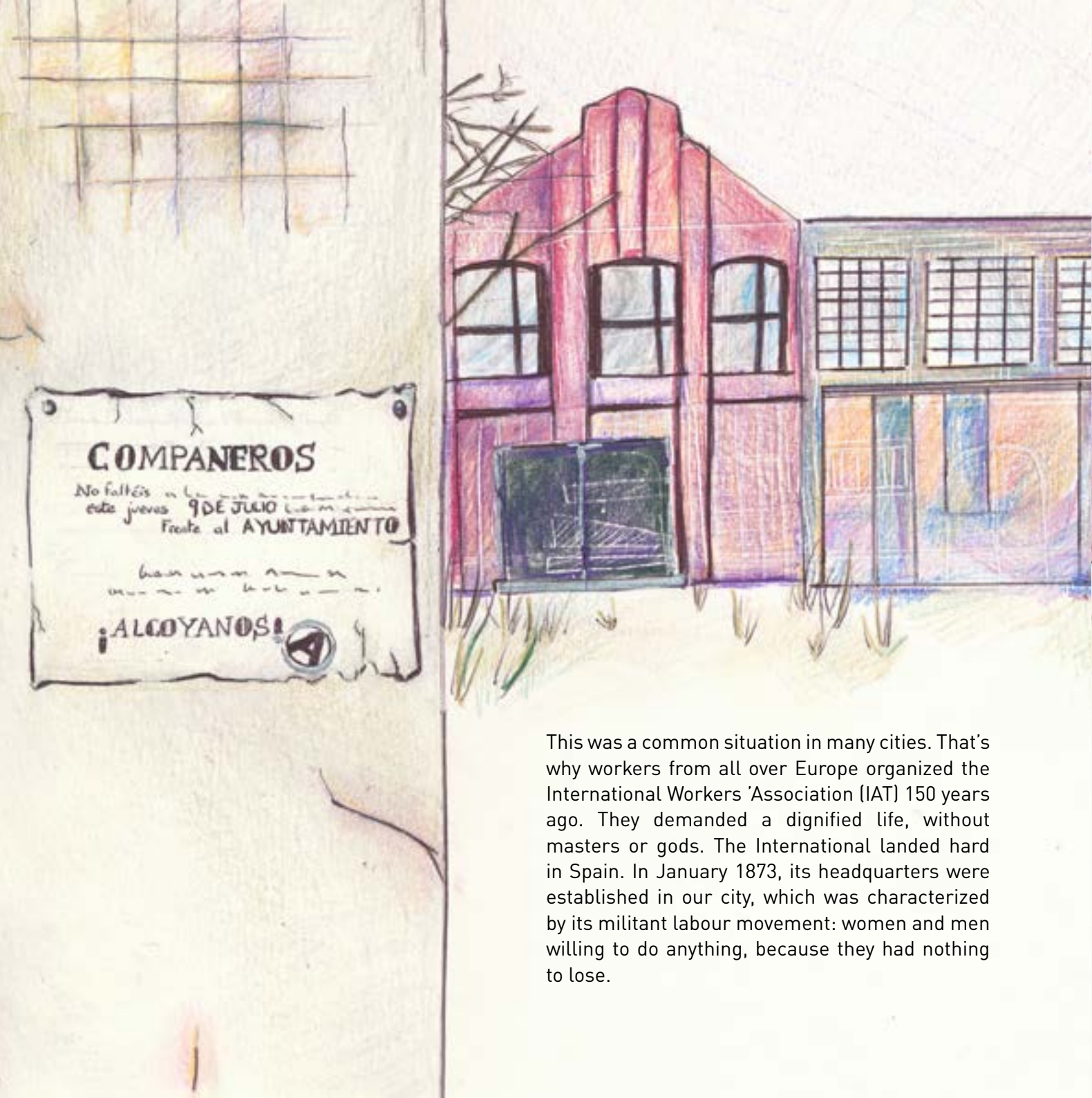


THE OIL REVOLUTION
ALCOI 1873-2023

In July 1873, in Alcoy, a peaceful demonstration of workers was dispersed by gunfire by the police force. Protesters responded to the attack and took the initiative. The uprising has gone down in history as the Revolució del Petroli, the Oil Revolution: the largest workers' uprising of 19th century.

The industry soon arrived in Alcoy. And with the factories, a lot of money, a lot of money, for the owners who rushed to build sumptuous stately buildings. But many of our great-grandparents lived in misery. The workforce laboured 10, 12 and up to 18 hours a day for 2 pesetas of the time; the women worked the same hours, but earned half and their daughters and sons, from the age of 6, half of the half. They lived in heaps of pigs, starved, and frequently contracted infectious diseases. One in three children died before the age of one.





COMPANEROS

No faltéis en la manifestación
este jueves 9 DE JULIO
Frente al AYUNTAMIENTO

¡ALCOYANOS!

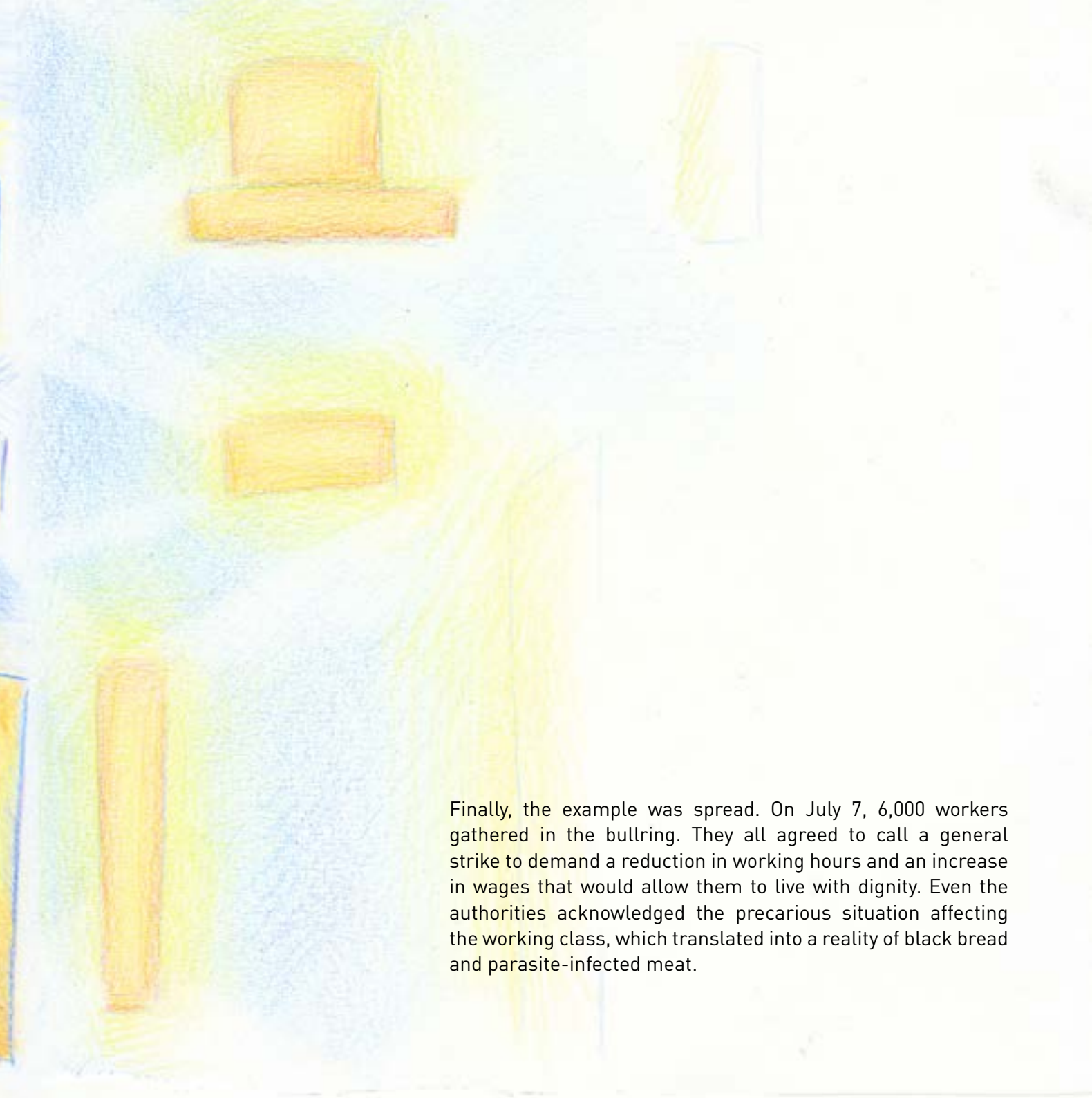


This was a common situation in many cities. That's why workers from all over Europe organized the International Workers' Association (IAT) 150 years ago. They demanded a dignified life, without masters or gods. The International landed hard in Spain. In January 1873, its headquarters were established in our city, which was characterized by its militant labour movement: women and men willing to do anything, because they had nothing to lose.

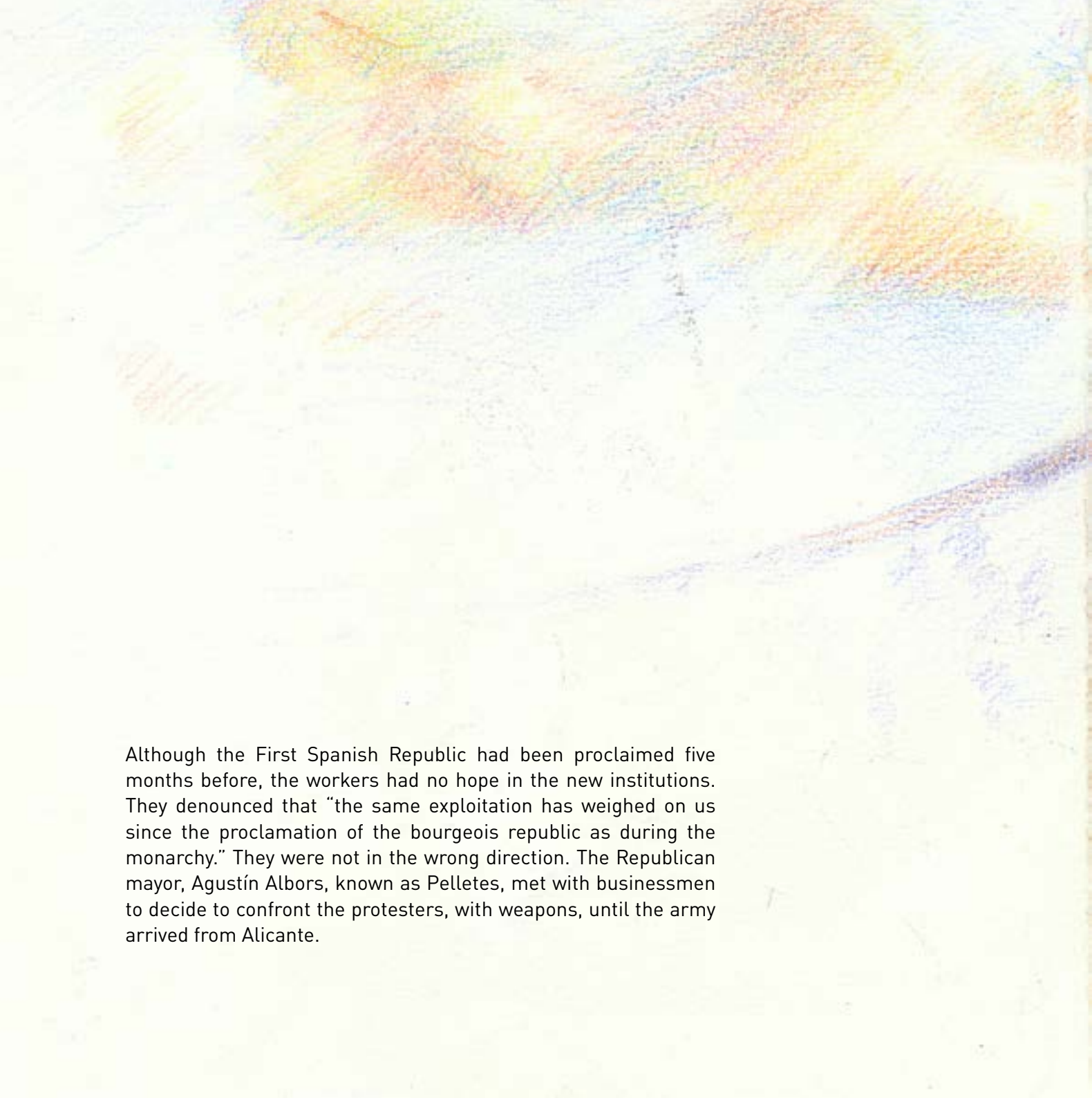


In the Algars, a district between Alcoi and Cocentaina, the conflict broke out. Paper mill workers demanded a pay rise and to work shorter hours. But the owner, Facundo Vitoria, did not accept the demands. Instead, he tried to hire strike-breakers and even outsource production to the competitors. The well-organized internationalists prevented it. The strike lasted four months, as the employer preferred to close the factory rather than grant the improvements. All this time they survived thanks to the solidarity of the rest of the workers of the region.





Finally, the example was spread. On July 7, 6,000 workers gathered in the bullring. They all agreed to call a general strike to demand a reduction in working hours and an increase in wages that would allow them to live with dignity. Even the authorities acknowledged the precarious situation affecting the working class, which translated into a reality of black bread and parasite-infected meat.



Although the First Spanish Republic had been proclaimed five months before, the workers had no hope in the new institutions. They denounced that “the same exploitation has weighed on us since the proclamation of the bourgeois republic as during the monarchy.” They were not in the wrong direction. The Republican mayor, Agustín Albors, known as Pelletes, met with businessmen to decide to confront the protesters, with weapons, until the army arrived from Alicante.




Despite the threat of repression, the strike was a success. In two days, they would visit factories throughout the region to join the cause. On the evening of July 9, there were more than 10,000 of them and they were on their way to the town hall. Not only were they now demanding job improvements, but also the resignation of the mayor and councillors, and their replacement by a workers' committee.





The mayor went out on the balcony and shot, it was the signal, the police force shot at the protesters from the bell tower. Two people were killed and some were injured. As British historian Gerald Brenan would say years later, "For the first time, a group that was not part of the church, or the army, or the middle class, had manifested itself as revolutionary." The Revolució del Petroli had begun.

A watercolor illustration featuring a large, vibrant red splatter in the center. At the top, two pens are shown, one on the left and one on the right, as if they have just finished writing or drawing. At the bottom, a hand is depicted holding a pen, with the tip of the pen pointing towards the red splatter. The background is a light, textured wash of white and grey, suggesting a page of paper or a wall. The overall style is artistic and expressive, with visible brushstrokes and a soft, painterly quality.

They
set up barricades,
broke into the houses of the
masters looking for weapons and
held hostages. The fight lasted more
than twenty hours. They did not rape nuns,
beheaded civil guards, hung chaplains from
streetlights, or ate Pelletes' ears fried, as we
have been led to believe. 16 people were killed in
the clash. As the president of the government, Pi
i Margall, explained: "there was a struggle, the
passions were hardened and excesses were
committed, but not so many". The last to fall
was the mayor, Agustín Albors.

Indicaciones de servicio

TELEGRAMA

Número 47

Recibido de Alcoy

núm

Sr. D.

Agustín Albores

El Oficial

Garret P.



Para Gobernador Militar de Agustín Albores Núm 356 Depositado 8/11/1873


Manda tropas urgentemente. Revuelta obrera.

Peligro inminente

On the night of the 10th, the army was already waiting at the gates of the city. The insurgents negotiated their surrender in exchange for avoiding reprisals, and the bourgeoisie agreed. General Velarde entered the city peacefully and telegraphed the government of Madrid: "A good result is expected. It's been quiet since yesterday." So much that the soldiers left Alcoy the next day, because they had to face the cantonal insurrection of Cartagena.

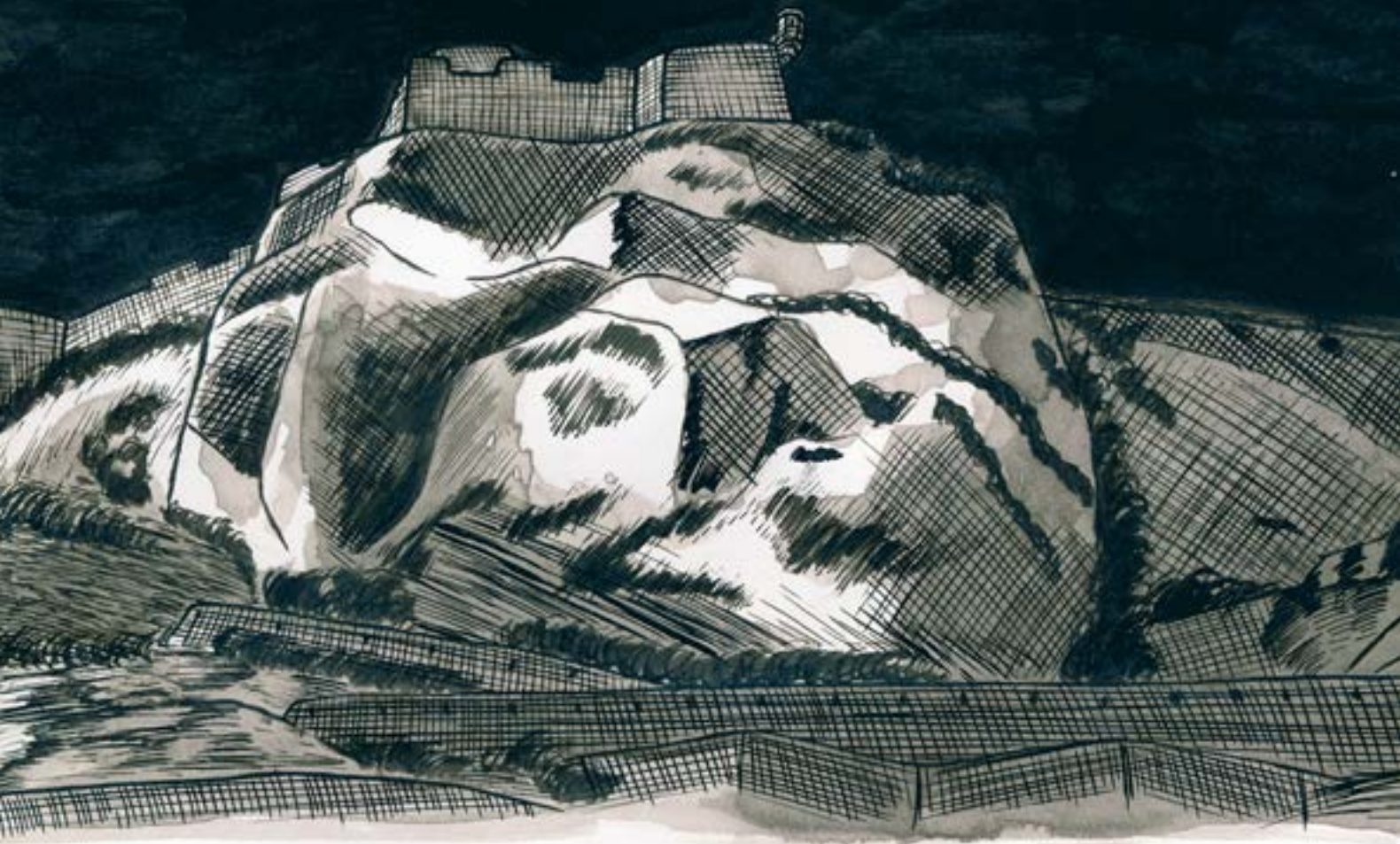


From July to October, internationalists took part in the reconstruction of the affected buildings, strengthened their defences against the Carlist threat and negotiated wage and labour improvements. But eventually, the revenge of the bourgeoisie came, carefully planned: President Castelar sent the army and the Civil Guard to the city and the persecution began. Hundreds of workers were detained and more than 700 were charged with sedition.

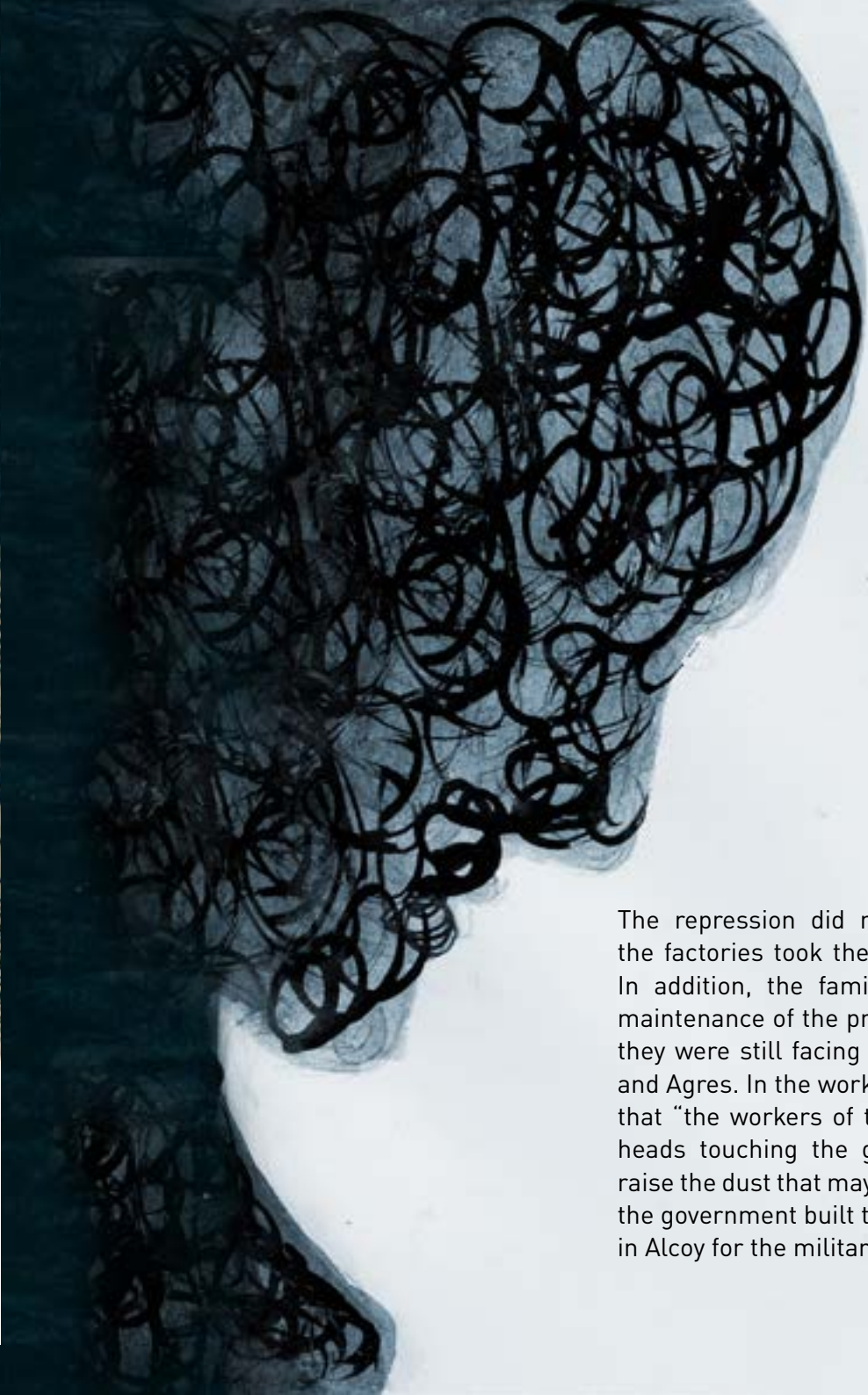
A black and white photograph showing several hands, some bound with white lace-like restraints. The hands are positioned in a way that suggests they are part of a larger group, possibly representing prisoners or victims. The background is dark and textured, with some light-colored brushstrokes or patterns. The overall mood is somber and evocative.

At night and tied with a rope they were transferred on foot to the castle of Alicante. An ordeal awaited them. A total of 289 would suffer years in prison in inhumane conditions and the judicial process would be a mess.

Whole families, with their children, would suffer hunger and disease in the castle of Santa Bàrbara.



Without legal assistance and imprisoned without evidence for anonymous accusations, some would be behind bars for years for having allegedly participated in petty thefts; for having worn the skirt oil-stained; for having collaborated in an attempted shooting or, simply, for their alleged misconduct, certified by the owners of the factories or by the new authorities reinstated in office. The amnesty decreed in 1876 by the restored king would forgive the Carlists and the uncompromising Republicans, but there would be no pardon for the workers.

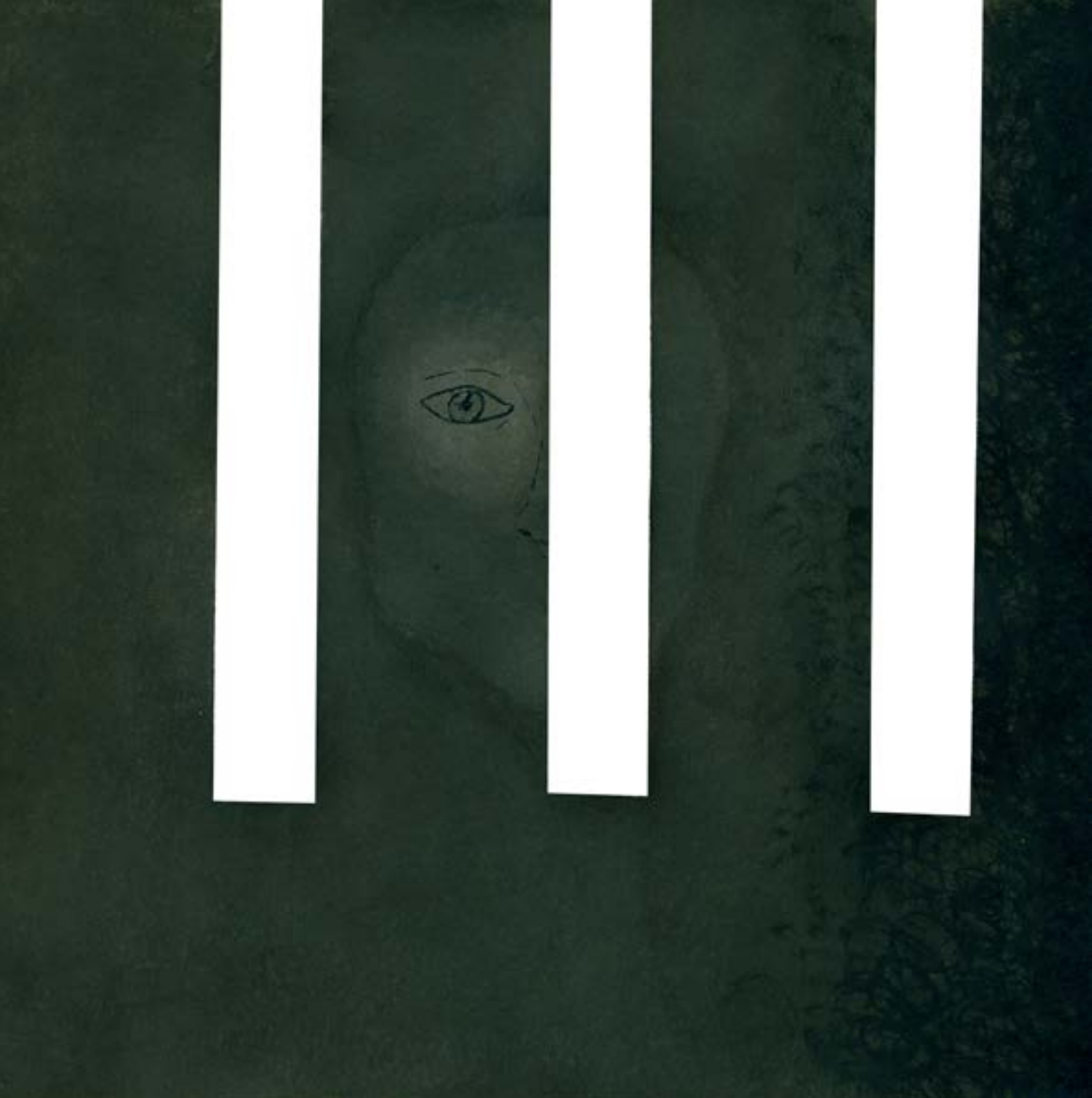


The repression did not end here. The owners of the factories took the opportunity to reduce wages. In addition, the families had to take care of the maintenance of the prisoners. In fact, 30 years later, they were still facing debts from Banyeres, Alfafara and Agres. In the workers' press of the time, we read that "the workers of the workshops walk with their heads touching the ground and without daring to raise the dust that may offend the masters." However, the government built the Alçamora Infantry Barracks in Alcoy for the military force to control future riots.



In 1887, fourteen years after the events, the umpteenth judge in charge of the case acquitted the last defendants. There was no evidence to continue the farce. The last six unfortunates were coming out of prison. Others had not been so lucky, at least twenty had died behind bars.





The incipient anarchist labour movement had suffered a severe blow and not only in Alcoy. The AIT was outlawed in 1874, internationalists were persecuted and imprisoned, and 2,000 were deported to the Philippines and the Mariana Islands, where many died of starvation and disease. But as they said, "If they were not allowed to gather in the sunlight, they would continue to do so in the shade." The Spanish Federation would live in hiding, but would be reborn more strongly years later. Sixty thousand members throughout Spain, and a good handful in our city, which would once again be the capital of internationalism. The story of the class struggle continues ...



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