

The Anarchists and the Social Revolution

Interviewing
Salvador Torrents
in Australia

by Campio Carpio



the seed

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Foreword

Salvador Torrents was one of numerous Spanish anarchists that found refuge in this distant continent of Australia following numerous chapters of rebellion and struggles for Justice throughout the history of the Iberian Peninsula.

Until death, they all remained faithful to their libertarian ideals, constantly contributing and planting the seed of anarchism with the hope that one day it would flourish.

Salvador Torrents, was born so it is believed, in 1885 and began his libertarian militancy at a young age in the township of Mataró. In 1903 along with Abelardo Saavedra, José Sánchez Rosa and Mariano Castellote, he participated in the first anarchist meeting held in the town. He further contributed in establishing the anarchist group “Nueva Semilla” *New Seed* as well as the “Ateneo Obrero” of Mataró.

Following the events of July 1909, he exiled himself in France. He was forced to return to Spain and in approximately December 1915 he elected to migrate to Australia. He settled in Essendon, Melbourne for a brief period finally establishing himself in the coastal township of Innisfail, Queensland. In either late 1919 or early 1920 he was joined by his compañera Teresa and daughter Paz Universal (*translated into English the name signifies Universal Peace*).

In early 1950, compañero Campio Carpio, a recognized and respected writer in the hispanic libertarian journals interviewed compañero Torrents via correspondence. This interview was published in a booklet form in 1975 by the spanish anarchist publishing collectives of Militando from Sydney and Ravachol from Melbourne, it was printed in Melbourne by Ravachol Press.

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Translated from Spanish to English by Vicente Ruiz (hijo)

1975 Introduction

The current resurgence of the anarchist movement around the world could not avoid influencing the youth of the last discovered continent. The bi-lingual anarchist publication “Acracia” is distributed in all major cities such as Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney as well as other large townships around the country, together with “Nosotros” which is a Spanish literary and informative magazine. In addition, the editorial group “Ravachol” is publishing quite a number of brochures and booklets with ideological and noble contents. Some of these being “The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution” by the great Kropotkin; “The Principles of Humanism” by the romanian-uruguayan Eugen Relgis and “La Revolución Social Española” (*The Spanish Social Revolution*) by Ramón Liarte. Recognition must also be given to the printing collectives of Strawberry Press, Slash/ Asterisk* and Ravachol Press who have assisted with their artistry in the layout process, as well as their labour in operating the presses.

A result of this dedicated labour is the new appearance of the magazine “Militando”, which in turn is encouraging other publishing initiatives of our ideals within our own shores as well as around the world. The times in which we live, demands of us, a conscious and constant effort by every single one of us, of both social and cultural assimilation to ensure that the revolutionary process we so desire is not halted. Such is the responsibility that civilization has given individuals who crave a better world.

Complementing this activity, we present, “The Anarchists and the Social Revolution”, an interview achieved via correspondence by compañero Campio Carpio with this most esteemed and late compañero Salvador Torrents, an anarchist pioneer of the Iberian East that with his exemplary life style and actions contributed to the rebirth of the anarchist militancy in Australia.

Antonio Jiménez.

The anarchist movement is a valuable movement because of its militants, no matter where one finds them. There are *compañeros* that eagerly follow the difficulties of the activities and situation of our movement in every corner of the world. Speaking different languages and of different cultural backgrounds our ideal finds us with a common ground, although we may take different paths, our purpose is the same. No problem is alien to us nor is any principle of rebellion foreign to us. We feel in unison the throbbing of our restlessness to the rhythm of events happening around us in anticipation for the revolution that we advocate.

Compañero Salvador Torrents, who originated from the Catalan region of Spain, passed away 4 years ago in Australia. He would have been in his 70's but his views, analysis and opinions of the fundamental problems of our society belonged with the youth, and I do not mean that conformist youth that accepts events as inevitable incidents and subsequently watch historical facts pass by as a “*fait accomplie*”.

Torrents could see in that conformist youth the product of the capitalist system, which was building, strengthening and defending with all sorts of control and censorship the State, against the revolutionary spirit that quivers within the proletariat around the world.

Taking into account the experience gathered by *compañero* Salvador Torrents through his years of activism, we shall endeavour to utilise his views and opinions to stimulate the younger generations into studying and analysing the social problems inherent within the capitalist system, and at the same time expose some of the purest libertarian ideological thoughts.

Salvador Torrents, whom regularly contributed articles in our journals, was a self-educated labourer able to grasp from the libertarian ideology all the constructive concepts it has and incorporate them into the melting pot of clashing ideological and social thoughts. The new generations have in this persona the example as to how the continuous social injustices around the world cannot delay the forthcoming Social Revolution.

With this in mind, we ask compañero Torrents:

Compañero, your historical experience, would have made you aware and alert to the deviation towards social democracy by certain individuals from within our ranks, declaring it as the lesser of all evils. Thus considering our future as a revolutionary movement which we all eagerly desire; should we as anarchists accept such a transition as an end result or, should we oppose such a stance by implementing the path of direct action as proposed by the founders of the First International and its adherent organisations, which historically has proven to be the logical course of action?

In the 50 years or so that I have been reading the writings of numerous and varied illustrious exponents of our ideology, each one of them has projected their individual point of view. There are innumerable differences amongst them regarding the most appropriate path to overthrow the capitalist system and establish a libertarian society. Yet, they have no doubt; that such a goal can only be achieved through a revolution. A revolution that we ourselves must accomplish, revitalising ourselves, without waiting for the day that it may erupt, we need to act now, on a daily and hourly basis. Demonstrate that when put to the test, we, as anarchists are capable to live by the ideals that we advocate.

During the last War, various monarchs believed they had the divine blessing to rule eternally and yet had to prepare their suitcases in order to escape the inevitable. The collapse of the Russian Empire and its new authoritarian regime, can only teach us a good lesson. What could happen should the third world war erupt? With the cunningness and cruelty of aspiring generalissimos on one side; and the apathy of the people whom always await the arrival of the so-called liberators on the other; it is extremely difficult to make a judgement on what may transpire in times of semi prosperity should there be another carnage.

History could very well repeat itself or on the other hand, the promoters of the carnage may find that their venture could backfire.

As anarchists, we must be alert and use all our knowledge and energy to reveal our reasoning in opposing such criminal ambitions by never deviating from our principles; we seek to live in freedom, without generals, politicians or bishops no matter which playing field they may come from.

What could we as anarchists do, so that today's youth -used as cannon fodder for wars and misguided by politicians of all persuasions- develops an awareness and consciousness accepting the responsibility as members of the human race to struggle in defence of their lives and that of humanity by ensuring the advancement of the revolution?

The Australian youth is overwhelmed with the virus known as sport, which also embraces 90% of the population. Should you try to put an end to this illness, you are looked upon as a mad old man, out of touch with the reality of life. We must not make a distinction between the old and the young. When coming to terms with the principles of anarchism the age of a person is of no significance. Planting the seed of rebellion is our task and I am sure that this seed will eventually eradicate each and every conflict as well as those political drones whose only interest is to maintain their privileges.

How do you see the confrontations by the Spanish anarchist movement encompassed within the CNT-FAI -against the apathy of the world's reformist workers organisations, the lack of interest shown by the capitalistic United Nations as well as the social democracies of the world with regards to the continuous struggle against Franco's nazi fascist regime- in an endeavour to establish a society of free Iberian producers?

The militants of the CNT-FAI have proven to be quite capable in putting into practice the theories they have always promoted. The Iberian revolution was a praiseworthy event, during which thousands of magnificent compañeros lost their lives. The capitalist nations, hypocritically and blatantly, did whatever they could to crush the revolution.

Reactionary forces will always find mercenaries to accomplish their ambitions.

When at the beginning of the last century (*19th century*), a series of rebellions erupted throughout Spain against the savage Ferdinand VII, the King of France, representing the European monarchies sent to Spain the army of the One hundred thousand children of Saint Luis, commanded by the Duke of Angoulême to destroy the liberal movement. It would be ignorant not to think that history could not repeat itself for a third time.

One will find the patriotism of the capitalists wherever a profit is to be made. In order to establish a society of free producers, the good will of a group or the inhabitants of a locality is not good enough, you also require the support of numerous other regions that are willing to support, encourage and further develop such an initiative. Modern times have taught us that when the neighbour's house is in flames, our house is also runs a risk. Had Spain been left alone with its tragedy, its inhabitants would have found the appropriate solutions to their problems, because they had the knowledge and understanding of the principles of freedom and justice in order to position the revolution on a road of continuous progress.

Workers must belong to the *sindicato*¹, not only to gain improvements that are often erroneous deceptions, but principally to educate themselves so that when the time is ripe they are able to break away from the capitalist system, thus have the knowledge and ability to organize production in a free society.

I am sympathetic towards the cooperative movement, not in order to save a couple of cents but because I lived it, I experienced it during my youth, in Mataró, in order to better defend ourselves against the capitalist system and to educate ourselves in how to self manage without the need of the State. Our movement has suffered from the lack of adminis-

1. *Translators' note:* I have refrained from translating the word *sindicato* to union. The term *sindicato* has a completely different connotation to what is understood by the word union. It was within the environment of the *sindicato* that the majority of Spanish workers were taught to read, write and were encouraged to further their self education, thus the materialistic aspirations of new members would soon be transformed into a revolutionary spirit.

trators, due to the absence of adequate preparation. It is true that during the period 1936-39 very capable individuals evolved from within our ranks, but we have to prepare ourselves for tomorrow and replace of all those that died.

We have to start somewhere, an example is the Ateneo Obrero (the libertarian community centre) or as compañero Garcia Pradas explains it in number 5 of "Cenit" when referring to the various community initiatives being undertaken in Britain, all of which contribute to the development of a consciousness.

What I believe to be the best way to accelerate the pace towards emancipation is the Rationalist School as proposed and established by Ferrer and Faure and which in a similar manner, is implemented by the anarcho-syndicalist movement with its educational courses. The seeds sown by them have yielded good results, for it was from that environment that illustrious representatives and exponents of anarchism sprung, and believe me we need lots of them.

The ignorant and gullible masses are easy prey for the illusionist representatives of politics and religion just as they are for the exploitation of man-by-man. We, ourselves, have to work towards the revolution from this very instant. Let the politicians and capitalists kill each other. We are anarchists. We have to promote our ideals, unmasking all the fake saviours whose only desire is to become the new masters. We should not and cannot be accomplices to the crimes of the social democracies. We have seen, no matter which country it is, that the immediate task by these manipulative and shrewd individuals is to crush the rebellious spirit, and in the long term, they become the new autocrats and executioners. This, we have seen so many times that we would be more than stupid to accept them. There are many recent examples.

How do you see the immediate future for anarchism and what course of action should we as anarchists take - when confronting the possibility that the next global war for control of the World could well be between the two ideological forces of bourgeois and communistic capitalism?

Observing what is happening around the globe, I firstly have to notice the recent electoral results in Australia, what a disgrace and it is

moving backwards rather than forward, for this nation has chosen the most conservative government one could think of. In the name of democracy, political propaganda took a holiday in order to prepare for war and declared communism to be within the law so as that it could be a respectable ally. Using this as a reference one cannot be very optimistic. Nevertheless, not every country is Australia. History is a great teacher. The Franco-Prussian War gave birth to the glorious Paris Commune, which, though stifled in blood, it left revolutionary roots that no tyrant could extinguish.

The advocates of capitalism try to lull the workers who unfortunately do not always rebel, thus being able to abduct the worker's children using them as canon fodder, exterminating them with their wicked ventures, and preventing them from being free individuals. Working class internationalism is as necessary as the daily bread.

Your years of activism, would have helped you conceive an opinion of a future after the collapse of the francoist regime?

Looking at the future through my own experience of life, I must recognise that the basic conditions of humanity have somewhat improved. Regardless, there still are large sectors of the population dissatisfied with the system of exploitation they are subject to, and consequently they are the ones undermining the foundations of the present social system. As time passes by, the number of discontented people increases. They may delay the collapse of the current system but it is inevitable.

Although I live in Australasia, I am aware of the constant shove the discontented Spaniards are giving the inauspicious regime which oppresses them, defying Franco's wrath and the so called democratic nations witnessing their fate with the same cynicism as Hitler did, certifying the slaughter that the executioner inflicts upon those heroic workers. Hitler lost the war, but won peace. The legacy of the fields of death is not in Belsen, Dachau or Buchenwald; it is everywhere. Yesterdays' heroes of freedom today bear the trademark of the democracies that we as anarchists know so well.

Many direct descendants of Don Quixote, willing to risk their lives

defending the freedom of the world are still found in that Iberian peninsula. Moreover, those *compañeros*, all worthy representatives of the C.N.T., never submit an invoice for their deeds. Their destiny is far beyond that of self-interest. Their mission is to precipitate the social revolution, and this encourages both the elderly and the young ones.

As a final question, could you tell us, which has been your most satisfying experience during your long and respectable years as a militant?

I have had several extraordinary experiences although the most satisfying one was when in Mataró we celebrated the first anarchist meeting, some 48 years ago. Amongst a few friends and acquaintances, I was able to collect a few pesetas to cover the expenses for this event, which, for me, is unforgettable. The orators we selected were some of the best that we could choose in those years.

The meeting was a great success. Most of those who attended had no other opinion of anarchism and anarchists except for the one conveyed to them by the priests, capitalists and politicians. With proficiency and simplicity, the speakers presented our ideas. I remember them as if it were yesterday: Saavedra, Rosa Sánchez, González Solá and Ojeda, as well as the veteran bricklayer Mariano Castellote. Despite the years that have elapsed, many of the issues raised are as vivid in my mind as if the event had just occurred. Anarchists and sympathizers from the region attended and we were able to initiate contact. Amongst these were my intimate friends and *compañeros* Vilagrassa, Compte, Vehils and the veteran Casanovas, whom like me, is in Australia. As a result of this meeting, a few of us got together and formed the group “Nueva Semilla” (New Seed). We organised numerous other events with speakers who came from Barcelona, including Leopold Bonafulla, Romero, A. Loredó and the unforgettable first-rate Teresa Claramunt. How many wonderful and emotional moments I can recall spending at the “Ateneo Obrero” of Mataró, premises from which we wanted to fix the problems of the world! There we debated and argued with passion and it was in that environment where we became anarchists. Those passionate debates attracted the interest of young people, many of them joining our ranks and becoming radiant advocates of our ideals.

The events of July 1909 gave reason for those gatherings. We took an

active part during those days and there we saw the true face of the oppressor, humiliated when the people unleash their fury in defence of justice.

From there, so as not to fall into the clutches of law and order, I had no to cross over to France, with no money, no knowledge of the language, without craft or trade, only able to work as a labourer and looked upon at all times as an undesirable, the same as today's "rojos" refugees. Great credentials if you wanted to make your life somewhat easier. In Toulouse, I met several *compañeros*, forced, like me, to cross into France. I remember the demonstrations outside the Spanish Consulate upon hearing of the authorities' intentions to assassinate Ferrer, a crime carried out with the blessing of the worlds' conservative forces. Just like today. I do not know what is so bad, so gruesome or so odd about the Iberian workers, because when ever we try to get our heads just above the water level all the jackals from heaven and earth join forces and descend upon us.

Whilst in France I received a letter from my father advising me of the birth of my first daughter. He sent me a cutting of her hair. We named her Paz, in memory of Ferrer's daughter.

Memorable times I have spent in France, debating and discussing with friends the problems of the revolution thus forgetting our dilemmas as refugees. I recall some of those discussions with the then federal Republican Bruno Lladó. The last time I saw him was in the Barcelona Prison, he had been a member of the Sabadell Strike Committee. Po, was another that debated issues with me, he too was from Sabadell.

Another emotional experience I had was early in 1915 when, along with *compañeros* Corney and Gabalda, we visited to the old *compañero* Anselmo Lorenzo. Having knocked, his daughter opened the door and smiling asked; "you wish to see the grandfather?" She took us to his study. The maestro took us in with kindness and affection.

We spoke about every topic you could think of, although the main theme was the war. We however could not comprehend anarchists supporting the war, just like Kropotkin. Lorenzo said: "If it were not for these poor legs, today I would go to Madrid to deliver a lecture expressing our opinion about the war".

It was quite common in those days, to read articles written by Lorenzo in both “Solidaridad Obrera” and “Tierra y Libertad”. One may formulate a judgment about an author, but to meet him in the flesh and have the opportunity to talk with him only reinforced my opinion of him.

Whilst in France I also met E. Armand who published “L ' Unique”, and I met Sebastian Faure, Mañé, Costa, Ballesteros as well as Tomás. During a visit to the editorial offices of “Le Libertaire” I had the opportunity to meet with P. Martin, whom with his thick beard reminded me of compañero Anselmo Lorenzo, he also had the same opinions as the old veteran from Barcelona with respect to the war, the anarchists and the social revolution around the world.

After France I elected to move to Australia because it reminded me of the old England where persecuted compañeros found refuge.

Compañero Salvador Torrents concludes with the following sentence:

And here I am, indulging every so often with pills of encouragement after reading articles in our journals about the courageous, rebellious and anarchistic Iberian Peninsula.



Estudios



504



... Y LA CIENCIA Y EL TRABAJO
BAJO FUERON LA BASE
FUNDAMENTAL DE LA
SOCIEDAD LIBRE, PRE
CONIZADA POR AQUELLOS
LOCOS, SUBLIMES,
LA IDEA MATÓ A
LA VILEZA Y AL
EGOTISMO.....

LA TIERRA SE LLENÓ DE
FRUTOS Y DE FLORES,
MOSTRANDO SUS EN
TRAÑAS FECUNDAS,
Y LA VIDA CANTÓ
AL FIN SU CANTO
INMORTAL. LA
CULTURA Y EL AMOR
VICIERON LO DEMÁS.

R. GARCÍA ESCRIBÁ