

Distance, control and punishment

The importance of dispersion in the prison system of the Spanish State

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During the almost three years that we have been confined by different prisons of the Spanish State, there is one aspect that particularly calls attention to its determinant importance in prison life; we refer to the dispersion.

The dispersion corresponds to a policy of Penitentiary Institutions implemented by the socialist government in the mid-1980s, which consists of transferring determined prisoners to distant prisons many kilometers from their place of residence. In many cases these transfers are incessant and see the prisoners forced to go through various prisons in a short period of time preventing them from establishing themselves and establishing lasting relationships with others.

The purpose of this policy was to curb the riots and protests inside the prisons that had been occurring during those years by drastically removing prisoners considered hostile to the prison system. On the other hand the dispersion was applied to all political prisoners as an exceptional measure to aggravate their punishment, the transfers also affected their close ones who were forced to travel hundreds of miles to be able to visit a family member or friend in prison. Therefore, from its inception, the policy of dispersion affected both social and political prisoners, and continues to do so, contrary to many who think and express that it is only applied to 'políticos'.

The difference lies, as we stated, in that for the latter it is an exceptional measure that affects everyone only for the reason that led to their imprisonment, while it is applied against social prisoners for certain behaviors within the prison that are seen as disturbing to the 'penitentiary order'. It is important to note that the difference between social and political prisoners is not used by us, however it is

the making of this categorization that enables the structuring and functioning of the measure in question.

The dispersion is still as prevalent as it was in its beginnings. No doubt it has fulfilled some of its purpose to pacify the prisons of the Spanish State where the demands and protests are almost nonexistent, and where more than ever there is a close collaboration between prisoner and jailer. We can see how much prison is a reflection of society. The dispersion has so affected the prison life that the threat of prison transfer is permanently in the minds of each inmate. It is a constant threat that implicitly regulates and controls the behavior of the people here insofar as any behavior that disrupts the 'order' and manifests some intent is punishable by transfer. Thus, any breakthrough initiative is canceled by this tool of control, the transferred prisoner must begin to develop new relationships and complicities only to be warned by the jailers that they will again be subject to transfer. Today there are prisoners who, because of the provision of penitentiary institutions, do not stay for more than a year in each prison, mainly because of their history of conflict.

Although in its beginnings the dispersion was applied to the social prisoners who participated in and encouraged the protests and the rupture inside the prisons, nowadays since these initiatives are practically non-existent, the penitentiary system has needed to adjust to the current situation and has begun to apply this measure to any more or less repetitive behavior that breaks the internal norms, no matter how minimal. Sanctions that were previously mild are currently cause for possible conduct, for example if you are caught with a mobile phone or you get involved in a minor fight.

Related to the above, one aspect that has gained much relevance is everything that involves the prisoner's conduct, transforming into a true institution within the prison system. In the Spanish State there are about 80 prisons, some of which are women only, many for men only, others for mixed quarters and also special sections for mothers. Therefore the options to carry out the transfers are varied and anecdotally in this they do not skimp on the expenses; if they are looking for a good punishment they do not mind giving you a good tour to the other end of the peninsula. The security guards in charge of transfers are the civil guards, they are responsible for transfers from prison to prison. Perhaps one who reads this will wonder what a transfer is like? They may vary by geographical location but more or less follow the same protocols. We can assure you that any prisoner who been through this experience would agree with us that it is disgusting. Usually they will take you from one prison to another at any given time and sometimes you do not know where they are taking you until you arrive, which causes much anxiety. Until arriving at your destination it is possible that you stop in several jails for a couple of hours or several days, this is what is called 'transit'. When you are in this situation you cannot have more than what is strictly necessary (according

to the whims of each prison). The means of transport for the transfer are called 'kangaroos', vans of the civil guard with interior compartments that have space for two prisoners in each one. These compartments are very asphyxiating, not enough space to move, not even to stand upright and where you can spend up to six or seven hours in a row. It is important to note that there are prisons destined to be transfer centers that are equipped with all the necessary infrastructure for this; large income modules for those who are in transit, special parking bays for the vans of the civil guards, among other things. The prison of Valdemoro in Madrid fulfills this function for prisoners and the prison of Soto del Real is where the majority of prisoners pass that are being transferred from the north to the south or vice versa.

All of this points to the importance of the transfer to the prison institution and shows that the dispersion is a fundamental tool with a clear and vengeful intention towards all prisoners and prisoners who are a nuisance since it attacks them where it has the most effect: Taken away from your loved ones, be they comrades, family or friends.

In this sense, an aspect of the dispersion that was applied to us was to keep us separated, we were kept in seclusion for the first eighteen months without seeing each other and there is nothing to prevent this situation from happening again. Penitentiary institutions are supposed to provide access for regrouping as soon as prisoners can 'prove' that there is a close and stable relationship, although this is often not the case, many prisoners will spend months or even years without seeing their close comrades or incarcerated relatives.

Being behind bars the closeness with your loved ones is essential, it is very important on an emotional level and also in some way, to break with the isolation that allows us in our case to maintain the political connection to the street. However this becomes much more difficult when it is not only bars and high walls that separate you but also hundreds of kilometers.

As anarchists we do not want more prisons, even if they are 'better', but we believe that we need to discuss how to deal with and fight against dispersion considering that it represents the fundamental pillar of prison control.

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