear to be the product of a vivid imagination in his evident pursuit of the goal of constructing a monster in the figure of Escorza: “In Zaidin, the little town of the gunmen who assassinated López Raimundo, a crime against twenty-two members of the UGT was committed. The person in charge of the operation in Ziadin arrived in Barcelona. Escorza congratulated him.

²¹ For example, one may read an account on a blog (http://srabsenta.blogspot.com.es/2012_09_01_archive.html) in which the author publishes an account written by her grandfather, Pere Friexas, in which the latter recounts his experiences in the cheka of the Monells Farm which, according to his testimony, was in the hands of Escorza.

²² The corresponding passage from the English-language edition: “Thus, behind a rhetoric of revolutionary justice, acts of violence were being perpetrated and not just against the clergy. The violence reflected popular outrage at the military coup and its attempt to destroy the advances made by the Republic. Revenge was taken against the section of society on whose behalf the military was acting. So hatred of an oppressive social system found expression in the murder or humiliation of parish priests who justified it, of Civil Guards and policemen who defended it, of the wealthy who enjoyed it and of their agents who implemented it.... The targets of ‘revolutionary justice’ were ‘proven fascists’, which meant right-wingers of any kind who could be supposed to support the coup. Accordingly, landowners, bankers, factory owners, shopkeepers, senior personnel, engineers and technicians in factories and even workers thought to be too close to the bosses were likely to be condemned by any of the many tribunals that were set up by factory or neighborhood committees in the towns or village committees in the countryside” (English edition: 2012, p. 238) [Translator’s note].

--Only five got away.

--You let them escape?

Escorza raised himself up on his twisted arms and fired his gun.

--You have wounded me!

--That's what I wanted to do; now go and get treatment.

(1978, p. 233)

This story told by Benavides is more than just a journalistic libel; sometimes he approaches infantile science fiction. Period.

But how was this repression organized? To speak of an “organized” repression is perhaps going too far. In Catalonia, once the military coup was neutralized and the situation was half-way between a libertarian revolution and a State in “decomposition”, the enemy had to be confronted. This was because the military-reactionary revolt was victorious in other zones of Spain, where a reign of terror was unleashed (this was, in fact, the objective of the revolt). And as we saw above, as attested by Federica, Escorza’s Commission was entrusted by the libertarian organizations with the task of hunting down any fascists who might have remained hidden among the population.

One of the most problematic aspects when it comes to studying this “anti-fascist repression” of the first few months of the war, however, is the confusion between the initial explosion of violence, and the violence that emanated from the Department of Investigation of the CCMA, and then from the Generalitat (the Committee of Internal Security); that is, between the violence of these official institutions and the violence attributable to the Investigation Commission of the CNT-FAI itself, which is the object of our inquiry. In this connection, the republican Pons Garlandí writes the following: “The commanders of the Department of Investigation of the Committee of Militias were chiefly responsible for the state of disorder that afflicted Catalonia at that time. Especially the representative of the FAI, Aurelio Fernández, because of his complicity with the *incontrolados*, but also the representative of the communists, Vidiella, because he failed to perform his duty. Aurelio Fernández was the boss of the Department, and along with Josep Asens, one of commanders of the Control Patrols, Dionís Eroles, of the Committee of Workers and Soldiers (a parallel center of power in the Police units, in which a leader of the ERC, Carles Durán, was also involved) and Manuel Escorza, the leader of the *incontrolados* of the FAI, he organized a terror network based on crime, robbery and dishonor” (2008, pp. 68-69).

As you can see, the whole question of repression is too complicated to attribute the lion’s share of the responsibility to the libertarians. In the environment of that aura of collaboration between the anti-fascist forces during the Civil War, the Control Patrols and

the prison at San Elías symbolized the general background of collaboration with respect to domestic security and repression up until June 1937. And it worked, or was made to work so badly as in almost all the fields affected by this “continuous dis-collaboration”, for, while the libertarian organizations were shipwrecked on the reefs of top-down operations [*verticalidad*], the other anti-fascist groups were more concerned with destroying the power of the libertarians and reconstituting the State power than with making real progress to win the war under libertarian auspices.

Guillamón attempts to explain the whole “extrajudicial” labyrinth of repression of the first few months of the war: “The Control Patrols [founded on August 11, 1936] were under the authority of the Investigation Committee of the CCMA, led by Aurelio Fernández (FAI) and Salvador González (PSUC), who replaced Vidiella. Its administrative headquarters was located at 617 Gran Vía, where the delegates of the Patrols had their offices, that is, José Asens (FAI) and Tomás Fábregas (Acció Catalana). The wages of the members of the Patrols, ten pesetas a day, were defrayed by the Government of the Generalidad. Although all the sections of the Patrols made arrests, and some of the prisoners were interrogated at the former Casa Cambó [that is, by Escorza’s organization], the central prison was located in the former convent of the nuns of the Order of St. Clair in San Elías. The commandant of the prison was named Silvio Torrents “Arias” (FAI), the delegate of the central administrative headquarters of the Patrols. A tribunal was established at San Elías, without the formal consent of any organization, whose purpose was to judge the prisoners as expediently as possible. This tribunal was composed of the Patrolmen Riera, the brothers Arias, Aubí and Bonet, from the FAI; África de las Heras and Salvador González, from the PSUC; Coll from the ERC and Barceló from the POUM. The operations of this tribunal were absolutely autonomous and independent of the CCMA, all other organizations, and the Generalidad. It was under the command of Aurelio Fernández, Manuel Escorza, Vicente Gil (“Portela”), Dionisio Eroles and José Asens. The prisoners were summarily interrogated, without any judicial guarantees of any kind.... The Patrolmen had no other restrictions than the clearly expressed orders to refrain from molesting Freemasons and the Consulates” (2007, pp. 77-80).

Pons Garlandí, the well-known leader of the ERC, described the system in the following way: “The Control Patrols had their own separate prison at the convent of Sant Elies, under the command of Arias, from the FAI. There, a tribunal was established (the brothers Arias, Riera, Aubí and Bonet, from the FAI; Joan Coll, from the ERC—although he had no officially recognized appointment by the organization; África and González, representing the communists; and Pau Barceló, from the POUM) to judge the prisoners, which functioned without abiding by any judicial norms, but, to the contrary, operated in an entirely anti-judicial, arbitrary and inhumane manner” (2008, p. 113). We are therefore told that one of the “*incontrolados*” was a member of the ERC....

According to Martín Ramos, this “Emergency Tribunal” on San Elías Street was created on “November 25, 1936, from a ‘tribunal’ that was totally outside the law, but was accepted as the lesser evil by the Committee of Internal Security, at the time of the panic caused by the Revertés affair” (2012, p. 284).

In another book, Guillamón adds: “This Revolutionary or Emergency Tribunal was given ‘official authorization’ at the meeting of the Secretariat of the Patrols held on January 3, 1937 ... its purpose was to judge the prisoners as quickly as possible.... The operations of this tribunal were autonomous. Aurelio Fernández, Manuel Escorza, Vicente Gil (‘Portela’), Dionisio Eroles, Riera and José Asens occasionally participated in the proceedings of this tribunal, because of the positions they held” (2011, p. 109). It would therefore seem that Manuel Escorza performed a major administrative role in the wave of repression, since, “having established his offices on the top floor of the former Casa Cambó, he had seized the archives of the Fomento de Trabajo and La Lliga, which provided him with many names, addresses, membership lists, and a large quantity of other information, which he used to carry out an efficient ‘purge’ of right wing elements, priests and individuals who were opposed to the ‘new revolutionary order’, dispatching, almost daily, fateful lists of names of persons who were to be arrested and interrogated, and subsequently either released or executed, to the Control Patrols of the CCMA, or to the various anarchist committees, not only in Barcelona but throughout all of Catalonia” (Guillamón, 2011: p. 109).

And Guillamón also emphasizes the control that Escorza exercised over the Central Patrol based at San Elías: “The central investigation patrol, which was under his command, transformed San Elías, which was then the central prison for all the Control Patrols, into a fortress, a power center, a military command center and the headquarters of the tribunal of the Patrols” (2007, p. 78).

The republican Pons Garlandí said with respect to this tribunal: “The men from the FAI created a domestic tribunal, with ramifications for the whole country and internationally, for the pursuit of their criminal designs, composed of Aurelio Fernández, Escorza, Eroles and Asens, and its most visible leader was ‘the hunchback’ criminal, Escorza” (2008, p. 85). We assume that Pons Garlandí, when referring to this “domestic tribunal” with “international” ramifications, was alluding to the rulings that were issued from the top floor of the Casa Cambó, that is, from Escorza’s Commission.... But was Pons Garlandí also expressing the fear of this shadowy influence and the extension of the network of this Investigation Commission led by Escorza?

In any event, this republican went on to name the libertarians who were responsible for the repression: “the henchmen upon whom Aurelio Fernández, Escorza, Eroles, Portela and Asens relied were Ángel Ruiz Rusbel, Nevado, Gutiérrez, Sancho, Massot, Solans, Arias, Bonet, Aracil, López, Riera, Mario (de Sants, the driver of the ghost car), Aubí, Rubio Fernández (Xiquito)” (2008, p. 92). But he offers practically no explanation for where he obtained the information upon which these accusations are based.

Pons Garlandí cannot deny, however, the evidence that implicates his ERC in all these repressive activities that he wanted to attribute exclusively to the libertarians, and he even claims that the ERC surpassed in ferocity the “diabolical deeds” of the FAI: “Unfortunately, I must also mention one of the local sections of my own party, the Federal Center of the ERC, located on the upper part of the Paseo de Gracia, whose

honorary president was Martí Rouret and whose official president was Solé Arumí. This Center surpassed in ferocity even the operations of the FAI groups, and Aurelio Fernández himself requested information from Solé on how to get rid of ‘stiffs’ without leaving any trace. And Solé told him that he burned them. Fernández thought this was a good idea and embraced this lesson for future use” (2008, pp. 91-92). According to the historian Martín Ramos, the involvement of the ERC “was not of secondary importance, but of primary importance, and not just in quantitative terms” (2012, p. 120).

While Pons Garlandí was very interested in revealing the names of the libertarians implicated in repressive activities, he provided practically no information at all about the henchmen of his Solé Arumí. Although there can be no doubt that the latter did not act alone, and although Pons Garlandí should have known the names of the other persons implicated in Arumí’s activities or at least should easily have had access to them, he only offered up the scapegoat Solé Arumí in order to whitewash the role of his ERC. While the leaders of the other anti-fascist organizations denounced the libertarian “*incontrolados*”, they looked the other way when it was a matter of the activities of the members of their own organizations, when they did not give the orders themselves.... And, as we shall see in upcoming installments of this series, Solé Arumí carried out domestic operations that were quite gratifying to Pons Garlandí and company....

It appears that it is Miquel Mir who can shed some more light on how the Escorzian repression actually operated. In the debate concerning Escorza in which he participated on the Sentits program (Catalunya Ràdio), Mir announced that he was writing a biography of Escorza (this was in 2012), and that he was gathering documentation concerning the arrest orders signed by Escorza. These orders were issued to Aurelio Fernández and Asens, directing them to dispatch Control Patrols to make the necessary arrests. According to this same author, however, out of the 740 arrest orders that he had access to at the time, 34 were signed by Escorza. And he even focused on just one of these arrests in order to attempt to prove that the accusations against Escorza were true. The problem is that in that same arrest order Escorza is spoken of in the third person, which would be hard to explain if he was the one who signed the arrest order (according to the radio program, Escorza was especially interested in apprehending the lawyer, Francisco Javier de Alós, the Marquis of Dou, and had been looking for him ever since he fled from his home on Sant Pere Street in Barcelona during the July Days).²³

Thus, not counting this arrest order that Mir is so interested in, which, it seems, evidently cannot be attributed to Escorza, out of the total number of arrest orders that Mir was able to discover, Escorza signed approximately 4.5% of them. And this percentage is only valid if these documents were really signed by Escorza, which is evidently unproven. Furthermore, it is one thing to issue an arrest order, and another altogether to order an assassination.

²³ This arrest order was published on page 39 of the October 6, 2007 issue of *La Vanguardia*, which contains a two-page advertisement for Miquel Mir’s book, *Diario de un pistolero anarquista* [Diary of an Anarchist *Pistolero*], on pages 38 and 39.

The historian Martín Ramos (who cannot by any stretch of the imagination be considered to harbor libertarian sympathies—quite the contrary) examines the fine points of this “institutional” structure that crystallized around the Control Patrols (at first under the authority of the CCMA, and then under that of the Internal Security Committee of the Generalitat until its liquidation in June 1937), and the investigation departments that every organization possessed: “Besides the activities of the Control Patrols, another question entirely is posed by the existence of investigation services under the control of certain anti-fascist organizations, which do not seem to have been devoted so much to participating in the broad wave of repression as to their own agendas as political police, operating within their own organizations, and spying on and monitoring the activities of the other organizations in the anti-fascist alliance. Nonetheless, their activities are sometimes conflated, inappropriately, with the whole phenomenon of ‘Patrol’ violence. It is not the case, strictly speaking, that they were not capable of employing violence, including assassination, but this was only secondary to an objective that was not exactly coterminous with that of repression. One example was the ‘Department of Investigation’ of the CNT-FAI, under the command of Manuel Escorza, with its headquarters in the central office complex of the CNT on Vía Layetana” (2012, p. 121).

César M. Lorenzo offers the following explanation: “... there were police forces organized by each party or trade union that were exclusively under the control of their respective leadership groups: the famous chekas, so widely feared, with their secret agents, their private prisons and their commando teams. The one controlled by the CNT, under the command of Manuel Escorza, was the most important and the most highly-developed” (1972, pp. 92-93).

The Investigation Commission was also entrusted with internal “missions” by the CNT-FAI, when elements within the libertarian ranks carried out actions that violated the directives of the organization. In late July 1936, “one or two assassinations could be characterized as a settling of accounts between trade unions. Desiderio Trillas, the leader of the UGT’s longshoremen’s trade union, was gunned down by a group of anarchists because he had prevented members of the CNT from being hired on the waterfront. This assassination was immediately condemned by the leaders of the CNT/FAI, who promised to summarily execute any of their comrades who acted on their own personal account, a threat that was made good: the leader of the construction workers trade union, Josep Gardenyes (who had been freed from prison on July 19) and the leader of the food supply workers trade union, Manuel Fernández, who had taken vengeance on the persons who had denounced them to the police during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, were executed by their own comrades from the FAI” (Beevor, 2005: pp. 69-70).²⁴

²⁴ The corresponding passage from the English-language edition: “There was inevitably a wide-ranging settlement of accounts against blacklegs. One or two killings even went back to old inter-union disputes. Desiderio Trillas, the head of the UGT dockers, was shot down by a group of anarchists because he had prevented CNT members from receiving work. This murder was condemned at once by the CNT-FAI leadership and they promised the immediate execution of any of their members who killed out of personal motives. It was a threat which they carried out. Several prominent anarchists, such as

Or, as Guillamón explains: “the CNT had proven to be all-too-vulnerable and accessible to criminal activity on the part of very dubious elements like Ruano (in the Columns) and Gutiérrez (in the Patrols). Their punishment was always carried out within the confines of the organization, and almost in secret, and in any case was not widely publicized, so that these kinds of crimes seemed to go unpunished (although Ruano was condemned to death) and never had the effect of restoring the CNT’s tarnished prestige” (2014, p. 400).

Finally, to what degree were the acts of repression carried out by the “unofficial” Control Patrols, and the acts of repression ordered by Escorza, separate phenomena? It seems that with respect to the libertarians’ own apparatus of repression, Escorza was only “in charge” because, while he was only one of several leaders of the Commission, he was the one who possessed all or most of the information. What is more difficult to determine is the degree of influence exercised over the Control Patrols by the other organizations, which were conducting and organizing their own particular forms of repression. For example, while torture was almost never employed within the libertarian apparatus of repression, within the other organizations it was the usual practice, beginning with Solé Arumí of the ERC and ending with the systematic practice of torture that was practiced by the SIM under communist and Soviet tutelage after May 1937.

3.6.1 Escorza’s prisons

This leads us to speculate that San Elías, insofar as it was the central prison for the Control Patrols, was not Escorza’s preferred location for holding detainees, if he really had one. Did Escorza have his own prison? According to Pons Garlandí: “At first it seemed that the Control Patrols had remedied that chaotic situation, but soon enough one could see that everything had reverted to the way it was before. The secret prisons of Sant Elies, the Plaza de Santa Anna, the Tower of Sant Gervasi (in the hands of Escorza), etc., carried on with their criminal labors” (2008, pp. 68-69).

According to this republican, “wealthy people, or individuals who were the victims of the personal vengeance of a member of the FAI, were brought to the Defense Committees or to the headquarters of the FAI (Vía Layetana, Casa Cambó). In very special cases and in cases where the victims did not confess, they were brought to the special personal cheka of monster number one, both physically and morally, Escorza, in a tower at Sant Gervasi” (2008, p. 104).

In fact, all the anti-fascist organizations had their own detention centers. For example, the detention centers of the PSUC were located in the Hotel Colón and at the Círculo Ecuestre. And while Pons Garlandí speaks of a tower at Sant Gervasi as Escorza’s personal prison, Miquel Mir speaks of a tower on Tibidabo Avenue. The most dubious

their building union leader, Josep Gardenyes, who had been freed from prison on 19 July, and Manuel Fernández, the head of the catering syndicate, were executed by their own comrades in the FAI for taking vengeance on police spies from the time of Primo’s dictatorship (footnote omitted)” (English edition: 2006, p. 85) [Translator’s note].

account, however, is the one provided by Miquel Mir in his book,²⁵ since his “imaginary” source (the alleged memoirs of a Patrolman whose name does not appear on any service roster, according to Guillamón) obliges us to exercise even more caution than usual with his claims: “Manuel Escorza had everything planned in advance, and this is proved by the orders that he issued to the Patrolmen of his Investigation Brigade: they must exercise extreme care to prevent the corpses from giving any signs that they were the cause of their deaths, in order to avoid falling under suspicion and running the risk that they and their leaders would be exposed.

“Some of the bodies of people that might be recognized by a family member or friend who saw the Patrolmen make the arrest, were loaded onto vehicles and brought to a cement factory on the outskirts of Montcada, where they were burned in the factory’s kilns, with the connivance of the workers at the cement factory, many of whom were anarchists. The highest degree of caution was observed to avoid suspicion. Other persons from a very select group were also taken there, mostly rich people who had been arrested by the Patrolmen under orders from the Investigation Brigade of the CNT-FAI, and brought to the Barracks at San Elías, where they were forced to surrender valuable objects or money in exchange for their lives. These persons were taken to a tower that Manuel Escorza, Aurelio Fernández and Dionisio Eroles operated on Tibidabo Avenue, located about fifty meters from the Soviet Consulate, and after these people had paid their ransom, they were promised that they would be taken in vehicles to the French border at dawn. And what happened? The Patrolmen loaded them onto a vehicle in the middle of the night and after leaving the City of Barcelona, they took the national highway that led towards France, but turned off the highway and took a side road towards the cement factory in Montcada. When they arrived at the factory, the Patrolmen made their victims get out of the car and walk a few meters before the Patrolmen shot them. The Patrolmen then retrieved the corpses, loaded them onto the vehicle and drove to the kilns of the cement factory where they were burned; thus, not a single trace remained and the victims’ families were told that their loved ones had disappeared or fled Spain” (2006, pp. 111-112).

Guillamón cites other documentation from the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Council of the Generalitat held on February 24, 1937, presided over by Companys and attended by all the Ministers, where Escorza and his alleged prison were discussed: “Aguadé referred to various cases ‘when authorized agents have looted and even murdered’ Aguadé also said, referring to the Torre dels Pardals (Bonanova), that ‘a Committee of the FAI is active there, with the participation of elements from the Commissariat of Public Order, under the orders of the Chief of Services’. Although he did not mention his name, everyone knew that the Chief of Services of Public Order was Dionisio Eroles. Aguadé explained that, in this Tower, ‘there were many prisoners who were offered passports for three thousand pesetas’. Aguadé then read ‘a report that gave details of how they operated, under the command of a hunchback’. Aguadé did not mention any names in this instance, either, but everyone knew that this hunchback could

²⁵ See Agustín Guillamón’s critique of Miquel Mir’s book at: <http://www.ateneuenciclopedicpopular.org/spip.php?article272>.

be none other than Manuel Escorza del Val. Aguadé claimed that he had no control over these agents (Eroles, Escorza, Asens) because ‘they are not working for the Government, but under the personal command of Leaders who are not enforcing the orders of the Ministry’” (2014, pp. 283-284).

Thus, Escorza is blamed for everything from control over the San Elías barracks (although San Elías was the central prison of the Control Patrols, which were staffed by all the anti-fascist organizations), to “private” prisons, one located on Tibidabo Avenue, another at Sant Gervasi and another at Bonanova (the Torre dels Pardals). Are all of these prisons one and the same?

The following is an excerpt from an eyewitness account by Pere Freixas Badía, which may be consulted in its entirety on a blog on the Internet.²⁶ We are unable to verify the accuracy of his statements:

One of the chekas that displayed the most initiative in its highly refined criminality during the first months of red anarchy was located at 42-44 Arrabal Street (the road to the San Gervasio cemetery), at the farm called “Monells” and its farmhouse. They fitted the farm buildings out as a prison and in the farmhouse that was accessed by way of a gate in the wall, they established the tribunal that was presided over by a kind of general staff of the FAI.... That cheka was a death cheka.

At the head of this tribunal was an individual of small stature, named Escorza, a native of Alcañiz, who could not stand on his own feet and struggled to walk with crutches. A degenerate type, a hunchback, he was acting under the orders of another invisible criminal hierarchy, with which he was in communication and from which he received execution orders by telephone.

The victims were brought there in separate automobiles, guarded by patrols composed of red pistoleros who were themselves accompanied by a handful of apaches, most of whom were natives of the Marseilles criminal underworld. After the prisoners were interrogated and after all their valuables and documentation were taken from them, they were taken to the Monells farm where they were imprisoned and held in solitary confinement in filthy dungeons, with water leaking everywhere; in these pigsties the only furniture was a mattress tossed on the floor, and everything was completely drenched by the water that constantly leaked from the walls....

²⁶ http://srabsenta.blogspot.com.es/2012_09_01_archive.html. According to the creator of the blog: “What I am now going to explain, or rather, transcribe, is part of the story of my maternal grandfather, Pere Freixas Badía, who was arrested by members of the FAI during the Civil War and imprisoned in a cheka in the neighborhood of Bonanova. He had the good fortune to escape with his life to tell the story and wrote it down so that I, his granddaughter who never knew him (he died long before I was born), would read it, and I decided to publish it on a blog....”

The unfortunate prisoners, once they entered the prison, were registered in a book, and those who departed had their names marked with a red pencil, a special sign of their miserable end, whose epilogue was concluded with the deposit of the corpses at the Clinical Hospital. Now and then I was able to get a look at this book and saw with horror that almost all the names were marked with that sinister red color.

... During the 12 days that I was imprisoned there, the eleven other persons who were held with me in separate cells never again saw the light of day.

Now and then we were taken from our cells and forced to work. They loaded more than 20 tons of roofing slates on our backs to pave the walkway between the two towers and if anyone faltered while working, he was encouraged with blows from a rifle butt and pistol-whipped with the enormous handguns that those thugs always carried.

... The whole operation proceeded as follows: To carry out a search, in the car there was the driver, an apache, two men from the FAI and a thug they called Bonet, who, in order to provide legitimacy to their visit, went to obtain a checkpoint pass from the Generalitat at the guard post at Plaza Molina, and when they arrived at the home of the victim, they showed him the pass and made the whole affair seem like official business that posed no threat whatsoever. Then the search commenced, which ended in the looting of the victim's belongings and the arrest of the unfortunate object of the assault.

Once this was done, rather than proceeding to the usual tribunal, they went to the patrol guard post at the Plaza Molina and returned the pass, then drove the car to the Palace, which is what they called the farmhouse at Monells where they unloaded their loot and the prisoner.

The stolen goods were handed over to Escorza and other comrades who examined them and assessed their value. Then they were taken to another nearby department, where an expert comrade was sitting in front of a rug, separating the diamonds from the gold, and when there was enough, they mailed a request for a passenger ticket to Air France, a company that seemed to have an interest in serving them since it always reserved a seat for one of them to safely transport the loot that they periodically collected, the proceeds from which, according to Escorza, were for obtaining weapons.

When their emissary arrived in France, he mailed various letters that they had themselves written, in a special section, which were addressed to various prominent persons in this city [Barcelona], and which contained sensitive information that posed a security threat to the republican regime, which obliged the censors at the border to deliver the correspondence that fell into their hands

to the investigation service of the Generalitat, which was none other than the agency that is the subject of my account.

This was how they created a pretext (for the searches and arrests) whenever they discovered someone whose only crime was being wealthy and possessing money and valuables.

... I cannot understand how anyone could have been released when they faced all those charges.... Among those of us who had the misfortune of falling into the hands of these criminals, I remember that they killed a respectable lady for the crime, according to them, of having been proven to have listened to Queipo's radio program. For practicing his profession, they killed the lawyer, Don Pedro Amat Rutllan.

For belonging to the Grupo Alfonso fifteen years earlier, they killed the Cuban citizen, Pedro Muñoz Ruíz, who lived at 8 Conde del Asalto Street. They made him sign four checks for 50,000 pesetas each, drawn on the Credit Lyonnais, where he had a very large bank account, and his wife told me when I was released about all of their schemes and then they threatened to kill her, but since everyone in the neighborhood found out about it, they were frightened and did not bother her anymore.

For the very same crime of having once been a member of the Grupo Alfonso, they also killed a lawyer who was a friend of Señor Muñoz, an elderly man.

The night that I was released, in the same car they picked up the pharmacist, Señor Surós, the brother of the professor of the same name; he was accused of being a member of the radical party and he was condemned to death. They also pronounced the death sentence against my friend, Francisco Pujol Campins, a native of Vilassar de Mar, and the former manager of the glass factory at Badalona. They accused him of being a despicable bourgeois and for having mistreated the workers at his factory. To humiliate him, they tied a rope around his neck and dragged him more than two kilometers along the road until the rope broke, and then they stopped the car and made Surós get out so he could see the strangled victim.

While he was gazing at the shapeless heap of human remains, they opened fire on Surós and left him sprawled on top of Campins. On the following day, their corpses could be viewed at the Clinical Hospital, one of them with the rope still tied to his neck.

After having eliminated about 500 victims with these bloody raids, they closed that cheka, only to swell the ranks of the staff of the other notorious cheka at San Elías, where Escorza gave free rein to his most refined criminal instincts.

Then, however, there were too many apaches at San Elías, whose existing staff was more than sufficiently skilled in crime, and the apaches from Monells were transferred to a tower that was next to the cheka on Vallmajor Street, until the eve of the liberation of the city by Franco's army, and then they ran away with all the other heroes.

If, for the crime of being rich, they killed so many people, and for the crime of belonging to certain political associations, they liquidated so many unfortunates, if the reds were to follow the same examples they set from the very beginning of the revolution, now they would have to kill everyone from Negrín to the last Minister, and everyone from the highest officials of the trade unions to the lowest beneficiary of patronage, since all of them would have been riddled with bullets. And as for their suppression of sympathizers of one or another political party, by the same logic, now they would have to eliminate everyone who was a member of the trade unions, which is to say everyone in Barcelona....

(...)

January 1937—REDS AND WHITES

When the comrades from the FAI took me for a ride after having stolen everything of value in my home (about 400,000 pesetas worth in current money), when they brought me to the Palace (this is what they called the tower of Monells de la Bonanova that they turned into a prison and execution center), I recall that one of the comrades said to the gang leader, while we were in the car—"Barcelona is full of fascists and needs even more cleaning up".

If I had been able to respond to comrade Bonet—for this was what they called the thug who arrested me—I would have told him that in Barcelona, before July 19, 1936, there was not one single fascist, nor did anyone understand the political and social meaning of this word. The fascists were created by the FAI, the CNT, the POUM, the Esquerra, the Control Patrols, and the whole swarm of thieves and criminals who assaulted and robbed the respectable people of Barcelona.

As for those people whose family members and friends they robbed, assaulted and killed—and in loyalist Spain their numbers were greater than the grains of sand on the beach—what kind of ideas do you think they will have?

The comrades circulated the notion that "fascist" is synonymous with ogres, criminals and thieves who rob, kill and assassinate everyone.

A logical error, my dear comrades. The word, "Fascist", as I, and every respectable person, understand the word, is synonymous with respect, order, work, government and personal security, factors that must be desired by every honorable and well-born person. And as for those who are disgusted by these qualities, they are not worthy to be called civilized; and as for those who do not

find such qualities disgusting, they cannot, they must not, abide by a society that is raised up on a pedestal of blood and calamity, disgrace and horror for the whole civilized world.

3.6.2 *The confederal chain of command: who was giving orders to whom?*

The first thing we must take into consideration is the degree of autonomy of the Investigation Commission. We have seen that it was created by the “highest echelons” of the CNT-FAI in Catalonia. And it is likely that, especially at first, it strictly followed the orders of the CNT-FAI leadership. With the passage of time, however, the power of the Commission in general, and of Escorza in particular, increased. The question is: how much did it increase?

Another factor that has yet to be satisfactorily resolved is the relation between Escorza and the other libertarians we have mentioned who were associated with the various tasks of repression: Aurelio Fernández, Portela, Dionís Eroles and Asens. The questions are: Did one of them give orders to the others? What kind of personal relationships obtained among them? Did their relations with each other change over the course of the war?

Among their contemporaries, and also among historians, there are disagreements concerning the period during which one or another was preeminent. According to the historian, José Luis Martín Ramos, “José Asens was an important CNT cadre, who in July of 1936 served as the Secretary of the Local Federation of Barcelona and was also a member of the Regional Defense Committee of the CNT. He always acted as a go-between for CNT Patrols’ organization and the CNT’s other organizations” (2012, pp. 116-117). For Martín Ramos, “the figure of Asens is doubly relevant, as the head of the ‘revolutionary police’ of Barcelona, a force whose power extended, as we shall see, throughout Catalonia, and also as an important player in the financing of the most radical CNT rank and file members as well as other sectors controlled by the CNT” (2012, p. 118).

For Guillamón, however, this role was essentially played by Escorza: “Aurelio Fernández worked strictly in conjunction with Manuel Escorza, the real brain that led, coordinated and informed the leaders of the CNT’s other ‘police’ agencies: José Asens, the delegate of the Control Patrols and Dionisio Eroles, the Secretary of the Workers and Soldiers Council, an institution created to purge the military and the police forces of any elements of dubious loyalty” (2007, p. 78).

In fact, the relations between Escorza, Eroles, Asens and Aurelio Fernández, not to mention Portela, are hard to unravel, and everyone depicts them according to his own tastes. While La Pasionaria says that Escorza gave orders to his “lieutenant”, Aurelio, Carlos García and Harald Piotrowski do not concur with her view: “Moreover, the anarchist Aurelio Fernández was the head of the Investigation Committee of the CCMA, and the fact that the Investigation and Intelligence Services of the CNT-FAI, with Manuel Escorza in charge, were under his authority, and the fact that he performed coordinating functions in conjunction with José Asens (the Delegate of the Control Patrols) and

Dionisio Eroles (Secretary of the Workers and Soldiers Council), allowed the anarchists a large margin of maneuver for autonomous operations outside the direct control of the Generalitat” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 211). And the authors add: “It can be said that the Investigation and Intelligence Services of the CNT-FAI were the political police of the anarchists, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that their operations were not under the control of the official departments of the Ministry of Public Order of the Generalitat” (Nelles *et al.*: 2010, p. 212).

In any event, Escorza was gradually accumulating more influence within the organization [the CNT-FAI] and, by virtue of his control of strategic information, he would play an increasingly more prominent role in the whole array of repression and in the end it was Escorza, and no one else, who stood at the head of the libertarian movement, as we shall see in future installments of this series of articles.

In any event, it is obvious that Escorza, Asens, Aurelio and Eroles were in continuous contact with each other. Even the republican, Pons Garlandí, claimed their relations extended all the way to the Judicial Office: “Furthermore, Aurelio, Escorza, Eroles and Portela were in direct contact with, and gave orders to, the Judicial Office at the Palace of Justice in Barcelona, of such ill repute, whose staff included the lawyer, Eduardo Barriobero, Ángel Samblacat, Rusiñol, Devesa, Juandó, etc.” (2008, p. 144). We do not know just how extensive these relations were, but it seems that the Judicial Office operated quite autonomously, and within it even people like Devesa and Batlle were suspected of being police informers and of aiding and abetting fifth columnists.²⁷ This would explain why, at the end of the war, some of them did not think it was necessary to go into exile. This decision cost more than one of them his life, however.

3.6.3 Escape networks for victims of anti-fascist persecution

In opposition to this persecution of elements suspected of sympathizing and even collaborating with the enemy, other networks were working to save people’s lives (some for a very high price). Within the Generalitat itself, the names of Ventura Gassol and José María España are always mentioned, and Pons Garlandí himself tells us the following: “I can say that all the people who approached my office seeking protection from the excessive application of authority and from the abuse of power, found in me and my collaborators understanding and the spirit of justice.... And all of them—republicans, Catalanists, workers, industrialists, manufacturers, civil servants, priests, nuns, etc., who were not involved in any crimes—were vouchsafed a guarantee of safe-conduct to go wherever they pleased, since their imprisonment could not be allowed without a mandate from the legally vested authority and a court order” (2008, p. 76). These institutional networks of aid for the victims of persecution, however, found especially willing collaborators in the embassies of Nazi Germany and Mussolini’s Italy. While it is true that, up until November of 1936, these two fascist countries did not officially declare

²⁷ See, in the book, *Anarquismo y Bajos Fondos*, the chapter: “The Assistance Given by Some Members of the Judicial Office to the Fascists...”, pp. 129-132, www.instintosocial.org.

themselves non-neutral, the collaboration of both in the coup d'état was not only suspected but proven by documents seized at the beginning of the war which confirmed their participation in the revolt. In consideration of this fact, this display of solidarity (it would be interesting to know the prices charged by these networks) during wartime was not only counterproductive, but demonstrated a clear lack of loyalty to the anti-fascist cause.

Pons Garlandí himself makes the following confession concerning two people he helped to escape from Spain: "I admit that I was too benevolent and led astray by an exaggerated sense of justice with respect to both Señor Mateu [the owner of the Castillo de Peralada] and Señor Soler Janer [a former councilman of the Barcelona Municipal Council], for although neither was directly incriminated in the events of July 19 [he does not inform us of the basis for this claim], both of them nonetheless, after the fall of Barcelona into the hands of the anti-republican forces, on January 26, 1939, were appointed to positions of authority in the victorious regime. Mateu was appointed Mayor of Barcelona and Janer was appointed to serve as the Postmaster General of the Catalanian Post Office" (2008, pp. 79-80). Small potatoes. Señor Mateu was able to escape thanks to the fact that "I myself escorted him to the house of a friend, in the Gracia neighborhood, and a few days later he departed from Barcelona for Italy with an Italian passport, on an Italian ship. Later, I arranged for the departure of his wife so she could join him" (2008, p 79).

And this is only what he chose to confess. A reading of Pons Garlandí's book enables one to easily understand this whole phenomenon of collaboration with the fascist countries engaged in by the ERC and other parties, like Estat Català. We note that Pons Garlandí never speaks of the enemy as "Fascists" but only as "Anti-republicans". Furthermore, his praise for [Catalonian] patriotism might give rise to suspicions among more than a few people, despite his insistent claim to upholding his liberal principles, as if it was only a historical fluke that placed him on a side that he would never in other circumstances ever have chosen to support.

Tarradellas even ventures to offer a figure for the number of people who escaped from Spain with the help of the Generalitat: "I think that the weakness of the leaders of the Republic, especially at the beginning of the war—for Negrín was different—is one of the principal reasons why we lost the war. If we had acted differently at the beginning, perhaps the revolt could have been defeated. For the other side, the rebels, had a man who was in command, and who killed without mercy. He was doing the killing. We just defended ourselves. In the Generalitat we issued 160,000 passports to people who wanted to escape. He, Franco, did not let anyone escape" (Udina: 1978, p. 211). We cannot vouch for the reliability of the figure mentioned by Tarradellas. But just what is Tarradellas saying here? What is it exactly that he is regretting having done? Is it for having made possible the escape of all these people who, as we have seen from the testimony of Pons Garlandí, included more than a few who were later to collaborate in one way or another against the Republic?

They were not the only ones, however. According to Amorós, Badius (a prominent member of The Friends of Durruti Group, which played the role of a kind of opposition

to the officially sanctioned collaborationist line of the CNT-FAI), had to intervene to save the life of one of his friends, a member of Estat Català who was helping people to escape from Spain to finance his party: “‘Meanwhile, another one of my friends from the old days, Daniel Cardona, was in a tight spot. . . .’ As a member of the party [Estat Català], the Committee of Militias dispatched him on a mission to the Aragon Front. Once his mission was completed, he made arrangements to return to Barcelona, but he was arrested and imprisoned in Caspe along with two priests. Then he was transferred to Barcelona. The reason: the party was financing its operations by smuggling ecclesiastical personnel and right-wing elements to France, and Cardona was caught while conducting one of these operations. When he was informed of his arrest, Balus feared the worst. . . .” (2003, p. 106). In fact, the connections linking Estat Català with international fascism are beyond dispute, and even during the Casanovas conspiracy the party was in contact with the German consulate. . . .

According to Pons Garlandí, his agents entrusted with surveillance over the border “revealed the misdeeds committed by individuals affiliated with the Communist Party, Comorera and company. Communist elements had an organization—whose headquarters was located in Barcelona, at the Euskadi Bar, on the Paseo de Gracia—that sold passports and visas, between Sort and Viella. The communists, friends of Comorera, charged thirty thousand pesetas for each transaction. They also discovered that the Police Chief of the Generalitat in Lleida, the communist, Vilà, was smuggling olive oil and other products in the Vall d’Aran and the south of France, for his own profit” (2008, p. 140).

3.6.4 Who was exempt from persecution?

We have seen that, throughout this whole web of repression, which was not exclusively libertarian, all kinds of people were swept up, depending on the nature of each anti-fascist organization. In the Escorzian organization, strictly speaking, we have seen how, according to Guillamón, Escorza each day drew up lists of people who were to be arrested and interrogated, which he distributed to the Patrols. These lists were compiled on the basis of the relationships that he had been able to discern from his examination of the confiscated archives of the Employers Association and the Casa Cambó. By using these resources he was able to hunt down those persons who had in one way or another assisted the military coup, and who might attempt to destroy from within the new social order that he was trying to build. The problem was that the trail of relations always led to people who were never considered to be suspects. In other words, there was no distinct dividing line that separated fascists from anti-fascists, as on the fronts. And this explains why the repression began to affect many people who had too many connections, which soon occasioned much anxiety in certain anti-fascist circles.

All authors agree that only the embassies and consulates were exempt from the activities of the Patrols. Express orders to this effect were issued in order to avoid international complications. According to César Alcalà, however, there was another kind of list that might very well be attributable to Escorza’s Commission: “They drew up a list with the names of all the members of the [Masonic] Lodges. The list became, so to speak, a safe-conduct pass that saved many people’s lives during the implacable persecution carried

out by the Control Patrols. The original list was compiled by the anarchosyndicalist intelligence service so that the Control Patrols would know who was untouchable” (2010, p. 76).

3.7 Weapons

Another objective of the Commission was the alleged supply of arms for the confederal forces, and this was all the more important insofar as no help that might end up in the hands of anarchists could be expected from any State. We were only able to find any references to this topic in Mir’s unreliable book. According to this author, when they were performing arrests and requisitions, the members of the Patrols kept objects for their own personal profit. But “... not all these requisitions were for the personal profit of the patrolmen. Most of the material was delivered in obedience to the orders of Silvio Torrents, the delegate of the Barracks at San Elías; José Asens, the leader of the Control Patrols; and Aurelio Fernández, leader of the Patrols and Investigation Department. But the highest official was Manuel Escorza, of the Investigation Committee of the CNT-FAI, who supervised a team of individuals at a warehouse across from the Ateneo Colón in Pueblo Nuevo where everything of value that was requisitioned was catalogued, separating the silver, the gold, the brass, etc. Many of the objects made of precious metals were melted to create ingots of precious metal or else they were redeemed by their former owners for cash. This work was carried out at an FAI warehouse in Pueblo Nuevo; the ingots were stored in boxes that were shipped to the border in trucks, to be sold in foreign countries. According to the leaders of this operation, the money from their sale was used to finance the purchase of weapons. Manuel Escorza organized a system for this purpose that was under his exclusive control. The arms purchases were made in foreign countries and were paid for with jewels or gold bars” (2006, p. 93). The source for these claims is the same patrolman whose name does not appear on any payroll list for the Control Patrols.

Pons Garlandí might provide us with a hint of how this arms-buying network operated: “We placed a brigade of civil servants from the Generalitat under the command of the agent, Roses, at La Jonquera, Cantallops, Recasens, Darnius, Agullana, Maçanet de Cabrenys, Terrades and Sant Llorenç de la Muga. These agents were very productive, foiling many of the operations of the FAI and guaranteeing the government services and the security of persons authorized to cross the border at these locations.... In addition, these agents, working under my orders, stationed in La Jonquera and its vicinity, kept me informed concerning the movements of Durruti’s wife, when she tried to cross the border to France, along with certain persons from the FAI, under the orders of Aurelio and Portela, with a suitcase full of jewels, and my men arrested her....

“The arrest of these gold smugglers and small-time crooks, who had taken advantage of certain unfortunate circumstances that afflicted our people, must have been a very important blow struck against the FAI, insofar as it caused the FAIsta, at that time the Minister of Justice, Joan García Oliver, to rush to Barcelona expressly for the purpose of throwing up a smokescreen and making sure that nothing happened to his agents. Our brigade of agents also, at my orders, discovered how the FAI was able to evade the

border controls, smuggling gold and silver that had been smelted and poured into the molds of car fenders, and then plated with a thin layer of other metals. The FAI did all this with the consent and in conjunction with the FAI members who then held government positions, Aurelio, Escorza, Portela, Asens, Iborra, the chief of the State Police on the border at Portbou, and the men who were appointed by them to perform these functions near the border, Segaró and Martín (the Cripple of Málaga)” (2008, pp. 139-140).

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