

## 50 YEARS AFTER SACCO & VANZETTI

# Immigrants: still taking the flak

Fifty years after the murders of Sacco and Vanzetti, immigrant workers in North America are still getting the message:

Work, but don't think; consume, but don't demand; suffer, but don't complain.

All the liberal breast-beating these days about the railroading of the two anarchist militants is just so much ancient—and hypocritical—history. If you believe the current keepers of the public conscience, Sacco and Vanzetti were victimized by a once-in-a-lifetime confluence of lamentable circumstances—a “red scare” atmosphere feeding on the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution and a particularly vicious and reactionary judge and prosecutorial staff.

The truth is, the life work of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti sprung from the institutionalized racism and exploitation of immigrant laborers that has characterized the “building” of America throughout its history. And they were killed, not only because they were anarchists, but also as a warning to the great under-class of non-Anglo laborers who were once-again becoming active.

In the Spring of 1920, U.S. Attorney General Palmer, warning of radical aliens plotting the Red revolution, launched a series of wholesale arrests and deportations. More than 1,000 aliens were shipped home.

In this climate of fear and hysteria, where foreign-looking Reds and Bolsheviks

were seen lurking at every troublesome spot, Sacco and Vanzetti were arrested on a trumped-up murder charge involving a payroll robbery in South Braintree, Mass. Their subsequent sham of a trial was followed by seven years of legal appeals and protests around the world, but 50 years ago this year, on August 23, 1927, their string ran out and they went to the electric chair.

While their deaths may not have been completely in vain, they would still easily recognize many of the features of racist exploitation that they fought in their own day, if they were to return now.

### Chinese and East Indians

Only it wouldn't be the Black, Italian, German, and Irish in the U.S., nor similar groups plus the Chinese in Canada, who were on the receiving end of the (North) American dream. Now it's the hispanic people of Mexico and Latin America in the U.S. and the East Indians in Canada.

And although unlike Sacco and Vanzetti and other foreign dissidents, the majority of these immigrants may not represent any immediate political threat to the State, they are still obviously being scapegoated as the current menace to jobs, the economy and American society.

The most recent accounts of the “threat” posed by these “undesirable” workers perpetuate such myths as that the silent invasion of 14



Sacco (left), Vanzetti and their death-house guards.

million illegals is responsible for present economic problems in the U.S.

The majority come from Mexico to work on farms, vineyards or in service industries and factories where their wages of a few dollars a day, in some cases, represents a substantial improvement over their former income. Lured by that seductive “American dream,” they are

willing to leave their homeland behind and endure exploitation to become part of it.

The truth is that illegal aliens pose no threat to U.S. jobs, nor do they drain the economy. Instead, the government's own researchers found that these workers provide an easy source of cheap, exploitable labour, especially for U.S. agribusiness; the majority are afraid to seek public assistance

and thus, less than one-half of one percent received welfare benefits; and they work on jobs undesirable to the majority of Americans because of the less-than-minimum wages paid, the unappealing job categories, and overall discouraging work conditions.

### INS Gestapo

As long as they remain in the country, they are subject not only to the demands of

the employers who may also charge them exorbitant prices for false identification, room and board, or even sham marriages, but they live as a hunted species, in constant fear of being caught by the Immigration and Naturalization Service during frequent factory and farm raids.

Known as the Gestapo of the U.S. Southwest, the INS throws its weight around freely, carrying out arbitrary decisions on the spot, in some cases splitting up families or alternately, threatening activists in immigration reform with deportation.

Although there are no exact figures on the numbers of “illegal aliens” present in the U.S.—estimates range from 2 million to 20 million—there is evidence to indicate that the population is increasing. More are found and expelled by INS every year.

The paradox of the whole situation finds these immigrant workers caught in the middle between right wing elements who blame them for everything under the American sun, while on the other hand, they receive qualified support, if not at least tacit approval, from U.S. big business, which regards their presence as a familiar and healthy phenomenon, given their desirability as a commodity to some industries.

The Carter government has responded to the issue by beefing up INS border patrols and attempting to piece together new immigration legislation that would fine or penalize employers for hiring undocumented workers. Plans for a fool-proof national identity card and a “Berlin Wall” at the Mexican border seem to have been scrapped temporarily.

In Canada, the Trudeau government, riding the crest of a racist wave that has attempted to blame immigrants for the shortage of jobs and housing, enacted a new Immigration law this summer creating a virtual police-state network of regulations for foreign-born workers.

Such workers can now be coerced into strike-breaking, and are virtually barred—on pain of deportation—from political activity. This even extends to individuals actively supporting struggles against dictatorships in their homelands or any other countries.

It's no wonder, then, that in the 50 years since Sacco and Vanzetti were railroaded, the established opinion-moulders have striven mightily to characterize the case as a civil liberties issue. Even today, their emphasis is on whether the two anarchists got a fair trial under due process of law. (The governor of Massachusetts says maybe not, but he has been severely rebuked by his own legislature.)

All that's a black herring, though. Sacco and Vanzetti knew that the only fair trial would have been if authoritarianism was under indictment, and the only due process was the process of Social Revolution.

# New blood rejuvenates CNT

Following a summer of high-impact strike actions and huge public mobilizations, Spain's anarcho-syndicalist trade union movement is now restructuring itself to accommodate its rapidly-burgeoning mass base.

The National Confederation of Labour (CNT), which emerged from the underground in May after 40 years of Franco-era clandestinity, is in the process this fall of assembling its first openly-chosen national committee.

The old 17-member national committee was put together a year ago when the CNT was still illegal, and the then total membership of only 25,000 was still strongly influenced by pre-Civil War militants and exile groups.

But now, with a total strength approaching 125,000, and the vast majority of these under the age of 30, the committee needs a new look to reflect its recent revolutionary upsurge. Since the CNT maintains a determinedly anti-bureaucratic and decentralized stance, the committee serves only as the instrument of the membership (and not vice-versa), and the selection process is fashioned to help ensure this.

A member of the outgoing committee said the process would take several weeks and involve mass meetings of

militants in all 12 regions of Spain, plus a full-time five-member secretariat to be selected by the Madrid federations, subject to approval by referendum of the other regions.

“The national committee has the function of communication among the federations, and after one year all the members, including the secretariat, must go back to their local unions,” he said.

“The committee can only carry out the mandate of the unions, not take action on its own. For instance, the mandate for the past year was to abstain from any ‘social pact’ with the government.”

The ex-national committee member said one of the main tasks of the new committee will be to plan the first open national congress of the CNT since the Civil War. The congress, probably to be held next summer, will chart the organization's future strategy for achieving its goal of libertarian communism.

### More Than Busy

Meanwhile, however, the CNT is keeping more than busy with on-going workers' struggles and in building a

public presence through mass rallies. Among important strikes this summer in which it played a significant role were:

- The three-month-long construction workers' strike in the traditional socialist stronghold of Asturias, which ended in July in victory for the workers, despite sabotaging efforts by some elements of the Communist Party-dominated workers' commissions.

- The strike of 30,000 hotel workers in the Costa del Sol and other sunspots in August during the height of the summer tourist season. The strike was declared illegal, and more than 100 workers were arrested, but the bosses finally coughed up a 25 per cent wage increase and other concessions.

- The mutiny in July by prisoners in 18 prisons throughout Spain. The strike, which was organized in part by CNT militants inside the walls, was put down after four days by riot police in helicopters firing tear gas, smoke bombs and rubber bullets.

In support of the prisoners' own secret organization, COPEL, the CNT established a nationwide network of amnesty committees which raised the historic anarchist demand to free all prisoners and tear down the walls of the prisons. The prisoners picked up this theme themselves after first advancing limited demands for reforms in the penal

system.

(The CNT has traditionally been an active force among “common” criminals in Spain, whereas the Communist Party militants in prison have always disdainfully stood apart, considering themselves an elite corps of “political” detainees. See the article in Spanish entitled “Points On Prison Society in Spain”, by Luis Ide, in the April, 1977 *Interrogations*, BM Box 746, London WC1 6XX, England).

CNT mass rallies during the summer were used as an effective counterpoint to the strike actions to reinforce the point that the organization was back on the scene and growing, and intended to reclaim its pre-war eminence as the fighting organization of two million Spanish workers.

First there was the gathering of 40,000 militants in a Madrid bull-ring in March—the first mass public manifestation of the CNT in 40 years—followed by a meeting of equal size in Valencia in May.

### 250,000 in Barcelona

On July 22-25, an estimated 250,000 people thronged to a CNT jamboree in Barcelona to take part in discussions on such topics as

Marxism and Anarchism, and Basque Nationalism vs. Proletarian Internationalism, to meet and debate with “headliners” like Noam Chomsky, Jean-Paul Sartre (allegedly a closet anarchist) and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, and to watch the American anarchist ensemble *The Living Theatre*.

Unlike the contending (authoritarian) unions, the CNT gets no financial support from political parties or other organizations. Funds are urgently needed from overseas. Contributions may be sent directly to Spain c/o Pedro Barrio Guazo; Banco De Bilbao; AGC, 18 Lopez De Hoyos #103; Madrid 2, Spain.

The CNT has established an editorial collective to exchange libertarian materials with comrades and friends from around the world. Send correspondence and exchange copies to Campo Abierto Ediciones, Concepcion Bahamonde 10, Madrid 28, Spain.

To keep up on the situation in Spain, check with *News From Libertarian Spain*, Box 733, Cooper Station, New York, N.Y. 10003; and the Iberian Solidarity Committee, 3934 St. Urban, Montreal, Que. H2W 1T7.