



ARTÍCULOS

**ONE HUNDRED YEARS SINCE THE "BOLSHEVIK TRIENNIUM"
(1918-1920): AGRARIAN UNIONISM AND COLLECTIVE ACTIONS
DURING THE RESTORATION CRISIS**

**A cien años del "Trienio Bolchevique" (1918-1920): Sindicalismo
agrario y acción colectiva en la crisis de la Restauración**

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Abstract: Agrarian conflicts that erupted from 1918 to 1920 in rural Spain, with an epicentre in Andalusia and namely in the province of Cordoba, went down in history as the "Bolshevik Triennium". This term, coined by Juan Díaz del Moral in his classic *Historia de las agitaciones campesinas andaluzas* (1929) encompasses a strike offensive led by thousands of day labourers, tenants and small landowners unparalleled in the contemporary history of Spain. This work aims to analyse that conflict as a collective action phenomenon, framing it in the national and international political context, identifying its time, regional and sectoral discontinuity, as well as contributing to the updating of historiography on that topic as we celebrate one hundred years since those events took place.

Keywords: Bolshevik Triennium, agrarian unionism, collective action, Restoration, workers' movement, agrarian history.

Resumen: La conflictividad agraria desatada entre 1918 y 1920 en el medio rural español, con epicentro en Andalucía y particularmente en la provincia de Córdoba, pasó a la historia bajo la denominación de "Trienio Bolchevique". Este término, acuñado por Juan Díaz del Moral en su clásico *Historia de las agitaciones campesinas andaluzas* (1929), engloba una ofensiva huelguística protagonizada por miles de jornaleros, arrendatarios y pequeños campesinos sin precedentes en la historia contemporánea de España. Este trabajo trata de analizarla como fenómeno de acción colectiva, contextualizarla en el marco político nacional e internacional, situar sus discontinuidades temporales, regionales y sectoriales, así como contribuir a la renovación de la historiografía sobre la misma conmemorando el centenario de los acontecimientos.

Palabras clave: Trienio Bolchevique; sindicalismo agrario; acción colectiva; Restauración; movimiento obrero; historia agraria.

INTRODUCTION: A REGIME IN CRISIS AND COLLECTIVE ACTIONS IN RURAL AREAS

In the spring of 1918, the Restoration regime was in a situation as critical as in the last months of the previous year. Inflation and shortages continued to cause social unrest, demonstrations and protests. Post office civil servants had seriously challenged the government when it tried to suppress the organisation they had created, ignoring their demands. The strike was contested with a militarisation of the services. From a political standpoint, the main parties organising the Restoration system (liberals and conservatives) were split into several contradictory groups and trends. Riots due to shortages were frequent in many towns and villages across the country. In this context of chaos, the epicentre of social unrest was the countryside in Andalusia¹, namely the province of Cordoba, where a series of demonstrations led by day labourers and peasants gave shape to what would be known as the "Bolshevik Triennium".

The economic crisis that spread throughout the country, worse in Andalusia due to the unbalanced structure of its agrarian tenure, demographic pressure - greater in the south of Spain than average -, the gradual increase of unemployment and the particular impact caused by the cost of living in such an unequal society, were some of the reasons for this social unrest². In the case of Cordoba, contemporary research shows us a type of crop that was financially profitable, but inadequate to absorb the large amount of labourers available, with greedy contracts and expensive subleases for modest agricultural tenants³. The province's civil governor stated in fact that one of the

¹ Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADÓ, *España, 1914-1918. Entre la guerra y la revolución*, Barcelona, Crítica, 2010, pp. 177-178 and 192.

² Ángeles GONZÁLEZ, "La construcción de un mito. El Trienio Bolchevique en Andalucía", *Andalucía. Revista de Historia Contemporánea*, 9-10 (2000), pp. 163-205.

³ INSTITUTO DE REFORMAS SOCIALES, *Información sobre el problema agrario de la provincia de Córdoba*, Madrid, Sobrinos de la Sociedad de M. Minuesa, 1921, pp. 37-174 and 197-236.

reasons for the conflict was the limited land distribution and the large amounts of land not being cultivated, devoted to meadows and pasture⁴.

Moreover, we have to add to those the news coming from Russia - where the revolution was expropriating large estates and giving the land to the peasants - and the radicalisation of the revolutionary unionism model promoted in capitalist agricultures with a great dependency on landless labourers, as was the case at the time in Italy. The crisis of the liberal regime, intertwined with the European context, led to the belief that this was a time of political opportunities⁵. In his conversations with the day labourers rallied during the Triennium, Diaz del Moral asked one of them: "How come you believe in victory? Is there no army or government in Spain?" To which the worker answered: "But sir, Germany has collapsed, can the bourgeoisie still have confidence in the government of Spain, when it is worth so little?"⁶

It is true that a typical trait of this period was the succession of short-lasting governments and the contradictory diversity of ministerial strategies to confront the huge problems faced by the country. This could cause in certain social sectors a relative feeling of weakness, but it does not accurately express the vitality or political direction of each of the governments. There was no official "pigeonholing" in the elections of February 1918, nor did they resort to the usual government intervention via civil governors to establish the election result. Due to that, the parliament was extremely fragmented, which led to a political crisis just one month after the elections. Under threat of abdication, Alfonso XIII managed to form a "national government" in March 1918 led by Antonio Maura and that included the majority of the leaders from the parties that supported the dynasty (Dato, García Prieto, Romanones, Cambó and Alba).

Víctor O. MARTÍN MARTÍN, "Los jornaleros y la gran propiedad agraria en el Sur de España", *Anales de Geografía*, 28-2 (2008), pp. 137-165.

⁴ José RODRÍGUEZ LABANDEIRA, *El trabajo rural en España, 1876-1936*, Barcelona-Madrid, Anthropos-Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación, 1991, p. 91.

⁵ Francisco COBO ROMERO, "Anarquismo y "cuestión agraria" en España, 1913-1939", *Entre la revolución y la reforma. Cuestión agraria y asociacionismo rural (1874-1939)*, Santiago de Compostela, Fundación Luís Tilve, 2014, pp. 79-93.

⁶ Juan DÍAZ DEL MORAL, *Historia de las agitaciones campesinas andaluzas*, Madrid, Alianza, 1973 [1929], p. 343.

Disagreements between them soon arose and, unable to provide stability, this coalition government collapsed at the end of the year⁷.

This government was followed by one led by García Prieto that only survived a few weeks and finally by another single-party government headed by Count Romanones from December 1918⁸. Given the recent social conflicts, this new government combined freedom-restrictive measures, such as suspending the constitutional guarantees⁹, with accommodating decisions, such as the decree on an 8-hour working day (3rd of April 1919), which in any case did not apply to agriculture. Romanones' liberal cabinet was finally overwhelmed by the lack of parliamentary backing to its reformist desires and the increase of social malaise both in Catalonia and in Andalusia. That same month of April, he presented his resignation and Maura returned to power with a government that brought together those who supported him and the conservative wing led by La Cierva, whose aim was to take the necessary authority to be "tough" in terms of public order given the challenges faced by the regime¹⁰, as we will see later when we look into the types of measures that the cabinet applied to rural Andalusia.

The first strikes had overwhelming victories. News of those victories, such as in the municipalities of Castro del Rio and Espejo in the winter of 1917-1918, spread quickly¹¹. Until then, there were differences in Andalusia's agricultural areas between the ideas of some working class leaders, such as the socialists, and the workers' immediate ambitions. Whilst the former continued to insist on asking the government to solve inflation, just like in the general strike of 1917, the latter saw in a salary increase a real opportunity to overcome the worsening situation they faced. Once both anarcho-

⁷ Susana SUEIRO SEOANE, "El reinado de Alfonso XIII de 1902-1923", Blanca BULDAIN JACA (coord.), *Historia contemporánea de España 1808-1923*. Madrid, Akal, 2011, p. 593.

⁸ Manuel TUÑÓN DE LARA, *La España del siglo XX, 1. La quiebra de una forma de Estado (1898-1931)*, Barcelona, Laia, 1981, p. 95.

⁹ Eduardo GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA, *La razón de la fuerza: orden público, subversión y violencia política en la España de la Restauración (1875-1917)*, Madrid, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1998, p. 71.

¹⁰ Susana SUEIRO SEOANE, "El reinado...", *op. cit.*, p. 595.

¹¹ Juan DÍAZ DEL MORAL, *Historia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

syndicalists and socialists accepted the social atmosphere and joined their union actions to the demands of higher salaries, the movement became unstoppable¹².

Agricultural strikes were not limited to Cordoba; they also gained special importance in the nearby provinces of Jaen and Malaga. However, they were less frequent in Huelva, Cadiz and Granada. As we will see, conflicts were concentrated on the initial dates of the two great harvesting cycles of Mediterranean agriculture: the cereal and olive harvests. To have an idea of their size, we only need to observe that both in 1917 and in 1921-22, there were 21-25 strikes in Cordoba, Jaen, Malaga and Granada jointly, whilst between 1918 and 1920, there were 210, 337, and 216 strikes in each of those three years respectively¹³.

THE TRIENNIUM OUTSIDE ANDALUSIA

Outside of Andalusia, agricultural workers' collective actions were also frequent during the Triennium, even though most studies have logically focused on that region. In Badajoz, the imminent cereal harvest in the summer of 1918 encountered strikes in at least 18 municipalities, with the same intensity in 1919, although support fell the following year just like in the other economic sectors, also highly mobilised¹⁴. Although it was not typical of that period, some municipalities implemented labour strategies that were precursors of more frequent future realities. In Torre de Miguel Sesmero, given the landowners' practices to continue using the per item method that left many day labourers without work, they decided to work as groups and to harvest in the farms that needed it, against the owners' will. Once production was limited by judicial order, the owners were forced to pay their salaries. Given that mobilisations were heavily followed and that the results of the harvest were so productive, the owners finally accepted the situation and the Guardia Civil chose not to intervene¹⁵.

¹² Ángeles GONZÁLEZ, "La construcción...", *op. cit.*

¹³ Francisco COBO ROMERO, "Anarquismo...", *op. cit.*

¹⁴ Martin BAUMEISTER, *Campesinos sin tierra. Supervivencia y resistencia en Extremadura (1880-1923)*, Madrid, Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación, 1997, pp. 332 and 360-366.

¹⁵ "Triunfo de la organización. La siega colectiva", *El Socialista*, (1920, July 9).

There were also important agricultural strikes in provinces such as Valencia, Alicante, Zaragoza and Murcia¹⁶. The living conditions of Castilian day labourers were in some cases similar to the misery suffered by their Andalusian peers. Working from dawn to dusk, with seasonal work and inflation, more so in the villages than in cities (49.42% increase between 1916 and 1918) and with the fall of nominal salary indexes (with a 46.47% decrease) the number of conflicts increased. In 1919, there were 28 agricultural strikes in Castilla la Vieja and León¹⁷, with a 60.71% increase in the number of strikes and 40.75% increase in the number of workers involved. Just like before, the epicentre of strikes was the province of Valladolid, followed by Salamanca, Zamora, Palencia and Avila.

With the exception of the province of Leon, there was a clear match between the conflicts and geography of agrarian socialism in Castilla la Vieja and Leon. The movement's goals were the improvement of working conditions and an important increase in the salaries. Most strikes were successful, at least partially. Emigration would help deflect the situation, preventing the strikes from increasing in size and radicalisation. Contrary to the Triennium in Andalusia that went from 1918 to 1920, the agricultural conflicts in Castilla la Vieja and Leon took place mainly during 1919 and 1920, with the latter having the most intense activity. And strikers' figures remained high between 1921 and 1923, although the number of strikes decreased¹⁸.

THE FIRE LIGHTS UP IN CORDOBA

During 1918, Europe saw the end of the aftermath from the Great War, the end of the Central Empires and the temporary successful socialist revolutions in Hungary and Bavaria. The seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in Russia, news of which came to

¹⁶ Gerald H. MEAKER, *La izquierda revolucionaria en España, 1914-1923*, Barcelona, Ariel, 1978, p. 195.

¹⁷ Historically, Castilla la Vieja and León had had many day labourers, gravely affected by the end-of-century crisis and the despotic appropriation of community equity. However, the consequences on the social reconstitution could have been delayed gradually, until the decade of 1920, given that during the period of 1917-1923 both regions witnessed an important increase of agricultural proletarian organisation - amongst the members of UGT - in provinces such as Zamora, Salamanca, Valladolid and Palencia.

¹⁸ Carlos HERMIDA, "Coyuntura económica y agitaciones campesinas en Castilla la Vieja (1914-1923)", *Estudios de Historia Social*, 18-19 (1981), pp. 193-227.

Spain late and were welcomed with indifference and ignorance, was now publicised everywhere, generating unprecedented hopes in thousands of workers. In Italy, half a million agrarian strikers in 1919 and not fewer than one million in 1920, mainly linked to the agrarian "red leagues" grouped in the *Federterra*, were the protagonists of the so called *Bienio Rosso*. A period of conflict that included land occupation and a land control and labour market strategy led by many town councils now controlled by the socialists. In the Italian case, there was a glowing conglomerate of collective emotions that shook the roots of agriculture during 1919 and 1920, promoted by the lack of State, the mistrust towards the agricultural bourgeoisie and the growing feeling that nothing had changed despite the war, amplified by the collective imagination on the Russian Revolution and the European post-war riots, and the collapse of governments and crowned leaders. A series of reasons that led to a global crisis of authority, especially in the Padua and Emilia regions, with rulers about to be overruled. Contrary to the case in Spain, whilst in 1919 the *Federterra* was based on consolidated and stable unionism praxis whose main purpose were salaries and working hours, everything changed after the general election in November, when the PSI became the most-voted party, with the possibility of a revolution and proletarian socialisation¹⁹.

The first sparks of the working class turmoil in Cordoba's agricultural areas - and in some of the neighbouring provinces - started in the spring of 1918 with strikes called by less than ten local associations. At that time there were 18 workers' agricultural associations in Cordoba, of which eight were anarcho-syndicalist, three neutral and six had socialist trends: Puente Genil, Montilla, Villanueva de Córdoba, Lucena, Pedroche and Adamuz. Those agricultural associations, in a vulnerable situation after the recession of the previous years, had a network of propagandists and activists ready to spread the message in the neighbouring villages. Although their role was exaggerated, mainly due to the employers' and government's belief that the only reason for the turmoil was the work they did amongst the masses, they were clearly important in the effort to mobilise the first few groups. Nevertheless, when the fire was fuelled, mobilised workers became rioters themselves.

¹⁹ Aldino MONTI, *I braccianti*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 1998, pp. 115-136.

In just a few months, all but four of the 75 municipalities of the province of Cordoba had a workers' association. Between June 1918 and May 1919 over one hundred associations were created. The movement's fire starters were the associations of anarcho-syndicalist nature, which were the main protagonists, although with interesting trends that need to be analysed after the events. The associations' socialist activities intensified during April and May 1918, with their municipalities joining the strikes. From September that year - a month that is favourable for their organisation and propaganda, at the end of the harvest - until the summer of 1919, agricultural associations reached their peak, as well as the number of strikes known till that date.

At the end of May 1919, the immense majority of agricultural workers, tenants, and small tenors, both in Cordoba's plateaus and hills, followed the messages of their respective associations, and most were members of those. The huge strike cycle was hit by the declaration of the state of war in the province by the government on the 29th of May 1919. Military authorities declared the closing of the associations and the arrest of their governing bodies. Until the 14th of August their offices were not authorised to reopen and operate, and after that date they could open only for administrative work. After that the movement declined, with less activities and fewer members.

In total, Díaz del Moral estimates that there were about 160 workers' associations in Cordoba that participated in the Bolshevik Triennium struggles. After 1918, each town saw the following: associations were created where they did not exist, even if only by contagion, despite the initial difficulties. They did not survive the repression, but enjoyed intense activities at least during the first wave of strikes in 1918. In municipalities with prior organisations or experiences, the associations resisted to a better extent the State's repressive blows. Organised workers registered their association's regulations before the province's civil government and opened a registered office, a "workers' centre" or a "Casa del Pueblo" (Village House) in a rented or owned building. In just a few weeks, most of the working population joined the trade union, and the unions continued by calling and successfully holding one or several strikes. The logical result of that juxtaposition of facts was that soon after that all peasants and rural workers were part of the organisation, whether they were day

labourers, tenants, small tenors or other workers, such as craftsmen or people with other trades²⁰.

This situation was not just typical of Andalusia's Triennium; it had been present in other areas of the country in previous years. A paradigmatic example in Toledo, one of the many that continued, is the case of Madrideojos: "After eight days of struggle, agricultural workers in the village achieved a salary increase of 25 cents (...). There was joy amongst the workers for their victory, as it was their first step towards emancipation, with all of them joining the associations of the village, convinced of the generosity of socialist ideas"²¹. As we said before, the peasant turmoil of the Triennium cannot be limited to Andalusia. For instance, in Toledo, the largest conflicts took place in May 1919, around the same time that Cordoba was about to be occupied by the military, The province of Toledo witnessed a wave of agrarian strikes, although, compared to the case of Cordoba, their potential coordination has not been proven till date. The reports of the Civil Government mentioned up to thirteen municipalities with strikes, coercion against non-strikers and the posting of the Guardia Civil, which called the situation an "insurrection". At the end of May the strikes had finished, except in El Carpio de Tajo, where workers stated that they would not go back to work "till the land was theirs"²².

GENERAL STRIKES, COORDINATION OF COLLECTIVE ACTIONS AND EMPLOYERS' COUNTERATTACK

The fact that the strikes during the Triennium were followed by so many people until the summer of 1919 meant that they were considered to be general strikes in the region. The working conditions negotiated with employers and authorities included all professions. Although only two or three associations formally had women as members, they were active players in the struggles. Proof of the importance reached by the

²⁰ "...The strikes reached villages and regions that until then had stayed out, affecting even social and professional sectors that had never before resorted to strikes: shop assistants, scribes, singers and banderilleros, and so it became an everyday phenomenon and, as such, it was the target of jokes and caricatures. Ángeles GONZÁLEZ: "La construcción...", *op. cit.*

²¹ "Triunfos obreros", *El Socialista* (1917, January 14).

²² Óscar BASCUÑÁN AÑOVER, *Protesta y supervivencia. Movilización y desorden en una sociedad rural. Castilla-La Mancha, 1875-1923*, Valencia, Centro Francisco Tomás y Valiente, UNED-Instituto de Historia Social, 2008, pp. 138-139.

conflict was that female servants were part, sometimes a very important part, of the strikes called, sometimes even nursemaids were. This had a very high symbolic and practical value, as they left in a difficult situation the until then powerful landowners. Another important fact is that the movement included small landowners and tenants in many municipalities. In fact, many of them represented a large majority of the peasant population and without their support the Triennium would not have taken place. Moreover, the areas where the movement was more durable and stronger were those where those groups were included. A weakness in terms of organisation was the funding of the workers' organisation, always a weakness in agrarian unionism, given the living conditions of its members and the lack of organisational culture²³.

On the other hand, during the Triennium there were general strikes in the Andalusian capital cities of Seville (August 1918, February 1919 and December 1920), Malaga (January 1919), Cadiz (February 1919) and Cordoba (March 1919), which started in the urban areas but always spread to the closest villages. Those strikes were promoted by the CNT, although the socialists participated actively in some of them, trying to halt the anarcho-syndicalist power and aiming to consolidate their bases²⁴.

The autumn on 1918 witnessed the greatest amount of strikes, with 34 villages simultaneously halted. The public authorities were surprised by the waves of simultaneous agrarian struggles, unexpected to them, so there was little presence of the Guardia Civil. The dominating class had not foreseen at all what was being prepared. They disregarded the work of the propagandists, whom they considered undesirable people no one listened to, and, when the Institute of Social Reforms quickly sent a delegate to keep it informed about what was happening, the delegate could only collect reliable data from landowners and authorities, and so the report sent was full of mistakes in terms of associations, strikes and salaries²⁵.

In November 1918, the civil governor of Cordoba sent a telegraph to the minister of Governance saying: "There is currently an extraordinary workers' movement in the

²³ Juan DÍAZ DEL MORAL, *Historia...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 273-284.

²⁴ Ángeles GONZÁLEZ: "La construcción...", *op. cit.*

²⁵ Juan DÍAZ DEL MORAL, *Historia...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 262-263.

province that receives great solidarity, as demonstrated by the strikes carried out by day labourers, nearly simultaneously, in 29 villages over the last 7 days. The one in Montilla, after it was resolved, was reproduced severely and it took superhuman efforts to solve it. Guardia Civil is needed to avoid coercions by the farmhouses". Nevertheless, it added: "Apart from that, no other unusual circumstance is seen in the province"²⁶. He must have thought it was not serious enough. During the turbulent month of November, strikes were unleashed in 43 of the 75 municipalities of Cordoba²⁷. UGT deployed at the end of 1918 a huge propaganda campaign across the province's villages, with the participation of Largo Caballero²⁸. The socialists, at least in terms of discourse, linked the Triennium struggles to the complaints against the regime: "We do not believe that the king's ministers, even if they belong to so-called liberal parties, will do much except defend the interests of large landowners and estate owners, tenors of all the wealth of Andalusia, the Spanish region where there is greater disparity between the contemptuous fortune of landowners and the tragic and terrible misery of those who tend to the land, making it fruitful"²⁹.

Initially, the civil governor's desire was to try to avoid bloody clashes that could lead to unknown situations, and to try and reach agreements³⁰. Employers, with no hope of effective and immediate repression by the State and with economic possibilities to grant demands, and also surprised and scared by the movement's strength, gave in in most municipalities, accepting all the workers' demands. The increase in agrarian productivity seen in previous decades, and the subsequent profit accumulation by owners, meant that the peasants' struggles were more likely to succeed and to maintain

²⁶ Fondo Contemporáneo, Ministerio del Interior, Leg. 53, Exp. 1, C. 1, Archivo Histórico Nacional.

²⁷ Constancio BERNALDO DE QUIRÓS, *El espartaquismo agrario andaluz*, Madrid, Reus, 1919, p. 40.

²⁸ "Largo Caballero en Rute" [Largo Caballero en route], *El Socialista*, December 18, 1918.

²⁹ "Sembrando tempestades. Las huelgas en Andalucía" [Sowing storms, Strikes in Andalusia], *El Socialista*, December 19, 1918.

³⁰ Despite the total lack of neutrality of the State when faced with the social conflict, it acted at times of great difficulties by mediating in order to decrease the employers' resistance that could complicate the situation further. The truth is that by acting like this it represented the general interests of the ruling classes. Manuel TUÑÓN DE LARA, *Luchas obreras y campesinas en la Andalucía del siglo XX. Jaén (1917-1920). Sevilla (1930-1932)*, Madrid, Siglo XXI, 1978, p. 103.

their labour conquests³¹. However, that capital accumulation did not only come from agriculture. Many landowners also had businesses in other industries and were important members of boards of directors, and they funded the demands and the salary increases with what they had made from other businesses during the exceptional boom of the First World War. Moreover, this financial explanation must not conceal the other political factors that led to the workers' victories, given that, in the case of the Second Republic - in full international economic and agricultural crisis- a unilateral plan would not explain the huge salary advances made by the labourers of that period.

A vicious circle followed the demands after they were met, with some landowners in some villages who did not accept the agreements and thus conflicts took place again as a show of solidarity. It went from a general attack to occasional conflicts, which reached huge levels again in the spring of 1919, with about forty strikes. But now landowners started to react, firing workers after the agreements that put an end to a strike or not complying with those agreements, thus forcing the authorities to intervene in their favour and to deploy forces. Moreover, landowners showed greater resistance to accepting demands such as shorter working days, eliminating the per item method or giving preference to local workers when hiring, than to accepting salary demands³². On the other hand, middle-sized owners and those who had recently joined the agrarian bourgeoisie, as well as administrators and foremen, were more radical and strict than some of the large landowners who were absent from the land, as they felt, on site and emotionally, the everyday conflict with workers, and also because they were economically affected as they had less flexibility to give in financially³³.

THE TRIENNIUM'S NATURE

The main demands of the Triennium's strikes in Andalusia were a salary increase, better working conditions - amongst which the most important one was to

³¹ Francisco ACOSTA RAMÍREZ, Salvador CRUZ ARTACHO and Manuel GONZÁLEZ DE MOLINA NAVARRO, *Socialismo y democracia en el campo (1880-1930). Los orígenes de la FNTT*, Madrid, Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Medio Rural y Marino, 2009, p. 77.

³² Constancio BERNALDO DE QUIRÓS, *El espartaquismo...*, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

³³ Manuel TUÑÓN DE LARA, *Luchas obreras...*, *op. cit.*, pages. 90-91.

eliminate the per item methodology³⁴— and, because of what was mentioned above, the compliance of the contracts signed by both parties during the struggles. Later on, great importance was given to prohibiting the hiring of non-local workers and fighting unemployment. Thus, this is a strike movement that was initially offensive, with strong fighting spirit and organisation, but it did not have at all a revolutionary nature. Nevertheless, the reasons for other conflicts and the role that agrarian unionism played in the control of the labour market and in some aspects of the society at specific times could have led to something more than a series of strikes. Other reasons for the strikes were to prevent non-unionised workers from working, to complain about the attitude of foremen and supervisors, to ask for the dismissal of police officers who had mistreated workers, to reject agreements that had not been agreed upon by the group of unionised workers or to establish salary equality amongst workers, for the cases when some employers did not comply with the demands others had accepted. We must also bear in mind that there was a somehow "hybrid" nature in the protests in rural areas at that time, with some well-organised strikes and other more occasional and turbulent mobilisations³⁵. Moreover, just before the Triennium there were mutinies due to the price hike of commodities or to the cost of house rentals, as well as protests that were spontaneous and short-lived and that had women as protagonists, very common during the first few months of 1918³⁶.

As we have previously stated, the second wave of simultaneous strikes took place in the spring of 1919. The first proof of employers' intransigence meant the conflict spread, and so the general strike extended to the second half of May in many agricultural municipalities of Jaen, Cordoba and Seville, following the Guadalquivir

³⁴ In their fight to eliminate it, labourers took sometimes advantage of the agricultural cycle and threatened with a strike at the time of harvest, putting the crops at risk. "Movimiento social", *El Socialista*, (1928, December 26). Landowners used the same technique when the harvest season finished, causing an increase on unemployment. Economic cycles were key to understand the workers' and employers' techniques. In September, once the harvest finished, employers had more pressure power. And they said to labourers: "...And you can go and tell Largo Caballero about it, for whom you would die to defend, whilst he peacefully walks about without remembering anything or anyone". "Crisis de trabajo", *El Socialista*, (1919, August 4). Clearly a prologue to "¿Tenéis hambre? ¡Pues comed República!" of 15 years later.

³⁵ Francisco ACOSTA RAMÍREZ, Salvador CRUZ ARTACHO and Manuel GONZÁLEZ DE MOLINA NAVARRO, *Socialismo y democracia...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 110 and 339.

³⁶ Ángeles GONZÁLEZ, "La construcción...", *op. cit.*

valley³⁷. It was part of the proletarians' general attack in the rest of Spain, an important example of which was La Canadiense strike, in Barcelona, and the legal establishment of an 8-hour working day. The working-day reduction was approved in April 1919 by a Royal Decree (with effect from the 1st of October that year) due to the increase of social conflict and without waiting for the parliamentary procedure. Given the avalanche of protests against it, it was modified in September that year to include many exceptions, which affected, amongst others, most agricultural activities. For example, it accepted increasing the working day to 10 hours a day if overtime was paid or if agreements were reached between workers and employers to set working days of up to 12 hours³⁸. On the other hand, this period established ways to institutionalise conflict, strengthening negotiation and the recognition of associations as interlocutors, giving them a key role, which perfectly fitted with the socialists' strategic ideas.

In the spring of 1919 the government, expecting serious problems to guarantee the collection of that year's harvest, decreed³⁹ the creation of regulatory assemblies for the establishment of working conditions with paritary representation⁴⁰ to ensure a negotiated exit to the conflict, a precedent to the mixed juries that were established during the Second Republic. The goal of the government by sending its development minister to Seville in May was twofold, on the one hand to ensure the harvest took place, and secondly to have the crops of some land available in order to offset the huge social malaise. In June, Minister Ossorio decreed the creation of agricultural job banks to fight unemployment, another measure that was present in the subsequent republican legislations. Those actions, totally separate from the issue of property, did not soften the workers' demands and led to greater upset and mistrust amongst the agricultural

³⁷ Francisco COBO ROMERO, "Anarquismo...", *op. cit.*

³⁸ Gloria SANZ LAFUENTE, "Organización económica, movilización y catolicismo social en la sociedad rural del primer tercio del siglo XX", Teresa María ORTEGA LÓPEZ and Francisco COBO ROMERO (eds.), *La España rural, siglos XIX y XX. Aspectos políticos, sociales y culturales*, Granada, Comares, 2011, pp. 89-123. Please refer to *Royal Decree* dated April 3, 1919, *Gaceta de Madrid* (1919, April 4) and *Royal Order* dated September 19, 1919, *Gaceta de Madrid* (1919, January 16).

³⁹ Please refer to *Royal Decree* dated April 30, 1919, *Gaceta de Madrid* (1919, May 1).

⁴⁰ Francisco ACOSTA RAMÍREZ, Salvador CRUZ ARTACHO and Manuel GONZÁLEZ DE MOLINA NAVARRO, *Socialismo y democracia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

elites, who wanted a tougher repression⁴¹. It was no longer a conflict between some day labourers and their employer, "but between two radically opposed organisations"⁴². The movement's clear structure, its active and rich unionist spirit, its well-defined practices, the creation of a list of demands in workers' conferences and, above all, the coordinated organisation of the strikes in some key occasions (34 villages at the same time in November 1918, 21 in March 1919, 33 in May 1919) were a clear example of its maturity⁴³.

The feeling of uncertainty on the outcome of the events that would take place that year in Andalusia reached foreign chancelleries. Emile Dard, chargé d'affaires from France, told his minister of foreign affairs the following in May 1919: "Affected by the price hike and the gradual decrease of importations, will the working and peasant masses react in a revolutionary manner? (...). The Andalusian peasants who are secretly preparing the strike in July or even the burning of crops, will they be subjected to the "Dragonnades" of General Barrera?" Francesco Ragonesi, Apostolic Nuncio in Spain, said the following to the secretary of state of the Holy See, two months earlier: "As well as unionism in Barcelona and Catalonia, it is present in other regions, namely in Andalusia, where there is a great sense of communism and anarchism, not just amongst industrial workers in the cities, but also amongst peasants who live in the countryside. Many landowners had to abandon for the time being their rural properties so as not to risk their lives."

The Transatlantic German Bank, in turn, sent the following report to its headquarters in Berlin:

On their own, these events would only have local importance if the rioting trade unionists did not use as much as they can the turbulent atmosphere they have (...) created to fuel the anger of proletarians, thus expanding through the country a strong workers' unionist organisation. They have managed to achieve this for now

⁴¹ Antonio ELORZA, Luis ARRANZ and Fernando DEL REY, "Liberalismo y corporativismo en la crisis de la Restauración", José Luis GARCÍA DELGADO (ed.), *La crisis de la Restauración. España, entre la primera guerra mundial y la II República*, Madrid, Siglo XXI, 1986, pp. 5-50.

⁴² Ángeles GONZÁLEZ, "La construcción...", *op. cit.*

⁴³ Manuel MORALES MUÑOZ, "Anarquismo y socialismo en el campo andaluz (1868-1931)", *Entre la revolución y la reforma. Cuestión agraria y asociacionismo rural (1874-1939)*, Santiago de Compostela, Fundación Luís Tilve, 2014, pp. 11-22.

(...) especially in urban and rural areas of Andalusia, where the movement threatens to adopt more severe revolutionary traits. There is no doubt that, currently, this problem surpasses by far the difficulty and dangerous nature of any other national policy issue (...). If the government does not manage to moderate the price increases with draconian and radical measures and, above all, if it is not able to answer the legitimate demands of the badly-paid and underfed proletarians through social aid and protection laws, it will continue to play the tune of the unionist movement and will increase considerably the dangers of social convulsion in this country⁴⁴.

There is no doubt that, instinctively, many Andalusian agricultural workers perceived the news that arrived from Russia as an incentive in their fight, which was filled with optimism about the future and that put in the horizon the issue of land property. Just like Diaz del Moral, other liberal professionals, such as Fabián Vidal, went to the region to find out first-hand about the situation, talking to those who had never been the protagonists of history. Despite the patronising and arrogant tone of their questions and thoughts, it is worth focusing for a while on some of the articles they published about it, because they reflect to a certain extent the atmosphere: "In the farms, in the workers' centres of the villages, in the pens of shepherds, in the taverns that serve as the casinos of farmers, they pronounce, with the normal unavoidable mispronunciations, strange names. *Er Lenine. Er Trotzky. Er Soviet. Er borchevikism.* (...) An old farmhand, sarcastic and dogmatic told me: "In Russia the tables have turned. Those who had lots have none. Don't wanna die without seeing the same here". A sullen, thin, sharp-featured, somehow hunched boy, with black eyes and curly and shiny hair, the guide and inspirational figure of five hundred men who followed him blindly, spoke to me honestly and confessed [sic] his doubts. - *Borchevikism?* I have no idea. I have read something about it. *Borchevikism* does not work for Andalusia. But we have to make our own *Borchevikism*, fit to our needs. We want the land. Land is everyone's right. If they don't give us land, we'll take it"⁴⁵.

After the salary increases and the improvement in working conditions, solidarity with the prisoners from previous conflicts, the decrease of commodities prices and the

⁴⁴ Hipólito DE LA TORRE GÓMEZ, *España desde el exterior, 1917-1923*, Madrid, Ramón Areces, 2015, pp. 121, 313 and 362.

⁴⁵ "Notas de un viaje rápido. Los problemas agrarios de Andalucía" [Notes on a quick journey. The agricultural problems in Andalusia], *El Sol*, April 13, 1919. Underlined in the original.

placement of unemployed people were the backbone of new strikes. The strikes of 1919 did not have the same success as previous ones, as employers and the authorities were now stronger and not willing to give in any more. Not achieving the most difficult demands meant new strikes were not organised, and they moved again to a new phase of occasional conflicts which led to tiredness and discouragement within some associations⁴⁶. Whilst in Cordoba the fires of the Triennium were dying out, between November and December 1919, the huge agricultural conflicts in Jaen started - with the natural delay - in the context of the olive harvest. In this case, those conflicts were framed in an environment of a large demanding campaign led by the new Workers Provincial Federation of the UGT. Those mobilisations demanded the elimination of the per item methodology, a minimum salary of 5 pesetas for men and 2.50 for women and minors. Just like it had happened in its neighbouring province, many of those strikes were won quickly, in places such as Jaen, Martos, Torredelcampo o Torredonjimeno, and the halting of the harvest did not last long. However, those victories led to higher levels of workers' organisation and confidence, which predicted new waves of future demands⁴⁷.

According to some anarcho-syndicalist leaders, such as Manuel Buenacasa⁴⁸, during the Triennium experiments were carried out with collective wealth and in some villages such as Aguilar de la Frontera and Montilla, "Bolshevik-style" republics were proclaimed⁴⁹. We have not found any references to those in any other source and that situation was not at all the general scenario during the Triennium. We must bear in mind when accurately characterising the Triennium that, despite some violent forms that were exaggerated by some specific communication and governmental media in order to smear the movement and encourage repression, such as the burning of crops⁵⁰ and physical harassments to owners, and the degree of power sometimes

⁴⁶ Juan DÍAZ DEL MORAL, *Historia...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 319-324.

⁴⁷ Manuel TUÑÓN DE LARA, *Luchas obreras...*, *op. cit.*, pages. 82-84.

⁴⁸ Manuel BUENACASA, *El movimiento obrero español, 1886-1926: historia y crítica*. [The Spanish workers' movement, 1886-1926: history and review] Paris, Family and friends of the author, 1966, pp. 166-167.

⁴⁹ Gerald H. MEAKER, *La izquierda...*, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

⁵⁰ In fact official statistics themselves, for instance in the province of Seville, showed that the fires were

reached by workers' associations, the struggles were constantly based on specific and immediate demands, related at all times with the desire of workers to greatly improve their revenues, given the huge amount of social crisis they had suffered for years.

Obviously, there was a revolutionary discourse in the air that gave historic sense and argumentative strength to the actions carried out, supported by the contemporary events in Russia⁵¹, but the agrarian revolution was presented as a future goal, not as a practical task to implement at the time. Moreover, the most significant thing is that both anarcho-syndicalists and socialists shared the approach, ultimately. No collective contract signed included any item on the sharing of land property, except for the recovery of communal property that had been privatised. Given that the main reason for conflict was the achievement of material improvements, as well as workers' efforts to have their own instruments to achieve them, the recurrent comments made about Andalusian peasants having an "all or nothing" strategy has no foundations⁵².

SOCIALISTS AND ANARCHO-SYNDICALISTS: A CHANGING EVOLUTION

Despite the fact that historiography has repeatedly mechanically identified rural Andalusia, the Bolshevik Triennium and anarchism as intertwined, the social and political reality was more complex and changing, proof of which are the changes that developed during that period. Libertarian unionism was more deeply rooted in one specific area, which went from the region of the lower Guadalquivir to the coast of Cadiz and Malaga, with its main feud in the province of Cadiz⁵³.

four times more likely to be due to accidental causes (such as the traditional burning of stubble) than to deliberate actions. In the provinces of Jaen or Cadiz, the Guardia Civil acknowledged that the fires were few and mainly accidental. Despite that, the burning of grain became a myth during the Triennium, accepted as a typical trait of the peasants' struggles by the bourgeois press. Jacques MAURICE, *El anarquismo andaluz. Campesinos y sindicalistas, 1868-1936*. [Andalusian anarchism. Peasants and unionists, 1868-1936.] Barcelona, Crítica, 1990, pp. 318-319.

⁵¹ Because they stood out, slogans started appearing on the walls of some Andalusian farmhouses during that time that read: "Long live the Soviets" or "Long live Lenin". Manuel TUÑÓN DE LARA, *La España...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-102.

⁵² Ángeles GONZÁLEZ, "La construcción...", *op. cit.* Manuel TUÑÓN DE LARA, *Luchas obreras...*, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

⁵³ Jacques MAURICE, *El anarquismo...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.

Moreover, in the case of Cordoba the initial pre-eminence of the local anarcho-syndicalist associations was clear. They created around 50 organisations in Cordoba's countryside, close to ten in the hills. Although some associations were lost on the way, to become part of UGT (Carcabuey, Monturque, La Rambla, Santaella, Montalbán...), they still had over 40. In turn, 24 associations that created a provincial federation in April 1919 were part of UGT. But "as repressions destroyed the weaker associations, socialism replaced their vacancies with organisations coming from the other sector"⁵⁴. In fact, the Triennium was the first time that Andalusia witnessed an agrarian movement so big with the socialists playing an important role.

During the Triennium, logically both anarchists and socialists saw the exponential growth of their members. But what is interesting is going beyond the surface and delving into its dynamics: the CNT boomed but its growth was fleeting, that of the UGT was slow growing but constant. In December 1918, already immersed in the heat of the struggle, the anarchist Federacion Nacional de Obreros Agrícolas (FNOA) held its 6th Conference, representing 25,092 members, of which 60% were from Cordoba⁵⁵. In that conference they decided to dissolve and become part of CNT, which did not have practical consequences in terms of greater unity of the movement, geographical coordination or uniting the agricultural and industrial sectors. Quite the opposite⁵⁶.

During 1918, the CNT spread across Andalusia, but mainly in some province capitals and cities, at the expense of the rural areas, a trend that was similar in the rest of the country. At the end of 1919, coinciding with the Conference of La Comedia, which approved a brief and concise agrarian decision, the CNT, contrary to socialists (who approved the Agrarian Program in 1918), did not have anything they could call a program. The anarcho-syndicalist leaders, guided by the creation of industry unions that were so temporarily successful in Catalonia, subjected all the unions' activities to

⁵⁴ Juan DÍAZ DEL MORAL, *Historia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem.*, p. 309.

⁵⁶ Edward MALEFAKIS, *Reforma agraria y revolución campesina en la España del siglo XX*, Barcelona, Ariel, 1971, pp. 180-181.

this strategy⁵⁷. If to this we add the UGT strength, the internal fights that led to disagreement and grief during the spring and summer of 1920 in the Andalusian region, and the governmental repression, the crisis of the anarchist agrarian unionism in Andalusia would be one of the paradoxical results of the Triennium⁵⁸.

In July 1918, UGT only had 9,040 members from agricultural professions, spread amongst 60 associations, accounting for 10% of the whole of socialists' unionism. The decision of the FNOA to be part of the CNT and the UGT's decision to develop intense propagandistic and organisational campaigns in the rural areas were simultaneous, as well as the holding of provincial conferences that gave structure to the agrarian workers' movement with their name. In some of the provincial conferences held by the associations, it was frequent to have the joint participation of local organisations from both unions. Coinciding with the internal anarchist crisis and the repression, the socialists decided to raise important provincial federations, strengthening them even with militants that came from anarcho-syndicalist associations⁵⁹. Meanwhile, and although there were setbacks and difficulties given the libertarian strength in Granada and Seville, the socialists achieved total success in places such as Almeria, Malaga or Jaen, ended in better conditions in Cordoba and achieved important progress in Cadiz⁶⁰. In 1919-1920, the CNT had a total of 20,492 agricultural members in the region of Andalusia, whilst the members of UGT went from 8,572 in 1918 to 30,617 two years later⁶¹.

The elements for the tense relations between CNT and UGT were many, and digging into them allows us to better understand the evolution. The nature of the agricultural strikes were, contrary to what is thought, very well organised and had a

⁵⁷ Jacques MAURICE, "A propósito del Trienio Bolchevique", José Luis GARCÍA DELGADO (ed.), *La crisis de la Restauración. España, entre la primera guerra mundial y la II República*, Madrid, Siglo XXI, 1986, pp. 345-346.

⁵⁸ Ángeles GONZÁLEZ, "La construcción...", *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ For instance, the Association "La Parra Productiva" of Montilla (Córdoba) saw a fight between socialists and anarcho-syndicalists to attract the influence of the organisation, until it finally joined UGT in 1917. In 1918, when the Triennium started, most of the previously libertarian members joined the socialists. Juan DÍAZ DEL MORAL, *Historia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

⁶⁰ Manuel MORALES MUÑOZ, "Anarquismo...", *op. cit.*

⁶¹ Francisco COBO ROMERO, "Anarquismo...", *op. cit.*

peaceful "nature", strengthening the socialist arguments in favour of their methodology. For UGT it was key not to fall for provocations with the law enforcement bodies, they were not to base their activities in violent actions, but rather on the numbers and discipline of the movement, and the strikes had to be called when there was a solid enough base for their organisation, enough resources and awareness. Moreover, they were very cautious when joining the general strikes called with strength by the anarcho-syndicalists during the Triennium and tried to always link the movement to political action⁶². For instance, in 1920, the general strike called by the CNT in Andalusia was rejected by the UGT. The strike, with great success in Seville and surroundings, was unable to spread to any other province, proof of the crisis of Andalusian anarcho-syndicalism, suffering since 1921, when the repression ended practically breaking up the organisation⁶³.

In the words of Malefakis "amongst the agricultural masses - just like it had already happened amongst the industrial proletarians - socialism, once implemented, proved to be more resistant to the extraordinary changes of anarchism"⁶⁴. Beyond Andalusia, agrarian socialism had in 1921 an important union in Asturias, created in 1915 and growing, made up mainly of tenants and tenant farmers, In Galicia it had consistent penetration and carried out federal attempts under tough conditions. In Zamora they had agricultural provincial unions or workers' associations federations, mainly agricultural, as well as in Palencia, Valladolid and Toledo; it had a strong organisation in Salamanca, like in Extremadura, with total hegemony, and there were three provincial federations with important presence and growing in the provinces of Castellón, Valencia, Alicante, Albacete and Murcia. Except for Levante, anarcho-syndicalism was practically non-existent in the territories above mentioned. In the case of the provinces of Valencia and nearby areas, the trend in the growth of UGT was at the expense of the Libertarians, key to understand the changes in the forces' relationship.

⁶² Francisco ACOSTA RAMÍREZ, Salvador CRUZ ARTACHO and Manuel GONZÁLEZ DE MOLINA NAVARRO, *Socialismo y democracia...*, *op. cit.*, pages. 259 and 337.

⁶³ Ángeles GONZÁLEZ, "La construcción...", *op. cit.*

⁶⁴ Edward MALEFAKIS, *Reforma agraria...*, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

AGRARIAN EMPLOYERS AND THE STATUS OF RESTORATION

Property's structure must be considered a cause but also the framework of the dispute, but under no circumstances was the transformation of property structure an objective set by the movement in the short term. Having said this, the workers' demands, if fully implemented, entailed a transformation without precedents of the rural world and threatened the ways of the landowners' power. This power was based on the employers' belief that workforce was unlimited, susceptible of being overexploited. In case of strike, resorting to hiring of non-local workers and non-strikers was always a possibility. Unions' control measures of the labour market, the salary increase, the elimination of the per item methodology and the reduction of the working hours amongst others, were a torpedo to the waterline of the agrarian bourgeoisie. Thus, they were not going to remain still to the threat of workers' mobilisations against their privileged interests⁶⁵.

On the other hand, the accumulation of perceived grievances by workers made them be strong in their demands, even more so at times of harvest. This reason for conflict was combined with the employers' and authorities' fear of a hypothetical revolution that, although it did not take place, was perceived by them as a possibility, turning this into a political priority. As stated by Antonio Ávalos, secretary of the provincial federation of UGT from Jaen: "the alarm was raised straight away by the bourgeois media, as they still believed that each workers' demand was an unequivocal omen of social revolution"⁶⁶.

Agrarian employers, initially overwhelmed by the events and unable to see in them anything deeper than just the basic work of "rioters" - common in the history of Spanish elites - decided to demand an "iron fist" against the "unruly", although they also had to try other options, such as promoting employer-approved unionism, or "yellow" unionism, arming themselves and creating their own repressive forces and joining forces with others, even though they had a history of opposing interests. But their view of the social conflict, reluctant as they were to any small change, was perfectly

⁶⁵ Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADÓ, *España...*, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

⁶⁶ Manuel TUÑÓN DE LARA, *Luchas obreras...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 81 and 84.

summarised in this speech by Tomás Ybarra y Lasso de la Vega, important landowner and head of the Conservative Party in Seville. "The riots that may pop up here or there by workers are mainly due to the disrupting actions of a few individuals who look for a comfortable life by using riots and mutinies, not due to the actions of the real working class. This minority of rioters are an imposition on the real working class, who are forced, maybe reluctantly, down the path of violence. Thus, to normalise economic life in the Andalusian countryside it is necessary to free the workers from the pressure of those unruly members, ensuring their full freedom to work and making sure contracts between employers and workers are free from coercion, that is, that the rules of supply and demand now violated by the workers' agreements once again reign on universal economy"⁶⁷.

In May 1920, the government even decided to inform the civil governors of some provinces affected by agrarian conflicts that the Spanish protectorate in Morocco had offered to send workers to replace the strikers. "The military commander of Alhucemas offers 2,000 moors from the closest Berber communities to work in the fields in those provinces, in exchange for 6 pesetas per day, 1 kg of bread, for 11 hours of work and a 2-month contract. I inform you so that you can see if there is a possibility for work for those who have offered". Finally, the threat of losing the crops prevailed over the negotiations and agreements were reached in some cases, thus this bizarre measure was not implemented. Nevertheless, the employers' strategy started by denying any work at the end of the harvest, artificially increasing unemployment during the months in which it was lower in any case for day labourers⁶⁸.

Moreover, they resorted to armed practices, despite the established power. Self-defence tactics set up by the employers' themselves on their land, creating armed groups to coerce the working population and defuse social protests. Groups that, using the name of "armed citizens", "civic guards" and namely the famous "Somatén"⁶⁹ tried to take justice into their own hands by using employers' violence against workers'

⁶⁷ Ángeles GONZÁLEZ, "La construcción...", *op. cit.*

⁶⁸ Manuel TUÑÓN DE LARA, *Luchas obreras...*, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁶⁹ Francisco COBO ROMERO, "Anarquismo...", *op. cit.*

demands. The Sociedad de Tiro Nacional de Jaen (1919) and armed groups were created, mainly made up by the young sons of agricultural employers - foreseeing future developments -, adding their own fire to the Triennium's recent conflicts in: Granada (1919), Malaga (1919) and Seville (1921), with great intensity in some of Cordoba's towns⁷⁰. The creation of the civic militia and similar organisations needs to be put into the context of an atmosphere of fear amongst the ruling European classes after the Bolshevik victory in 1917. Just one year later, the Marquis of Comillas founded the "Citizens' Defence", that did not receive the support of the state authorities, but was not hindered either. Catholic trade unions, very relevant in some agrarian regions, ended participating in the violence and coercion strategy against the organised working classes. In that same manner, there were attempts to enhance the rural guards' units, with a membership nature, with employers' resources and not under the control of the state's institutions⁷¹.

Sensationalism was prevalent in the bourgeois press, with daily warnings stating that a revolution such as the Russian one was hatching in Spain, heating up the ambience, ready to oil the repressive machinery of the State. *El Debate* was the journal that was most clearly obsessed with the "Bolshevik danger"⁷². The employers' fear, which constantly pressurised the government to intervene, finally led to the appointment of general La Barrera as the head of an army contingent which in fact military occupied the province of Cordoba, under a state of war declared on the 29th of May 1919. It would impose a dictatorial situation based on the suspension of constitutional guarantees⁷³ decreed in March that year. At that time, there were "only" 33 municipalities on strike, most of them anarcho-sindicalists. But the repression targeted

⁷⁰ Francisco COBO ROMERO, "La *aurora roja* del campo andaluz. Agitación social y luchas campesinas durante el *Trienio Bolchevique*, 1918-1920", Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADÓ and Angel SMITH (eds.), *La agonía del liberalismo español. De la revolución a la dictadura (1913-1923)*, Granada, Comares, pp. 113-139.

⁷¹ Antonio ELORZA, Luis ARRANZ and Fernando DEL REY, "Liberalismo y corporativismo ...", *op. cit.*

⁷² Almudena DELGADO LARIOS, "¿Problema agrario andaluz o cuestión nacional? El mito del Trienio Bolchevique en Andalucía (1918-1920), *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea*, 13 (1991), pp. 97-124. As an example, please refer to: "El bolchevismo en España", *El Debate*, (1919, January 9), and "Voz de alerta. El bolchevismo en Andalucía", *El Debate*, (1919, March 1).

⁷³ Between 1874 and 1923 constitutional guarantees were suspended 27 times. During the Triennium, they were suspended in four occasions. Almudena DELGADO LARIOS, "¿Problema...?", *op. cit.*

at will all the organisations, including the socialists. What the struggle did not fully unite, the prison did.

CONCLUSIONS

Repression was one of the most important factors when explaining the reasons for the end of the Triennium. Openly illegal measures were applied, coercions were exercised against militant workers, preventing them from leaving their homes, there were threats, beatings, imprisonment and prohibition of meetings and rallies, there were communication cuts amongst associations, the expelling of propagandists when they arrived at the villages, etc., Employers even applied in the countryside measures typical of industrial conflicts, such as the lock-out.⁷⁴ To oppose this tactic, which had been pre-emptively used before harvest, the workers' organisations tried to give those affected economic solidarity coming from other associations in Spain⁷⁵. But the ruling power also used more subtle techniques, such as promoting catholic trade unions, which until then were not approved of by agrarian employers.

In March 1919, the Agrarian-Catholic Provincial Federation was established in Cordoba, with ten trade unions. At the end of the year there were 30. In the spring of 1920, at the time of its first assembly, it had 36 local unions and 6,867 members, although only 3,812 of them were workers. It reached its peak in 1921, with 42 trade unions and 7,079 workers. From 1922, its membership numbers started to decrease until it virtually disappeared, once it had fulfilled its role⁷⁶. Catholic unionism, framed in the at the time powerful federal organisation (the CNCA), was not the only or first attempt to oppose the workers' movement with a docile union movement, there were other attempts by mixed groups of employers, such as the "Casa de Todos" in Puente Genil. Its lack of success led to their support of agrarian catholic unionism, which, despite its strong numbers, concealed a local reality that was very precarious. Mostly

⁷⁴ "Malestar en los obreros del campo", *El Socialista*, (1918, August 1). "De Andalucía", *El Socialista*, (1918, August 3). In Lange (Avila).they kept the lockout for two months against the agrarian organisation "La Campesina" "Locaut campesino", *El Socialista*, (1920, April 1).

⁷⁵ "Unión General de Trabajadores", *El Socialista*, (1919, April 23).

⁷⁶ Juan DÍAZ DEL MORAL, *Historia...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 363 and 371-373.

present in areas where renting was popular and there were traditional crops, the decrease of conflicts since 1921 meant there was no need to maintain it.⁷⁷

Without a doubt, the *El Debate* daily did the most to spread the agrarian-catholic view and supported its ideological positions during the Triennium. For this journal, the basis of social conflict was the "abuse" or "degeneration" of a legal institution such as property, which was natural and sacred, as it was the backbone of social order. This deformation had led to large estates, replacing the Christian sense of property with liberal principles. The best solution in its opinion were small reforms that distributed some of the unfarmed land and promoted the figure of small farmers and cooperatives, obviously after purchasing the land from its owners with favourable conditions. During the Triennium, *El Debate* did not cease to put pressure so that large estate owners supported the CNCA more actively, clearly showing the distrust employers had for Catholic unionism⁷⁸.

One of the reasons for the end of the Bolshevik Triennium was tough governmental repression and the strengthening of employers' associations, after their initial defeat. The economic changes that took place and the increase of unemployment and decrease of commodities prices. The end of the revolutionary cycle that started in Europe with the Russian revolution. The appearance of differences of interest amongst day labourers, tenants, "muleros" (similar to the ploughmen in Extremadura), small tenors and craftsmen. Associations' exhaustion, forced to constant strikes due to the short duration of collective contracts, their violation and to the need to be constantly presenting new negotiation bases. As well as the internal divisions that arose within the workers' movement. It is also remarkable how, just like in previous phases, the organised and conscious workers' groups that stayed in the villages, were bigger than in the past despite the defeat. This meant that each workers' offensive left a deeper

⁷⁷ Ángeles GONZÁLEZ, "La construcción...", *op. cit.*

⁷⁸ Almudena DELGADO LARIOS, "¿Problema agrario...?", *op. cit.*

trace in each village, and this could explain how the new workers' movement emerged in rural areas after 1930-1931⁷⁹.

In Malefakis' opinion, the convergence between life's scarcity, the commodities crisis, the political crisis and the news of the Russian Revolution were some of the reasons for the Triennium⁸⁰. In turn, Meaker says that it is the last element that plays a more important role, linking it to the fact that peasants had remained passive during the previous years and, at the beginning of 1918, they were in better financial conditions than before, so the motivation must have been mainly the influence of the Bolshevik revolution, disseminated by the anarcho-syndicalist and libertarian press, as well as by the bourgeois media⁸¹. Meaker also suggests that a revolutionary movement such as that of August 1917 could have been successful in a post-world war context, if it was better prepared logistically and politically, and if it had coincided with the agrarian struggles.

Although this will never be known, what is clear is that the impact of the defeat of the revolutionary general strike of 1917 and its short-term consequences meant that the socialist leaders and second-in-command totally ruled out doing anything of the kind during the remainder of the Restoration crisis⁸², and so the movement would be left without the main windows of political opportunity to channel it, giving it more ambitious political objectives. To this we have to add the non-political principles of libertarian movements, reluctant to have as a goal any political power. Moreover, the workers' movement division was not just between the two main unions that usually walked separately, not looking at each other, but that this separation was deployed inconsistently at a geographic, social and economic scale, hampering any possibility to take power, if indeed they had ever planned for that. This was also the case in 1934 and after 1936.

⁷⁹ Juan DÍAZ DEL MORAL, *Historia...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 359-360. Ángeles GONZÁLEZ, "La construcción...", *op. cit.*

⁸⁰ Edward MALEFAKIS, *Reforma agraria...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-147.

⁸¹ Gerald H. MEAKER, *La izquierda...*, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

⁸² *Ibidem.*, p. 130.

Updates on the historiography of the Triennium have nuanced some of the original conclusions of the person who coined the term, Díaz del Moral, in the 1920s. The concept of "Triennium" has been questioned, bearing in mind that the waves of the strikes, in their full scale, lasted between May 1918 to June 1920, so it would have lasted two and not three years, although it could be extended to three years if we include the period during which the workers' movement was reignited from an organizational and political perspective⁸³. Acosta, Cruz and González de Molina presented an interesting concept that deserves more attention: the "Red Six-year period", spanning from 1918 to 1923⁸⁴. Without a doubt, this term is very appropriate in order to analyse the largest agrarian union movement known till date, as well as to interpret its influence in the Restoration crisis.

But, more importantly, it is more appropriate because we are not witnessing a homogeneous and linear development, rather with ups and downs and with geographical differences, and so only a period as the one proposed allows us to analyse the phenomenon in its entirety. One of the conclusions that we draw with our research is that the Andalusian Triennium (1918-1920) had a similar duration in Extremadura, it overlapped in a diachronic fashion other conflicts and workers' movements in rural areas, such as in Castilla León (1919-1921), Toledo (1916-1918)⁸⁵, Levante (1919-1921), and Asturias (1922-1923) and even in the Andalusian province of Jaen (directly related to the strengthening of UGT around 1920)⁸⁶. This explains the constraints presented by the concept of "Triennium", as well the limits of the potential classes struggle in the agricultural sector of that time.

⁸³ Ángeles GONZÁLEZ, "La construcción...", *op. cit.*

⁸⁴ Francisco ACOSTA RAMÍREZ, Salvador CRUZ ARTACHO and Manuel GONZÁLEZ DE MOLINA NAVARRO, *Socialismo y democracia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

⁸⁵ In the case of Toledo, it is important not to mix the workers' organisation and the growth of workers' collective actions. If the former was concentrated mainly in 1916-1918, it is true that in this province and in the neighbouring Ciudad Real the highest levels of conflict coincided with the classical period of the Triennium (1918-1920), although its peak was in 1920. Nevertheless, and compared to other regions, the figures reached in those years both in Toledo and Ciudad Real had a clear precedent in 1916, with similar numbers. Óscar BASCUÑÁN AÑOVER, *Protesta y supervivencia...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-135, 140 and 192-193.

⁸⁶ Ángeles GONZÁLEZ, "La construcción...", *op. cit.*

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