

## ÁNGEL HERRERIN LÓPEZ AND “ACADEMIC TERRORISM”

*It is worse than immoral, it is badly written*  
Oscar Wilde

On 21 October last, under the aegis of the Seminario Permanente Mexico-España organized by the Centre for Historical Studies at the Colegio de Mexico (Colmex), there was a book launch for *El terrorismo anarquista a finales del Siglo XIX. El caso español* (Late 19th Century Anarchist Terrorism. The Spanish Case) featuring its author, Dr Angel Herrerin López from Madrid’s UNED (National Distance Education University) with occasional and apposite comment from Colmex’s Dr Clara E Lida.

In the course of his talk Herrerin López missed no opportunity to spew anachronisms, clichés and misrepresentations which would not have deserved any attention had it not been for the implicit, starkly anti-anarchist message (one well-established in the wide circles of bourgeois intelligentsia) and the defense of state repression as the safeguard and guarantor of order and justice.

Anyone familiar with Herrerin López’s previous work will not be surprised at the avalanche of manipulation and calumny, nor at his blatant lack of objectivity, paradoxically paraded as ‘scientific objectivity’. Naturally, we will not play the innocents; it is an open secret that History is written to suit the winners and, besides, ‘objectivity’ is always glaringly absent. However, this is all the more to be deplored when an attempt is being made to sell us such belittling efforts in the service of the status quo as some sort of ‘alternative research’, as is the case with Herrerin López.

Even so, there is no denying the efforts of countless male and female comrades committed to the recovery of historical memory and salvaging the true history of the social struggle, vindicating OUR dead and acknowledging OUR theoreticians and OUR fighters. Some have even done so from the groves of academe, although — as one comrade remarked — academia as an institution has been created lest anything as subversive as anarchism might find there any opportunity to germinate as activity and thought. Because university campuses are centers of ‘knowledge’ and knowledge is Power. Which is why the university is the great seedbed, the incubator where the block-and-tackle by which continuity is handed on are shaped and where the technocrats of the future, the next generation of experts in surveillance and social domestication receive their training. As such, it is the proper place for vermin like these to try to dissect anarchism as if it were some stinking corpse for which they have been trying to issue a death certificate since 31 March 1939.

Even though *El terrorismo anarquista a finales del Siglo XIX. El caso español* requires an emphatic rebuttal (which would require a long-winded, sprawling reply) here we shall focus on a few of Herrerin López’s ‘conceptual’ assertions, starting with his choice of title for the book which is blatantly sensationalist, tendentious, prosaic and indicative of a determination to discredit anarchism.

We might point out the use of the term ‘terrorism’ as shorthand for ‘propaganda by deed’, that is as a synonym for direct action mounted from within anarchism in its unequal struggle against oppression and exploitation: underpinning the semantic (and indeed pragmatic) burden and values and ideas intimately wrapped up with the term, in contrast to the values and ideas associated with the ‘intervention’ of the state as the deliverer of justice and purveyor of Peace and Order.

Determined to clarify any ‘doubts’, we have consulted several lexicographies, especially the *DRAE* (*Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*/Dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy) 22<sup>nd</sup> edition, as well as Julio Casares’s *Diccionario ideológico de la lengua Española* (Ideological Dictionary of the Spanish Language) and Mara Moliner’s *Diccionario de uso del español* (Dictionary of Spanish Usage). Thus, according to the *DRAE*, ‘terrorism’ is defined as:

### **1. Rule by terror.**

### **2. A series of violent acts performed in order to instill terror.**

Note that the term is but one of many borrowed from the French by liberals and romantics on foot of the connotations of the French Revolution and absorbed — according to the researches of a number of lexicographers - into our language, first in the insurgent Americas before Spain proper, being embraced and taken up by the Academia only a long time later. In 1825 Nuñez de Taboada added it to his dictionary; yet I was not until 1869 that the Royal Academia introduced it, mentioning it as ‘a word of recent usage’, even though 23 years before the word had gained admission in neighbouring France in the Vicente Salva dictionary and by 1853 had been incorporated into Ramón Joaquín Domínguez’s lexicography.

The 11th edition of the *DRAE* defines ‘terrorism’ as ‘rule by terror’. That meaning was to remain unchanged up until 1925, in which year a second meaning was added in the 15<sup>th</sup> edition, ‘**A series of violent acts performed in order to instill terror**’. Under both meanings there is a striking inadequacy about the

definitions, leaving plenty of opening to the art of interpretation. There is no information as to who actually does the ruling through terror nor whom they rule over: likewise, it is left to the imagination to work out who carries out the acts of violence and in whom they seek to **instill** terror. Nor are they specific as to the means employed to that end — nor the purpose to which they are directed. Not until the 1984 edition does a third definition emerge, in parentheses — this during the Reagan/Thatcher era when Felipe González was prime minister in the Spanish state — and the political intention is blatant: **‘Violent form of political struggle whereby the aim is the destruction of the established order or the creation of a climate of fear and insecurity likely to cow one’s adversaries or the general public’**. This third sense was to reappear in the 1989 handbook. On the same note and during the same period (1984-1989) this third sense of the term ‘terrorism’ was to pop up in a number of Spanish language dictionaries: **‘Criminal activity by organized gangs, repeatedly and, usually, indiscriminately, designed to create social alarm for political purposes’**. Likewise, in the *Diccionario Esencial de la Lengua Española* published by Larousse Editorial the number one definition offered was to be: **‘A range of acts of violence designed to create insecurity or overthrow the established government’**. Amid this political imposition emanating from the Academia, we should highlight the definition of “terrorism” honestly offered in 1988 by the *Diccionario Práctico de la Lengua Española* by the Catalonia-based Ediciones Grijalbo and an editorial panel made up of Manuel Bartolom, Daniel Fernandez, Angela García Ruiz, Maria Paz Ortuño, Helios Rubio and Fernn Vallespins, under the supervision of Alfonso Carlos Bolado:

**‘TERRORISM. Rule by terror, esp. as exercised by the State. Based on widespread recourse to arbitrary or inhuman measures (arbitrary imprisonment, torture, killings, reprisals) either discriminating (targeting specific groups) or indiscriminate (whereby anybody might find themselves a target, if only by association). //A political tactic that advocates the use of violence: the aim being not so much to unseat the government as to create the conditions for other social agents (esp. the popular classes) to do so. //The spectrum of terrorist practices.’**

That definition of terrorism leaves no room for doubt and makes it clear to us who actually rules through terror and who victims are. There is also the need to point out who carries out the acts of violence and to list almost every single resource used to such ends and what the purpose is behind such deeds. Even so, we shall steer clear of the definition from the *Diccionario Práctico de la Lengua Española* from Ediciones Grijalbo, to ensure that we are not accused of the very thing that we are complaining about and, to that end, we shall stick with the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the *DRAE* wherein the term is explained as ‘rule by terror’ and ‘series of acts of violence performed in order to **instill** terror’.

So, taking this interpretation as our basis and despite any ambiguities, that very definition is more than enough to reject any association of the term with anarchism. Anyone conversant with anarchist ideas knows that the very idea of anarchism is a rejection of rule, that domination is not an anarchist objective, be it through terror or any other means. Instead its struggle is a fight for Freedom, that is, against domination in any its forms.

Not can direct action or ‘propaganda by deed’ be lumped with a series of violent acts carried out for the purpose of instilling terror, since revolutionary violence is precisely a response to State violence, an ongoing violence designed to foist its rule upon the excluded by means of terror. Yet here we have **Herrerín** López arguing:

*‘There is nothing new in pointing out that terrorism has among its purposes the inciting of an unwarranted backlash from the State that justifies its actions or the triggering of a popular backlash that helps it survive.’*

And he reminds us that ‘propaganda by deed has been linked in the popular imagination with the terrorist outrage’. Here it is imperative that we point out the way in which he endorses this semantic deviation in the popular mind without delving into the misuse of the term ‘terrorist’ — as applied to the actual struggles of the **marginalised** — on the part of the political authorities and the Fourth Estate (the media) and the logical implications of the indiscriminating use of the term in popular culture.

Throughout history, there have been more than enough instances of the unwarranted and tendentious use of the term ‘terrorist’ by the State and the mass media but one might have hoped for a moment’s reflection by **Herrerín** López, (he being an historian), about acts of ‘anarchist violence’, in terms both of their purposes as well as of their extent and scale before deciding if these deserved to be described as ‘terrorist acts’. Regrettably, his political prejudices together with his intellectual limitations compel him to shun the evidence and launch into a hotchpotch of semantic crassness and nonsense for the clear purpose of not acknowledging the practice of State terrorism (yesterday, today and for as long as it has been in existence). And he is precluded from acknowledging it because his work is **subsidised** by the Spanish State and so, right from the title, his intention to discredit anarchism is unambiguously displayed.

Thus 'terrorism' means the violent acts of the dispossessed, the direct action of the excluded and oppressed in their unequal battle against the State/capital and those who carry out these acts are described as 'violent fanatics'. Whereas State terrorism is supposed to be law-bound with laws and regulations governing it and if finds its justification in the safeguarding of the State/capital by means of rule by terror. Thus the series of acts of violence performed in order to instill terror has a defensive, democratic and indeed humanitarian purpose and is **practised** by all States within the parameters of international law.

This entire fog surrounding the use and abuse of the term 'terrorism' is nothing but the outcome of a war waged by authority on all fronts against the excluded of the Earth, whereby a political definition of the misrepresentation of the term 'terrorism' is imposed, rooted in a document that we cannot allow to pass unnoticed: **THE CATECHISM OF TRANSITION**.

In the jargon of the powers that be, that is the name by which the *Findings and Recommendations for Heads of State and Governments* (produced by the Conference on Transition and Democratic Consolidation held in Madrid, Spain on 26 and 27 October 2001) is known. That Conference was sponsored by the Gorbachev Foundation, the Weatherhead Center For International Affairs at the University of Harvard and the **Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y Diálogo Exterior**/FRIDE (Foundation for International Relations and External Dialogue). The event drew 35 heads of state and government leaders, prominent among them former Russian president Mikhail Gorbachev, Bill Clinton from the USA, former Spanish premier Felipe Gonzalez, former president of Mexico Ernesto Zedillo, Cesar Gaviria of Colombia, Jose Figueres of Costa Rica, Eduardo Frei of Chile and Julio Mara Sanguinetti of Uruguay, among others.

In paragraph one of *Findings and Recommendations* .. the delegates and former presidents assembled there made it clear that they are 'at war with terrorist fanaticism'. Likewise, they issued a declaration to the effect that 'from this conference, at which we exchange our experiences of our transitions to democratic political systems, we issue a special appeal for a strengthening of our democracies and for toleration towards different cultures to counter fanaticism and violence'.

Under the heading of 'Guaranteeing the future' and identified as 'the mission of the modern democratic State', the meeting was wound up, but not before it had announced the launch of the 'Madrid Club'. Bequeathing to posterity yet another definition of the term 'terrorism' as a '**series of acts of violence carried out by fanatics**'. A definition that — in the name of *raison d'état* — includes all who obstruct their rule and covers all of us who oppose the system's rationale. From which angle any group or individual that opts for actual struggle against the State/capital can find it/himself indiscriminately accused and this application of the anti-terrorist laws will be lauded by academia.

In which regard Dr Ángel **Herrerín** López is leading the field and deserves the gratitude of all who champion the State/capital for his priceless contribution from the world of academe.

Gustavo Rodríguez

22 October 2009, Mexico, DF

The author is active in the anarchist movement and in the Cuban Libertarian Movement (MLC) in exile. He also contributes regularly to the anarchist journals *El Libertario* (Venezuela), *h Uopan USA* and *Cuba Libertaria*.

(Translated by Paul Sharkey)