

# **The Brief Summer of Anarchy: The Life and Death of Durruti - Hans Magnus Enzensberger**

## ***Introduction: Funerals***

The coffin arrived in Barcelona late at night. It rained all day, and the cars in the funeral cortege were covered with mud. The black and red flag that draped the hearse was also filthy. At the anarchist headquarters, which had been the headquarters of the employers association before the war,<sup>1</sup> preparations had already been underway since the previous day. The lobby had been transformed into a funeral chapel. Somehow, as if by magic, everything was finished in time. The decorations were simple, without pomp or artistic flourishes. Red and black tapestries covered the walls, a red and black canopy surmounted the coffin, and there were a few candelabras, and some flowers and wreaths: that was all. Over the side doors, through which the crowd of mourners would have to pass, signs were inscribed, in accordance with Spanish tradition, in bold letters reading: “Durruti bids you to enter”; and “Durruti bids you to leave”.

A handful of militiamen guarded the coffin, with their rifles at rest. Then, the men who had accompanied the coffin from Madrid carried it to the anarchist headquarters. No one even thought about the fact that they would have to enlarge the doorway of the building for the coffin to be brought into the lobby, and the coffin-bearers had to squeeze through a narrow side door. It took some effort to clear a path through the crowd that had gathered in front of the building. From the galleries of the lobby, which had not been decorated, a few sightseers watched. The environment was charged with expectation, as in a theater. People were smoking. Some removed their hats, while others never even thought of doing so. It was very loud. Some militiamen who had come from the front were greeted by their friends. The guards tried to prevent the crowd from pressing too close. This also caused a lot of noise. The man in charge of the ceremony issued some directives. Someone tripped and fell on a wreath. One of the coffin-bearers carefully lit his pipe just as the lid of the coffin was being raised. Durruti's head lay on a white silk lining, under glass. His head was wrapped in a white scarf that made him look like an Arab.

It was a scene that was tragic and grotesque at the same time. It was like a Goya engraving. I am describing it just as I saw it, so that the reader may get a glimpse of what inspires the Spanish people. In Spain, death is like an old friend, a comrade, a worker that one knows in the fields or in the factory. No one is surprised when he comes calling. You want friends, but you don't go around begging for them. You let them come and go as they please. Perhaps it is the age-

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<sup>1</sup> Known as the Fomento Nacional del Trabajo (Spanish translator's note).

old fatalism of the Moors that resurfaces here, after having been cloaked for so many years under the rituals of the Catholic Church.

Durruti was a friend. He had many friends. He had become the idol of an entire people. He was very much beloved, from the heart. Everyone that was there at that time lamented his loss and offered him their respects. Apart from his French girlfriend, however, only one person shed tears: an old charwoman who had worked in the building when it was still occupied by industrialists, and she probably never knew Durruti personally. The others felt his death as a terrible and irreparable loss, but expressed their feelings modestly. Observing a moment of silence, doffing their hats or putting out their cigarettes were just as foreign to them as making the sign of the cross or sprinkling holy water.

Thousands of people paid their respects to Durruti all through the night. They waited in the rain, in long lines. Their friend and leader was dead. I would not hazard a guess as to how many people in this crowd were there because of grief and how many out of curiosity. But I am certain that one feeling was completely alien to all of them: respect for death.

The burial was scheduled to take place the next morning. From the very beginning it was evident that the bullet that killed Durruti had also grazed Barcelona's heart. It was estimated that one out of every four of the city's inhabitants attended his funeral procession, not to mention the masses of people who lined the streets, watched from windows and rooftops and even from the trees of the Ramblas. All the parties and trade union organizations, without exception, summoned their members. Alongside the flags of the anarchists, the colors of all the anti-fascist groups of Spain fluttered over the crowd. It was a magnificent, impressive and bizarre spectacle; no one drilled, organized or ordered these masses of people. Nothing went as planned. An unprecedented chaos reigned.

The funeral ceremony was supposed to start at 10:00 a.m. By 9:00 a.m. it was impossible to get anywhere near the headquarters of the anarchist Regional Committee. No one had thought of blocking off traffic on the route that the funeral procession would take. The workers from all the factories of Barcelona had gathered in groups, the groups converged and got in each other's way. The mounted police and the motorized escort that were supposed to lead the funeral procession were brought to a total standstill, pressed against a vast multitude of workers. On every nearby street one could see cars covered with wreaths, immobilized and incapable of moving either forward or backward. A herculean effort was required to clear the road so that the Cabinet Ministers could get near the coffin.

At 10:30 a.m., Durruti's coffin, draped in a red and black flag, was carried from the anarchist headquarters on the shoulders of militiamen from his column. The masses gave their final salute with their fists in the air. The anarchist hymn, "Sons of the People", was performed. A great wave of emotion swept over the crowd.

For some reason, or by mistake, two bands were invited to play at the ceremony; one played at a very low volume, the other very loudly. They were unable to keep the same measure. Motorcycles were roaring, car horns were sounding, the officers of the various militia units were blowing their whistles, and the coffin-bearers were brought to a halt. It was not possible to organize the free passage of a funeral cortege through this chaos. Both bands played the same song over and over again. And they had long since ceased to keep even near the same measure. You could hear the tones, but the melody was unrecognizable. Everyone's fists were still raised in the air. The music finally stopped, the fists descended and then you could hear the noise of the crowd amidst which Durruti reposed on the shoulders of his comrades.

It took at least half an hour for the street to be cleared enough to allow the passage of the funeral cortege. It took several hours for the coffin to reach the Plaza Cataluña, which was only a few hundred meters away. The mounted police cleared the way, two abreast. The musicians, who had been scattered among the crowd, tried to reunite. The drivers that had become trapped in traffic were slowly backing up to find a way out. The drivers of the cars transporting the wreaths took a detour through various side streets to rejoin the procession at other points along its route. Everyone was shouting at the top of their lungs.

No, these were not the funeral rites of a king; this was a burial ceremony organized by the people. No one gave any orders, everything happened spontaneously. The unpredictable reigned. It was simply an anarchist funeral, and this was its greatness. It had its bizarre aspects, but at no time did it lose its strange and somber majesty.

The funeral orations were delivered from the foot of the Column of Columbus, not far from where Durruti's best friend had fought and died.

García Oliver, the last survivor of the *compañeros*, spoke as a friend, as an anarchist, and as the Minister of Justice of the Spanish Republic.

Then the Russian consul spoke. He concluded his speech, which he had delivered in Catalan, with the slogan, "Death to Fascism!" The President of the Generalitat, Companys, had the final word: "Comrades!", he began, and he ended with the slogan, "Onward!"

The funeral procession was supposed to disperse after the speeches. Only a few of Durruti's friends were supposed to accompany the hearse to the cemetery. This plan had to be scrapped, however. The masses did not budge; they had already occupied the cemetery, and the road to the cemetery was blocked. It was hard to make headway, and, to top it all off, thousands of wreaths could not be delivered to the cemetery lawn.

Night fell. It began to rain again. Soon the rain turned into a downpour and the cemetery became a swamp where the wreaths foundered. At the very last moment they decided to postpone the burial. The coffin-bearers turned back from the gravesite and carried their burden back to the funeral chapel.

Durruti was buried the next day.

[H. E. Kaminski]

### ***First Commentary: History as collective fiction***

“No writer has ever attempted to write the history of his life; it would seem too much like an adventure novel.” This is the conclusion that Ilya Ehrenburg had already arrived at in 1931 as a result of his personal acquaintance with Buenaventura Durruti, and it would not be long before he would himself attempt to write such a history. His view of Durruti may be summarized in a few words: “This metal worker had fought for the revolution ever since he was very young. He fought on barricades, robbed banks, threw bombs and kidnapped judges. He had been condemned to death three times: in Spain, in Chile and in Argentina. He had spent time in countless prisons and had been deported from eight countries.” And so on. This repudiation of writing an “adventure novel” reveals the old fear of the narrator that he might be thought to be a liar, and this precisely when he has refrained from invention and instead adheres strictly to “reality”. On this occasion, at least, he wants to be believed. Then he has to face the mistrust that his own work has aroused against him: “Never believe anyone who has lied once.” Thus, to write the history of Durruti, the writer must repudiate his status as a narrator. In short, his refusal to write such fiction also conceals the complaint that not much is known about Durruti, and the understanding that the only trace that remains of the forbidden novel is the vague echo of conversations in a Spanish café.

It was not possible, however, to completely silence or sweep under the rug everything that he knew. The accounts that he had heard struck a deep chord in him and turned him into a mere recorder. But where did he get his information? Ehrenburg does not cite his sources. His few sentences capture a collective product, a confluence of voices. Anonymous and unknown persons speak: a collective voice. The anonymous and contradictory declarations merge and acquire a new character: from these narratives, history arises. This is how history has been transmitted since the most remote past: as legend, epic or collective novel.

History as a scientific discipline was born precisely when we freed ourselves from oral tradition, when “documents” appeared: diplomatic notes, treaties, government records and official files. But no one remembers the history of the historians. The aversion we feel towards it is irresistible, and it seems insurmountable. Everyone has felt it while sitting in a classroom. For the people,

history is and will always be a mass of facts. History is something that one remembers and can recall again and again: the repetition of a narrative. In these circumstances oral tradition is not averse to legend, triviality or error, so that they all go hand in hand to create a concrete representation of the struggles of the past. Hence the notorious powerlessness of science when faced with compilations of “hallelujahs”<sup>2</sup> and the repetition of rumors. “I cannot and will not recant anything.”<sup>3</sup> No proofs offered in rebuttal can erase the effect of these words, even if it is someday proven that they were never actually spoken. The Paris Commune and the assault on the Winter Palace, Danton at the guillotine, and Trotsky in Mexico: the popular imagination has participated more than any scientific discipline in the elaboration of these images.

When it comes right down to it, the Chinese Long March is for us what we are told about the Chinese Long March. History is an invention, and reality supplies the elements of this invention. It is not, however, an arbitrary invention. The interest that it arouses is based on the interests of those who tell it; those who listen can recognize and more precisely define their own interests and that of their enemies. We are deeply indebted to scientific research that is assumed to be disinterested; for us, however, it is still an artificial product, a Schlemihl.<sup>4</sup> Only the real existence of history casts a shadow, and it casts it in the form of a collective fiction.

This is therefore how Durruti’s adventure novel must be understood: not as a biography that is the product of a compilation of facts, much less as a scientific study. Its narrative scope surpasses the mere depiction of a personality. It also embraces the context and makes contact with concrete situations, without which this personality would be impossible to imagine. He is defined by way of his struggle. This is how his social “aura” is manifested, in which, furthermore, all his actions, declarations and speeches participate. All the reports we possess about Durruti are bathed in this peculiar light; it is now impossible to distinguish between the effects that can be attributed strictly to his aura and those that his chroniclers attribute to him in their accounts. On the other hand, the narrative method allows for precision. This method is derived from the person that is described, and the problems that it poses can be characterized in the following manner: it involves reconstructing the existence of a man who died thirty-five years ago, a man whose entire estate at the time of his death consisted of “an extra pair of underwear, two pistols, a pair of binoculars and a pair of sunglasses”. That

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<sup>2</sup> Stories accompanied by abundant color illustrations, with brief texts rewritten in the form of poems, for the purpose of disseminating religious and political ideas, which first appeared in Europe during the 13<sup>th</sup> century (a kind of medieval comic book).

<sup>3</sup> The words allegedly spoken by Luther when he refused to recant his teachings at the Diet of Worms in 1521.

<sup>4</sup> “Peter Schlemihl, or The Man Who Lost His Shadow”: a story by Adalbert von Chamisso.

was the full inventory of his possessions when he died. His complete works do not exist. His declarations in writing are quite scarce. His actions completely absorbed his life. They were political actions, and they were largely illegal. Our task is to rediscover his tracks, which are not so clear after the passage of a generation. These tracks have been obliterated, erased and almost forgotten. They are nonetheless very numerous, if not chaotic. The fragments transmitted in writing are buried in archives and libraries. But there is also an oral tradition. Many of the people who knew him are still alive; we need to find them and ask them questions. The material that can be gathered in this way is of a bewildering variety: form and tone, gestures and reliability, vary from one to the next. The novel as collage incorporates reports and speeches, interviews and proclamations, it is composed of letters, travel narratives, anecdotes, pamphlets, polemics, newspaper articles, autobiographical material, posters and propaganda leaflets. The discordant nature of the forms reveals a rift that extends throughout these materials. Such an effort of reconstruction is similar to a jigsaw puzzle whose pieces do not fit without alteration. It is precisely there, in the cracks in the picture, where we have to stop. Perhaps that is where the truth of which our sources speak resides, without their knowing it. The easiest thing to do would be to play dumb and say that every sentence of this book is a document. But this would be a hollow claim. We need only pause for a minute to examine them, and the authority that such “documents” seem to possess runs through our fingers like sand. Who is speaking? With what intentions? In whose interests? What is he or she trying to hide? What are they trying to make us believe? Just how reliable are they? How many years have passed between the event and its telling? What has the narrator forgotten? And how does he know what he is telling us? Is he telling us what he saw with his own eyes, or what he thinks he saw? Or is he telling us what someone else told him? These questions lead us far, very far, afield, since answering them compels us, with regard to each source, to interrogate a hundred other sources; every stage of this examination leads us progressively further away from the reconstruction, and brings us closer to the destruction, of history. In the end we shall have liquidated what we were trying to find. No, the questionable nature of our sources is a problem of principle, and their differences cannot be resolved with a critique of these sources. Even the “lie” contains an element of truth, and the truth of incontestable facts, assuming that such a truth is obtainable, does not help us at all. The ambiguous iridescence of oral tradition, its collective shimmering light, emanates from the dialectical movement of history. It is the esthetic expression of its antagonisms.

Anyone who keeps these admonitions in mind will not commit many mistakes in his mission of reconstruction. He is merely the latest (or rather, as we have seen, the next to latest) in a long series of accounts of something that might have occurred in one way or another, of something that over the course of its narration has become history. Like all who preceded him in this task, he, too, wants to put the spotlight on his own interest. He is not impartial, and intervenes in the narrative. His first intervention consists in choosing this, rather than any other, history. The interest that he displays in this quest does not aspire to be exhaustive.

The narrator has omitted, translated, abridged and rearranged. Deliberately or by accident he has introduced his own fiction into the set of fictions, except that his fiction is right only to the extent that it tolerates the rights of the others. The reconstructor owes his authority to ignorance. He did not know Durruti, he did not live during that period, he does not know more than the others. Nor does he have the last word, because the next person who will transform his history, whether by rejecting it or accepting it, forgetting it or remembering it, ignoring it or repeating it, this next person, the last for the moment, is the reader. His freedom is also limited, since what he finds is not mere “materials!”, randomly scattered around him, with absolute objectivity, *untouched by human hands*.<sup>5</sup> To the contrary. Everything that is written here has passed through many hands and displays the wear and tear of its use. On more than one occasion this novel was also written by people who are not mentioned at the end of the book. The reader is one of them, the last who recounts this history. “No writer would have proposed to write it.”

## ***Stray bullets***

### **Two sides of a city**

León, the administrative center of the bishopric and capital of the province of the same name, is located on a plateau 851 meters above sea level, at the confluence of the Torío and Bernesga Rivers, which merge to form the León River. Population: 15,580 (1900). The Madrid-Oviedo Express train passes through the city. The old district, with its cathedral and other medieval buildings, is surrounded by the city walls; the city has not lost its personality, despite the architectural renovations undertaken during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During that same period, beyond the city walls, new suburbs were built to house the industrial workers attracted by the construction of a foundry, a factory producing railroad equipment, a chemical plant and a tannery. León is therefore composed of two cities: one old and clerical, the other new and industrial.

[Encyclopedia Britannica]

The neighborhood of Santa Ana, where Durruti was born, is composed of small, old houses. It is a proletarian neighborhood. His father was a railroad worker, and almost all his brothers worked for the railroad, just like Durruti.

The social environment of the city was profoundly influenced by the presence of the bishop and his retinue. The latter suppressed every idea and activity that displeased the clergy. In short, León was a bastion of the old clerical and monarchist Spain. There were almost no industries. The residents all knew one another. A strong garrison, several brigades of the Civil Guard, numerous convents and monasteries, a cathedral, an episcopal palace, a teachers college, a veterinary school and a powerful petit bourgeoisie that sought to preserve law and

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<sup>5</sup> In English in the original (Spanish translator's note).

order: that was all. This environment did not tolerate any dissident or contradictory opinions. The only solution was to emigrate. Someone like Durruti never would have found his place in León, at least in the León of our youth, which considered the few lukewarm and inoffensive republicans of that time to be extremists and scandalous elements.

[Diego Abad de Santillán]

## **A sister's recollections**

Buenaventura Durruti was born in León on July 14, 1896.

Siblings: Eight—seven brothers and one sister. In 1969 two of his brothers and his sister were still alive.

Profession: Mechanic.

Personal background: At the age of five he was enrolled in the elementary school of León. He was always a good student. Intelligent, a little mischievous, but with a good character. He attended the Sunday School of the Capuchin Fathers of León, where he won various awards and certificates that my mother carefully preserved.

Between 1910 and 1911 he worked at the workshop of Melchor Martínez, for 25 céntimos a day. He told me that he was not satisfied because the pay seemed too low to him. My mother did not agree. She thought the pay was good enough and told him that he could learn a useful trade that would allow him to live on his own. At that time he was attending night school. He spent almost all his free time studying and reading. Then he got a job at Antonio Miaja's foundry. He worked there until 1916. Then he took a practical examination at the railroad company in northern Spain and was hired as a mechanic in 1916. He was fired after the strike of 1917. He left Spain and traveled to Paris, where he remained until 1920. Then he returned to Spain and worked at the coal washing plant of the mine at Matallana de Torío, in the province of León. Once he reached military age, he returned to Paris. He was registered as a draft evader and upon returning to Spain he was arrested in San Sebastián. Since he was big and strong, he was detailed to a heavy artillery unit but due to a hernia he was declared unfit for military service and discharged.

Observations: his early years were full of hardship and suffering, as were his later years. His relations with his family were excellent. For example, he told his brothers that they should look for decent jobs and not get into so much trouble, so that their mother could get some peace. He was always very devoted to his mother, and his devotion was a combination of great respect and deep veneration. He never spoke about his ideology at home. My mother and I always enjoyed the



sympathy and the consideration of the residents of León, without distinction of social classes, even after the Civil War.

My father was a railroad worker. He had a job at the repair depot in León. He died in 1931. My mother died in 1968, at the age of 91. My father was also very highly respected in the city. Under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera he served on the city council when Raimundo del Río was mayor.

[Rosa Durruti]

### **A friend from his school days**

Durruti and I were friends since we were little kids, we were comrades and we were brothers, you understand? We were hardly off the tit, long before we went to school. We were neighbors. My mother died very young, back when I was seven or eight years old, and Durruti's mother let me stay at her house; I felt at home there.

I think that she called him Pepe, because to us he was always Pepe, just Pepe, Pepe Durruti; she had to tell him: Florentino doesn't have a mother now. Maybe that's why he liked me so much, more than a mere playmate, more like a brother, I was like a brother to him.

At school Durruti worked very hard, he studied a lot. One day the teacher called his mother and told her, "Your son is not learning anything new here, he is wasting his time. If I may be so bold, I think he has the qualities to study other things, he is very intelligent."

But he didn't study; he preferred to work. Besides, you know what kind of kids we were? We were loose cannons. The neighbors said that we were incorrigible, that there was no hope for us, that we would come to a bad end, that we were degenerates, gangsters, things like that.

Why did they say such things? Because we used to go to the orchards, especially Durruti, who always wanted to share everything. Until one day the owner of a large farm, right here in León, caught us and said, "Listen! You [he addressed us with the informal second person pronoun], you, get out—get out of here!" And Durruti said to me, "Get a load of this old codger". And the landowner then said, "Didn't you hear me?" And Durruti answered him, "Yes, we heard you". And the landowner said, "Scram, get lost!" And Durruti responded, "I'm in no hurry". And the landowner said, "This is my farm!" And Durruti asked him, "And where is my farm? Why don't I have one?" "I'm going to give you both a good thrashing!" "Go ahead and try and you will see what happens to you". So we picked the fruit, Durruti, a couple of our friends and I. But we almost always gave it all away, we liked to do that. Durruti couldn't act in any other way, he always gave everything away.

Durruti never went to high school. What could he do? Back then we were ordered to work at the age of fourteen to support our families with a little money.

His father worked on the Northern Railroad, and he was therefore able to get his son a job on the railroad when the boy was sixteen or seventeen years old. Back then, that was a cushy job. Because it meant a guaranteed full day's work, a steady job, working as a mechanic.

Before he was hired to work on the railroad, he had a few other jobs in workshops in León: when he was fourteen he worked in Miaja's workshop, where he first got to know Asturian workers. They talked about social questions, too, and Durruti listened to them attentively, because he knew about injustice. These workers came from far away, from Asturias, and when they wanted to have dinner again with their wives and children, at home, they had to walk home on weekends.

[Florentino Monroy]

## **The general strike**

Then came the big general strike of 1917. The strike spread all over Spain. At the time we belonged to the socialist trade union of León; there was no other trade union there at the time.

We were the first ones to try to generate enthusiasm to prevent our local trade union from getting bogged down. They always said that the only solution was voting. No, man, we said, we have to look for other ways.

When the strike broke out in 1917 we were sixteen years old. Was it violent? It sure was! We provoked the violence. The government threw the army at us. The strike was declared one evening, and began at midnight. The Civil Guard was deployed everywhere to intimidate the workers who had voted to go on strike. But we had already determined to prevent the strike from being defeated. We had some weapons, nothing really major, but enough to give a scare to the soldiers. They had occupied the train station. This station was on the other side of the river across from the city. It was at night, we saw the reflections gleaming on the equipment of the mounted soldiers, and then we opened fire: Bang! Bing-bang! Bing-bang! It was almost a little war, we were having so much fun.

Soon we had the Civil Guard coming up behind us. There was nothing we could do with our little revolvers. In downtown León we found some high voltage towers, very tall and well-situated, with trees all around them. We climbed the towers with our hats and pockets full of rocks, we were very careful to hide ourselves, and from the towers we threw rocks at the police. The Civil Guards were mad with rage, they didn't know where the rocks were coming from. When

the rocks hit the paving stones, sparks burst in the darkness. Rocks from all sides. The mounted police charged the people. They never caught us.

It was no big deal, but it was good, because the people understood that with peaceful struggle nothing can be achieved, and little by little a revolutionary state of mind was created, similar to the state of mind that was later spread throughout the country by the CNT.

Of course, even back then it was Durruti who led these battles.

[Florentino Monroy]

## **The trade unions**

Because of the general strike of 1917 the railroad workers trade union expelled Durruti and several of his comrades. This trade union was an institution controlled and manipulated by the social democrats. Durruti and his comrades had taken the strike too seriously, without understanding, in their youthful enthusiasm, that the whole strike movement was nothing but a trick played by the big shots. Largo Caballero, Besteiro, Anguiano and Saborit, the social democratic leaders, had broken the strike with the simple proposition of handing over the workers whose actions had briefly escaped their control, bound hand and foot, to the railroad corporations.

This cunning maneuver, and the comedy of their police prosecution, not only earned the trade union bureaucrats a few seats in parliament, but also made it possible to expel the anarchists from the railroad workers trade union. During the course of an assembly the anarchists had attacked the reformist tactics and the dominant influence of the social democratic party and fought for an openly revolutionary orientation for the trade union.

Durruti was one of the most rebellious and militant of all the anarchist dissidents. He and his comrades refused to capitulate to the employers; to the contrary, his group, along with many others, responded with sabotage on a grand scale. They burned locomotives, tore up rails, set fire to fuel tanks and storage depots, and so on. This tactic was very successful, and many workers adopted it. But when the sabotage began to spread, the socialists ended the strike.

Many trade union organizers, including Durruti, lost their jobs. The anarchist trade union, the National Confederation of Labor, began to grow. A large part of the Spanish proletariat sympathized with it and joined it. Durruti went to the Asturian mining district, a stronghold of the social democrats, and there he waged a campaign against the reformist and neutral trade union leaders, and in favor of the anarchist line of the CNT. They blacklisted him, he was fired from his job once again, and he had to emigrate to France.

[V. de Rol]<sup>6</sup>

I introduced Ascaso and Durruti to the principles of anarchism. The first time I saw Durruti he seemed very timid to me. He still did not have his own ideas. He came from León, and showed up at our trade union hall in San Sebastián. He wanted to work as a mechanic, and we sent him to a factory. A few days later he returned, complaining that the trade union at the factory did not have the guts to fight the employer. He wanted to take it over, if the trade union would allow him to do so. The trade union did not agree, due to its weakness it was unable to do anything yet, and it warned Durruti not to sacrifice himself. This is why Durruti quit that job. It was in San Sebastián that he began to assimilate our ideas, in a rather intuitive way. That is how Durruti got his start....

[Manuel Buenacasa]

### **His first period in exile**

Then he went to Paris and worked as a typesetter. I think he worked for a company called Berliet or Breguet. He didn't go alone, he was with some of his comrades from León, including one that we called "Everything's OK", who was later killed by the fascists.

They learned a lot in France. When they returned to Spain they knew the theory of the class struggle to a "t". Durruti liked that, it was something that fit perfectly with his temperament and his way of viewing the future. Durruti was a disciple of the French anarchosyndicalists, and he learned from them in Paris, fighting at their side.

[Florentino Monroy]

In Paris he worked for three years as a mechanic. His Spanish friends sent him letters keeping him informed of the political and social situation in our country. They told him that the Spanish anarchist movement was getting bigger every day; the CNT already had a million workers in its trade unions; the republicans were ready to revolt; the fall of the monarchy was thought to be imminent; the government and the bourgeoisie were organizing gangs of thugs, the so-called "pistoleros", to eliminate the most well-known anarchist, CNT and left republican militants. As a revolutionary, Durruti found this news very disturbing. He secretly crossed the French border and returned to Spain. In San Sebastián he joined the militant anarchist groups that were conspiring against the monarchy. There he met Francisco Ascaso, Gregorio Jover and García Oliver.

[Alejandro Gilabert]

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<sup>6</sup> Pseudonym of Rudolf Rocker. See bibliography below, entry for "V. de Rol"  
[American translator's note].

## **Mr. Davis with the White Carnation**

I will never forget when Durruti came to Matallana del Torío; it must have been in 1920. This town is located in the northern part of the province of León. Durruti was working there as a mechanic for the Anglo-Spanish Mining Company. In this mining town in the mountains there was an organized workers movement, of a socialist tendency. When he arrived a labor conflict had just broken out, and he was elected to the strike committee.

I went to the town with my father, who was an anarchist and who had agitated among the workers. Durruti climbed onto a wall and addressed the crowd. The workers decided to go to the manager's office of the mining company. When the delegates arrived at the manager's office, the manager, an English engineer named Davis, I think, refused to receive the strike delegation.

Mr. Davis was a frail man, always very elegantly dressed, with a white carnation in his buttonhole, always somewhat sickly-looking, I think he had tuberculosis. He had heard about Durruti, maybe he was afraid; in any case it is a fact that he announced, through his security guard in the building lobby, that he would speak to no one.

Durruti approached the security guard, who was armed, and said to him, "Give my regards to Mr. Davis, and tell him that if he does not want to leave by way of the door I will find him and throw him out the window onto the street, down here where we are".

A few minutes later Mr. Davis appeared at the door and politely welcomed the strike committee to join him in his office. There was a long discussion. The demands of the workers were satisfied, and the strike ended in victory. A few days later the police came with a warrant for Durruti's arrest. But he had already disappeared.

[Julio Patán]

## **Dynamite**

His restless and curious temperament and his desire for battle brought him to La Coruña, Bilbao, Santander and many other cities in the north. Upon his return from one of these trips, Durruti noticed an unusual commotion in front of the modest boarding house where he lived. The police had surrounded the house, and Durruti kept his distance. His precautions were justified, because at that time the notorious "law of flight" [*ley de fuga*] was beginning to be implemented, which cost so many workers their lives.

In San Sebastián preparations were underway for the grand opening of a luxurious nightclub called Gran Kursaal, which was to serve as a cabaret and casino. The royal family and the cream of the Spanish aristocracy, which often spent its summers in San Sebastián, were scheduled to participate in the festivities. The police discovered a tunnel under the basement of the building. This tunnel was immediately blamed on the anarchists, who, presumably, had planned to blow the Kursaal sky-high during its grand opening festivities, along with the king, his government ministers and other big fish. The police never had any problem with accusing their victims of alleged crimes. This time they chose Durruti and two of his friends as their scapegoats, who had worked as carpenters on the construction site of the casino. The police accused them of having dug the tunnel at night. Durruti, as a mechanic, was supposed to have been responsible for planting the bomb and was accused of having obtained a large amount of dynamite, allegedly from the mines of Asturias and Bilbao, where he had a lot of friends.

In Barcelona, the police assassinated the two carpenters, two comrades named Gregario Suberviela and Teodoro Arrarte. Durruti managed to escape to France. The Spanish authorities requested that France extradite him if he could be located. Thus began the first campaign of slander against him. They wanted to depict him as a common criminal. This campaign intensified as he continued to pursue his revolutionary activities, despite the wave of persecution.

[V. de Rol]

Before he was an anarchist, Durruti was already a rebel. Buenacasa, the leader of the movement in Catalonia, told him that Barcelona was the only place in Spain where he could live, because “only in Barcelona is there a proletarian consciousness”. So the bold young man from León, who had provoked armed conflicts on his own account in Gijón and Rentería and who called his workmates “bootlickers” because they accepted the working conditions of the time, went to Barcelona.

[Manuel Buenacasa, *Crónica*]

## ***Second Commentary: The origins of Spanish anarchism***

One day in October, 1868, Giuseppe Fanelli, an Italian, arrived in Madrid. He was about forty years old, and he had a thick black beard and glittering eyes. He was tall, and radiated a serene resolve. As soon as he arrived in the city, he asked for directions to an address that he had written in his notebook: a café, where he found a small group of workers. Most of them were typographers who worked for small print shops in the Spanish capital.

“His voice had a metallic tone, and his expression was perfectly adapted to what he said. When he spoke of tyrants and exploiters his tone was wrathful and threatening; when he referred to the sufferings of the oppressed his tone alternated

between sadness, pain and inspiration. What was really extraordinary about the affair was that he could not speak Spanish; he spoke in French, a language that a few of us could only barely understand, or in Italian, in which case, as far as possible, we tried to understand what he was saying by relying on the cognate words that language had in common with ours. His ideas seemed so convincing to us, however, that when he stopped speaking we felt overwhelmed with enthusiasm.” Thirty-two years after the Italian’s visit, the man who related the above account, Anselmo Lorenzo, one of the first Spanish anarchists, could still quote Fanelli, the “apostle”, word-for-word, and he could still recall the thrill he felt when Fanelli exclaimed, “*Cosa orribile! Spaventosa!*”

“For three or four nights Fanelli expounded his doctrine. He spoke to us while we were walking through the city, and in cafés. He also gave us the statutes of the International, the program of the Alliance for Social Democracy and a few copies of *La Campana*, with articles and transcripts of speeches by Bakunin. Before leaving, he asked us if we could have a group photograph taken, with him in the middle.”

No one he spoke to in Spain knew anything about the organization that had dispatched Fanelli as an emissary to Spain: the International Workingmen’s Association (IWA). Fanelli was a follower of Bakunin, and was a member of the “anti-authoritarian” wing of the First International, and the message that he brought to Spain was the message of anarchism.

The impact of this revolutionary doctrine was immediate and sensational; it spread among the rural and industrial workers of western and southern Spain like wildfire. At its very first congress in 1870 the Spanish workers movement declared its support for Bakunin and its opposition to Marx, and two years later the Anarchist Federation held a convention in Cordoba attended by delegates representing 45,000 active members. The peasant insurrections of 1873, which spread throughout all of Andalusia, were undoubtedly led by anarchists. Spain is the only country in the world where Bakunin’s revolutionary theories were transformed into a real power. The anarchists maintained their control of the Spanish workers movement until 1936; not only were they the most numerous, but they were also the most militant.

These exceptional historical circumstances have given rise to a long series of attempts to explain them—none of which, in isolation, is really successful, and up until now there has been no coherent explanation elaborated in accordance with the principles of political economy. In any event, it is possible to identify the conditions amidst which Spanish anarchism developed; these conditions at least allow us to understand a process that has up until now eluded a purely economic explanation.

Until the First World War, Spain was an exclusively agricultural country, except for a few regions. Class polarization was so extreme and so obvious in Spanish

society that one may speak of two nations, separated from each other by an abyss. The political class that controlled the state apparatus, in close alliance with the army and the Church, was composed for the most part of big rural landowners [*latifundistas*]. It was a totally unproductive and corrupt class, incapable of measuring up to the progressive transitional role that had been performed by the bourgeoisie in other western European countries. Its parasitic existence was limited exclusively to collecting rent; it was not interested in developing productivity by means of capitalist expansion. As a result, the petit bourgeoisie was extremely underdeveloped. With the exception of some poor artisans and small shopkeepers, the bulk of this class was composed of “state drones” [“*timoratos estatales*” in the Spanish translation], as Marx called them,<sup>7</sup> a superfluous and low-paid bureaucracy, which, while it was not entirely exempt from working, played more of a repressive than an administrative role.

The real Spain, the immense majority of the working people, lived in rural areas, and it was in these areas that the most important class struggles were fought on Spanish soil during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Spain’s development was strictly dependent on its agrarian structure. The latter still preserved medieval relations of property and production, as in the provinces of the North, where entire towns of small-scale and middle level peasants still retained their communal lands of woods and pastures, where the soil was fertile and well-irrigated, and where primitive social formations survived in proud isolation, almost completely outside of the money economy.

In other regions, however, especially along the coast of Levante and in Andalusia, the nascent entrepreneurial bourgeoisie waged a violent struggle to clear the way for its development, beginning in 1836. In Spain, the word “liberalism” really meant the privatization of the old communal lands and their sale on the “free” market, the expropriation of small farms and the creation of large agricultural estates [*latifundios*]. The establishment of the parliamentary regime in 1843 confirmed the rule of the new big landowners, who, of course, lived in the cities, and viewed their rural estates as distant colonies and exploited them by means of bailiffs or tenant farmers.

This led to the development of an enormous rural proletariat. Until the outbreak of the Civil War, three-fourths of the inhabitants of Andalusia were *braceros*, that is, day laborers who sold their labor power for a starvation wage. During the harvest season the length of the working day for the field laborers was generally around twelve hours. For half the year these workers were almost totally unemployed. The consequences were endemic poverty, malnutrition and an exodus from the rural areas.

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<sup>7</sup> I was unable to locate the corresponding English passage in the works of Marx, and therefore translated the Spanish term in accordance with the context [American translator’s note].



In the towns, State power was manifested principally in the form of an army of occupation. One year after taking control of the government apparatus, the new political class of big landowners created its own occupation army, the Civil Guard, a full-time military-style police force with its own barracks, allegedly for the purpose of eliminating banditry, the most primitive form of peasant self-defense. In fact, its real purpose was to intimidate the rural proletariat, which had adopted new forms of struggle. The Civil Guard was composed of carefully selected individuals, who were always assigned to units far from their native regions. These troops were not allowed to get married to local women or to fraternize with the local populations. They were not permitted to leave their barracks and camps alone or unarmed; even today people in the rural areas of Spain call them “couples”, because they always patrol in groups of two. In the towns of Andalusia, the glaringly obvious class hatred was manifested right up until the 1930s in constant guerrilla warfare, a primitive kind of peasant guerrilla warfare that had a tendency to spontaneously coalesce in peasant insurrections. These revolts unleashed an irresistible collective violence; the rebels fought with an incredible fearlessness. The insurrections followed a predictable course: the rural workers killed the Civil Guards, kidnapped the priests and government officials, burned the churches, burned the land ownership and tax records and agricultural leases in public offices, abolished money, declared their independence from the State, proclaimed free communes and resolved to cultivate the land collectively. It is amazing to see how these peasants, most of whom were illiterate, had followed Bakunin’s directives to the letter, without knowing they were doing so, of course. Because these uprisings were exclusively local and uncoordinated, they generally only lasted a few days, until government troops drowned them in blood.

Spanish anarchism set down its first roots in the towns of Andalusia. There, it almost immediately provided an ideological basis and a solid organizational structure to the spontaneous movement of the rural proletariat; in the towns, it fostered ingenuous but persistent hopes for an immediate and total revolution.

At the end of the century, “apostles of the idea” were to be seen everywhere in southern Spain, traveling through the countryside on foot, on donkeys or in wagons, without a penny in their pockets. The workers gave them food and shelter. (From its very beginnings, and this is still true today, the Spanish anarchist movement was never the beneficiary of any foreign aid or financing.) This was the beginning of a long process of apprenticeship. Everywhere, one could see day laborers and peasants reading out loud to their fellow workers, and among the illiterate there were many who memorized the texts of entire articles and whole essays from the newspapers and pamphlets of the movement. Every town had at least one “enlightened” man, a “conscious worker”, who distinguished himself by abstaining from smoking, gambling, and drinking, professed atheism, did not get married to his girlfriend (to whom he was faithful), did not baptize his children, read a lot, and tried to spread his knowledge to others.

Catalonia is the economic opposite of the impoverished and arid zones of the south and west of Spain. It has always been the wealthiest and most industrially developed region in the country. Barcelona, the shipping, exporting, banking and textile producing metropolis, was by the end of the century the bridgehead of capitalism on the Iberian peninsula. Per capita tax revenues in Catalonia were double what they were any other part of Spain. With the exception of the Basque Country, Catalonia is the only part of Spain that has produced a functioning entrepreneurial bourgeoisie; the Catalan industrialists and bankers did not think exclusively of squandering their money, like the big landowners, but also of accumulation. Between 1870 and 1930 an immense and highly concentrated industrial proletariat became established in Barcelona and its vicinity.

In contrast to other regions of Europe that were similar in this respect, the Catalan workers did not join social democratic parties or reformist trade unions, but supported anarchism, which set down its second set of roots in Catalonia, its urban base. In 1918, 80% of the workers of Catalonia belonged to anarchist organizations. This circumstance is even harder to explain than the success of the Bakuninists in the rural areas. Sociology can provide us with the first suggestions. Only a small proportion of the workers of the industrial zone of Barcelona were natives of the region; half came from the arid provinces of Murcia and Almeria, that is, the south; these internal migrations have continued right up to the present day, due to the structural unemployment that afflicts the rural areas of Spain.

Centrifugal forces, which are so important in the history of Spain, represent the second cause. Many Spanish provinces are characterized by their strong regionalism, a fervent desire for independence and autonomy and a tenacious opposition to the rule of the central government in Madrid; but nowhere was this tendency as evident as in Catalonia, a region that in many respects could very well be considered to be a nation, and which had already waged a war of independence in the 17<sup>th</sup> century against the Spanish monarchy. Its particular type of economic development has also contributed to reinforcing this tendency. Catalan nationalism has two faces. Its right wing represents the interests of the regional bourgeoisie and uses the issue of autonomy to mystify the class struggle. For the masses, however, the Catalan question acquires an entirely revolutionary meaning.

Desire for self-determination, hatred of the power of the central state and insistence on the radical decentralization of power were elements that were found in anarchism.

Nowhere did the anarchists consider themselves to be a political party; their principles require them to refuse to participate in parliamentary elections and not to accept government positions; they do not want to take over the State, but to abolish it. In their own organizations, as well, they are opposed to the

concentration of power at the summit or the central committee of the organization. Their federations are elected by the rank and file membership; every one of their regional committees enjoys extensive autonomy and, at least theoretically, the rank and file is not obliged to obey the decisions of the leadership. The practical application of these principles depends of course on the real conditions. In 1910, anarchism discovered its definitive form of organization in Spain, when the confederation of anarchist trade unions, the CNT (National Confederation of Labor), was founded.

The CNT was the world's only revolutionary trade union. It never conducted its affairs according to the "bosses and workers" paradigm, in which the trade unions negotiate with the employers to improve the economic situation of the working class; its program and its practice consisted in waging the open and permanent struggle of the wage workers against capital until final victory. Its structure and its tactics coincided with this strategy.

The CNT was never a trade union based on dues-paying members, and never accumulated financial reserves. The membership dues were insignificant in the city, and in the rural areas there were no dues for membership in the trade union. Even in 1936, the CNT, with one million members, had only one paid official! It had no bureaucratic apparatus. Its organizational cadres lived on the proceeds of their own labor or directly on the assistance provided by their own rank and file groups. This is not an insignificant detail, but a decisive factor that explains why the CNT never produced "working class leaders" isolated from the masses and instilled with the inevitable conventional deformations of local bosses. This permanent control from below was not formally guaranteed by means of statutes but was a consequence of the ways of life of its leaders, who depended directly on the trust of the rank and file.

The main weapons of the CNT were, in the city as well as in the countryside, the strike and guerrilla warfare. For the anarchists, the strike was just one step from the revolution. Their labor struggles were always waged with a great degree of practical common sense. This trade union rejected the simple struggle for higher wages for the expansion and consolidation of the "welfare state". It rejected "social benefits" and insurance schemes, and systematically refused to sign collective agreements. It only recognized the numerous benefits that these methods had obtained for the workers. It never accepted arbitration boards or truces of any kind. It did not even have a strike fund. As a result, its strikes did not last very long, but they were all the more violent for that very reason. Its methods were revolutionary: they included everything from self-defense to sabotage, and from expropriation to armed insurrection.

The anarchist movement therefore had to confront the question of legal vs. illegal activity. Given the conditions in Spain at the time, this was by no means a moral problem, since the ruling class of the Iberian peninsula had not even made the slightest attempt to uphold the bourgeois façade of a democratic and

constitutional State. For many decades, the parliamentary elections were a complete farce; they were based on vote-buying and extortion on the part of the local political bosses in the rural areas, and on the most shameless fraud. There was never a division of powers in Spain, as this concept is understood in the liberal theory of the State. No social reform legislation was passed by the Cortes until the end of the First World War, and the laws mandating social reforms that were subsequently passed were never actually implemented. The working class was treated with unmitigated injustice and violence, both by the employers and by the State. The question of violence was therefore answered even before it could be posed.

The CNT, however, was a mass organization, and for this reason it was incapable of surviving under the clandestine conditions imposed by repression. Underground groups of cadres, such as Los Solidarios, assumed responsibility for the illegal activities of the CNT from its inception: self-defense, acquisition of weapons, collecting funds, liberation of prisoners, terrorism and espionage. This division of labor was formalized in 1927 with the founding of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (the FAI). This organization basically operated as a conspiracy. The number of members it had during this period, and details of its internal structure, are unknown. But we do know that it enjoyed immense prestige among the Spanish workers. All of its members were also at the same time members of the CNT. The FAI constituted, so to speak, the essential nucleus of the anarchist trade unions; it was a true guarantee against opportunist deviations and the danger of reformism. Bakunin's model of a vast, spontaneous mass movement led by clandestine, permanent groups of professional revolutionaries, was realized in this organizational structure.

Many stories have been told about the FAI. It is inevitable that all kinds of rumors would arise to embellish the prestige of a secret organization. We shall disregard the bourgeois propaganda about terrorism, due to its obvious ignorance. (Thus, for example, the spokesmen of the big landowners claimed, even in 1936, that the FAI was "working for Moscow".) Instead, what merits particular attention is the ambiguities entailed by the origins and structure of such conspiratorial organizations. The foes of the anarchists constantly referred to the "criminal elements" that had allegedly infiltrated the FAI, especially in Barcelona. A political analysis, however, cannot be based on references to the penal code. The Spanish working class, unlike the German and English working classes, was never known for its respect for private property, and, because it was oppressed by naked force, it always considered armed resistance as a normal means of self-affirmation. The ambiguity posed by these illegal groups from the political point of view is of a totally different nature. This ambiguity is in part related to the social element that has always played an important role in Barcelona: the lumpenproletariat. Its numbers were swelled by the rural exodus, unemployment, and also by the international subculture of a major port city. The Catalan industrial workers were not strictly separated from this social stratum; they felt bonds of solidarity and unity with it for more than one reason. In this respect as

well, the Catalonian industrial workers are different from the skilled workers of Western Europe, who are acutely aware of their difference, as a higher class, compared to the lumpenproletariat. The police did everything they could, of course, to take political advantage of the latent class antagonism between the industrial workers and the lumpenproletariat. Especially around the turn of the century, the police were able to infiltrate secret agents and provocateurs into the anarchist movement. We are familiar with this game of double agents from the history of the Social Revolutionaries and the Bolsheviks in Russia. The Spanish police collaborated with the revolutionary groups just as effectively as the Okhrana. Of the two hundred bombs detonated in 1908-1909 in Barcelona at the gates of factories and the homes of employers, the responsibility for most of them can be imputed to the police, which, under orders from the central government in Madrid, carried out these operations to deal a setback to the Catalonians' yearnings for regional autonomy. Just as in Russia, it would soon become obvious that the secret police in Spain had gone too far; instead of politically discrediting the anarchists, their provocations only facilitated the growth of the CNT and the FAI.

It is not easy to clearly distinguish the advantages, and the disadvantages, of anarchist organizational forms. Their contact with their base, their revolutionary zeal and their militant solidarity were unsurpassed; but these advantages were obtained at the price of a considerable lack of efficiency, coordination and central planning. Thus, shortly before the Civil War there were repeated outbreaks of local uprisings and spontaneous and isolated revolts, all of which were crushed without exception: "examples of how not to make a revolution", as Engels said in 1873.

Bourgeois and Marxist historians have tried again and again to explain why such violent and elemental outbursts could occur for the better part of a whole century with such persistence, only to end, in every instance, in repression. According to them, Spanish anarchism is basically a religious phenomenon. Its adepts imagine the day of the revolution as the final judgment, after which the millennium will ensue, the millennial reign of divine justice. According to this hypothesis, both the fanaticism and the spirit of sacrifice of the Spanish anarchists are messianic traits. It is in fact indisputable that the movement, especially in the villages, fostered quasi-religious fantasies and hopes. But the method of reducing everything to religious forms is insufficient, like every secular thesis. Thus, by proceeding according to the rules of the history of ideas the political content of this struggle is obscured. The Spanish workers consciously and resolutely realized the promises of their religion. The materialist historians should at least admit this much.

The thesis whose main advocates are Gerald Brenan and Franz Borkenau is much more interesting. According to this thesis, Spanish anarchism expressed a profound resistance against capitalist development, a resistance directed against material social progress in general, as it is conceived in the industrial countries of

Europe, and therefore also against the Marxist schema of historical development. According to this schema, the bourgeoisie is a transitionally revolutionary force, with the development of the forces of production as a necessary stage, and discipline and accumulation as the inevitable imperatives of industrialization. The anarchist workers and peasants of Spain, however, reject this “progress” with elemental violence. They have no admiration at all for either the productive capacity or the social conquests of the English, German and French proletariats; they refuse to follow in their footsteps; they have assimilated neither the rational goal of capitalist development nor its fetishism of consumption; they desperately defend themselves against a system that seems inhuman to them, and against the alienation that this system brings in its wake. They hate capitalism with a hatred that their comrades in Western Europe are no longer capable of feeling.

It think there is a great deal of truth in this explanation. It could help to explain the fact that, contrary to the expectations of Marx and Engels, the revolution was not victorious in the “advanced” countries (not England, not Germany, not the United States), but in societies where capitalism was a foreign intruder and only superficially established. As far as Spain is concerned, this does not mean, however, that the anarchists were mere “throwbacks to the past”; anyone who defines the Spanish anarchist movement as archaic is adhering precisely to the historical schema that we are challenging here. The Spanish revolutionaries were not Luddites. Their aspirations were not oriented towards the past, but towards the future: capitalism was moving in the direction of a totally different future; and in the brief period of their victory they did not close the factories, but placed them at the service of their needs and assumed responsibility for their operation.

## ***Los Solidarios***

### **The reign of terror of the *Pistoleros***

It was comrade Buenacasa, the President of the National Committee of the CNT in San Sebastián, who advised Durruti to get out of Barcelona. That was in 1920, during a time of terrible repression. Governor Martínez Anido and the chief of police, Arlegui, had organized a systematic campaign of terror against the anarchists of Catalonia. They used every means at their disposal. In collaboration with the region’s employers, they tried to organize yellow trade unions, membership in which was compulsory, known as “free trade unions”. Of course, no worker would willingly join these trade unions. Then the employers, with the help of the authorities, deliberately created armed gangs, the so-called “Pistoleros”. These groups of assassins were formed for the purpose of liquidating the politically active workers of Barcelona.

Durruti struck up a friendship with Francisco Ascaso, Gregorio Jover and García Oliver, a friendship that only death would sunder. They organized a combat group and with their pistols they confronted the assassins of the workers. The Spanish working class saw them as their best defenders. They practiced propaganda of the

deed and risked their lives every day. The people loved them because they did not play the political game.

The President of the Generalitat, Dato, was determined to be the primary culprit responsible for the campaign of repression unleashed in Barcelona. The anarchists resolved to obtain justice by assassinating him. They successfully carried out their plan.

Then they turned their sights on Cardinal Soldevilla, who lived in Saragossa. He fell victim to the bullets of Ascaso and Durruti. The distinguished Cardinal financed, with the income derived from a business venture that owned hotels and casinos, the yellow free trade unions and their assassins' headquarters in Barcelona.

[Heinz Rüdiger/Alejandro Gilabert]

I met Durruti in Barcelona, in 1922. At that time the CNT was an immense trade union organization. It not only represented the majority of the workers, but was also dominant in almost every enterprise.

We organized the group, Los Solidarios, which later became so famous, or so notorious. There were about twelve of us: Durruti, García Oliver, Francisco Ascaso, Gregorio Jover, García Vivancos and Antonio Ortiz. At first there were only about twelve of us altogether.

We needed these groups to defend ourselves against the white terror. The employers had formed, in connivance with the authorities, their own units of mercenaries, groups of well-armed, high-paid thugs. We had to defend ourselves. When we founded our group, more than three hundred trade unionists had already fallen victim to the white terror in Barcelona alone. More than three hundred killed!

At that time no one was thinking of offensive revolutionary actions. It was time for self-defense. The FAI did not yet exist; it was founded later. So we organized local groups of people who were familiar with certain neighborhoods or factories. We had to arm ourselves and we needed money to survive.

[Ricardo Sanz]

### **The members of Los Solidarios (1923-1926)**

Francisco Ascaso, from Aragon, a waiter by trade, born in 1901.

Ramona Bemí, textile worker.

Eusebio Brau, metal worker, assassinated by the police in 1923.

Manuel Campos, from Castille, carpenter.

Buenaventura Durruti, mechanic and typesetter from León, born in 1896.

Aurelio Fernández, from Asturias, mechanic, born in 1897.

Juan García Oliver, from Catalonia, waiter, born in 1901.

Miguel García Vivancos, from Murcia, longshoreman, painter and chauffeur, born in 1895.

Gregorio Jover, carpenter.

Julia López Mainar, cook.

Alfonso Miguel, cabinet maker.

Pepita Not, cook.

Antonio Ortiz, carpenter.

Ricardo Sanz, from Valencia, textile worker, born in 1898.

Gregorio Soberbiela or Suberviela, from Navarre, machinist.

María Luisa Tejedor, seamstress.

Manuel Torres Escartín, from Aragon, baker, born in 1901.

Antonio, El Tato, day laborer.

[Ricardo Sanz 2/César Lorenzo]

## **Ascaso**

I first met the Ascaso brothers in Saragossa. That was in 1919, when the Russian Revolution had not yet turned authoritarian and still had an incomparable power of attraction for the working class masses of the world, including Spain.

The Ascaso brothers then belonged to the group known as “Voluntad” [Will], which also published an excellent newspaper of the same name.

Around that time, there was a sudden mutiny of the soldiers in the Carmen barracks in Saragossa. One night, without any previous warnings given to the anarchists, some soldiers overcame their guards, killed an officer and a sergeant



and seized the barracks while shouting “Long Live the Soviets and the Social Revolution”. Then they proceeded to the city and occupied the telephone exchange, the post office and the telegraph office and the editorial offices of the newspapers. By four in the morning they did not know what to do, and in their naive and disorderly enthusiasm they finally decided to return to their barracks and prepare to fight. When the Civil Guard arrived, they surrendered after a brief battle.

The police, of course, tried to get information from the mutineers about the instigators and leaders of the revolt, but their attempts were all in vain, because there were no such leaders or instigators. The military justice system was faced with the dilemma of shooting all of them or none of them. But there is always a rat, and in this case it was the director of the local newspaper, the *Heraldo de Aragón*, who informed on seven soldiers who had occupied his newspaper’s print shop. These seven soldiers were shot. The hatred generated by this creep, who was always slandering anarchists and trade unionists, caused one of our comrades to take his pistol and gun him down.

Then, because of this assassination, a judicial investigation was launched against the Ascaso brothers. The older brother, Joaquín, managed to flee the city, but the younger brother, Francisco, a waiter, was apprehended. The owner of the hotel where he worked, the other waiters, and the guests, all unanimously testified that he was working when the assassination took place. He would nonetheless have certainly been condemned to death, as the public prosecutor had requested, if the population of Saragossa had not resisted and proclaimed the general strike on the day of sentencing. Under the circumstances, the jury preferred to find Ascaso not guilty. When the smiling Ascaso, who was then eighteen years old, was escorted from the prison, the crowd outside shouted “Viva la anarquía!”, and we, who were still in jail, joined in.

In view of the fact that he could not get a job in Saragossa and that the police were constantly arresting him, Ascaso decided to move to Barcelona. That was in 1922. There he became one of the organizers of the food workers trade union. He also participated on a liaison committee with the anarchists.

One day he told me that he wanted to go to La Coruña and take a job there as a waiter; the outlook was good, since the hiring for the merchant fleet was controlled by anarchist trade unionists. He had hardly arrived in the city when he was arrested and accused of planning an assassination attempt against Martínez Anido, who just happened to be in La Coruña that very same day. Since they had no proof, they had to release him again. He returned to Saragossa, where his parents lived. There, however, the police had set a trap for him. Cardinal Soldevilla, the instigator of many crimes against the workers and “subversive elements”, had been assassinated by unknown persons as he was on his way home after a visit to a convent. As a result, there were mass arrests of trade unionists and anarchists. Ascaso was also caught up in the dragnet. For the time being, the

police had to release him, because a guard and several prisoners testified that when the assassination took place he was in the prison visiting one of the prisoners. Since the police investigation came up with nothing, however, and because they needed a scapegoat, they arrested him again, eight days later. A case was being prepared against him. The public prosecutor was calling for the death penalty. The anarchists feared the worst for Ascaso, since in the meantime the dictator Primo de Rivera had taken power in a *coup d'état*, and Primo de Rivera had already ordered the hanging of two anarchists. Before the trial began, however, Ascaso escaped from prison along with six other political prisoners.

[V. de Rol]

## **Jover**

Jover was the oldest of Los Solidarios; the members of the group called him “El Serio” [the reliable or serious one]. He came from a family of poor peasants from the province of Teruel. His parents sent him to Valencia to spare him from the hardships of a life as a day laborer. There, he became a mattress-maker, and found a job at a mattress factory. He was imprisoned for the first time on account of a strike against the mattress industry. During the course of the strike, violent incidents took place: scabs were beaten, the factory buildings were besieged, and finally, in self-defense against the employers’ acts of repression, peoples’ justice was inflicted on the owner of one of the factories. The strike committee was imprisoned. Jover was sentenced to two years in jail, for instigating violence, for injuries and damage, etc. Shortly after his release from prison, he was once again imprisoned, this time for distributing subversive tracts in the barracks.

He finally went to Barcelona, and there he became one of the most combative militants of the illegal CNT.

At that time the bourgeoisie had unleashed a violent offensive against the workers. The white terror was becoming more intense every day. Arrests, torture, and shooting of “escapees” were routine. The anarchist workers had no other alternative than to resort to proletarian violence. Jover, just like his older comrades, took up arms against the capitalists’ gangs of *pistoleros*. Back then, no working class militant would leave his house without first arming himself to the teeth; in the workplaces they always had their pistols within reach, alongside their tools.

The millionaire businessman Graupera, the president of the employers association, fell to the bullets of armed commandos. Then the police assassins Barret, Bravo Portillo and Espejo were gunned down. Maestre Laborde, the former governor of Barcelona, was killed in Valencia. In Saragossa, the manager of a foundry in Bilbao, the owner of a factory that manufactured rolling stock for the railroads, the municipal architect, an engineer working for the electric company and a foreman, known as a snitch and a slave driver, were all victims of

the bullets of the revolutionaries. The CNT had to desperately defend itself in Barcelona, too. A worker was killed every day, and the next day a member of the bourgeoisie or a policeman would be killed. These street battles went on for three years. Martínez Anido and Arlegui, who directed the repression from their offices, did not dare show their faces in public.

The police announced that they had discovered an anarchist conspiracy to assassinate Martínez Anido. The conspirators allegedly planned to kill the mayor of Barcelona first, and then, during his funeral, which Anido and Arlegui would have to attend, to kill the guests of honor with hand grenades. The repression became even worse. Proletarian violence launched a counteroffensive. The Barcelona Hunting Club, a favorite haunt of the magnates of industry, was attacked with hand grenades, despite a strong detachment of guards; several employers were seriously wounded. The mayor of the city was also wounded by gunfire, as was the Catholic municipal counselor Anglada. Amidst this atmosphere of continuous fighting, while he was risking his life, Jover was distinguished for his calm resolve and his audacious spirit of initiative.

After the execution of President Dato at the hands of the workers, Anido and Arlegui had to resign. The trade unions were legalized. The workers organizations could once again operate openly. That was when Jover met Durruti and the Ascaso brothers.

After three years of bloody repression, the first public demonstration held in Barcelona was a big success. A meeting of the woodworkers trade union completely filled the Victoria Theater, one of the largest meeting halls in Spain. The meeting commenced with the reading of a long list: the names of 107 of the founding members of the CNT who had been killed. From then on the anarchist groups of Barcelona engaged in feverish activity. They founded cultural centers and schools for workers; their newspaper, *Solidaridad Obrera*, had a print run of 50,000 copies and therefore had a larger circulation than all the bourgeois newspapers of the city combined.

[V. de Rol]

## **Money for a school**

I joined the anarchist movement in 1915, during the First World War, under the influence of my father, who was a Communard, and fought in 1871 on the barricades of Paris.

When the war broke out I was barely nineteen years old; I had already written my first articles. I was an internationalist and did not want to participate in that war, so I went to Spain, because that country was neutral. There, naturally, I immediately entered into contact with the movement and I became an anarchist activist.

I spent ten years as a day laborer and as an assistant in a foundry; I worked at a dozen trades, until I was twenty-eight years old. Then I began to work as a teacher; not as a teacher at an ordinary secondary school, no, but as a teacher in a free primary school in La Coruña, in Galicia, in the extreme northwest of Spain. It was the trade unions, the CNT, the sailors, the longshoremen and the dock workers, who organized and operated this school. The capital required for its creation was contributed by Durruti.

Of course, he did not obtain the money legally. Now I can say it openly: it was a robbery, this time not of a bank, but of a currency exchange office. Durruti showed up with a pistol in his hand, demanded the money, there was an exchange of gunfire, the money was delivered to the trade union, the school opened, that is all.

Actions like this cannot be judged using the bourgeois penal code. Look, I have myself been in situations in which I might have been capable of killing, supposing that I had the courage to do so. To understand the desperation of these men and to explain their actions, it is necessary to have seen the misery, the terrible misery that prevailed at the time in Spain.

[Gaston Leval]

### **Three raids**

The Barcelona subway construction workers strike against the Hormaeche construction company led to a new wave of struggle. This firm was an old enemy of the CNT and hired a criminal gang to liquidate the leaders of the strike. The anarchists had to defend themselves.

The former governor of Bilbao, González Regueral, was executed in León. As usual, the police went looking among the ranks of Los Solidarios for the culprits. Suspicion first fell on Durruti. Durruti, however, could prove that during the day in question he was in Brussels to obtain an extension on his passport. Then Ascaso was accused, but he, too, had an alibi: on the day of the assassination he was in prison in La Coruña. Finally, the police decided to accuse the anarchists Suberviela and Arrarte, who went into hiding in Barcelona. By chance, the authorities discovered the locations of the safe houses where Suberviela, Arrarte, the younger Ascaso and Jover were hiding. The house where Suberviela was staying was surrounded. Rather than surrendering, Suberviela tried to fight his way out and charged the police with a pistol in each hand. The police retreated in terror, but other agents, concealed around nearby corners and in the doorways of houses, shot him dead. Several undercover policemen came to the house where Arrarte was staying, and told him that they were persecuted comrades. Arrarte pretended to believe them, and promised that he would bring them to a comrade's house where they would be safe, but he attempted instead to lead them to the

outskirts of the city. There he planned to give them the slip. But the undercover cops did not give him enough time to carry out his plan and they killed him on the street. Ascaso was surprised on the fourth floor of a house; he jumped out of a window and managed to escape while under fire from his persecutors. Jover was arrested at his hideout and he was taken to police headquarters. Later, while they were taking him to appear before the chief of police, they passed by a door that opened on the street; he gave his two guards a few good punches in the chest and escaped under a hail of bullets.

[V. de Rol]

In the summer of 1923, shortly after the execution of Regueral at the hands of Los Solidarios, Durruti was arrested while on the train from Barcelona to Madrid. The police press release that appeared the next day in the newspapers, stated that he was arrested because he was “suspected” of going to Madrid to engage in preparations to rob a bank. “Furthermore, there is an arrest warrant against him in San Sebastián for an armed robbery at the offices of the Mendizábal Brothers company.”

The very next day a member of Los Solidarios travelled to San Sebastián to pay a visit to the Mendizábal brothers to suggest to them that they should not meddle with Durruti. When the police escorted Durruti to San Sebastián and displayed him to his accusers in a police lineup, the Mendizábal brothers refused to identify him. The judge had to release him.

On the day before, Cardinal Soldevilla was executed by unknown persons in Saragossa, at a place called El Terminillo.

[Ricardo Sanz 2]

Durruti, Ascaso, Jover and García Oliver participated in the planning of the assassination of President Dato.

Durruti was only marginally involved in the operation. “The planning of the assassination was actually the work of Ramón Archs, who was later tortured and killed. One of the other participants in the attack is still alive. Another one of the perpetrators, Ramón Casanellas, sought sanctuary in the Soviet Union, where he converted to communism; he died in a motorcycle accident.”

[Federica Montseny 2]

At the end of August, 1923, the majority of the members of Los Solidarios met in Asturias. On September 1<sup>st</sup>, the branch office of the Bank of Spain in Gijón was robbed. None of Los Solidarios were killed during the attack; a few days later, however, in Oviedo, the Civil Guard located some of the comrades who had participated in the robbery. In the ensuing gunfight Eusebio Brau was killed. He

was the first member of the group to be killed by police gunfire. Torres Escartín was arrested, whom the police accused of being the mastermind behind the assassination of Cardinal Soldevilla. Escartín was tortured by the police. He participated in an escape attempt at the prison in Oviedo, but the Civil Guard had inflicted so much mistreatment on him during his interrogation sessions that he did not have the strength to flee.

The body of Eusebio Brau was never identified by the police. His mother, who was more than fifty years old and a widow, lived in Barcelona. To help support her in her old age, the group paid the rent on a market stall in Pueblo Nuevo, the neighborhood where she grew up.

[Ricardo Sanz 2]

## **Weapons**

As for weapons, we only had portable firearms, little revolvers. It was not easy to buy weapons in Spain. In Barcelona, however, there was a foundry where some of our comrades worked. They said that it was possible to use this enterprise to manufacture hand grenades. This was ideal for the revolution. We only lacked the dynamite to pack into the hand grenades. But this was no problem because we also had comrades who worked in the quarries, and they could supply the dynamite.

We could do nothing without money, however, and the money was in the banks. At the time it seemed heretical for us, who were against capitalism and money, to go looking for banks. Today it is considered normal. We did not need the money for ourselves. We took it because the revolution needed money. In Spain, we were the first, the trailblazers so to speak. Back then it was considered immoral. Today it is moral; what was wrong yesterday is right today.

I once travelled to Marseille with a Spanish smuggler. In Marseilles we obtained weapons. The smuggler is a specialist in this kind of business. From Marseilles I also acquired my first machine gun, made in Germany. Later, in 1936, after the *coup d'état* of the generals, I took it with me to the streets.

[Ricardo Sanz 1]

In October, 1923, one month after Primo de Rivera's *coup d'état*, Los Solidarios purchased, via a middleman from the Garate y Anitua arms factory in Éibar, 1,000 rifles with twelve-round magazines, along with 200,000 cartridges. The group paid 250,000 pesetas for these goods.

Some time before that, Los Solidarios bought a foundry in the Pueblo Nuevo district of Barcelona for 300,000 pesetas. In this foundry the group fabricated its own hand grenades. The metal worker Eusebio Brau was in charge of this work

that was performed for the group. In the Pueblo Seco neighborhood, also in Barcelona, Los Solidarios had an arms cache containing more than 6,000 hand grenades when it was discovered by the police thanks to an informant.

There was also a series of arms deposits containing handguns and rifles, almost all of which were bought in France and Belgium, scattered throughout the city. They had been smuggled into Spain, generally across the French border, through Puigcerda and Font-Romeu, where the group had its intermediaries. Other supplies came via the maritime route.

Los Solidarios strictly abided by one rule: only the direct participants may know anything about an action they are planning, that is, each person only knows what he needs to know. There was never a leader or a chief in the group. The people who were involved in an action were the ones who made the decisions.

[Ricardo Sanz 2]

The National Committee of the Revolution bought weapons in Brussels and shipped them to Spain via Marseilles. It was not enough, however. This was why Durruti and Ascaso went to Bilbao in June of 1923 to obtain a more abundant supply of arms. The factory was in Éibar. An engineer who worked there served as intermediary. The weapons were ostensibly supposed to be shipped to Mexico; but arrangements were made for the captain to receive new orders when the ship reached the high seas, and that by way of the Strait of Gibraltar it would then set a course for Barcelona, where the cargo would be unloaded, at night, far from the main shipping channels. Time passed. The factory could not meet the delivery deadline, and the weapons did not reach Barcelona until September; too late, since in the meantime Primo de Rivera had victoriously concluded his *coup d'état*. The ship had to return to Bilbao and then the weapons had to be brought back to the factory.

[Abel Paz 2]

## **His mother**

Later we did not see him so often, but when Durruti came to León and visited his family he kept us up-to-date on what was happening in Barcelona and the struggles that were taking place there. He came home to see his mother, you understand, and she mended his clothes and cleaned his shoes.

And his mother said, “So I don’t know what’s going on. The newspapers say Durruti did this and Durruti did that and so on, and whenever he comes home he is in rags. Don’t you see what what it means? What are the journalists thinking? They say nothing but lies, they need a scapegoat and they have chosen him”, and that is just how it was, you know. For two years, Durruti was the incarnation of the devil. And they just could not resist the chance to attack him whenever

something happened in a bank or whenever a bomb exploded somewhere. And his mother exclaimed, "This can't be, every time he comes home I have to mend his clothes, and in the newspapers they say that he has money by the shovelful, wherever he finds it". There were of course many robberies, but Durruti took the money with one hand and gave it away with the other to the families of prisoners and for the struggle. We have nothing to hide, you understand, and we are not ashamed of what we did, just so that you know.

[Florentino Monroy]

Each and every one of us did time behind bars. Once? Don't make me laugh! Dozens of times. In 1923, when Primo de Rivera seized power, all of us went to jail. They put us away for any reason at all, and not just during the dictatorship. I spent five years behind bars, not only in Barcelona, but also in Saragossa, in San Sebastián and in Lérida. And while we were prisoners there were always some guards who sympathized with us. They brought us news and delivered our encrypted messages to the outside, it worked like magic. Some of them did this out of conviction, while we bribed others. The comrades took care of our families, so we could rest assured on that count. Sometimes we even held political meetings in prison.

I was only in prison once with Durruti, several times with García Oliver, and some of the comrades who were in prison back then would later be government ministers.

[Ricardo Sanz]

### ***Third Commentary: The Spanish dilemma (1917-1931)***

Spain was a neutral country during the First World War. The antiquated mines of northern Spain, most of which were in the hands of foreign capital, worked full-time; the Catalanian industries worked around the clock; the country's agricultural production was sold easily at astronomical prices. The war led to a sudden boom in the Spanish economy, without changing its anachronistic structure. Wages, however, remained low. On the day the Armistice was signed, the Bank of Spain had gold reserves valued at ninety million pounds sterling.

"Barcelona was making merry, with its Ramblas illuminated at night and luxuriously sunlit by day, full of birds and women. Here too the cornucopia of the war was gushing away. Both for the Allies and the Central Powers, the factories were working full blast and the companies were positively coining gold. Zest for life shining at you from faces and shop-windows, oozing at you from banking-houses, smacking you on the back. Everything was going mad." That is how the professional revolutionary Victor Serge described the winter of 1916-1917 in Spain.



“Then, awaited so keenly that we eventually wondered whether we should still believe in it, the Revolution appeared, and the improbable became reality. Reading the dispatches from Russia, we were transfigured; for the images that they conveyed were simple, concrete. A minute clarity was shed over things; the world was no longer impelled along by helpless lunacy.... The Spaniards, even the workers on the shop floor beside me, who were no militants, instinctively understood the Petrograd days, since their imagination transposed those events to Madrid and Barcelona. The monarchy of Alfonso XIII was no more popular or stable than that of Nicholas II. The revolutionary tradition of Spain, like that of Russia, went back to the time of Bakunin. Similar social causes were operating in both countries: agrarian problems, retarded industrialization, a political regime at least a century and a half behind Western Europe. The wartime industrial and commercial boom strengthened the bourgeoisie, especially that of Catalonia, which was hostile to the old land-owning aristocracy and to the utterly hidebound royal administration; it also expanded the energies and appetites of a young proletariat which had had no time to form a working-class aristocracy, that is, to become bourgeoisified. Knowledge of the war aroused a disposition towards violence, and the low wages (I earned four pesetas a day, about eighty American cents) stimulated the workers to press their immediate demands.

“From one week to another the horizon became visibly clearer. Within three months the mood of the Barcelona working class was transformed. Their fighting spirit mounted. The CNT gathered strength. I belonged to a tiny trade union in the print-shop. Without any increase in the number of activists (there must have been about thirty of us) its influence advanced to such an extent that the whole body of workers seemed to have woken up. Three months after the news of the Russian Revolution, the Comité Obrero began to prepare a revolutionary general strike, entered negotiations for a political alliance with the Catalan liberal bourgeoisie, and calmly planned the overthrow of the monarchy....

“At the Café Espagnol, on the Paralelo, that crowded thoroughfare with its blazing lights of evening, near the horrible *barrio chino* whose mouldering alleys were full of half-naked girls lurking in doorways that gaped into hell-holes—it was here that I met militants arming for the approaching battle. They spoke enthusiastically of those who would fall in that fight, they dealt out Browning revolvers, and baited, as we all did, the anxious spies at the neighboring table. The notion of seizing Barcelona was straightforward: it was studied in detail. But Madrid? The other regions? Liaison with the rest of Spain was weak. Would it lead to the overthrow of the monarchy?”

The general strike of 1917 was drowned in blood; seventy workers were killed by the armed forces. Two factors were decisive in the failure of the mass action: the dominant role of the army in Spanish society and the disunity of the Spanish workers movement.

Ever since the 1880s and 1890s, social democracy had been the declared enemy of anarchism in Spain. The party was founded in 1879 and was devoted to parliamentary action within the legal framework; for decades, it was a very small and weak party, its growth thwarted by Spain's notorious electoral fraud; its trade union branch, the General Labor Union [Unión General de Trabajadores—UGT], hardly made any progress at all until the First World War. With its high dues to fund its benefit systems, its coterie of paid petit-bourgeois leaders, and its political moderation, which could hardly be distinguished from timidity, Spanish social democracy faithfully imitated its western European models. It was, from every point of view, the antithesis of the CNT. The rival trade unions were opposed even with regard to their geographic distribution, which divided the workers movement until the Civil War. While the anarchists had their bases of support in Catalonia and Andalusia, the social democrats were entrenched above all in Asturias, Bilbao and Madrid. Reformism became a mass movement during the economic boom of the First World War, which seemed to provide evidence in support of the economic and parliamentary illusions of the social democrats. The conflict between the UGT and the CNT had such deep roots that only on a few occasions were the two trade union federations able to act in unison: in 1917, in 1934 and during the Civil War. It was always the pressure of the rank and file that forced the two organizations to engage in joint action, but this unity was always fragile, replete with mistrust and old grudges. An alliance between the two tendencies could not last very long, since social democracy sought to integrate the workers into society, while the CNT sought to radically overthrow that same society.

In 1917 the revolution was simultaneously necessary and impossible. The old regime had completely failed from the political point of view, but the military and economic forces upon which it was based were still formidable. Their political parties, the Conservatives and the Liberals, which were actually a partnership sharing government power, continued to staff government positions, as always, but they did not have real freedom of maneuver nor were they capable of adapting their course to the tactical requirements of the situation. The only reform of any significance that the Madrid administration could muster the motivation to carry out was an agreement with the Catalonian bourgeoisie, to which it granted certain customs and import-export concessions during the early 1920s; as a result, the Catalonian nationalism of the time leaned towards a leftist stance. Its demands for autonomy, never satisfied, crystallized in a new force, the Esquerra Catalana, the party of the petit bourgeoisie, which became a potent yet uncertain ally of the workers movement. Behind closed doors in the legislature, the social forces of the right regrouped in a lifeless and incoherent coalition: at the top, as always, was a class of big landowners of inconceivable ineptitude and vacuity, flanked by a superfluous and parasitic bureaucracy; below, increasingly more interlinked with the former, was the growing class of entrepreneurial bourgeoisie and the high clergy, especially the Jesuits, who in 1912 controlled one-third of the foreign capital that, especially after the First World War, had flowed into the country, and which subsequently, in 1936, would play such an important role (three billion

marks worth of French capital; five billion marks worth of English capital; and three billion marks worth of American capital). This coalition of forces was to remain intact until 1936, despite its internal contradictions and its inertia. This coalition kept the revolutionary workers movement at bay not with political, but with military means.

Already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Spanish army was isolated, like a caste, from society, and gained importance in the State. It had an enormous number of officers: there was one officer for every six soldiers. Despite its poor leadership, its technical backwardness and its insufficient training, it absorbed, during the early 1920s, more than half the national budget. Its *raison d'être* was that of an occupying army in its own country. The ruling classes were completely dependent, up until the Civil War, on the army and other, secondary instruments of repression: the Civil Guard, the Assault Guard, the *Carabineros* and the *Mozos de Escuadra*. And this is still the case today.

A confrontation was inevitable. The choice was: revolution or military dictatorship. In 1917, Spain was ripe for the latter option; but the king hesitated. He was afraid of the Republic, and at his side the agrarian oligarchy tenaciously clung to the traditional forms of government. As long as the social democracy was content with promises and minimal concessions, a compromise with the CNT was unimaginable. Thus, the confrontation unfolded on the terrain of the anarchists, in Barcelona. An interregnum of five years, during which the two opposed forces, at close quarters with one another, yielded almost no ground; this was the urban guerrilla war that lasted five years in Barcelona, from 1917 to 1923: the status quo was a state of continual crisis, a generalized practice exercise in preparation for the Civil War. The employers, supported by the army and the police, launched a counteroffensive against the CNT. The line that separated criminality from state power was erased. The commander-in-chief of the army in Catalonia, General Martínez Anido, and his chief of police, General Arlegui, were simultaneously figures from the criminal underworld and representatives of national authority. It was not the Gestapo, but the Spanish government, that legally sanctioned the shooting of “fleeing” prisoners, and Catalan capitalism created, in the form of the paramilitary *Pistoleros*, an SA<sup>8</sup> *avant la lettre*. The permanent war in the crowded streets of Barcelona brought the city to the brink of chaos with its gunfights, acts of sabotage, provocations, lockouts, mass arrests, secret police, assassinations, torture and extortion.

In 1923 the colonial war in Morocco, which resulted in an ignominious defeat for the Spanish army, delivered the *coup de grâce* to the old regime. The only possible answer was dictatorship. Primo de Rivera was above all the candidate of the industrial bourgeoisie; he rose to power with a program of “modernization”

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<sup>8</sup> *Sturmabteilung* (German: “Assault Section” or “Storm Detachment”). The “storm troopers” or “brownshirts” of the German Nazis [American translator’s note].

that was cobbled together from slogans made famous by Kemal Ataturk and Mussolini. He naturally depended on the support of the army, to which he had to make all kinds of concessions. The CNT was outlawed. Social democracy decided to collaborate; its leader, Largo Caballero, accepted a Ministry in the Cabinet of the dictator; arbitration and collective bargaining were supposed to resolve the “social problem”. This meant, in practice, the nationalization of the trade unions and the creation of a “labor front”. The intellectual opposition was crushed. Primo de Rivera ignored the Catalanian question. His reforms were never implemented. The contradictions of Spanish society could not be “purged” from the office of the dictator. The authoritarian experiment of Primo de Rivera collapsed with the outbreak of the economic crisis of 1929. Primo de Rivera could no longer count on the complete support of the army. The monarchy came to an end. The interests of Spanish industrial capital imposed another form of government: the Republic. In March of 1931, Alfonso XIII abdicated.

## *Exile*

### **Flight**

In 1923, when the dictator Primo de Rivera seized power, Ascaso and Durruti fled into exile; otherwise, the reactionaries would have killed them. Ascaso was in jail at the time, accused of involvement in the assassination of the Archbishop of Saragossa, Cardinal Soldevilla. But his comrades had organized an escape plan, and among the escapees was Ascaso. He did not follow their lead, however, when they just drifted around town or spent their time in cafés, and within a few days they were in jail again. He stowed away on a night train carrying cattle from the north to Barcelona. This train was guarded by cattlemen. So Ascaso put on a cattleman’s black shirt, hopped on the train in Saragossa at night, and on the next morning showed up at the door of my house in Barcelona.

From Barcelona, Ascaso made his way to France, and in Paris he met Durruti, García Oliver and Jover. We sent them what money we still had. Los Solidarios carried on with their activities in France. The first thing they did in Paris was to help create the International Bookstore at 14 Rue Petit. We donated 300,000 pesetas to the bookstore; they also founded the Anarchist Encyclopedia at the same time, which even today has not yet been completed, as new volumes are always being published and will never end.

[Ricardo Sanz 1]

In Paris the four survivors of Los Solidarios met again: Jover, Durruti and the Ascaso brothers. Durruti got a job as a mechanic at the Renault factory; the older Ascaso brother found work at a workshop that produced mosaics and artificial stone, and his younger brother got a job as an assistant at a factory that made water pipes and plumbing equipment. Jover worked at a mattress factory where,

due to his experience, he was offered a position as a foreman, to supervise the other workers. He refused the promotion, however, since it was not in conformance with his ideals.

[V. de Rol]

I met him during the first few years of the dictatorship, in 1923 or 1924, at a meeting of conspirators that took place in Bilbao. Durruti had come to Bilbao illegally from exile in Paris; he strolled peacefully through the main square of Bilbao, along with Jover, one of his best friends. It was a very important meeting, almost a congress; many comrades were in attendance, even from other organizations. Even socialists were present. I recall that Durruti had a discussion with Largo Caballero, the leader of the social democratic party, who would later be the Prime Minister of the Republic.

[Juan Ferrer]

## **A naive plan**

The Spanish anarchist exiles in Paris, who remained in contact with their comrades in Spain, planned to violently overthrow the hated dictatorship. The plan called for various teams of commandos to attack the barracks and to build barricades, while the comrades from Paris were to cross the border at the same time and occupy the border posts.

News arrived from various cities in Spain regarding the growing discontent among the troops. They were scheduled to be shipped to Morocco, to oppress the Africans. The situation seemed favorable. The anarchists in Paris resolved to send a representative to Barcelona. This mission was entrusted to Jover. After his arrival, a meeting was held on the outskirts of the city, which was attended by delegates from the CNT and the armed groups, to plan and prepare for the revolt. The comrades from Barcelona were supposed to occupy the barracks and seize the artillery depot. Some soldiers and a junior officer declared that they were ready to open the gates of the barracks and help them. They assured them that the majority of the soldiers had pledged their support for the revolt.

When he returned to Paris, Jover informed his comrades of the results of the meeting. Another delegate was sent to Barcelona. It was arranged that the comrades in Barcelona would set the date for the revolt; the Paris group would attack the border posts at Hendaya, Irún, Vera de Bidasoa, Perpiñan and Figueras.

One week before the date set for the revolt, another meeting took place. The two delegates of the CNT, who had expressed their agreement with the decision made at the previous meeting, on this occasion proved to be suddenly hesitant and expressed their misgivings about the revolt. They offered their personal collaboration, and assured us that they would help us as much as possible; the

organization itself, however, would not participate in the action. They had been intimidated by the specter of “responsibility” that certain influential persons in important trade unions had invoked. It was nonetheless agreed by all the delegates that the action of the rank and file would drag these “notables” along with them and they resolved to carry out their plan. One of the delegates returned to Paris. Jover, who had been asked to go to Paris, refused. Although he was in great danger in Barcelona, he believed that he could do much more for the cause in his native land than he could at the border. Another comrade went to Paris in his place.

This comrade confirmed that everything was ready for the revolt in Barcelona and that the date for the commencement of hostilities would be transmitted to the group in Paris via telegram. The code phrase would be: “Mama is ill”. In Paris, Lyon, Perpiñan, Marseilles, and other places where anarchist groups existed, the comrades impatiently awaited the telegram. Anyone who was there during those feverish moments will never forget them. We knew that once we received the telegram we would have to go to the border, ready to engage in a hard battle with the border police, who were numerically superior, more effectively organized, and more heavily armed than we were.

The telegram finally arrived. Then we set forth in small groups of between ten and twelve men, armed only with revolvers. We had gone hungry to save the money to buy them. The Paris comrades were at the Gare d’Orsay. The elder Ascaso brother distributed the tickets and was the last to board the train with his heavy suitcases. He brought twenty-five Winchester rifles in his baggage, the highest caliber weapons we had.

At that time, the comrades in Barcelona were getting ready for the assault on the Atarazanas artillery barracks. In order not to call attention to themselves, they split up into very small groups that occupied strategic points the night before. The offensive was to begin at six a.m. sharp, with hand grenades.

Atarazanas is in the Fifth District of Barcelona, a neighborhood closely watched by the police, because it is in this neighborhood that the first barricades are always erected, the neighborhood where *Solidaridad Obrera* is printed, where the offices of the editors of *Tierra y Libertad* and *Crisol* are located, where the Wood Workers and the Construction Workers trade unions’ central offices were located, and where many of the comrades who worked at these enterprises lived.

Despite all the measures taken to ensure secrecy, the police must have suspected something was up, because one of the commando squads, while it was proceeding towards the barracks, was intercepted by a patrol. An intensive exchange of gunfire ensued in which one policeman was killed and another was wounded. The police called for reinforcements, sounded the alarm, and police units set up machine gun emplacements all around the barracks. The offensive was crushed

even before it began. Two comrades were arrested in the vicinity of the barracks and shot on the spot.

After the failure of the revolt in Barcelona, the attack against the border posts did not have even the least chance of success. And as if these setbacks were not bad enough, the groups assigned to attack the border posts at Vera and Hendaya arrived at their rendezvous points eighteen hours too soon, because they overestimated the amount of time it would take them to reach their destinations. In their first engagement they emerged victorious, but numerically superior forces were soon mobilized and they were forced to retreat and fight their way back to France in a long and exhausting attempt to escape across the mountains. Two comrades were killed, and another was seriously wounded. Two days later various other comrades who had taken different routes through the mountains during their attempts to escape to France were also arrested. Four of them were executed in Pamplona, and it was assumed that the others were tried and executed, too.

Upon arriving at Perpiñan, the groups that were supposed to attack Figueras and Gerona read in the newspapers about what had happened at Vera. They had arrived too late. The police had been warned long before they arrived. Almost one thousand men had come to Perpiñan that morning, and the contingents had to disperse immediately in order not to call attention to their presence. Many comrades were arrested, however. Only one group of fifty men managed to escape without dispersing. They even saved their suitcases filled with rifles and ammunition. They quickly reached the foothills of the Pyrenees. There, as agreed, they met a comrade from a Spanish town, who was supposed to guide them to Figueras by way of mountain paths. There, according to the plan, they were supposed to attack the jail and liberate the comrades held there. Their guide, however, brought bad news. Several regiments equipped with artillery and automatic weapons had been posted along the border. Without the factor of surprise, and with inferior forces, our attack would not make any sense. We cried with rage, with fury and with shame, because we had been defeated without even having engaged in battle. Ascaso was with us. Durruti had gone with the group that crossed the border at Vera. Jover participated in the attack in Barcelona.

It was a futile and naive plan. But no matter what anyone says, it deserves respect. There are people who laugh at us and consider us to be politically washed up; even some people who call themselves anarchists make such a claim. In fact, our project was only a setback. We have suffered many setbacks. This is no reason to bury the memory of the fallen in oblivion or to disparage the conduct of the comrades who await execution in Pamplona. Others, like Ascaso, Durruti and Jover, will carry on with the struggle.

[V. de Rol]

The police did everything they could to annihilate the revolutionary activity of the anarchist group, Los Solidarios. Towards this end, they accused its members of

having robbed the local branch of the Bank of Spain in Gijón. It is easy to prove that this accusation is false, since on the day of the robbery Durruti was in France, and the Ascaso brothers were in prison: one in Saragossa, accused of the assassination of the Archbishop Soldevilla, and the other in Barcelona, where the police raided the headquarters of the Wood Workers Trade Union. The comrades repelled the attack; in the fighting, two policemen were killed and one was wounded. With their allegations about the bank robbery the police attempted to justify their demand that France should extradite Durruti and Ascaso, who had escaped and who was also assumed to be in France. And as if this was not enough, the Spanish authorities also sent photographs and the police files of the fugitives to other countries, especially to the Spanish speaking countries of Latin America. Ever since then, whenever there is a robbery or an bomb attack in Chile or Argentina, the Spanish police immediately send an official report for the purpose of imputing the responsibility for the incidents to Ascaso and Durruti. And the Latin American police authorities did not hesitate to put the blame on both of them, although there was no evidence at all to implicate them. That is how the police from different countries worked together, until in the end Durruti, Acaso and Jover appeared to public opinion as legendary criminals whose extradition was the most urgent necessity of the moment.

[V. de Rol]

## **The Latin American interlude**

Durruti, Ascaso and Jover did everything they could in Paris; but seeing that there was not much left for them to do in France, they went to Latin America.

We are going to look for new lands, they said, and so they went to Argentina, Cuba, Chile and other countries. But they did not find the right environment there. The working class was weak and poorly organized and they felt like fish out of water, and after wandering from place to place without any particular destination or direction they said to themselves: there is nothing to do here, and, like don Quixote, they returned to France.

[Ricardo Sanz 1]

In December 1924 Durruti and Ascaso embarked for Cuba, where they launched a public campaign in favor of the Spanish revolutionary movement. This was their debut as public speakers, and Durruti impressed his audiences as a tribune of the people. Soon the police came to view them as dangerous agitators and they had to leave the country. After that, they lived a very unsettled life. They were always on the road, and spent short periods of time in Mexico, Peru and Santiago in Chile, until they came to Buenos Aires, where settled for a longer stay. They were not safe there, either, however. So they went to Montevideo, where they boarded a ship bound for Cherbourg. When the ship reached the high seas, however, it was



forced, for navigational reasons, to change course several times; later, the ship became famous as the Ghost Ship. They finally arrived at the Canary Islands.

[Abel Paz 2]

The police authorities in all of Latin America were looking for Durruti, whom they considered to be the most dangerous spokesman of the Spanish anarchist groups. His photograph was displayed everywhere: in the train stations, on the trains and on the trolleys. Durruti was nonetheless able to travel all over the continent with his comrades, and was never caught by the police.

[Cánovas Cervantes]

I can testify that I saw Durruti in Buenos Aires. At the time he was traveling through Latin America. There, Durruti and his comrades robbed several banks to obtain money for the revolutionary movement.

[Gaston Leval]

Once, in Buenos Aires, Ascaso and Durruti were riding a trolley car when they noticed that they were sitting directly beneath a “Wanted” poster with their names and pictures on it. The government was offering a reward to anyone who would provide information leading to their arrest; they had to leave the country as soon as possible.

They bought first class tickets on an ocean liner, which was very clever of them. They boarded without incident. It was obvious, however, that they were working class persons travelling first class, especially Durruti, who was very self-confident and good-looking, but altogether lacking the external hallmarks of a distinguished businessman. For example, at the entrance to the dining room there was a hat rack. Durruti passed the hat rack without taking off his hat. “Mister, mister, your hat!” Durruti paid no attention and put his hat in his pocket. Or, during the dessert course at dinner, the idea of peeling apples and oranges with a knife was something that he could not abide by, so he tore the skins off the fruit with his hands. Then his friend said to him: “Careful, they’re watching you. It looks like something is happening. You have to come up with an excuse. Tell them that we are artists!” “What? Artists? Do you want me to prance around like a dancer?” “No, not like that, but what should we do then? I know! Tell them that we are athletes, professional baseball players.” And that was how they introduced themselves to people on the ship, as baseball players, a wild idea. And the passengers believed them. When they reached port, the third class passengers were carefully searched and examined, but the first class passengers only handed over their passports, the passports were stamped, and they were told, “you may proceed, sir!”, and they immediately went ashore.

[Eugenio Valdenbro]

## **The ideal bookstore**

The great dream of Durruti and Ascaso was to found anarchist publishing houses in all the major cities of the world. The central publishing house would have its headquarters in Paris, the center of the intellectual world, and if possible it would be located on the Place de l'Opéra or the Place de la Concorde. There, the most important works of modern thought would be published in all the languages of the world. With this in mind, the International Anarchist Library was founded, which published numerous books, pamphlets and magazines in various languages. The French government persecuted this venture with all the police measures at its disposal, just like the Spanish government and all the other reactionary governments of the world. It did not like the fact that the Durruti-Ascaso group should also attract attention on the cultural plane. Arrest warrants and eviction notices finally brought about the destruction of the publishing house. These sons of don Quixote had to postpone their cherished dream for the time being. They once again took up their pistols, just as the Knight of the Sad Countenance shouldered his lance, to “right the wrongs of the world, to help the weak and to establish the kingdom of justice on Earth”.

[Cánovas Cervantes]

Durruti donated 500,000 francs to the *Librairie Internationale*.

After the proclamation of the Republic, the anarchists wanted to transfer the headquarters of the publishing house to Barcelona. This cost us thousands of pesetas. But at the French customs checkpoint in Port-Bou, the French police set fire to all the publications and records. So we lost the fruits of so much expense and so many sacrifices.

[Alejandro Gilabert]

The famous Russian anarchist guerrilla, Nestor Makhno, was working in Paris at a small carpentry shop. He was a man of action, like Durruti. The Ukrainian peasants worshipped him like a god. He defeated the white guards of the counterrevolution with an army of peasants. Trotsky, the Commissar of War of the Red Army, tried to eliminate him because Makhno was conferring a libertarian character on the Russian Revolution. Makhno had to escape from Russia.

Durruti admired him very much and was his friend. Both of them had the same kind of character and the same understanding of the goal of the revolution.

[Alejandro Gilabert]

## **The plot to assassinate the king**

I met Ascaso and Durruti at the house of a Parisian comrade named Berta. One day they both asked me for a suitcase. Naturally, I offered mine. Ascaso took it in his hands and said, laughing: "It is not strong enough." I disagreed and I said that my suitcase was a good one, made of excellent vulcanized material.

I must have seemed like a shopkeeper who was anxiously trying to sell his wares. All my efforts were in vain, however. Ascaso did not want my suitcase. A little while later I found out why. They needed a suitcase to transport some disassembled rifles and other weapons.

At the time (this was in 1926), Paris was preparing for an official visit by King Alfonso XIII of Spain. This man was guilty of more crimes than all the rest of his family, the Bourbons, put together. Durruti and Ascaso planned to accompany the band's rendition of La Marseillaise, with which the Third Republic would welcome the murderer of Francisco Ferrer, with a couple of gunshots. They conducted their preparations with the most absolute serenity.

That is what the Spaniards are like: they behave like big feudal lords, or like Spanish grandees, even when they are proletarians. Our two comrades also possessed this talent and made extensive use of it during the days prior to the official visit. In order to elude the network of police agents they frequented the very same places where the high society of the French capital spent its leisure time. They played tennis at a club, and even deliberately bought a luxury automobile, in order not to trigger suspicion amidst all the vehicles of the statesmen gathered to attend the reception ceremony. Everything was planned down to the smallest detail.

On the eve of the official visit, we had dinner at Berta's house. I recall that she served a sago palm soup that neither Ascaso, nor Durruti, nor I liked. We all laughed at her culinary art. When Durruti and Ascaso left, she began to cry.

"Where two people are conspiring, my man is the third"—this is what Maniscalao allegedly said, the well-known agent provocateur of the Bourbons. This time the third man was supposed to drive the car that would take Ascaso and Durruti to the scene of the reception ceremony. This third man sold himself to the French police. The two conspirators were arrested, and Paris was able to welcome Alfonso XIII with La Marseillaise without missing a beat.

It was only thanks to the vehement protests of the comrades in Paris that the French democracy refused to deliver the prisoners to the vengeance of the Bourbon hyena. They did not rest until Durruti and Ascaso were released and deported to Belgium.

From Belgium, where he got a job in a machine shop, Francisco Ascaso sent me one last farewell note.

Although he spent a lot of time thinking, I never saw Ascaso worried. He always seemed to be in a good mood, always ready to crack a joke; he was short, thin and agile; his face had an Arab look. His skin was very dark. He was clean-shaven and his black hair was always impeccably combed.

Durruti was physically heavier and more reserved, somewhat taciturn, unless the situation demanded the employment of his vast energy. He wore thick eyeglasses, I think. Maybe he was a little shortsighted. These two friends were inseparable, the one could not do without the other: the thinker could not do without the man of action, and vice-versa.

Ideologically, they were not individualists. They believed in the necessity of organization, but they thought that every individual was needed to set the masses in motion. They expected nothing from the masses, nor did they ask them to do anything; they did, however, have something to offer them and to tell them.

[Nino Napolitano]

Ascaso also told me about how they planned to assassinate Alfonso XIII in Paris. They wanted to eliminate the King of Spain. They knew the precise route that the official motorcade would take, and where the attack had to take place. But the person who was supposed to drive them to the scene of the attack informed on them. The police put them under surveillance and one morning, when they were calmly walking down the street to buy a newspaper, they arrested them. Then came the big trial of Durruti, Ascaso and Jover, and the three of them sat in the defendants' dock.

[Eugenio Valdenbro]

## **The trial**

I have defended various Spanish anarchists. With variable success, but almost always with a positive result. Among these anarchists, the most tenacious and intrepid were Ascaso, Durruti and Jover.

On July 2, 1926, the French authorities announced that they were hot on the trail of a conspiracy to assassinate the King of Spain. The King was to be received with great pomp on July 14. Three men who were also wanted by the Spanish authorities were arrested in a furnished flat: Ascaso, Durruti and Jover. They were arraigned in October, accused of contempt of court, altering passports and immigration violations, crimes that seemed relatively insignificant. During the trial, the defendants declaimed bold arguments and proclaimed that it was their right to do whatever was necessary to overthrow a hated government. They admitted that they had planned to kidnap the king to provoke revolution in Spain.

They were sentenced to prison and hard labor and their cases were transferred to the High Court. The situation became dangerous. Demands for their extradition were pending: one from the government of Argentina, “because they were suspected of having been the perpetrators of the robbery of the Banco de San Martín”, and the other from the Spanish government. Madrid claimed that Durruti participated in the robbery of the Bank of Spain in Gijón, and that Ascaso had participated in the assassination in 1923 of the Archbishop of Saragossa.

The French government refused the Spanish request for extradition, but ruled that the decision concerning the request of the government of Argentina should be made by the High Court. Berthon, Guernut, Carcos and I were the counsel for the defense. The police packed the courtroom in an extraordinary show of force. The Palace of Justice seemed to be preparing for a siege. Ascaso, Durruti and Jover were not impressed by the police mobilization. They could very well have served as models for a Goya painting, with their thick, black hair, their sun-tanned faces, their bristling eyebrows and stern expressions. In his defense of these valiant “*pistoleros*”, Berthon once again marshaled, with his insinuating phrases and obsequious gestures, the entire art of euphemism: “Gentlemen of the Court”, he said, “I have the honor of representing before you three men situated on the extreme wing of the Spanish liberal opposition.”

The Court pronounced in favor of extradition. The Court’s recommendation, however, was not mandatory for the government. According to the law, the Cabinet can annul the sentence. Therefore, we did not give up, and we launched a public campaign and at the same time we had private discussions with people like Herriot, Painlevé and Leygues.

[Henri Torres]

Durruti was held for more than a year at the Conciergerie prison. There, he occupied the same cell as Marie Antoinette before she was decapitated. After his release, the police escorted him to the Belgian border and told him to cross it illegally. This is how the French government evaded the request for extradition submitted by Primo de Rivera, which proved to be a major blow against the Spanish dictator at that time.

[Cánovas Cervantes]

## **The Campaign**

I directed, in the name of the Sacco and Vanzetti Committee, a long and comprehensive campaign to save the two American anarchists from the electric chair; and one day my comrades said to me: “And what about Ascaso, Durruti and Jover? You should also fight for their release.”

These three Spanish anarchists had engaged in politically-motivated attacks as members of the CNT and had fled to Argentina after Martínez Anido, the executioner of Catalonia, and Primo de Rivera, the chief lackey of Alfonso XIII, banned the CNT. Later they returned to Paris to “encounter”, in the original meaning of the word, “their king”, who was coming to Paris for an official visit.

In Buenos Aires, a crime had taken place: the teller at a bank was murdered and robbed. A taxi driver, under pressure from the police, diverted suspicion towards Ascaso, Durruti and Jover. Furthermore, the sudden departure of the “three musketeers”, as they were called in Spain, had also aroused some suspicion, although they were totally innocent.

Argentina submitted a request for extradition to the French authorities and the latter approved the request, in principle. But Ascaso, Durruti and Jover had to serve a previous sentence of six months in prison pronounced by a Paris court for illegal possession of weapons. They had been arrested in an automobile where they were awaiting the arrival of the King of Spain, with loaded rifles.

I had to pay attention to two different cases at the same time and defend five militants. Sometimes I would get the impression that my activity was viewed with derision in the committee for the right of political asylum, which worked on behalf of the Spanish comrades; then I heard the complaints of the Spanish émigrés. On the other hand, when I was devoting less time to the Sacco and Vanzetti Committee, the Italians became restive. And I also had to face the representatives of the “pure line”, for whom it seemed unacceptable for me to use my influence to save the five defendants. One of these “purists” wrote a pair of poems that crossed the line that separates the ridiculous from the nasty which concluded as follows: “What does death matter! Long live Death!” The poem is not, of course, praising the death of this “poet”; and he was not the first nor will he be the last person to create literature at the cost of the lives of others.

The Spanish dictatorship also requested the extradition of Ascaso, Durruti and Jover (they were accused of being guilty of participating in various politically motivated attacks), but in vain. The French government wanted to preserve its liberal façade. In fact, the whole affair was a hypocritical comedy, a coordinated intrigue involving the Spanish government and the government of Argentina. The three of them were spared the punishment of the disgusting Spanish garrote, only to have to face life in prison on the terrible islands of Tierra del Fuego.

The circumstances under which we undertook the defense of the “three musketeers” were not exactly favorable. At that time the police had unlimited powers to decide the fate of foreign “suspects” and order their deportation. The victims had no right of appeal. Only the national government could overrule the decrees of the police. At the time, however, Poincaré was President and Barthou was the Minister of the Interior.

They were cowards and it would have been imprudent to trust to their noble sentiments. To intimidate them, we had to arouse public opinion. From the very beginning I thought of using the influential League of Human Rights, although the main focus of this pusillanimous organization was to rehabilitate the dead of the First World War or to intercede on behalf of a few liberals who had gone too far. Anarchists, however? Those bums whose very name sends chills down the spines of so many people?

First I went to see a very influential woman of my acquaintance: Mme. Séverine. She gave me a warm welcome. "What can I do for you, Lecoin?" I briefly told her what I wanted. She did not demand any proof that the comrades were innocent.

"Very well, Lecoin, I will send a note to Mme. Mesnard-Dorian. She is all-powerful in the League, and very accommodating. I will do it now."

Mme. Mesnard-Dorian lived in a luxury hotel on the Rue de la Faisanderie. Her salon was frequented by all the distinguished and famous personalities of the Republic. She immediately made a phone call to the President of the League, Victor Basch. I went to see him immediately. When I met him the first thing he said was very strange. "They are guilty, your friends", exclaimed Basch. "I am sure, the representative of the League in Buenos Aires has told me so."

I replied that his judgment was more uncomprehending than the worst of the judges, that is, without reviewing the case, with an empty file. Then he responded unexpectedly: "I would like to see the anarchists in charge of the government!" "Such a desire is proof of your absolute ignorance concerning anarchist thought!", I retorted.

My accusation infuriated him. I had forgotten that he was a professor at the Sorbonne and that a few years earlier he had published a book on anarchism.

When he left, he was still angry. We were convinced that we had utterly failed. We were mistaken, however. That same evening I received a call from Guernut, the General Secretary of the League, and he asked me to send him the file on the case of "Ascaso & Co.". This "& Co." did not seem very promising, but in any event the League would give us leverage that we urgently needed. The mere mention of the League helped us get a foot in every door.

The Minister of the Interior was scheduled to personally meet with Basch and Guernut, to convince them not to help us. He maintained that the guilt of the three Spaniards was undeniable and that the League would allow itself to be used against its better judgment if it were to support our cause.

Then Basch and Guernut met with me again. I still seem to hear their voices: "Tell us the truth, Lecoin! Admit that your friends are not innocent! The League will not get involved in this case unless it is absolutely certain!"

In the meantime, five or six newspapers published editorials in our favor. Even the other newspapers carried articles about our activities. The committee for the defense of the right of political asylum became a force to be reckoned with, and the extradition of Ascaso, Durruti and Jover became a national issue that affected the government. Meanwhile, the three prisoners had begun a hunger strike. They were transferred to the military hospital in Fresnes. They were very worn out, but Barthou had to yield and promised a judicial examination. I went to Fresnes to tell them the news. The warden of the prison and his subordinates gave me a formal welcome; it was the only time in my life that I entered a jail in a triumphal procession. I found the three rebels in bed, each in his own cell. They were very happy to see me.

They were taken to be presented before the presiding judge. This judge, however, hid behind his statutes, refused to rule on the case and restricted his deliberations to the formal problem of whether the extradition request should take precedence.

Despite the pleas of four distinguished lawyers (Carcos, Guernut, Berthon and Torres), the judge maintained that the extradition request should take precedence. It seemed that the Minister of the Interior had won the game. The assistant chief of police of Buenos Aires had already arrived in Paris to take charge of the prisoners, and was rubbing his hands in satisfaction.

Our cause appeared to be lost. I worked harder than ever. Six thousand people gathered at a meeting at the Bullier dance hall. It was resolved to send a delegation to the Ministers Painlevé and Herriot. Painlevé was confused, and spluttered, "Why not! ... Of course!" He deserved as much confidence as a rotten bridge. Herriot's attitude was better. He asked us to send him the case files in forty-eight hours, and he promised to present the matter to the Cabinet. He managed to have the ruling postponed until another, later hearing.

The assistant police chief of Buenos Aires, furious, began to prepare for his return trip to Argentina. The press in Argentina published headlines reading, "The French Government Overruled by a Bunch of Gangsters!"

If public opinion were to have made the decision, Ascaso and Durruti would have been released immediately. But the government was under pressure from the Spanish royal family. It preferred to yield again and approved the latest request for extradition.

Only a government crisis could have set aside this ruling, and only the legislature could unleash a government crisis. We attempted to get in touch with influential deputies who were ready to present an urgent motion before the National Assembly.



I obtained a pass that permitted me to enter the building where the National Assembly held its sessions, and I established my base of operations there. I now had five deputies to support our motion. They represented two hundred votes in the Assembly. I needed fifty more, which I would have to get from the government majority. This called for meticulous preparations. When it comes right down to it, for this kind of activity there is no one better than an inveterate enemy of parliamentarism!

Meanwhile, all over France everyone was talking about nothing but Ascaso, Durruti and Jover. Argentina sent a warship to transport the prisoners. The battleship had mechanical problems and broke down in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. The deadline for extradition had expired. But the “three musketeers” were still imprisoned in the Conciergerie. We invoked the legal rulings and we requested their immediate release. They laughed at us, of course.

The day finally arrived when our bill would be submitted for debate at the National Assembly. Some deputies wanted to fight for justice; others wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to depose the Poincaré government. This would be easy to do if the government were to call for a vote of confidence. In the hallways of the National Assembly rumors and speculations spread. Poincaré, however, who was no novice, foresaw the result of such a vote, and shortly before the lunch break he sent a mediator, his faithful watchdog and confidante, Malvy, the President of the Tax Commission, to meet with me.

“Look here, Lecoin, what do you want?”, he asked me. “Are you really so interested in the fall the government?”

“Not at all, I am only asking for one thing: the release of Ascaso, Durruti and Jover.”

“Then I am going to meet with the President. Come at two, please. I will inform you of his decision.”

The vote never took place. Barthou and Poincaré chose to capitulate. That was in July, 1927.

The next morning we presented ourselves at the gates of the Conciergerie, at the Quai des Orfèvres, surrounded by a swarm of reporters and photographers. The doors opened. There were Ascaso, Durruti and Jover.

[Louis Lecoin]

The stubborn Lecoin, who seemed to be part Merlin the Magician and part Capuchin preacher, overcame all obstacles with his clever strategy. In July 1927 the gates of the Conciergerie were opened. My colleague was the first to convey the good news to the prisoners: “In less than one hour you will be released. What

do you propose to do?" After a brief moment of silence, Durruti answered thoughtfully: "We will carry on with our work ... in Spain".

[Henri Torres]

## **The girlfriend**

Durruti and I never got married, of course. What do you think? Anarchists don't go to the justice of the peace. We met in Paris. That would have been in 1927. He had just been released from prison. There had been an immense campaign in all of France, the government gave in, the "three musketeers" (that was the name the press had given them) were released. Durruti got out of prison, and that same evening he visited some of his friends, I was there with them, we saw each other, we fell in love at first sight, and we went on from there.

[Émilienne Morin]

After Belgium and Luxemburg refused to admit them, their friends tried to obtain asylum for them in the Soviet Union. This failed due to the political conditions that the Russian government wanted to impose on them: these conditions were unacceptable for the anarchists. So they had no other recourse than to return to Paris under false names. Some comrades hid them in their homes for months. Finally, they found jobs in Lyon. After about six months the police found them. They were brought before a judge and sentenced to six months in jail, for violating the deportation order.

[José Peirats I]

We met again in Lyon. It was at his second court appearance. They found out that Buenaventura was living there without papers. I recall that I traveled to Lyon with Ascaso's girlfriend.

That was the first time that I saw the inside of a prison. Then we were separated again, because after they were released they were immediately deported to Belgium. Of course, they had problems with the police there, too; they wouldn't give them residence permits. They also spent some time in Germany. I don't remember exactly when.

[Émilienne Morin]

## **Undesirable aliens**

In 1928 Durruti came to Berlin with his friend Ascaso, illegally of course. We had to find them a place to stay. Durruti stayed at my house for a few weeks, in Berlin-Wilmersdorf, Augustastraße 62, on the fourth floor.

To get a job, however, he had to be registered with the police, so I tried to get a residence permit for him.

The Prussian government at the time was composed of a coalition of social democrats and centrists. It just so happened that I was acquainted with the Minister of Justice. I went to see him and I asked him to allow Durruti to live in Prussia. He explained to me that this was not possible, because the centrists would surely resurrect the story of the assassination attempt. You know, the alleged assassination attempt against the Archbishop of Saragossa.

I had many discussions with Durruti during the weeks he stayed at my house. He met Rudolph Rocker, Fritz Kater and Erich Mühsam while he was in Berlin. Sometimes it was hard for him to communicate, because he did not speak German. The conversations revolved around the subject of the revolution. Durruti always insisted that the revolution must not conclude in a party dictatorship, and that the new society must be organized from the bottom up, rather than on decrees issued from above. That was why the anarchists were not satisfied with the results of the Russian Revolution.

[Augustin Souchy 1]

I was very impressed by Durruti. He was big, athletic, he had a powerful head, he was a kind of Danton. He had a loud voice. Of course, he could also be kind when he wanted to be, almost gentle.

I knew a lot about him and his friends, his travels in Latin America, his robberies and gunfights. But it must be acknowledged that, while Ascaso and Durruti were (if you like) political gangsters, or precursors of terrorism (today it is common, the newspapers are full of talk about terrorists), they never kept a single peseta for themselves.

[Federica Montseny 1]

## **A quiet life in Brussels**

In 1930, in Brussels, they finally got permission to live in Belgium. They lived two years in Brussels. That's where I got to know Ascaso and Durruti.

Ascaso was a very likeable, ironic and discreet comrade, suave and energetic at the same time; I thought he was a little on the sickly side. Durruti, on the other hand, gave the impression of being as strong as an ox, and athletic; he was very hairy and when he smiled he looked like some sort of carnivorous animal. But his gaze reflected goodness and intelligence. I met Ascaso first. We worked at the same factory, a workshop that produced automotive parts. From the very beginning we discussed social problems. I can still hear his voice when he quietly

told me, “no one has the right to rule over others”. I was immediately fascinated by him.

Anyone who lived in Brussels during the years of 1930-1931 will remember how the city was swarming with foreign comrades, especially Spaniards and Italians. I can never think of the place where they sought refuge in the city without feeling a certain melancholy: the eclectic and cozy nest of the bookstore next to the Mont des Arts, whose proprietor was the intrepid Hem Day. That was where the “subversive elements” met.

The first floor had two tenants: me and the Barasco Company. This original enterprise produced all kinds of sweets that it sold directly to street vendors. The “factory” was composed of an apartment that served simultaneously as dining room, living room, kitchen and bedroom, or, more accurately, a dormitory, since the number of guests who sought shelter there at night was limitless. There were more than half a dozen people registered under the name of Barasco; Ascaso and Durruti were among them.

[Leo Campion]

I quit my job as a typist and followed him to Brussels. The Spanish fugitives lived in semi-legality, so to speak, with false passports and identities. Of course the police knew what was going on. Durruti could not travel anywhere without the police sending his case file after him. But in Brussels they left us in peace.

[Émilienne Morin]

Ascaso and Durruti were mutually complementary. Durruti was the man of action, impetuous and enthusiastic, capable of winning people’s confidence; Ascaso was the man of calm resolve, of reflection, of tenacity, amiability and planning. It was a perfect strategy. It was Ascaso who planned the revolutionary actions. His plans were so precise that when the time came for their execution they were confirmed in every detail. Durruti’s strong points were the speed and energy with which he went into action; he put violence at the service of a resolute spirit and superior discernment. Each needed the other, and it was hard to resist them when they were together.

[Cánovas Cervantes]

#### ***Fourth commentary: The Spanish dilemma (1931-1936)***

The Spanish working class celebrated the proclamation of the Republic as a political victory. As always after a period of repression, the CNT was immediately reestablished; its distinctive form of organization made it possible for it to undergo a period of dormancy and then to suddenly reemerge with replenished forces. The republican regime did not owe its existence to a

revolutionary movement, however, but to a bloodless and coldly formal substitute for such a movement. Then the merry-go-round of liberal and bourgeois parties, government crises and new elections began. The center of gravity of this system was constituted by the “center” parties (i.e., the petit bourgeoisie, numerically and economically weak), which generally governed with the tacit, although passive, consent of the social democracy. In other words: the social basis of the Republic was ridiculously flimsy; its political power was eroded due to the joint obstructionist tactic of a convergence of interests of the right wing and the workers movement. The freedom of maneuver of the new government was therefore limited by this obstructionism. There could be no thought of structural reforms actually being implemented. The agrarian question remained unresolved. The agrarian reform law was sabotaged. Apart from a few initial steps towards the separation of Church and State, there was only one real achievement, which took place in the first year of the Republic: approval of a statute of autonomy for Catalonia.

The problems of the workers and peasants were not addressed at all. The anarchist movement, the main organized force of the workers and peasants, boycotted the legislative elections. The defrauded masses once again took to the streets. Strikes, peasant revolts, hunger strikes and urban guerrilla warfare: the government used the same means to confront the direct action of the working class as its predecessors, that is, it used the police, the Civil Guard, and, when necessary, the army. A state of emergency became routine.

During the third year of the Republic, the Spanish dilemma was once again posed. As a result of anarchist electoral abstention, government power easily, and legally, passed into the hands of the reactionaries: the new electoral coalition of the right wing, the CEDA, entered the national legislature. The government of Gil Robles immediately revoked the few positive political reforms of the Republic. That was the beginning of the Two Black Years, 1933-1935. The strategic objective of the right wing was naturally the annihilation of the workers movement. But Gil Robles was not a fascist. While Hitler and his counterrevolution transformed German society in such a way as to render it unrecognizable, while the German monopolies were resolutely modernizing the economic structure of the country, and while the German Reich was preparing to go on the offensive to achieve world domination, the Spanish right wing was only interested in restoring a past that had long since become obsolete. The only movement that seemed to be capable of carrying out these tasks had chosen to go backwards instead. But even this goal could not be pursued without violence.

The Spanish social democrats faced a life and death situation. Their old collaborationist policy had failed; to persist in it would have verged on suicide. The pressure exerted by the rank and file on the leadership of the reformist party intensified. Under these circumstances the leader of the social democracy, Largo Caballero, decided to change the party’s tactic. He broke off the party’s alliance with the republican parties of the liberal bourgeoisie, and prepared his supporters

for armed resistance. Leninist slogans soon appeared in the press of the UGT, the trade union led by the social democrats. In October of 1934, a revolt broke out in Asturias, a stronghold of the UGT, that totally eclipsed the armed operations of the anarchists. This Asturian "October Revolution" has been unjustly forgotten. Nothing like it had taken place in western Europe since the Paris Commune. "Unite, proletarian brothers!" Under this slogan, entire provinces in northern Spain rose up in revolt. Workers councils were immediately formed; the leadership in Madrid lost control over the movement; old rivalries were erased overnight; in Asturias, social democrats, anarchists and communists united in the struggle against government troops.

The tragedy of the Asturian revolution resided in the fact that it was isolated from the start, limited to a peripheral region, cut off from the rest of the country. The revolt in Madrid was crushed almost before it even began. In Barcelona, the Asturian workers had a very weak ally: the Esquerra Catalana, led by Lluís Companys, who was only interested in defending the statute of autonomy. The anarchists of Catalonia and Andalusia did not participate. They had all too often been the victims of slander and intimidation at the hands of Largo Caballero; all too often had the social democracy used the police against the CNT. The ultimate cause of the defeat of 1934 was the profound disunity of the workers movement. Due to the political isolation of the Asturian revolt, the government was able to crush it militarily, overcoming desperate resistance. The revolutionary strongholds were bombed, and the Foreign Legion and African regiments under the command of a young general named Francisco Franco crushed the revolt of the Asturian workers. The subsequent repression was appalling. By the end of 1935 there were more than thirty thousand political prisoners in Spanish prisons.

After this "success", the arrogance of the reactionaries knew no limits. They were so confident of their predominance that they agreed to hold new elections in February of 1936. The electoral campaign for these elections showed just how thoughtless this decision was. The social democracy had reached the conclusion, thanks to its Asturian disaster, that it was not the stuff from which revolutions are made. It returned, full of repentance, to its parliamentary tactic and entered an electoral alliance with the centrist republican parties; the communists, a numerically insignificant group, also joined this alliance.

And so the Popular Front was born, which won an overwhelming victory in the elections of February 1936. This reversal of political fortunes was ultimately brought about by a force that had absolutely no representation in the legislature. The CNT, with its members numbering in the millions, was the decisive force in this election, tacitly disregarding its customary electoral boycott.

The new government, however, was just as uninterested in carrying out decisive reforms as the republican government of 1931. It was content to reinstate the laws that Gil Robles had repealed. Otherwise, everything remained the same as before.

The Popular Front did not represent the people. The republicans were not capable of resolving the Spanish dilemma.

The blow that would finally lead to the overthrow the old society came from the right. Ever since the formation of the Popular Front, the right wing was planning to violently overthrow the elected government. This required ideological and organizational preparation. Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy offered examples of how the reactionary forces could detach themselves from their dreams of turning back the clock and go on the offensive instead; the Axis powers also promised material support and propaganda services. The Spanish Falange began its rise to prominence. The army prepared the *coup d'état*. The confrontation was predictable. The government vacillated. The generals struck. On July 17 Franco assumed command over a military revolt in Spanish Morocco. On July 18, the revolt spread to Spain itself. Three days later, one-third of the country was in the hands of the generals: fanatically Catholic Navarre, part of Aragon, Galicia, León, Old Castile, Seville, Cadiz and Cordoba. The officers who planned the coup did not expect to encounter any serious resistance. Their calculations had failed to take the Spanish people into account.

## **The Republic**

### **Return**

A few days after the proclamation of the Republic, in April of 1931, Durruti, Ascaso and García Oliver showed up at my house.

We had a long discussion, focused particularly on the main problem facing anarchists at that time. Some people thought that we should give the Republic a chance, and others said (and this was the extremist wing of the anarchist movement, to which Durruti, Ascaso and García Oliver belonged) that the Republic must not be given any time to consolidate its rule. According to them, the consolidation of the Republic would interrupt the ongoing process of structural revolutionary transformation.

I disagreed. I admit that, at that time, I was afraid that too much haste would be counterproductive. Later, after having seen the political evolution of the Republic, I had to admit that Durruti, Ascaso and García Oliver were right. The Republic sank into a timid reformism; it did not even manage to implement its agrarian reform program, which was the key problem in Spain.

[Federica Montseny 1]

In 1931, when the Republic was proclaimed in Spain, it was crazy, delirious.... The emigrants in Brussels got all their papers in order; they wanted to return to

Spain as soon as possible. Durruti and Ascaso were the first to leave. We were left alone with their suitcases and baggage.

I was able to go to Spain a month later. My first impression of Barcelona was ambivalent. They told me that it almost never rains in Barcelona. So I had given my raincoat to one of my girlfriends in Brussels. When we arrived in Spain it was raining buckets. That was in June. The political scene was very different from the political scene in Paris. I was familiar with the anarchosyndicalist movement in France, but it was totally different in Spain. The mentality of the Spanish comrades.... They seemed to me, if I may say so, they seemed to me somewhat simple, somewhat elementary.

I found something else disturbing: the women played no role whatsoever. There were women at demonstrations and meetings, of course. But they were never with their husbands. The men got together at the café. They spent hours and hours sitting with a cup of coffee in front of them. Coffee, yes, but they did not drink alcohol. So one day I asked Buenaventura: "What's up with your comrades, are they all bachelors?" But all in vain. Now I get it. Woman's place is in the home, and that is enough.

[Émilienne Morin]

When I first came to Spain after the proclamation of the Republic, I met Durruti at the café called La Tranquilidad. It was a meeting place for anarchists, and was therefore also a focal point for the attentions of the police, who were constantly going there and frequently arresting people. But the anarchists were not too disturbed by this. I had already heard many legendary tales about Durruti. He was totally different from what I expected as a result of hearing those stories. I found him to be a very placid and amiable man; the immense energy that he would so often display was hardly discernable.

[Arthur Lehning]

Ascaso was the most reserved of the "three musketeers". But just as García Oliver was the flexible force and Durruti represented the strong arm and the will power, Ascaso was the dauntless and penetrating intellect. His face was pleasant and intelligent and his mouth had an expression of melancholy and mockery; his gaze was penetrating and ironic. He was rather short and thin, deliberate in his gestures; he displayed a certain kind of indolent grace that concealed a superhuman energy. Compared to Durruti, with his plebeian, frank and rough exterior, Ascaso had an ineffable, almost aristocratic quality. Whenever I saw them together, Buenaventura pounding the table with his enormous fists and shouting at the top of his lungs, and Francisco at his side, cunning and indifferent, with his eternal smile on his lips, I could see the stark contrast between the power of the one and the genius of the other. They complemented each other.



[Federica Montseny 1]

## **May Day**

After the proclamation of the Spanish Republic, I travelled to Barcelona to visit my friends, Ascaso, Durruti and Jover. I arrived on the eve of May Day. The communists were planning to hold a demonstration and had plastered the walls of the city with posters. From the CNT-FAI, on the other hand, nothing, not even a flyer! Would they fail to take advantage of the opportunity to distribute their propaganda on a day like this? Durruti assured me: “No, quite the contrary, we are organizing a demonstration for the streets downtown. We are expecting one hundred thousand participants.” “And the propaganda?”, I asked. “I don’t see any posters announcing the demonstration.”

“We announced the demonstration in our newspaper, *Solidaridad Obrera*.”

As it turned out, the anarchist demonstration on the following day was attended by 100,000 people, while the communist demonstration attracted six or seven thousand at most.

I was nevertheless convinced that their confidence in themselves verged on recklessness. I had the impression that they underestimated the danger posed by the communists. The “three musketeers” and their Spanish comrades made fun of me. They said that I was seeing ghosts. A few years later their recklessness would cost them dearly.

[Louis Lecoin]

Every Sunday the FAI held a meeting in the enormous exhibition hall at Montjuïc Park. The speakers were almost always the same: Cano Ruiz, Francisco Ascaso, Arturo Parera, García Oliver and Durruti. The first meetings were attended by only a few hundred people. When the public discovered the quality of the speakers, especially García Oliver and Durruti, the exhibition hall seemed small. Every Sunday, thousands and thousands of workers attended these meetings.

Durruti was not an extraordinary speaker. His speeches give the impression of being disorganized; he was not familiar with the art of rhetoric. The people came to listen to him most of all, however. His strong and clear voice really got through to the masses. He spoke simply, without ornamentation. What attracted the masses was his vehement and boundless emotion.

One day, the comrades in Gerona invited Durruti to address a meeting. He was arrested immediately after his first words, the charge still being his alleged involvement in planning to assassinate Alfonso XIII. Evidently, the judicial authorities of Gerona had not heard that the monarchy had fallen and that a general amnesty had been declared. The people of Gerona rose up in revolt. There

were several attempts to storm the prison to free Durruti. The workers proclaimed a general strike; the authorities declared a state of emergency. On the fourth day of the general strike, Durruti was released.

A revolt also took place in Barcelona in May of 1931. An assembly was held at the Palace of Fine Arts, attended by numerous former political prisoners who had been released because of the amnesty. Resolutions were approved, and it was agreed that the text of these resolutions would be delivered to the President of Catalonia, Francesc Macià. A gigantic demonstration was organized, at the front of which marched García Oliver, Durruti, Ascaso, Santiago Bilbao and other leaders of the CNT-FAI: the first demonstration held by the proletarian forces since the proclamation of the Republic. The march was scheduled to proceed along the downtown streets of the city. When its first ranks arrived at the Palace of the Generalitat of Catalonia, the police opened fire. The workers and the police exchanged hundreds of rounds. The situation became so serious that the army intervened. A unit of regular soldiers appeared at the Plaza de la República. Durruti addressed the soldiers. When the Civil Guards and security forces once again tried to attack the demonstrators, the soldiers turned their guns on the police. A massacre was therefore avoided.

This episode was characteristic of the erroneous policies of the Republic in 1931. The state bureaucracy was still staffed by the same elements who had previously served the monarchy. The command of the armed forces was in the hands of the reactionaries. The Republic lacked a social policy that would benefit the working class. The regime had changed its form, but everything else was the same as before, just like in the times of Alfonso XIII. The people's dissatisfaction mounted with each passing day.

[Alejandro Gilabert]

## **The miserable Republic**

During the period of the Republic there was a long series of bitter disputes, expressions of the revolutionary class struggle. In 1932 the miners of Fígols in the Catalanian mountains went on strike. The strike took on the features of an insurrection.

In January 1933 the workers revolted again, mainly in Catalonia, but also in Andalusia. Of particular note was the tragedy of Casas Viejas. In December of 1933 a revolt broke out in Aragon and part of Castile, and in 1934 the Asturian revolution took place, the first revolutionary movement that united anarchists, socialists and communists, and the two largest trade union organizations of Spain, under the slogan, "Unite, proletarian brothers!"

The left finally won a majority in the elections of February 1936. The question of amnesty for the numerous political prisoners played a role in this victory. The

CNT had always been opposed to parliamentarism, but this time its position was: vote, or don't vote, as you see fit. And almost no one boycotted the elections. Even Durruti agreed with this policy.

Durruti participated actively in all these revolts and struggles during the period of the Republic. He thought that one had to constantly drive the process forward. He became involved in actions as soon as he returned to Spain.

As a result of his activities, he was deported to Villa Cisneros, in Africa, in 1932. Later, they arrested him again. Soon after he was released from prison thanks to an amnesty or some strategic maneuver of the government, he would be arrested again, because he never let up, under any circumstances.

[Federica Montseny 1]

Durruti always told the workers that the republicans and the socialists had betrayed the revolution, and that it was necessary to start the revolution all over again from the beginning. He went to the mining district of Fígols with Pérez Combina and Arturo Parera. He told the miners that the bourgeois bureaucracy had failed and that the time for revolution had come. The bourgeoisie must be expropriated and the State abolished; only in that way was it possible to complete the emancipation of the working class. He recommended to the workers that they should get ready for the final struggle and he taught them how to manufacture bombs with strong metal containers and dynamite.

Unrest spread throughout all of Spain. The peasants engaged daily in battles with the Civil Guard, which defended the big landowners. Strikes broke out everywhere. The government found itself faced with the choice between supporting the workers or defending the bourgeoisie. It sided with the bourgeoisie, of course.

On January 19, 1932, the miners of Fígols rose up in arms against the capitalists. The movement spread to the valleys of Cardoner and Alto Llobregat. Fígols, Berga, Suria, Cardona, Gironella and Sallent were the revolutionary beacons. For the first time in history, libertarian communism was introduced in these towns.

After eight days, the army crushed the movement. The repression of the revolt was relatively moderate, since the government troops were under the command of Captain Humberto Gil Cabrera, a kind-hearted officer, who was later promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, and sympathized with the CNT. He prevented a campaign of bloody reprisals against the workers of the mining district.

[Alejandro Gilabert]

On January 18, 1932, the miners of the Fígols mining district, in the valley of Alto Llobregat, engaged in open rebellion, declaring the abolition of private

property and money and proclaiming libertarian communism. The central government described the rebels as “bandits with membership cards” (of the CNT), and President Manuel Azaña ordered the military commander of the region: “I am giving you fifteen minutes, from the moment the troops arrive, to crush the revolt.” As it turned out, the soldiers needed five days.

[José Peirats 1-2]

Five days of anarchy ... no longer than the lifespan of a flower.

[Federica Montseny]

## **Exile**

In the meantime, a general strike had been declared in Barcelona. The usual skirmishes and exchanges of gunfire took place. Hundreds of prisoners from the mining district were being held on ships anchored in the city’s harbor, which had been turned into floating prisons. The wave of repression affected all of Catalonia, the coast of Levante and Andalusia. The most important prisoners were taken aboard the transatlantic vessel Buenos Aires, which left port on February 10 with 104 deportees aboard, including Durruti and Ascaso, and set a course for West Africa (Río de Oro) and the Canary Islands (Fuerteventura).

Francisco Ascaso wrote, when he was separated from his comrades:

“Poor bourgeoisie, which has to resort to such procedures merely to survive! It does not surprise us. It is locked in a contest with us and it is natural that it should defend itself. Let it torture, let it banish, let it murder. Nobody dies without experiencing death throes. Beasts and humans are alike in this. It is lamentable that the throes may claim victims, especially when those who succumb are comrades. But the law is ineluctable and we must accept it. May its agony be brief. Nothing can contain our joy when our thoughts turn to it, because we know that our sufferings spell the beginning of the end. Something is decaying and in the throes of death. Its death is our life, our liberation. That sort of suffering is no suffering at all. It is to live, instead, a long-cherished dream; it is to be present at the materialisation and growth of an idea which has nourished our spirit and filled the emptiness of our lives.

“Leaving, then, is living! That is why our greeting must be, not farewell but merely see you soon! Francisco Ascaso.”

[José Peirats 2]

The comrades were deported to Africa on a banana boat that set course for Bata, in the Gulf of Guinea. They were packed into the hold of the ship, of course. There were one hundred sixty of them, and there was only one porthole. Everyone

wanted to get out, they wanted to go up on deck. Ascaso said, "I've had enough" and started to walk up the stairs. The guard raised his pistol and shouted, "Back!" But you know Ascaso, he was not a man who could be deterred so easily. He continued walking up the stairs. The guard pointed his gun at him, and Ascaso said to him, "Go on, shoot, coward, because if you don't kill me now, when I find you on the street I'll kill you like a dog!" The sergeant hesitated. He began to tremble. He did not know what would happen to him if he killed Ascaso, and let him go. Then there was no way to stop the others. Everyone went up on deck. The Captain was forced to call upon the destroyer that escorted the ship. The marines boarded the boat with loaded rifles to put down the mutiny. For the incident had become a real mutiny.

Durruti came forward, opened up his shirt—he must have weighed at least ninety kilos—and shouted at the marines: "Now you are brave, because you see us unarmed, but you will soon see what will happen in Spain if you kill us." Then the officers held a conference. It was decided that there was no mutiny, and that the prisoners could walk around on the deck if they wanted. And the boat docked at Bata.

[Manuel Buizán]

When the Buenos Aires, a boat that would have been good for scrap metal, and which had almost sunk during the journey, arrived at Río de Oro, the governor of Villa Cisneros refused to allow Durruti to be taken ashore. No one understood why he did this. Durruti and some of his comrades were separated from the other deportees and taken to Fuerteventura, in the Canary Islands. It was subsequently discovered that the governor of Villa Cisneros, a man named Regueral, was the son of the former governor of Bilbao. This governor of Bilbao had repressed the anarchist movement with great cruelty, and after he resigned he was executed at gunpoint on the streets of León, on the night of a festival. His son declared that he was convinced that Durruti and his comrades had killed his father, and this was why he refused to admit him to his colony.

[Ricardo Sanz 3]

## **Unrest**

The CNT protested against the deportations by calling another general strike. In Tarrasa the anarchists stormed the city hall and raised the black and red flag. They besieged the jail, until reinforcements approached from Sabadell. After a bloody battle, the anarchists surrendered. During the trial that followed the defendants received sentences of between four and twenty years of hard labor.

Protests against the deportations continued, however. On May 29, they reached their peak with mass demonstrations, armed clashes and acts of sabotage. The jails filled up with prisoners. In Barcelona, the prisoners mutinied and set fire to

the penitentiary. The warden of the prison, who crushed the uprising, was gunned down right in the middle of the street a few days later.

[José Peirats 1]

In late November of 1932, the deportees returned from Africa. The republican-social democratic government continued to persecute the CNT. The FAI organized a rally at the Palace of Fine Arts at Montjuich Park, in Barcelona. There, Durruti spoke before a crowd for the first time since his return from exile. It is estimated that the rally was attended by 100,000 people. Durruti unreservedly declared his faith in the revolution. The police had set up a large number of machine gun emplacements around the Palace of Fine Arts.

The Catalonian bourgeoisie was panic-stricken: its newspapers called upon the government to take decisive action against the anarchists. The trade unions of the CNT were banned and their newspaper, *Solidaridad Obrera*, was shut down. Hundreds of political activists were arrested. The idea that the repression should be confronted with violence was making headway among the anarchists. The railroad workers went on strike. A conflict like that could wreck the country's economy and jeopardize its political stability; the government therefore threatened to militarize the railroads. García Oliver proposed a subversive plan; he suggested that the railroad workers strike could be used to unleash the revolution throughout Spain. Ascaso, Durruti, Aurelio Fernández, Ricardo Sanz, Dionisio Eroles, Jover and others approved of García Oliver's plan. A fortuitous event acted as a detonator. Two anarchists, Hilario Esteban and Meler, who would later play such an important role in the Civil War on the Aragon Front, had set up an explosives factory in the Clot neighborhood in Barcelona. As a result of an explosion caused by carelessness, the police discovered the explosives that had been produced and stored at the site of the explosion. It was necessary to immediately commence the revolt to prevent the police from seizing all the arsenals of the anarchists. The commando teams and defense cadres of the FAI attacked the Barcelona barracks on January 8, 1933.

Armed clashes took place in every region of Spain. On this occasion, as well, the government was able to crush the revolt.

[Alejandro Gilabert]

After the suppression of the January revolt, Durruti and Ascaso were once again imprisoned; they spent six months in the prison of Puerto de Santa María. Almost immediately after his release, Durruti was involved in actions, with his usual tenacity.

[Diego Abad de Santillán]

After the proclamation of the Republic, the CNT and the FAI were the targets of an avalanche of slander and abuse. We can still recall the headlines on the front page of the communist organ, *La Batalla*: “FAI-ismo = fascismo”, and the declarations of Fabra Rivas, a well-known social democrat who was the most intimate advisor of Largo Caballero: “Anarchists like Ascaso and Durruti are insane imbeciles. We have to distance ourselves from such lunatics. You cannot reason with them. The best thing would be line up these throwbacks to the past and shoot them.”

[Luz de Alba]

I remember that one day the authorities raided our printshop and confiscated the rotary press of our newspaper, *Solidaridad Obrera*. That was during the Republic, I don't remember why they did it. Because of informers or troublemakers. The newspaper was shut down and the rotary press was scheduled to be sold at auction. Many businessmen showed up at the auction to bid on the press. But they weren't alone. We went to the auction hall, at least twenty of us, including Durruti and Ascaso. Durruti stood up and offered twenty pesetas for the rotary press. That was practically nothing. The businessmen got up all at once and shouted, “One thousand pesetas!”, but the first one to do so did not really have his heart in it, he felt something cold, made of steel, poking him in the ribs, and he immediately withdrew his bid, of course. Then it was Ascaso's turn. He shouted, “Four duros!” That was twenty pesetas again. A man who wanted to outbid Ascaso felt a revolver poking him in his side and preferred to keep his mouth shut. Finally, the auctioneer had no other alternative: he banged his hammer and sold us the rotary press for twenty pesetas, a very good deal.

There is no comparison between those days and today. What we are doing in Paris, at the printshop of the CNT in exile, is a bagatelle. We don't have anything, our machinery could be sold for scrap. We need new equipment. Sure, we now work legally, and working legally means having to work with old iron. If we had a Durruti, an Ascaso, it wouldn't be hard to get a new press. Yes, that would solve our problems!

[Juan Ferrer]

## **Factory work**

It called itself a “Workers Republic”, and what did they do with Durruti? They deported him to Bata, they accused him of vagrancy. That was their charge against Ascaso and Durruti and hundreds of other men who always earned their living in a factory. They weren't civil servants, they didn't sit at a desk in an office, paid by the trade union. Durruti was the opposite of a hierarch, he never took a peseta from the CNT or the FAI.

[Manuel Hernández]

One day the workers of the Damm brewery in Barcelona went on strike because their wages were too low. The employers did not yield and even fired some of the workers. Then the CNT responded with a boycott of the brewery. Some bar owners didn't want to observe the boycott. They continued to sell Damm beer. Then Durruti and a few comrades went to pay them a visit, they walked right through the door and broke all the windows and glassware and wrecked the bar. Soon enough, every bar in Barcelona featured a poster that said, "Damm beer not served here". After a few weeks, the brewery paid all the back wages of the workers, rehired all the workers who had been fired and negotiated a new contract with the CNT.

[Ramón García López]

Durruti believed that the liberation of the workers would be achieved by way of their economic unification, and with economic direct action. Ever since 1933 he had been emphasizing the formation of factory committees; in their constructive activity they would be the guarantee of the social revolution. At a big anti-parliamentary meeting in the fall of 1933, he said, "The factory is the university of the worker".

[Heinz Rüdiger]

He agreed that our movement should also incorporate representatives of the middle class, students and writers, but only on the condition that they renounce their privileges and merge with the people. One day, while I was speaking with him in the courtyard of the prison, he criticized the exaggerated esteem in which technicians and specialists are usually held. The metal workers will be capable of running any factory, just as the construction workers will be able to design and build a house. And the same thing is true, he said, of every other industry.

[Liberto Callejas]

## **Daily life**

Life in Spain was difficult for me. I couldn't get a job in my chosen profession, because I spoke almost no Spanish. So I worked as a dishwasher until I found a position through the trade union as an usher at a movie theater. That was a luxury then. And always moving from one apartment to another. We were constantly packing and moving, in Barcelona alone we moved five or six times. And to top it all off, Buenaventura was often in jail; I couldn't pay the rent and I had to move to a friend's house. Basically, all the troubles of women whose partners are professional revolutionaries.



In 1931, my daughter, Colette, was born in Barcelona, and this made my life even harder. Since Durruti was in jail, the comrades passed the hat; each contributed a few pesetas, and that was enough for us to pay the rent.

[Émilienne Morin]

In early 1936 Durruti lived right next door, in a small apartment in the Sans neighborhood. The employers had put him on the blacklist. He could not get a job anywhere. His partner Émilienne worked as an usher at a movie theater to provide for the family.

One evening we paid him a visit and we found him in the kitchen. He was wearing an apron, washing dishes and preparing dinner for his little daughter Colette and his wife. My friend wanted to kid around with Durruti, so he said, "Come on, Durruti, this is women's work". Durruti responded gruffly, "Take this example: when my wife goes to work I clean the house, I make the beds and I cook the food. I also give my little girl a bath and take care of her. If you think that an anarchist has to be lounging around in a bar or a café while his wife works, that shows that you have understood nothing".

[Manuel Pérez]

Yes, the anarchists always talked a lot about free love. But when it comes right down to it, they are Spaniards, and it makes me laugh when Spaniards talk about things like that, because it's contrary to their temperament. They repeat what they read in books. The Spaniards were never in favor of women's liberation. I know them very well, inside and out, and I assure you that they are quick to dispose of the prejudices they don't like, but they carefully preserve the ones they like. Woman's place is in the home! They like that philosophy. One day an old comrade said to me, "Yes, your theories are very nice, but anarchy is one thing and the family is another, that's how it is and that's how it will always be".

It was my good fortune to have Durruti. He was not as backward as the others. And he also knew who he was dealing with, of course!

[Émilienne Morin]

I liked him. I assure you that there are no more men like him. He could not bear injustice. He was not arrogant, he always lived simply, I mean, he was strong, believe me, he was as strong as the devil.

[Josefa Ibáñez]

I met Durruti at the *Solidaridad Obrera* printshop. We went there in 1934 to pick up our propaganda leaflets, leaflets with brief texts in German that we were sending illegally to Germany. They looked like advertisement brochures for

candy bars. I was not accustomed to the sun of Barcelona, so I always wore a hat. For the anarchists the woman's hat was a symbol of the bourgeoisie. That was why Ascaso was looking at me with a certain mistrust. I shook his hand. He did a double-take. I had no calluses on my hands.

"What?", I said. "You're Ascaso?" He seemed so small and insignificant. He took offense at this. I should not have spoken to him in that tone of voice. It is better not to laugh at Spaniards. And this is all the more true if you are a woman. I was twenty-one years old, but I looked sixteen. Ascaso seemed somewhat disdainful. Besides, he was one of those anarchists who did not want to know anything about strange foreigners like us. The others immediately accepted me. They even forgave me for my hat. The men of the CNT were proletarians, but they conducted themselves with great dignity and aplomb. A friend of mine, a railroad worker, gave the impression that he was an aristocrat; and he wasn't the only one.

Durruti was not like that. He was surprisingly modest. He was capable of anything, however, if necessary. I met him one night at a movie theater where his wife was working as an usher and cashier. Émilienne always talked more than the other women; she was silent only in the presence of Durruti. I had to buy some things on the Ramblas, and Durruti came with me. "The bombs and shooting scare me", I said. In Barcelona there was almost always a strike, a bank robbery or a police raid in progress. On the Ramblas there was an Assault Guard behind every tree, with a fixed bayonet, too; it was quite common to see regular troops there. The Moors with their scimitars seemed especially frightening. But for the most part a festive atmosphere reigned. Ladies were strolling past the shop windows. Then, a whistle. Hand grenades began to fall from the rooftops. The shopkeepers rolled down their shutters and slammed their gates shut with a bang, the ladies waved white handkerchiefs and threw themselves on the ground, or ran into the stores or onto the sidewalks. After a little while calm returned, the whistles stopped giving the danger signal, and everyone got up and dusted off their clothes, as if nothing had happened.

Durruti walked right by the police without the slightest sign of concern.

"I am just as afraid as you are", he said. "Fear and bravery go together. Sometimes I don't know where one ends and where the other begins." The children on the street knew him. With me he was always very kind. And he took me seriously, too. The anarchists never treated women discourteously. They were not aficionados of skirt chasing, to the contrary. Sometimes they seemed downright Calvinist to me. They were always thinking about the revolution.

Durruti did not know the meaning of the word arrogance. He took everyone he met seriously. The people of Barcelona felt that they were reflected in him. That is why they gave him a royal funeral.

[Madeleine Lehning]

## Boycotting the elections

The CNT waged an intensive campaign in preparation for the parliamentary elections of November 1933: it proclaimed abstention with unprecedented vigor and bitterness. The anarchists' newspapers and flyers disseminated the call to boycott the elections to the most distant villages. The slogan, "Don't Vote", was eagerly welcomed by the workers and peasants; they were tired of the "left wing" government parties, the policies of the left wing liberals and the social democrats, and the constant repression. The campaign reached its peak on November 5 with a mass meeting at Barcelona's Plaza de Toros Monumental attended by between 75,000 and 100,000 workers. The most popular speakers of the CNT echoed the refrain, "Instead of the ballot box, social revolution".

"Workers", cried Buenaventura Durruti, "last time you voted for the Republic. Would you have voted for it if you had known that this Republic would imprison 9,000 workers?" "No!", the crowd shouted.

Later, Valeriano Orobón Fernández, a young anarchist, spoke. "The revolution of the republicans has failed", he said; "a fascist counterrevolution is imminent. What happened in Germany? The socialists and communists knew perfectly well what Hitler was planning to do, but they voted and they signed their own death warrants. And in Austria, the pride of social democracy? There, the social democratic party accounted for 45% of the votes. They hoped to get six percent more; they thought this would be all they would need to rise to power. But they forgot about one very simple thing: even if their hopes were to be fulfilled, on the very next day after their electoral victory the masses would have to pour onto the streets with arms in hand to defend their victory, because the reactionaries will not give up power so easily."

[José Peirats 2/Stephen John Brademas]

Rates of abstention in the parliamentary elections of November 19, 1933:

Province of Barcelona: 40%

Province of Saragossa: more than 40%

Province of Huesca: more than 40%

Province of Tarragona: more than 40%

Province of Seville: more than 45%

Province of Cadiz: more than 45%

Province of Malaga: more than 45%

Spain as a whole: 32.5%

[César Lorenzo]

In the elections of 1933 the Spanish anarchists organized the most successful electoral boycott in the history of the workers movement. Abstention was effective, in view of the fact that most of the workers did not vote. As a result, however, the right wing and the conservative parties won the elections. The government of Gil Robles was not fascist in the strict meaning of the word, but it was extremely reactionary.

[Arthur Lehning]

### **The Saragossa insurrection**

Shortly after the elections, the CNT held a secret conference in Madrid. I attended this meeting and I can still recall the course of the discussion. The organization of the CNT is federalist, each province has a regional committee; these committees often have their own political lines, there was not always unanimity. The representatives from Aragon said, "We did not participate in the elections and it is basically our fault that we have a right wing government. We cannot just accept this result, we have to do something. Now is the time for the armed insurrection!"

The representatives from Barcelona said, "It's not possible, we don't have weapons, we aren't prepared, we've suffered too many defeats over the last few years".

But the delegates from Aragon were not convinced. In the northern part of Aragon, almost 99% of the eligible voters had abstained; the anarchists were strong in that region. For several days, Saragossa was in the power of the CNT, and libertarian communism was proclaimed in the towns of the northern part of the province. In the other regions the CNT did everything it could to support the insurrection, even though it had not gained the prior approval of the organization. The government declared a state of emergency. It lasted a couple of weeks. Durruti, Mera and the others were arrested, and they were put on trial for high treason.

[Arthur Lehning]

Durruti said, at a huge meeting held at the Plaza Monumental in Barcelona, that the only response to the electoral victory of the reactionaries was armed revolution. The CNT adopted this slogan. Only García Oliver was opposed, he thought the CNT had not yet recovered from the defeat of January 1933. He thought that this policy was adventurism. For the first time in their long

friendship, Durruti and García Oliver were at odds. Durruti went to Saragossa to coordinate the insurrection. The uprising broke out on the very same day that the Cortes convened in Madrid with its new counterrevolutionary majority. That was December 8, 1933.

[Alejandro Gilabert]

Early that morning there was a sensational mass jailbreak involving political prisoners in Barcelona. They had excavated a tunnel that connected with the city's sewer system.

The revolutionary committee of the CNT had its headquarters in Saragossa; that was also the location of the national committee of the anarchists. That night, several explosions rocked the city. The national authorities responded immediately and arrested almost one hundred revolutionaries, including Durruti, Isaac Puente and Cipriano Mera, who were members of the committee. The street fighting lasted all through the night and into the next day, at least. The workers erected barricades. A monastery was burned down. The express train from Barcelona arrived at the central station enveloped in flames; it had been firebombed. The army mobilized significant forces, including tanks.

In Alcalá de Gurrea, Alcampel, Albalate de Cinca and other towns in the province of Huesca, as well as various parts of the province of Teruel, libertarian communism was proclaimed. In Valderrobles, for example, the peasants abolished money and burned the records of the local government, the courthouse and the land title registry office.

The insurrection was rapidly crushed. The strike declared by the CNT was observed only in certain parts of the country. Fighting was limited to the territories of Aragon and Rioja. The most decisive regions, Catalonia and Andalusia, had not yet recovered from the defeat of January; a significant part of the movement characterized the insurrection as adventurism and ill-advised.

[José Peirats 1/Stephen John Brademas]

## **More prisons**

I remember the bitter and happy times we spent with him in the prison in Saragossa. He retained his good spirits there. He always preserved a certain innocence, certain childlike traits. He taught us how to fight.

I can still vividly recall the time he spoke at the famous meeting at the headquarters of the metal workers trade union in Saragossa, where the insurrection of December 8 was approved. He wore eyeglasses then, his gaze electrified us. The only thing that sustained us in this unequal struggle was our

hope. We took to the streets. Durruti was at my side. Many of us died then, others are still fighting against fascism.

I saw him again on Convertido Street, after we were separated. When the battle ended, I met him again in prison.

[Manuel Salas]

Durruti was sentenced to six months in prison as one of the ringleaders of the insurrection. While he was being held in preventive detention in Saragossa, the file containing the charges and evidence against him disappeared from the Palace of Justice during the night.

[Diego Abad de Santillán]

I lived in Spain until 1935; I was then the secretary of the syndicalist international, the IWA. I saw Durruti shortly before my departure. He was once again in jail, this time in Barcelona, and I visited him there. I knew that he wanted to talk to me, and I told his wife, “yes, he wants to see me, but it is impossible for me to visit him in jail, I live almost illegally here, I represent an internationalist organization, and I might be arrested at any moment, it is very dangerous. I have to think of my responsibilities, I cannot do anything too rash”.

She responded, “There will be no problems, come with me, you do not have to talk, we will tell them you are my uncle, and you can register under any name you want. It is very easy”.

Anyway, that is what she told me; these people know Spain better than I do. I took the chance, and we went together to the prison; Durruti was behind one set of bars, and we were behind another set of bars, and between the two sets of bars two guards were posted, one alongside the other. Then Durruti began to shout in French; I spoke in a soft voice about political questions, what had to be done in the organization, etc.

I was thinking, “How is it possible for him to be yelling like that here, in jail, in French, and to top it all off, with a foreigner? ... Now I’m going to be arrested”. But things like that happen in Spain. As it turned out, I left the prison without any problems.

[Arthur Lehning]

Once, Ascaso and Durruti were being held at the police headquarters in Barcelona. Since everyone was talking about them, the police brought their girlfriends to see the prisoners. And Durruti, in his cell, mussed up his hair with his hands until it was all disheveled, and when the girls came to see him he grunted like an orangutan, “Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!”. The women almost fainted from

fright, and a guard asked him, “Why are you doing that?” And Durruti said, “because that’s what they think, that we are monkeys, all they need is some peanuts to throw at us. If they want to be entertained they should go to the circus”.

[Eugenio Valdenbro]

## **The Popular Front**

After the Asturian October Revolution of 1934, Durruti was once again imprisoned: this time he spent several months in the prison in Valencia. The defeat of the Marxists in Asturias led him to reflect on the course of the Spanish workers movement.

Everyone agreed that bourgeois democracy had failed. What was needed was a revolutionary alliance of the working class. García Oliver suggested a line of action: “The Marxists of the UGT, the anarchists of the CNT, and both organizations united in action against capitalism.” At the last congress of the CNT in Saragossa, it was resolved to establish a revolutionary pact with the social democratic trade union, the UGT. The only condition the CNT insisted on for this pact was that the social democratic workers must publicly refuse to collaborate with the bourgeois parties. This would clear the way for the revolutionary proletariat.

The congress addressed another question, however: national legislative elections were scheduled for February 1936. There were more than 30,000 political prisoners in Spanish prisons at the time, most of them anarchists. The left wing parties promised to release them if they won the elections. The right wing threatened to intensify the repression. If the CNT called upon its supporters to abstain from voting, as in the past, it would reduce the chances that the 30,000 prisoners would be freed; if it advised its supporters to vote, it would recognize universal suffrage and parliamentarism, which the anarchists had always combated. Durruti found a solution to this dilemma. The electoral struggle had become so embittered that no sector seemed to be willing to accept defeat. The left wing parties announced that if the right were to win the elections they would respond with revolutionary measures; the right wing parties said that if the left were to win the elections it would lead to civil war. Durruti expressed the following conclusion at the meeting: “We face the choice of revolution or civil war. The worker who votes and then stays peacefully at home would be a counterrevolutionary. And the worker who does not vote and also stays home, he would also be a counterrevolutionary.”

The CNT did not recommend abstention. Most workers voted. The left wing parties won the election. The right wing made good on its threats and began to prepare for civil war. Durruti was to a great extent responsible for the outcome of the elections.

[Alejandro Gilabert]

“The CNT must preserve its vitality and its power in society; only the CNT can guarantee that no one, whether from the right or the left, can become a dictator over the country.”

[Buenaventura Durruti]

When the Popular Front won the elections on February 16, 1936, Durruti was at the Puerto de Santa María prison. Companys, who would later be the President of Catalonia, was also imprisoned there, as were various other members of the Ministries of the Generalitat. They were released immediately after the elections, once the amnesty was declared.

[Crónica]

## **Battle is declared**

In Barcelona, after the elections, the CNT first had to deal with two strikes that had already lasted two months: the public transport strike and the strike of the textile workers. On February 28, the new government promulgated a decree declaring that all the workers who had been fired since January 1934 for political reasons or because of their participation in strikes, must be rehired at their former jobs. Many employers, however, refused to obey this government edict. The anarchists demanded that the government take action. On March 4, one day after the inauguration of President Companys, Durruti said, in a speech at the Gran Teatro in Barcelona:

*We have not come here to celebrate the day that a few new men have risen to power. We are here to make these men from the left wing parties understand that they owe their electoral victory to us. The CNT and the anarchists took to the streets on the day of the elections. By doing so they prevented a coup d'état by the representatives of the Ministries and the authorities, who by no means want to respect the will of the people.*

*And as for the current labor struggles affecting the transport and the textile industries, it is the men in government who are at fault. Long before the elections we discerned their intentions, we were perfectly well aware that they were trying to lead the CNT astray from the road of revolution. We kept quiet before the elections, so that no one could say that it was our fault if the prisoners were not released. The people did not vote for the politicians, but for the prisoners. As for the strike, however, we say to these men here in Barcelona, and to the men in Madrid, “leave us in peace for once, we will resolve these conflicts with the textile industry and the trolley company. The government must not interfere!”*



*The men of the Generalitat owe their freedom to the generosity of the people. But if they don't leave the CNT alone, they will soon go right back where they came from! We demand that the government leave us a free hand in our struggle against the offensive of the capitalists! That is our minimum demand! Against their lockouts and capital flight, we say to the bourgeoisie: "As far as we are concerned, you can close all your factories! We will occupy them, we will seize them, because the factories belong to us!"*

Ascaso also spoke at the same meeting. He said:

*It is said that we were victorious, that we won! But what really happened? The left wing parties won the elections, but the economy remains as always in the hands of the reactionary bourgeoisie. If we give free rein to this bourgeoisie, our electoral victory would be futile, because then even the parties of the left would pursue a right wing policy.*

*Have we perhaps already reached that point? The Spanish capitalists have allied with their foreign accomplices and they are waging an economic war against us and in this war the government, whether or not it is a left wing government, can by no means remain neutral. What is the government trying to do? To get us to bear the burden of the consequences? Capital is being expatriated. The factories are shutting down. But the government does not want to expropriate the employers because that was not a plank on their program. And what about us? Perhaps we are a little naive, but we are not stupid. Until now we have remained quiet and peaceful in the factories. But we will not remain quiet and peaceful. We will meet in the courtyards of the factories and we will elect production committees. And if they close the factories, we will expropriate the owners and we will assume responsibility for their operations. We will organize production more effectively and more reliably than the capitalists. No matter how you look at it, they are only a burden on the enterprises.*

*Political victory is nothing but a deceit and an illusion if it is not accompanied by an economic victory and a victory in the factories.*

[Solidaridad Obrera/John Stephen Brademas]

## **Victory**

### **The Prelude**

At home he did not talk much about his activities. There were a lot of things everyone knew about except me. For instance, the military training before July

1936, training in the use of weapons. I assure you that they saw Franco's *coup d'état* coming long before July, and prepared for it. They had a shooting range on the outskirts of the city. I was the only person who didn't know anything about all this. For me it was a big mystery, but the neighbors knew what was going on. Women are always the last to be told. Always the same silence, the same mystery. Sure, it might seem romantic, too, if that's your idea of romantic!

[Émilienne Morin]

On July 16, at the request of the Generalitat, which was approved by a resolution of an emergency plenum of the CNT-FAI of Catalonia, a liaison committee was formed, in which Santillán, García Oliver and Ascaso represented the FAI and Durruti and Asens represented the CNT. The first issue that was raised in the conversations between the anarchists and the government of Companys was the matter of weapons. A bitter dispute ensued. Every time the anarchists demanded weapons (and in fact they did not even ask for what they really needed, which would have been 20,000 rifles, but only for 10,000), the government responded that it had no weapons. The politicians were afraid of fascism, but they were even more afraid of the people in arms.

Beginning on July 2, the CNT-FAI, as a precautionary measure, assigned groups of undercover armed sentinels to keep watch over the barracks in Barcelona. Instead of equipping the trade unions for the imminent *coup d'état*, the government instead tried to disarm these small groups. The district police headquarters were constantly calling the Minister of the Interior of the Generalitat to report the arrest of anarchist militants who resisted the attempts of the police to confiscate their pistols; the repressive routine was so deeply ingrained that they even wanted to charge the prisoners with illegal possession of weapons!

[Diego Abad de Santillán 2/Abel Paz 1]

Three days before July 19<sup>th</sup>, on the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup>, we raided a ship with a cargo of weapons in the port of Barcelona. The government of Catalonia, the Generalitat, wanted us to hand over the weapons; but Durruti and the others brought them to the transport workers trade union headquarters. Assault Guards showed up at the transport workers trade union headquarters the very next day. It was a raid. But Durruti was already on the street. "A truck, quick!" They managed to get a milk truck and they stashed the arms in its cargo hold. The government found four or five old shotguns. We, the CNT, had the rest.

[Eugenio Valdenbro]

For several days now, Federico Escofet, the commander of the forces of Public Order of Catalonia, has been engaged in feverish activity. He has conclusive proof that a military revolt is being planned all over Spain and that the Barcelona garrison is also implicated in these plans. In his desk drawers there are thick files

full of reliable reports from his informants and from republican officers, lists with the names of the coup leaders, manifestos, passwords, operational plans, and orders for the day of the revolt. The revolt was expected to take place on July 16; today, July 18, Escofet is sure that it is imminent.

For several days now he has been in constant contact with the Minister of the Interior of the Generalitat, José María España, and with Major Vicente Guarner, his closest collaborator, and is taking the necessary measures to confront the *coup d'état* in time. But this is not the only problem that the police commander has to resolve. The commander of the forces of Public Order must also deal with the anarchists of the FAI and the syndicalists of the CNT, who have been in a state of conflict with the autonomous government of Catalonia for years (and also with the central government in Madrid, the Socialist Party and everyone else). The anarchists, however, had over the last few days demonstrated their willingness to participate in a liaison committee that Companys, the President of Catalonia, has convened in view of the gravity of the situation. All the other anti-fascist parties and organizations are also participating in this committee. The first thing the anarchists demanded was weapons, but Escofet as well as the President and the Minister of the Interior know how dangerous it would be to hand over arms to the men of the CNT, who are so formidable in street fighting. If the military coup were to take place and a war were to break out between the army and the police, one as the enemy and the other as the defender of the Republic, both of them would be weakened, and the city would be at the mercy of the anarchosyndicalists. This would be just as dangerous for the political and social stability of Catalonia as the military coup itself. The telephone rings.

“Yes, Escofet here. José María? Buenos días. What? Ah, yes. The CNT. They are complaining, I suppose. I knew this would happen right from the start. They want to complain to the President, too, but that is just the way they are. You let them have the pistols, but if it was up to me I would have let them have the rifles, too. Anyway, we have the rifles. Guarner has confiscated them.”

They were talking about a dangerous incident that had taken place the night before. The anarchist militants of the transport workers trade union raided several of the ships anchored in the port, and stole a considerable number of rifles and pistols.

“That’s all I know. Guarner told me. Guarner himself, at the head of a company of Assault Guards, conducted a search of the trade union headquarters, after posting guards on the nearby rooftops. Of course they were armed! It was just lucky that the whole business did not go beyond an exchange of words and that no one opened fire. Yes, Durruti and García Oliver showed up, in person, to calm people down.”

Guarner leaned towards Escofet, who covered the mouthpiece of the telephone with his hand for a couple of seconds.

“Tell him that the people from the trade union were so furious that they threatened to shoot Durruti. His own people!”

“Guarner just told me that they pointed their guns at Durruti, his own people. Can you imagine? Inform the President. What? Yes, we are. Good, I’ll tell Guarner.”

Escofet hung up the phone; he is thirty-eight years old, with black hair, wavy and thick, his gestures are resolute and his voice crackling with energy.

“I don’t trust those people from the FAI. They are like madmen, the way they are trying to get weapons.”

“Did he say anything else?”

“Yes, it seems that the coup is scheduled for early tomorrow morning. He has reliable reports.”

“Do you know what I think? I would like to see them start right now, and that way we would know what we are up against.”

[Luis Romero]

## **The defense committee**

Unless one looked very closely, July 18 seemed like any other Saturday. However, despite the fact that it was a very hot day, there were only a few pedestrians out for a stroll, and the squares were empty. One thing that was noteworthy was the large number of housewives who were buying groceries; the bakeries were sold out until the evening shift.

At the headquarters of the Regional Committee of the CNT, the atmosphere was frantic. Delegates from every district of the city and its vicinity were there. The liaison committee that was meeting with the Generalitat was in permanent session. In one corner of the office Durruti was talking to some miners from Fígols, who wanted to get an update on the situation. Durruti was leaning on a chair. He just had a hernia operation and he still had not totally recovered. It cannot be ruled out that he was suffering from some complications from the surgery, because he still felt stabbing pains. A few steps past Durruti, Marianet was on the phone with Madrid. They were looking for Ascaso everywhere: “go to the Café Pay-Pay, hurry....” The activists from the metal workers trade union found Ascaso: “What should we do?” They suggested various courses of action. Francisco responded: “It’s not time yet. We have to remain calm.”

[Abel Paz 1]

A Hotchkiss machine gun, two submachine guns and numerous Winchester rifles with abundant ammunition are stored in a house at 276 Pujadas Street, near the corner of Espronceda, in the Pueblo Nuevo neighborhood. There, in Gregorio Jover's apartment, the anarchist defense committee is holding a meeting.

Juan García Oliver, Buenaventura Durruti and Francisco Ascaso arrived two hours late. This meeting, a kind of call to arms, had been scheduled to start at midnight. Servando Meana, an air force lieutenant, provided an automobile for the three men, to pick them up at the Ministry of the Interior. They drove through the city at high speed with weapons within easy reach; they knew that their comrades would be worried because they were late. In front of the building housing the offices of the Ministry of the Interior, an impromptu demonstration was in progress; militants from the CNT were demanding arms. García Oliver, Durruti and Ascaso had to address the crowd from the balcony of the Ministry of the Interior to keep them from storming the building. García Oliver recommended that they should surround the barracks at San Andrés and wait for the right moment. If everything goes as planned, tomorrow the CNT-FAI will have 25,000 rifles, machine guns and a few artillery pieces. Meana and other officers (their contacts in the air force) have spoken with Lieutenant Colonel Díaz Sandino, the commander of the airbase at Prat de Llobregat. As soon as the troops revolt and leave their barracks, the air force planes will take off to attack them. When they bomb the barracks at San Andrés, they will have to be careful not to destroy the weapons storage depots, so that the munitions stores do not explode. The members of the neighborhood committees of Santa Coloma, San Andrés, San Adrián del Besos, Clot and Pueblo Nuevo, will attack the barracks and blow open the doors with dynamite if necessary. Díaz Sandino agrees with this plan. There are several million rifle cartridges in the arsenal of San Andrés.

Meanwhile, Gregorio Jover is distributing bread and sausages and wine to the comrades. The necessary measures have been taken. The action groups and the neighborhood committees have been put on alert. Everyone knows what they must do when the time for action arrives. In the factories and onboard the ships anchored in the harbor, the stokers and firemen are at their posts; their sirens will sound the signal for attack. The members of the committee are only waiting for the military units to leave their barracks. According to the latest reports, the plotters of the coup will commence hostilities at dawn.

García Oliver is sitting in a chair, nervous and overwhelmed by several days of feverish activity. He should take advantage of the few hours that remain to rest, before he has to undertake even greater efforts. But he can't sleep.

The comrades at the meeting have worked for weeks and months to prepare for this night. Even before the February elections they were convinced that civil war was imminent. Many militants of the CNT had to revise their traditional attitude towards elections (that is, the boycott), and on that occasion had to vote for the parties of the bourgeois left and the socialists. The CNT leadership did not

recommend that its members should vote, nor did it try to dissuade them from voting; it let the membership decide for itself. When it came right down to it, it didn't really matter one way or the other if the right or the left won the elections. If fascism were to have legally risen to power because of the abstention of the anarchist workers, this would have been the signal for the armed insurrection. On the other hand, as the CNT foresaw, an electoral victory of the left would induce the fascists to try to seize power by way of the traditional military *coup d'état*. In either case, the fascists would have to be confronted militarily. Events have confirmed the accuracy of this prediction; the analysis of the anarchists was more realistic than the analyses of the professional politicians of all the parties.

The CNT was a federalist organization composed of regional federations that operated almost independently, which is why it could not plan a counter-coup on a national scale; it had to restrict its planning to Catalonia, that is, especially to Barcelona. Madrid is the political capital of Spain. But Barcelona is the industrial and proletarian capital of the country. The large percentage of its population composed of workers and its revolutionary tradition gave the city exceptional prestige and conferred upon it a leading political role in the country; if the working class masses are victorious here, the movement will also spread to the other cities of the country.

The Catalanian anarchists therefore began to organize defense committees in every neighborhood. These committees are coordinated in such a way as to make it possible to maintain constant communication with the delegates. Each delegate knows the directives for the moment for action. The Libertarian Youth and the Mujeres Libres are also involved in this operational plan. The trade union federation and the regional committee agreed that this time they would not proclaim the general strike, so as not to alert the enemy to our preparations.

The map of the city spread out on the table shows the location of the barracks and how many troops are stationed in each. Confidential reports from the barracks provide the finishing touches on the tactical report on the enemy. The committee has also studied the city's sewer network and is familiar with its underground access points and junctions. Even more important is the electric power grid; the necessary measures have been taken to shut off electric power to any district should this be required. The armed groups are under orders to allow the troops to leave their barracks without resisting them. This apparent initial success will make the soldiers believe that they will not have to face any resistance. The soldiers will probably be carrying fifty cartridges each. Once the troops are separated from their barracks, they will be fired on. When they run out of ammunition and realize they are on their own, the first signs of demoralization will appear. Then, the time for agitation will have arrived. It is of great importance that the soldiers should turn against their officers, or that they should at least desert. As for the Assault Guard, it is assumed that it will take the side of the constitutional government against the coup; the defense groups will therefore collaborate with it. The attitude of the Civil Guard is uncertain; it must be

carefully monitored and its troops will be fired on only if they attack the workers. In that case the Civil Guard will be combated just as implacably as the army.

Everything has been considered, discussed, studied and resolved. The members of the anarchist defense committee are silent. They are drinking a lot of coffee to stay awake. They are trying to restrain their impatience. Each of them goes over all the details in his own mind. They all know each other and have fought alongside one another for years. They are like brothers, or perhaps more than brothers. It is possible that tonight is the last night they will be together. Francisco Ascaso is nervously smoking cigarettes. He is pale, as always, and as always his cold, thin lips display a sceptical smile. Durruti also seems to be smiling, but despite his thick, dark eyebrows, his furrowed brow and the wrinkles on his face, his expression has a child-like quality. His grey, glittering eyes scan the weapons again and again. Ricardo Sanz, tall, blond and strong, is sitting motionless. His attitude is almost one of indifference. Gregario Jover, known as El Chino because of his high cheekbones, seems more Chinese than ever; he is fiddling with the cartridge belt he is wearing around his waist. Aurelio Fernández is trying to read the seriousness of the situation in the face of Jover, as if he were some kind of thermometer; his eyes seem to be popping out of his head and he is standing; he is the only member of the group who bothered to dress up for the occasion. All of them are veteran street fighters, urban guerrillas familiar with the use of the pistol. The committee also has two younger members, Antonio Ortiz and Valencia. Ortiz wants to talk and is vainly attempting to engage his silent comrades in conversation; he has very curly hair. Valencia seems to be very pleased that he has been admitted to this little get-together. He is smoking a lot, chain-smoking, in fact. They transferred their headquarters to this location because most of them live in this neighborhood. From Jover's apartment you can see the Jupiter football stadium; it is almost right outside his front window. The adjacent streets are being monitored by specially selected men. Two trucks are parked on Pujadas Street, next to the football stadium. García Oliver lives only fifty meters away, at 72 Espronceda Street. Ascaso lives on San Juan de Malta Street, right near the restaurant, La Farigola, where the neighborhood defense committees and the Barcelona defense committee held a meeting only a few days ago. Durruti lives in Clot, which is at least one kilometer from the Jupiter football stadium.

An old clock hanging on the wall, bought at the flea market (los Encantes), is ticking with an excruciating slowness. One Hotchkiss machine gun, two Czech submachine guns and a lot of Winchester rifles....

[Luis Romero]

Between eleven and midnight several groups are leaving the meeting of the regional committee to resolve the problem of transport. It is absolutely necessary to acquire some motor vehicles so that the assault commandos can be mobile. One hour later, requisitioned cars bearing the initials CNT-FAI emblazoned with chalk in big letters are being driven down the Ramblas. The workers walking along the

sidewalks salute the cars and shout to the drivers, “Viva la FAI!”. That same night, the gunshops of Barcelona are being pillaged. The anarchist groups emptied the display windows and storerooms and seized the revolvers and shotguns.

[Diego Abad de Santillán 2/Abel Paz 1]

At two in the morning Durruti and García Oliver showed up at the police headquarters and categorically demanded that police chief Escofet disarm half the Assault Guards and distribute their weapons to the workers. Escofet refused, and said that his men would do their duty to the very end, and that he could not spare even one weapon.

At 4:30 a.m., the telephone rang at police headquarters. “The time has come, the troops from Pedralbes and Montesa are leaving their barracks.” Ascaso and Durruti grabbed their weapons and left. Santillán and García Oliver managed to get their hands on a uniform of a guard officer. “Where are the pistols? Hurry!”

[Abel Paz 1]

At five in the morning there is a disturbance in front of the government palace. The guards are nervous. A crowd from Barceloneta is pressing against the doors of the building. The situation is critical. Durruti, who just arrived, knows the meaning of this demonstration. He goes to the balcony. The workers from the port recognize him and they ask the guards to allow a delegation to enter the building so they can meet with the liaison committee. At this moment, something extraordinary happens. The deadly tension between the demonstrators and the palace guards, composed of policemen from the Assault Guard, is dissipating. Military discipline is breaking down. Workers and guards are fraternizing. A guard unbuckles his holster and gives his pistol to a worker. Soon, the guards are also distributing rifles to the crowd. Their officers behold a shocking incident: the police are becoming human beings.

[Abel Paz 1/Diego Abad de Santillán 2]

## **Sirens**

The first rays of dawn are shining on the drab facades of the buildings on Pujadas, Espronceda and Lull Streets. Numerous armed men have occupied the vicinity of the Jupiter football field. Almost all of them are wearing blue coveralls. Twenty selected militants will form the escort of the anarchist defense committee; all of them are experienced street fighters. The weapons have been loaded onto the two trucks. Ricardo Sanz and Antonio Ortiz are setting up a machine gun on the roof of the first truck. “Comrades! We just received a phone call from the Sanz defense committee. The troops are leaving the barracks!” The messenger is breathless. On the neighboring balconies, early birds are stirring. Expectant faces, sympathetic, but also afraid. The militants of the neighborhood meet next to the



football field. Those who have pistols are brandishing them. Everyone else wants one. The reserve weapons are distributed.

“What should we do? Should we wait for the sirens?”, Durruti asks. The drivers start their engines. In the distance we hear a prolonged wail: the first factory siren. The men fall silent. The sirens grow louder as they approach, as more and more sirens are being sounded to join the din. The people of the neighborhood rush to their balconies. The members of the committee and their escort board the trucks.

“Viva la FAI!”

“Viva la CNT!”

“Let’s go!”

The trucks take off, the passengers clutching their weapons.

The red and black flag, raised on a wooden pole, waves in the wind. First they drive through the Ramblas in Pueblo Nuevo. One truck after another joins their convoy. The commanders display the machine guns to the crowds, who are impressed by these symbols of resolve. Durruti, Ascaso, García Oliver, Jover and Sanz are acclaimed from rooftops and balconies. The sirens are still sounding, their voices echoing from the poor neighborhoods of the industrial belt of Barcelona; it is a proletarian voice calling the workers to their mobilization points.

The anarchist militants spent the night in the various trade union halls, with the committees, and in the back rooms of offices. Now they are flowing en masse towards the center of the city. The groups from Sans, Hostafrancs and Collblanc, the “Murcians” of Torrassa, and the *cenetistas* of Casa Antúnez are heading towards the Plaza España and the Paralelo: their objective is the Lepanto engineers’ barracks. The textile workers of La España Industrial, the metal workers of Escorza and Siemens, the striking workers of Lámparas Z, construction workers, leather workers, slaughterhouse workers, sanitation workers, day laborers, some singers from the *coros de Clavé*, lumpenproletarians from the shacks of Montjuïc and even hoodlums from Pueblo Seco: everyone heeds the call. And so do the peasants from the old shantytown of Gracia, traditionally revolutionary and anarchist, workers from the cotton mills and the train yards, and also the retail trades. They are not all anarchists—there are also socialists, Catalan nationalists, communists and members of the POUM, and all of them are advancing towards the Cinco de Oros, towards the Diagonal, towards the borders of their neighborhoods, and erecting barricades, setting up checkpoints to guard the avenues and intersections. The lumpenproletariat of Monte Carmelo is descending on the city and is merging with the residents of the half-urbanized streets that extend far into the open countryside, with the old comrades of Poblet and Guinardó who once heard the words of Federico Urales,

the great teacher of the anarchists, and who knew his daughter, Federica Montseny, since she was a little girl. The workers of Fabra and Coats and Rottier, the mechanics of Hispano-Suiza and the operatives of La Maquinista are converging with the day laborers and the unemployed workers and are advancing towards the barracks and the arsenal of San Andrés, where enough weapons are stored to ensure that they can dominate the entire city. And we must not forget the workers of Fundición Girona, the workers in the paper mills, the gas and chemical workers of Clot, San Martín de Provensals, Llacuna and Pueblo Nuevo, who are joining with the people of Barceloneta, the fishermen, the longshoremen, the metal workers of Nuevo Vulcano, the railroad workers of the Northern Rail system and the gypsies of Somorrostro. Everyone is answering the call of the sirens.

The two trucks arrive at Pedro IV Street. There is a lot of excitement in the streets here, too. The houses of this district, however, are occupied by well-to-do people, businessmen and “high-class” artisans. They watch the convoy pass, stricken with fear. No one dares to give any sign of disapproval; even silence might be too dangerous. That is why they shout, “Viva la CNT! Death to fascism! Down with the priests!”

The decisive battle will be fought in the downtown district, in the old quarter of the city. There, too, the anarchists are counting on help from residents, because even in the bourgeois neighborhoods there are many comrades, and the porters, shoe-shine boys, waiters and street-sweepers are all on their side.

[Luis Romero]

### **The battles in the streets**

Juan García Oliver, Francisco Ascaso, Antonio Ortiz, Jover and Valencia are directing the operations against the rebels who have taken up positions at the intersection of the Paralelo and the Ronda de San Pablo. Fighting at the side of a growing number of more or less armed workers, there are a non-commissioned officer and two soldiers from the Atarazanas barracks who mutinied against their officers and brought their machine gun with them. From the roof of a house at the intersection with the Paralelo, they managed to force the troops who had taken up positions at the intersection to withdraw. At the same time, Jover and Ortiz rushed out the back door of the Café Pay-Pay and opened fire on the soldiers. The soldiers, surrounded, have now retreated to the Paralelo. They have taken cover behind a fruit stand in front of the Cabaret Moulin Rouge and on the roof of the Café La Tranquilidad. From there, they dominate the whole avenue of the Paralelo with their machine guns; the group led by Francisco Ascaso has suffered serious losses in its attempts to cross the Paralelo by way of Conde del Asalto Street.

García Oliver, Ascaso and Durruti conferred together early in the morning on the Ramblas. It was agreed that Durruti and his group will attack the Hotel Falcón, from whose windows enemy *carabineros* were operating; later, once the situation at the Plaza del Teatro was resolved, Durruti was supposed to advance towards the Casa Juan restaurant in order to set up some machine guns there to open fire on the fascists who had taken refuge in the Atarazanas barracks and the Puerta de la Paz. If they could dominate the central section of the Ramblas they would control the cross streets of the old quarter. The fact that army troops have set up defensive positions at the Paralelo-San Pablo intersection, a location of great strategic importance, is an unforeseen threat that could upset García Oliver's plan. That is why all available forces have been mobilized to eliminate the fascists' machine gun emplacements. The commando squad has had a hard time advancing up the length of San Pablo Street; first it had to get by the barracks of the *carabineros*. García Oliver ordered some men to cover the flanks of the commandos to prevent them from falling into a trap, and began to parley with an officer and some enlisted men. He called upon them to declare which side they were on. They answered that the *carabineros* were loyal to the government; that their job is not to perform the functions of police but to fight against smuggling and to ensure that customs duties are collected on imports and exports. The garrison of the barracks gave their word of honor that they would not attack García Oliver's combat group from behind. Later, they were delayed once more at the women's prison, on Amalia Street. It was searched, because it could not be ruled out that the fascists had occupied that building as well. But there were no fascists there. The prison was evacuated, however, since, if the commando squad was forced to retreat, it might be used as a fall-back position. The prisoners left their cells, crying. I don't know if they were crying due to fear or happiness; some of them were hysterical.

At the intersection with Abad Zafont Street, Ascaso and his men are approaching García Oliver's group. Ascaso is wearing a threadbare brown suit and sandals and is carrying a cocked pistol in his hand.

"They are falling back towards the Moulin Rouge. And they are still fighting!"

"Ah! It's you! Take up positions on the roof of the Chicago bar, and shoot at them from above. But not randomly, you have to aim carefully. When we hear your machine gun we will rush down the Paralelo and we will blow them to pieces."

While the assault squad is heading down Flores Street towards the Chicago bar, the others are waiting. They take a break and smoke cigarettes. The soldiers are still shooting, but they are now on the defensive and do not have distinct targets. Despite the intensity of the gunfire, some curious bystanders are circulating on the streets. They stay close to the doorways of the buildings, ready to take refuge in them.

Finally we hear a gunshot fired from a nearby roof. Machine guns respond by opening fire from every direction, alternating with the weak bangs of pistol shots.

“Viva la FAI! Forward!”

The anarchist leaders launch the attack and cross the Paralelo. A gaunt woman in a red dress raises her arms and shouts:

“Vivan los anarquistas!”

[Luis Romero]

Other armed groups are heading towards the Plaza de Cataluña from the side streets and from the subway stations and are attacking the soldiers. The Civil Guards are also shooting at the rebel troops. An artillery piece is being set up. But at the Hotel Colón the rebels still have some machine guns that they are firing blindly into the crowd that is advancing impetuously towards their positions. The fighting lasts more than half an hour, the Plaza is covered with bodies. Finally, once the Civil Guards have taken control of the ground floor of the Hotel, the first white handkerchiefs are seen waving from the windows of the building. The fascists are still putting up resistance at the Telephone Exchange building. The anarchists, with Durruti in the lead, are attacking the building from the side of the Ramblas. About halfway up the street, the pavement is covered with corpses, including the body of Obregón, the Secretary of the Barcelona Federation. The attackers finally reach the Puerta del Ángel. Durruti is the first to enter the lobby of the Telephone Exchange building, which will later be conquered floor by floor. The Plaza de Cataluña, the heart of Barcelona, is in the hands of the workers.

[Abel Paz 1/Diego Abad de Santillán 2]

On the Ramblas they set up a 75 mm artillery piece; its shells were getting closer and closer to the Atarazanas fortress, finally tearing open huge holes in its walls. Meanwhile, hundreds of workers surrounded the barracks. The people of Barcelona were shooting at it; women and children carried ammunition and brought food and supplies to the men on the barricades.

[Ricardo Sanz 1]

## **The death of Ascaso**

The anarchists took the initiative in the final battle against the Atarazanas barracks and the building housing the general headquarters of the military region, both of which were located at the end of the Ramblas. They have already reached the Rambla de Santa Mónica. At the other side of the barracks, on the Puerta de la Paz, some police units and anti-fascist elements from various organizations, not in uniform, are fighting alongside the street fighters of the CNT. Led by Francisco

Ascaso, who as always is brandishing his Astra 9 mm, the members of the anarchist defense committee are advancing cautiously towards the south, protected by the large trees of the esplanade of the Ramblas; Durruti, Ortiz, Valencia, García Oliver and the militants of the anarchist trade unions: Correa, from the construction workers trade union; Yoldi and Barón from the metal workers; García Ruiz, from the transport workers; Domingo and Joaquín are also there, Francisco Ascaso's brothers. The truck with the machine gun on its roof is there, too, occupied by Ricardo Sanz, Aurelio Fernández and Donoso. They are not alone: hundreds of workers have joined the fray.

As the attackers get closer to the barracks, every step forward gets more difficult and more dangerous. The rebel soldiers are well-entrenched. The workers are shooting at them from the balcony of the Transport Workers Trade Union and from the Centro de Dependientes; that night they improvised mobile defensive screens with furniture, mattresses and enormous rolls of paper from the printshop of *Solidaridad Obrera*.

The first anarchists leave their shelters behind the trees and cross the Ramblas; the attackers are stopped at Santa Madrona Street, located within firing range of the barracks and the military headquarters. The only protection they have is the kiosks of the used book dealers.

Durruti and his men see only one way forward. The oldest part of the barracks is surrounded by a wall that has been largely destroyed by artillery fire and hand grenades. Parts of the wall are still standing and can be used for cover. In the meantime, however, Ascaso has spotted, in a window that overlooks Santa Madrona Street, a soldier manning a machine gun that dominates the entire sector and is firing on the comrades who are advancing up the Ramblas.

[Luis Romero]

To reach that position they have to abandon their shelters and cross a stretch of ground that is under fire from the military headquarters building. While the comrades are still deliberating about what tactical maneuver they should employ, a bullet grazes Durruti's chest. His friends send him to an improvised medical station; Lola Iturbe, a fighter from the very first moments of the movement, dresses his wound. In the meantime, a commando team composed of Ascaso, García Oliver, Justo Bueno, Ortiz, Vivancos, Lucio Gómez and Barón race against death and zig-zag from the barricade to the booksellers' kiosks. These kiosks are the best launching points for an attack from Santa Madrona Street. There, they are subjected to a hail of gunfire; they make a good target, both from the parapets of the barracks as well as from the firing positions in the military headquarters.

[Abel Paz 1]

Francisco Ascaso reaches the booksellers' kiosks, followed by Correa and a few other militants. Durruti and his friends are calling to them, but he misunderstands their shouted questions, and signals that they should not worry about him, in order not to call attention to themselves. That machine gun in the window must be silenced. Ascaso studies the tactical situation. Almost exactly in front of the window there is a parked truck; between the last book kiosk and the truck, there is no cover at all. Ascaso is convinced that, if he can make it to the truck, he can liquidate the machine gunner with a single pistol shot, at short distance. Crouching down low, he begins to run. A series of rounds striking the wall of the house behind him show that the soldier has seen him.

[Luis Romero]

Durruti, who was watching the operation from behind the barricade, tells Pablo Ruiz: "You tricked me, this wound can wait". And he orders his men to concentrate their fire on the wing of the barracks that Ascaso was examining. But the enemy machine gunner has already discovered the attempted ambush.

[Abel Paz 1]

Before he could reach the truck, he kneeled, aimed and fired. As he was standing up and getting ready to continue his dash to the truck, a bullet struck him in the middle of his face. He fell.

The comrades saw him throw up his arms and fall to the ground. He was lying face down on the ground, motionless.

[Luis Romero]

García Oliver is the first to understand what has happened and tries to jump over the barricade, but he is stopped by an instinctive reaction on the part of Barón. A few more minutes pass before the enemy machine gunner is silenced. Then Ricardo Sanz and Ortiz can retrieve Ascaso's body.

[Abel Paz 1]

I was there during the July days in Barcelona. I wasn't on the streets, and I didn't do any shooting, because they wouldn't let me. But I did see Ascaso get shot, from the Metal Workers Trade Union, on the Ramblas. I saw his body when they recovered it; it was totally riddled with bullets, like a sieve!

No one could explain why he did that. He went alone, the barracks was still occupied by Franco's troops. He went ahead, alone, to face certain death. I don't know why he did it. It was as if he was committing suicide.

[Émilienne Morin]

The last meeting of the Nosotros group was held on July 20 in front of the Atarazanas barracks. The rattle of the machine guns and the shrieks of the bombs thrown by the FAI, familiar sounds to us, brought us together. Durruti led the attack in the front line, Ascaso and García Oliver manned an overheated machine gun, Sanz brought a basket full of hand grenades, which he threw at the besieged barracks; Aurelio Fernández, Antonio Ortiz and Gregario Jover were also there. Francisco Ascaso fell in this battle.

His death was the end of the group. We never met again, not even at Ascaso's funeral. And maybe this was the biggest mistake that the group ever made; it dispersed, it dissolved, it was blown away by the wind.

[Ricardo Sanz 2]

## **Anarchy**

“Viva la FAI! Viva la anarquía! Viva la CNT! Comrades! We have defeated the fascists! The fighting workers of Barcelona have defeated the army!”

“Viva la República!”

“Yes, long live the Republic, too!”

The fighting in Barcelona had come to an end. The defenders of the military headquarters surrendered; shortly afterwards, the besieged Atarazanas barracks also capitulated. Drenched in sweat, laughing and hoarse from shouting, the street fighters were embracing each other. They raised their weapons, they raised their fists in the air, they hailed their leaders.

Ragged, exhausted, filthy, in their shirt-sleeves, eyes wide open in fear and their hands high in the air, surrounded by threatening looks and insulted by an enraged crowd, the prisoners are led, no one knows where, not even their guards. García Ruiz, a transport worker, asks García Oliver:

“What do we do with them?”

In this city neither the police, the officers of the Assault Guard, nor the politicians are giving any orders. Those who wear the fancy uniforms, the masters who shout out their orders and have medals and epaulets, the men who wear swords at their waists and wear black top hats, have been brought low, they have been defeated. Those who have demonstrated their power, those who have won, are the ones who previously had nothing to say, the persecuted and imprisoned, those who had to hide in basements.

“Take them to the Transport Workers Trade Union headquarters and keep them in custody! Then we will decide what to do with them.”

Durruti, knitting his brows, is holding his gun, which is still hot.

His eyes are full of tears. Jover remains silent. They do not know what to say. The joy of victory is overshadowed by the memory of Ascaso, the comrade of so many years of struggle.

“Poor Paco!”

But they do not have time for sentimentalism, for pain or for grief. It is time for action.

García Oliver says, “Let’s go!”

[Luis Romero]

On July 20, Durruti was wounded twice, in the face and in the chest. I saw him crying with pain and rage next to Ascaso’s body.

When the fighting was over, Durruti, who was characterized by the bourgeois press as a terrorist and assassin, went to the episcopal palace and saved the life of the Archbishop of Barcelona, who was in danger of being lynched by an enraged mob. He took him from the building without anyone’s knowledge, dressed in coveralls. Durruti transferred the hoarded wealth of the palace, worth many millions of pesetas, to the Generalitat.

[Alejandro Gilabert]

The Archbishop of Barcelona was able to escape after July 20 thanks to the formal protection of the anarchists. Perhaps they were repaying a debt of gratitude: the prelate had agreed to sign a petition in favor of amnesty for Durruti and Pérez Farrás, when they were sentenced to death after the events of October 1934.

[Marguerite Jouve]

All the churches had been burnt, with the exception of the cathedral with its invaluable art treasures, which the Generalitat had managed to save. The walls of the churches are standing, but the interior has in every case been completely destroyed. Some of the churches are still smoking. At the corner of the Ramblas and the Paseo Colon the building of the Cosulich Line (the Italian steamship company) is in ruins; Italian snipers, we are told, had taken cover there and the building had been stormed and burnt by the workers. But except for the churches and this one secular building there has been no arson.



[Franz Borkenau]

Once victory was assured, the manhunt in Barcelona and Catalonia commenced: the hunt for priests, monks and nuns, aristocrats, and the rich, pursued by all those who wanted to get revenge. The monasteries and churches were burned down, and the mansions of the rich were looted.

The anarchists were not solely responsible for this wave of terror. Many of these incidents occurred spontaneously as a result of the age-old, simmering hatred of the people for the leisured classes and the Church. Besides, the doors of the prisons had been opened. Bandits, thieves and murderers formed gangs and gave free rein to their impulses.

It will never be possible to draw up a precise balance sheet of those first few days of the revolution. In Catalonia alone, seven hundred priests and monks were murdered, tortured and cruelly massacred. There were horrible scenes. It is estimated that 25,000 people were killed in Catalonia, and that 10,000 were taken prisoner.

[Jean Raynaud]

[A foreigner from a neutral country] told me: "The foreigners are fairly safe, but the Spaniards, the Spaniards" meaning by, naturally, that group of Spaniards with whom he has contact, the people around the Fomento and the Lliga—"hundreds and thousands were killed in the first days. Immediately after the defeat of the military the workers started *to settle personal accounts*." This expression I had heard once already, and insisted on being told about the exact facts. It turned out that the accounts which were settled were perhaps not so entirely personal. What really happened, it seems, was that priests were killed, not because they were individually disliked by somebody (*that*, in my opinion, is what can fairly be called settling of personal accounts), but because they were priests; the factory-owners, notably in the textile centers around Barcelona, were killed by their workers, if they did not manage to escape in time. Directors of large companies, such as the Barcelona tramway company, known as opponents of the labour movement, were killed by pickets of the appropriate trade union; and the leading politicians of the Right by special anarchist pickets. It is only natural that my interlocutor, who has lost friends, perhaps even close friends, in this massacre, is horror-struck.... "What a horror!", he exclaims. "People killed without trial, without even the allegation of a crime, on the simple acknowledgement of their identity, for nothing but their social position and their political and religious faith, by their personal enemies! These anarchists! These POUM people! These gangsters! The socialists and communists, it is true, are better, and the Generalitat, with the Esquerra, is horrified and terrorized itself".

[Franz Borkenau]

Anarchism is having a major impact on the police forces. Their barracks are empty, the police have been evicted and thrown out into the streets. Even the *Mozos de Escuadra*, the provincial police of the Catalanian government, are demoralized.

In a house next to the building that houses the offices of the President of Catalonia, three or four individuals are throwing furniture off a balcony. The incident is trivial; in every revolt, the homes of the enemy are attacked. If they do not find the enemy himself, the people take out their rage on his possessions. What really irritates President Companys, however, is the fact that only a short distance from the government palace, private property is being attacked and the Assault Guards are doing nothing about it. Isn't there a risk that the fruits of victory will be lost if the discipline of the servants of public order is destroyed? Companys makes a phone call to Escofet, and he asks him how much control he has over the units under his command: the Assault Guard, the Civil Guard and the *Mozos de Escuadra*.

Escofet answers: "No one listens to me. The troopers are going over to the FAI *en masse*."

[Manuel Benavides]

## **Dual power**

### **The problem of power**

Suddenly, all power was there for the taking for the CNT and the FAI throughout Catalonia. The anarchists only had to take it into their hands. Their organizations had to make a decision. Their leaders saw only two choices: either an anarchist dictatorship or cooperation with an existing, although powerless, government. It was a decisive turning point. If the anarchosyndicalists were to have destroyed the state apparatus of the Generalitat, perhaps they would have been able to defend their revolution more effectively in the following months. There is no reason, however, to believe that the destruction of the state apparatus in Catalonia would have changed the outcome of the war. The fact that the anarchists did not seize power was only one of many factors that contributed to the wayward course of the comet of the revolution.

[Stephen John Brademas]

That night, Juan Comorera, a social democrat and future secretary of the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSUC), which was formed by the merger of the communist and social democratic parties, tried to get the President to understand the situation.

“The FAI and the POUM are the masters of the streets and are doing whatever they want. A long war has begun that we will lose if we do not succeed in causing these organizations to decompose in a few weeks, at most a few months.... That is why we must unify our forces and organize the socialist trade union of the UGT to use against the CNT. You, Mister President, must by no means use force at this time. You must attempt to ensure revolutionary order and support the formation of military units loyal to the Generalitat. We have to set about the task of building an army. The anarchists and the Trotskyists will make a big fuss when they find out. We have to pretend to be deaf. As soon as we have some armed forces and we have a solid worker-peasant movement on our side, we will take charge of the war at the front and defend the economy behind the lines, instead of carrying out the revolution, which is not our goal right now.”

[Manuel Benavides]

The Casa Cambó, the headquarters of the Employers Association, a solid building that looks like a bank but on a larger scale, is located at 32 Vía Layetana. Nearby is the headquarters of the powerful Construction Workers Trade Union, affiliated with the CNT, in a gloomy old building on Mercaderes Street. During the fighting, the workers at the Construction Workers Trade Union held a meeting and voted to attack and occupy the Casa Cambó. Initially, they did this for purely military reasons, because from the top floor of the building, a soldier with a machine gun could dominate an important avenue of the city. Shortly after it was occupied, however, more and more groups came to the building, and it was automatically transformed into a kind of headquarters of the revolution. The Regional Committee of the CNT also transferred its headquarters to the Casa Cambó building during the fighting. After the victory of the revolution, the building was renamed: everyone in Barcelona called it the Casa CNT-FAI.

The rooms that were formerly the executive offices of financiers and industrialists were now occupied by the councils, the committees and the coordinating institutions of the trade unions of Barcelona. The change that had taken place could easily be seen at the main entrance to the building: the semicircle that formed the main entrance was blocked by a barricade of sandbags and defended by two machine guns. Enormous banners were hung from the broad balconies of the building's façade. In this building, on July 20, the plenum of the CNT of Catalonia engaged in deliberations concerning the policy that should be pursued with respect to the government.

[Abel Paz 1]

## **The conversation with the President**

The headquarters of the Construction Workers Trade Union, where the meeting of the Regional Committee of the CNT was just held, is not far from the Palace of

the Generalitat of Catalonia. The members of the defense committee have decided to drive there, however. A small convoy of cars with armed men accompanies them. With their rifles, pistols, submachine guns and hand grenades, they are making quite a show of force, and at the same time taking precautions against an unlikely yet still possible ambush. Durruti thinks of himself primarily as a man of action, although he has spoken at numerous rallies. He does not rely on his eloquence, but rather on the pistol that he wears on his belt and the rifle that he has between his knees. At his side, taking the place of the deceased Ascaso, is Francisco's brother Joaquín. Over the last three days, the members of the committee have thrown caution to the winds. Their victory has surpassed all expectations. The city is in their power. The CNT-FAI is the master of Barcelona and all of Catalonia. Anarchism's time has come. What will the government do? Durruti and his friends will demand that it do what they want it to do: give a free pass to the proletarian revolution. They do not want to form a government, but at the negotiating table they will defend the power that they have conquered with arms in hand. No one will take their victory away from them. The Civil Guard participated on the side of the government only at the last minute; its troops were undecided. The military-style barracks-based police forces are no longer effective as instruments of repression. Most of the Assault Guards are on the side of the people. The army has been annihilated; the anti-fascist officers cannot organize an effective new army on the basis of the few remaining loyal units. The provincial police forces are weak, and are hardly even capable of defending the government palace. The Catalan nationalists and the petit-bourgeois parties, which might be capable of mobilizing some opposition, are of no concern whatsoever to the anarchists. The proletariat of Barcelona is very well armed now; guard posts and manned barricades secure key positions; the local trade union offices and the workers centers have been fortified. The bourgeois politicians are isolated.

While the Regional Committee is deliberating at the headquarters of the Construction Workers Trade Union with Marianet, Santillán, Agustín Souchy and other militants, the telephone rings. Marianet Vázquez picks up the phone. "Yes, this is the Secretary of the Regional Committee." He looks surprised. Everyone is listening to him as he says, in a mocking tone of voice, "I understand. Good, we will discuss it right now". Then he hangs up the phone, he turns around and tells the other delegates, "President Companys requests that the Regional Committee send a delegation to his office. He wants to negotiate". Before they had recovered from their sense of shock, the Secretary continues in a calm tone of voice:

"Comrades, the Regional Committee, with the attendance of the current members of the defense committee, is now in session."

It was a long and tumultuous meeting. Some delegates wanted to refuse the invitation; others thought that this was the right time to overthrow the President and proclaim libertarian communism in all of Catalonia; others feared an ambush. The voices of the speakers were hoarse, and they were still awake only because of coffee and tobacco. García Oliver now posed the dilemma: collaboration with the

parties or anarchist dictatorship. It was finally resolved that they should find out what Companys had to say, without allowing themselves to be either intimidated or to render any binding commitments. It was undoubtedly necessary to allow the combat groups to rest, even if for only a few hours, to replenish their energy; they had to think about the fate of their comrades in Saragossa, who had been taken by surprise by the fascist coup and were now engaged in heavy combat.

The convoy drove up Jaime I Street towards the Palace, and reached the Plaza de la República. A huge Catalanian flag is hanging from the balcony of the offices of the Generalitat. Outside the entrance to the Palace there is a detachment of the provincial guard. Assault Guards are posted on the side streets, and there are also policemen with Catalanist armbands. The representatives of the CNT-FAI, heavily armed, get out of their cars. The officer in charge of the guards approaches the group that has gathered at the entrance of the building: Durruti, García Oliver, Joaquín Ascaso, Ricardo Sanz, Aurelio Fernández, Gregorio Jover, Antonio Ortiz and Valencia.

“We are the delegates of the CNT-FAI. Companys wants to talk to us. We brought our bodyguards.”

[Luis Romero]

We were armed to the teeth, with rifles, pistols and machine guns. We were in shirtsleeves, and our faces were blackened with grime.

“We are the representatives of the CNT-FAI,” we told the commander of the guard, “and these are our bodyguards. Companys wants to speak with us”.

The President stood up to welcome us. It was obvious that he was nervous. We shook hands; he seemed to be on the verge of embracing us. The meeting was very brief. We sat down. Each of us had a rifle between his knees. Companys recited the following short speech:

“Above all I have to tell you one thing: the CNT and the FAI have never been treated in accordance with their importance. You have always been harshly persecuted, and I, who was once at your side, have had to fight against you and persecute you, very much against my will, forced by the necessities of politics. Today you are the masters of the city and of all of Catalonia, because you alone defeated the fascists. I hope that you do not misunderstand me, but if you remember that the men of my party, of my guards and my subordinates, regardless of our numbers, have not refused to help you over the last few days....”

He paused just a few seconds for reflection, and then he continued:

“But the simple truth is that in the past you were persecuted, and today you have defeated the militarists and the fascists. I know you and I know what you want

and that is why I must speak so frankly. You have won. Everything is in your hands. If you no longer need me or you do not want me to continue to be the President of Catalonia, tell me now. In that case I will continue to fight as just another soldier against the fascists. But if you think that I, in this position, who would not be alive right now if you did not defeat the fascists, can be useful for the struggle that will continue throughout Spain, and who knows how long it will last and how it will end, then you can count on me, with the people of my party, on my name and my prestige. You can rely on my loyalty as that of a man and a politician who is convinced that on this day a whole infamous past has perished, a man who sincerely desires that Catalonia should take its place at the forefront of the most socially advanced countries.”

[Juan García Oliver 1]

Later, Companys met with the representatives of the Catalonian political parties. He informed them of the results of his discussions with the anarchists. The delegates of the CNT-FAI were invited to send delegates to a joint committee formed at the initiative of the President, a committee that would later go down in history as the Central Committee of Anti-fascist Militias. Its purpose was to reestablish order in Catalonia and to organize armed operations against the rebel forces in Saragossa.

[José Peirats 2]

## **The agreement**

In just one day, July 19, all the political structures of Catalonia and Spain were shattered. From then on, the government existed only on paper. The actual political situation of the country required the formation of a new institution of power. This is how the Committee of Anti-fascist Militias of Barcelona arose.

I assume that the initiative for the creation of this soldiers council came from the anarchists. They did not want to participate in the government, because that was contrary to their ideas. They therefore allowed the government to continue to function. In fact, however, from then on it was the militias and their committee that had the reins of government power in their hands.

Other anti-fascist groups were also represented on the Committee of Militias. I attended the sessions as a representative of the Esquerra, a liberal, left-wing party. We were dressed like typical bourgeois intellectuals, with ties, jackets and fountain pens, and suddenly we saw a group of anarchists walk through the door, unshaven, in their combat uniforms, with revolvers, submachine guns and belts with dynamite bombs clipped to them. Their leader was a man whose presence, oratory and energy gave the impression of a titan: Buenaventura Durruti.

[Jaume Miravittles 1]

I once wrote an article in which I claimed that there was no great difference between the fascists and the FAI. Durruti, the fierce warrior, expressed his agreement with this article all too forcefully. He came up to me, put his big hands on my shoulders and said, "You are Miravittles, no? Take care! Don't play with fire! You might get burned!" That is how the proceedings of the Central Committee of the Anti-fascist Militias began, in an atmosphere of tension and threats.

[Jaume Miravittles 2]

On July 21, a regional assembly of the anarchist county committees was convened to assess the new situation. It was unanimously resolved to postpone the question of libertarian communism until the fascists are defeated. The assembly ratified the resolution authorizing the CNT-FAI to cooperate with the other trade union organizations and political parties in the Central Committee of Militias. Only the county of Bajo Llobregat voted against collaboration.

The Central Committee of Militias, which was in fact dominated by the anarchosindicalists, immediately set to work, with its offices in the building that was previously occupied by the Barcelona Maritime Museum.

[John Stephen Brademas]

For the first time ever, the CNT-FAI was forced to deal with the question of power. "We are the masters of Catalonia. Should we seize power without the consent of the republicans, socialists and communists, or should we collaborate with the Generalitat?" The highest echelons of the anarchist movement deliberated on this question. They spent several months deliberating on it, without finding an answer.

Mariano Vázquez, García Oliver, Durruti and Aurelio Fernández said that an anarchist dictatorship was not a viable option in view of the real correlation of forces. If we take power, the central government in Madrid and the foreign governments will be against us. Therefore we must opt for cooperation and we cannot allow a government to be formed without our participation.

Federica Montseny, Esgleas, Escorza and Santillán argued against that position: the question of power is already resolved, since it is for all intents and purposes in the hands of the CNT-FAI, which is in charge of the militias in Aragon and also of public order and the economy behind the lines. So why should we make a deal with the government?

Escorza, the most extraordinary personality in the FAI, said, with a Machiavellian smile:

“You have the chicken in the coop and you are arguing about who owns the eggs. This question has already been answered for some time now. We should instead concern ourselves with the foxes, and for them you use shotguns. We must use the government of the Generalitat to collectivize the land and put industry under trade union control. The workers in the cities will automatically become members of the CNT, and the rural workers will become members of the collectives. We shall thus dispose of the old political organizations and parties. Trade unionism will become the basis of a new society.”

Santillán, ambitious and unscrupulous, was at first a staunch opponent of collaboration with the government; when they appointed him to a Ministry of the Generalitat he became a devoted advocate of collaboration. Federica Montseny, supported by Esgleas and Escorza, eloquently expressed her opposition to collaboration with the government.

During the two months that these discussions took place, the original impulse of the revolution was exhausted.

[Manuel Benavides]

At that time, the responsible leaders of the CNT felt so sure of their power, they felt so confident, that they behaved with an exaggerated degree of generosity. They allowed the revolution, which the CNT had led and carried out, and which only the CNT could continue to develop, to be governed by new institutions in which the CNT was in the minority.

This is how they justified their position: “This time we don’t want anyone to say that the big fish eats the little fish.”

In the political reality of the time, this saying was turned into a weapon that the politicians used to neutralize the men of the CNT and to liquidate the Spanish revolution.

[Cánovas Cervantes]

The Cabinet Ministers were meeting as usual at the government palace, a sort of phantom government that impotently contemplated the revolutionary situation. There was one exception, however. The President of Catalonia, Lluís Companys, was a man of great personal character. Companys had previously been the defense attorney for the anarchists in various trials, and he had friends in the CNT. When he attended his first meeting of the Committee of Militias, we all rose from our seats to greet him. But the anarchists remained seated. There were frequent heated arguments between the delegates of the CNT-FAI and Companys, who warned them that their violent actions were endangering the success of the revolution. Finally, Durruti got tired of being scolded and told the representatives of the government, “Give my regards to the President, and tell him that he’d better not



come here again. Something bad might happen if he insists on lecturing us like this”.

[Jaume Miravittles 1]

After the first session of the Committee of Militias, Durruti and García Oliver told Comorera, the representative of the PSUC, “We know what the Bolsheviks did to the Russian anarchists. We assure you that we will not allow the communists to treat us the same way”.

[Manuel Benavides]

The Committee of Militias attended to everything: establishing revolutionary order in the civilian areas, organizing forces for the front, training officers, founding a signalling and communications school, seeing to the supply of food and clothing, reorganizing the economy, performing legislative and judicial functions, converting industries to war production, propaganda, relations with the central government in Madrid, connections with Morocco, agricultural problems, health and sanitation, guarding the borders and the coastline, finances, payment of the wages of the militias and subsidies for families and pensions for widows. The Committee, composed of a handful of members, worked twenty hours a day. It performed tasks that could only be carried out by a normal government by relying on a costly bureaucracy; it was simultaneously a Ministry of War, of the Interior and of Foreign Relations. It was the most legitimate expression of the will of the people.

[Diego Abad de Santillán 3]

### **Trotsky's assessment**

The Anarchists revealed a fatal lack of understanding of the laws of the revolution and its tasks by seeking to limit themselves to their own trade unions, that is, to organizations permeated with the routine of peaceful times, and by ignoring what went on outside the framework of the trade unions, among the masses, among the political parties, and in the government apparatus. Had the Anarchists been revolutionists, they would first of all have called for the creation of soviets, which unite the representatives of all the toilers of city and country, including the most oppressed strata, who never joined the trade unions. The revolutionary workers would have naturally occupied the dominant position in these soviets. The Stalinists would have remained an insignificant minority. The proletariat would have convinced itself of its own invincible strength. The apparatus of the bourgeois state would have hung suspended in the air. One strong blow would have sufficed to pulverize this apparatus.

Instead of this, the anarcho-syndicalists, seeking to hide from “politics” in the trade unions, turned out to be, to the great surprise of the whole world and

themselves, a fifth wheel in the cart of bourgeois democracy. But not for long; a fifth wheel is superfluous.

In and of itself, this self-justification that “we did not seize power not because we were unable but because we did not wish to, because we were against every kind of dictatorship,” and the like, contains an irrevocable condemnation of anarchism as an utterly anti-revolutionary doctrine. To renounce the conquest of power is voluntarily to leave the power with those who wield it, the exploiters. The essence of every revolution consisted and consists in putting a new class in power, thus enabling it to realize its own program in life. It is impossible to wage war and to reject victory. It is impossible to lead the masses towards insurrection without preparing for the conquest of power. No one could have prevented the Anarchists after the conquest of power from establishing the sort of regime they deem necessary, assuming, of course, that their program is realizable. But the Anarchist leaders themselves lost faith in it.

[Leon Trotsky]

## **A man who didn't like desk jobs**

Durruti immediately realized that the Central Committee was a bureaucratic institution. It debated, it negotiated, it made decisions, it drafted decrees, it was bureaucratic work. But Durruti was not capable of sitting in one place for very long. Outside the Government Palace, fighting was underway. He could not take it for very long. He therefore organized his own unit, the Durruti Column, and proceeded with it to the Aragon Front. I was present when they departed, marching down the streets of Barcelona. It was truly impressive: a hodge-podge of uniforms, volunteers from all over the world, multi-colored and motley clothing. It was almost like a gathering of hippies, but these hippies carried hand grenades and machine guns, and they were determined to fight to the death.

[Jaume Miravittles I]

## **The military campaign**

### **The first column**

The first task of the Committee of Militias consisted in organizing and training units to fight on the Aragon Front. Four days after the military revolt was crushed in Barcelona, three thousand volunteers gathered on the Paseo de Gracia and the Diagonal. They left for Aragon under the command of Durruti and Pérez Farrás (an officer of the *Mozos de Escuadra* who was a devoted supporter of the government). The legendary Durruti Column gained new volunteers along the road. The anarchist press followed the progress of its hero with big headlines.

It is difficult to calculate precisely the number of militiamen that were mobilized. The anarchists themselves disagree on the details. Rudolf Rocker speaks of 20,000 working class militiamen, of whom 13,000 belonged to the CNT-FAI, 2,000 to the socialist trade union, the UGT, and 3,000 to the parties of the Popular Front; the Durruti Column, with its 8,000 men, was not included in these figures.

Abad de Santillán claims that within a few days after Durruti's departure for the front, a total of 150,000 volunteers reported to the recruitment centers in Barcelona; these volunteers were incorporated into the columns of the various parties and trade union organizations.

[John Stephen Brademas]

The CCMA, which directs the armed forces in Catalonia, has decided to dispatch the workers' shock columns to Zaragoza to attack the rebels. The CCMA determined to send 6,000 volunteers, but enthusiasm has been running very high. The number of volunteers who assembled in the Plaça de Catalunya to go to Zaragoza reached 10,000.

General fervour notwithstanding, the Durruti-Pérez-Farràs Column did not attain the projected figure, nor anything like it. Already bewilderment was beginning. The war was to be all-consuming of men, weapons, work, thought, life, everything. It was believed that the first expeditionary column had more than enough fighters and that its task would be a walk-over. The 3,000 *milicianos* left joyously, with inexpressible pride and spirit.

[José Peirats 2]

Long before their scheduled time of departure, about 2,000 men arrived at 14<sup>th</sup> of April Avenue (the Diagonal), including artillerymen, who brought artillery pieces of various calibres; others brought automatic weapons; the signalling crews brought all kinds of communications and radio equipment; but most of them were workers, armed only with rifles. The column departed on the afternoon of July 24.

[Ricardo Sanz 4]

When they left for Aragon, I wanted to go, too, so I jumped onto a truck. Cars with loudspeakers were driving all around Barcelona calling upon the population to contribute food, because the militias left without so much as a piece of bread. It was extraordinary, the people came out everywhere, they interrupted their lunch and brought us everything they had: soup, meat, vegetables, cans of sardines. In the blink of an eye the trucks were full and we followed behind the militiamen. Otherwise they would have died of hunger. I mean, even the bravest man has to eat, doesn't he? And so I arrived in Aragon, with the "sardine truck", as the militiamen called it. Durruti had no idea that I was there, but someone must have

told him, because he got out of his car and looked over towards the truck. He saw me and then kept going; he didn't say a word.

[Émilienne Morin]

## **The march on Saragossa**

Durruti was obsessed with the conquest of Saragossa. The fall of the capital of Aragon into the hands of the fascists was a terrible blow to the CNT, the revolution and the possibility of a successful outcome of the Civil War. Saragossa had been the center of gravity of Aragonese anarchism; the anarchist insurrection of December 1933 had already demonstrated the potential of this city. In addition, Saragossa was for the anarchists the natural conduit for communications between its bases in Catalonia and its strongholds in the Basque Country, in Vizcaya and in Asturias.

Two and a half months before the revolution, the National Congress of the CNT was held in Saragossa. It was a show of force that was without precedent in the history of the Spanish workers movement. Tens of thousands of workers, women and men from all over Spain, attended the closing ceremony at the Saragossa Plaza de Toros. They came to Saragossa in special trains that were draped with banners and covered with placards, flying the red and black flag of the anarchists. During the Congress, Saragossa was totally in the hands of the CNT and the FAI, and the enemy's strategists had drawn their own conclusions after seeing that demonstration.

Saragossa had been assigned a very special role in the strategic plans of the fascists. The counterrevolution concentrated all its forces there: a veteran garrison of the regular army, and the cadres of the *requetés* of Navarre, a fanatical group of volunteers whose ancestors had fought on the side of the reactionaries in the civil wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. And then there was the role played by the civil governor of the city, a typical weakling of the Second Republic, and that of the commanding general of the garrison, the elderly Cabanellas, a sly old fox who always bragged about being a republican and a Mason until he deserted to Franco. He was rewarded with the Presidency of the Burgos Junta.

The Durruti Column advanced by forced marches towards Saragossa, in the hope of saving the anarchists of that city from annihilation. It was thought that Saragossa was still the scene of a fight to the death; in fact, the fascists had crushed all resistance. When Durruti arrived at the plateau of Saragossa, the city was a necropolis bristling with machine guns and artillery.

[José Peirats 1]

After passing through Lérida, Durruti arrived with his men in Bujaraloz, a town that was about forty kilometers from Saragossa. There he set up his command

post, in the house of a road construction laborer, on a plain that was exposed to the enemy. The sector occupied by his militiamen, which extended to the Ebro on their left flank, was soon thoroughly purged of enemy stragglers. Durruti's advance units were about twenty kilometers from Saragossa, within sight of the city.

It is regrettable that Durruti got no help from the revolutionary forces of Saragossa. Those forces, however, were themselves surrounded and were not well armed, and as a result they had to wait for the siege to be lifted. The rebels completely controlled the city, and were thus able to calmly plan its defense.

If Durruti had taken Saragossa, the war would have quickly been resolved in favor of the republican side. The garrison there was a very strong one; it had considerable reserves of men and materiel. Its fall would have opened up the way to Logroño and Vitoria, and even Bilbao, on the Atlantic coast. Not even Teruel would have resisted for twenty-four hours after the fall of Saragossa.

It was undoubtedly because of the neglect and sabotage directed against the Aragon Front that we lost the war. From the very beginning it was impossible to conduct an offensive, and this goes for Durruti as well as the commanders of the other columns in Aragon. They did not have reserves, and lacked arms and ammunition.

Durruti had some spies who infiltrated Saragossa by passing through the enemy lines. These spies reported that the city was almost completely undefended and that it could be conquered with a relatively small number of men. The general staff was repeatedly informed of this state of affairs, yet nonetheless refused to authorize the attack, to give the necessary orders and to prepare the means for launching an offensive. The commanders on the Aragon Front never understood the conduct of the general staff.

[Ricardo Sanz 3]

### **From the diary of a village priest**

When the Civil War began, I was the parish priest of Aguinaliu, in the Province of Huesca. After the proclamation of the Republic, I noticed that a lot of people turned against the Church. They called us "crows". After the famous speech by Companys, which I listened to on the radio, I got the impression that a wave of persecution against the clergy was imminent. And even though the people of the village were friendly, the day would come when I would have to flee. That day came on July 27. I saw a car full of armed young men pull up at the marketplace. I immediately jumped on my motorcycle and I disappeared into the mountains.

It was a good idea, because the militiamen came to the towns and arrested the parish priests. Many of them were shot without trial or thrown into the river. The

local committees were responsible for this; they gave the militiamen a blacklist and the militiamen executed the people whose names appeared on the list.

At one point I was stopped at a highway checkpoint near the town of Barbastro and they questioned me. I had to say something to get out of that situation alive, so I said that I was a courier for the People's Army. It was a matter of yelling louder than they did. I even managed to get a safe conduct pass. After that I really had to watch out. Now I was not only a fugitive priest, but a deserter, too....

Before I reached Candasnos I had all kinds of adventures. Candasnos is where I was born. I snuck into my family's house. Fortunately, the President of the People's Committee was a good person. But he was not omnipotent, and he could not overrule armed troops. Someone denounced me, and I was arrested. My friend managed to prevent me from being shot on the spot, and succeeded in arranging for a trial instead. Timoteo, let's call him, brought me to the balcony of city hall, below which the whole population of the town was gathered, and asked the people what should be done with me. There was a loud commotion. The inhabitants of the town, many of whom belonged to left wing organizations, said that I should not be killed. And that was the ruling.

I was not yet entirely safe, however, because the strangers in the town, who were armed, were not resigned to allowing me to get off scot-free. Then Timoteo decided to speak with Durruti in Bujaraloz. The district was under his command.

Durruti told him, "Listen, if you want to save him, there is no other solution than to bring him to my column."

It was the middle of August. We went to Bujaraloz and they brought me to Durruti. He asked me, "What do you prefer? Go back home, or stay here with my column?"

"It's up to me?"

"Of course. But I'll be honest with you: if you leave, sooner or later one of these groups of *incontrolados* will kill you. You will not always be so lucky. If you stay with us you will at least be safe, I assure you of that."

Naturally, I decided to join the column. Durruti told me that he needed a clerk. Immediately I was brought to his office, where I found a redheaded girl sitting at a desk. "She will be your assistant. But don't try lifting her skirt, eh?", he said. Since then it was my job to tabulate lists of the troops in the column and to register the new volunteers that arrived. Of course, some of them soon recognized me, but no one dared to say anything to me because word had gotten around that I was under Durruti's protection.

[Jesús Arnal Pena 1]

## **A war without generals**

When I met Durruti again in 1936, he had become an influential man. He was not a great political leader, because he lacked the necessary intellectual background. He was a good agitator when he spoke in public, but he was not a first-rate speaker. He was possessed of good common sense and he was a good judge of character. He was also relatively modest. His power was based on the fascination he exercised over the imagination of the masses, especially in Spain. The southern imagination creates its own myths, as you know. His military abilities were limited, he was no general. He did not have a correct idea of strategy. As a military commander he displayed courage and prudence, in addition to an uncanny sense of proportion. He was not the kind of commander who blindly ordered fascists or alleged fascists to be shot. For he knew very well that such confused circumstances provide a fertile soil for the most unfounded denunciations. I recall, for example, that he saved a foreign comrade from execution after the comrade had complained about certain abuses. And he did not accept just anyone who volunteered to serve under his command. I was present when he told some dyed-in-the-wool anarchists, "Any brute knows how to fight; go back to your village, go back to your factory. There is a shortage of capable organizers, you must go where you are needed most; here at the front we can do without you".

[Gaston Leval]

He was no general, none of us were. We had a good enough idea of urban guerrilla warfare, in Barcelona and other places, in the streets, in a population we knew, a place we were familiar with, over there is a hiding place, there at the corner the newspaper vendor is a comrade, across the street is the police station, the armories, the warehouses at the port, we were familiar with the terrain. In the countryside, however, at such and such an altitude, the trenches, the military maps, we did not know much about this, it was not our strong point, and, besides, so what? Before the rebel coup we did not need any of that. No, we were not great strategists, not even Durruti.

[Ricardo Sanz]

My companion, who is not precisely a friend of the anarchists, had visited the Durruti Column and came back utterly disgusted. Undeniably they had advanced farther than any other column in the direction of Saragossa, without sparing their lives, trusting in the unlimited reserve of recruits which the anarchist proletariat of Barcelona can put at their disposal. Finally the central command under Colonel Villalba summoned them to stop this waste of human life, and after much wrangling Durruti was induced not to advance farther.

So far the tale of my socialist friend. I cannot help being somewhat sceptical as to his conclusions. From what I saw myself at the front the other columns had no exaggerated desire to sacrifice themselves, and there were practically no losses whatever. In this way the Catalans would never get into Saragossa. Possibly Durruti may have sinned in the opposite direction, but then it was necessary to find a middle line between useless sacrifice and ineffectual timidity. From the point of view of the whole front, the fanatical push of the Durruti column was certainly an asset, if rightly used....

Having seen the front, I am surprised at the lack of realism in the calculations of all political groups. They are all based on the approaching fall of Saragossa, whereas, in reality, nothing seems to be farther off than that. In consequence, the POUM seems to me unfair to charge the Government, in private talks, with a treasonable intention to handicap the operations. If they were afraid of what the anarchists might do after the famous fall of Saragossa, it would only be natural. But it is obvious that nothing of the sort will happen, not because of treason in high quarters, but from sheer inefficiency and incompetence all along the line. It would need the heroic efforts of a group of very able officers and politicians to overcome all the patent defects of the militia, and none such are available.

[Franz Borkenau]

## **The avenging angel**

All the villages and small towns which we passed through, though passionately guarding their own territory, have not sent a single man to the front. The main recruiting for the militia is in Barcelona.

In the old decaying townlet of Cervera there had existed a theological seminary. I question one of the village guards, a good-looking boy of certainly not more than sixteen, about it, and he answers with the happiest smile on his face: "Oh! They've gone—and how they've gone!" Churches are burnt without a single exception; only their walls are standing. This has mostly been done by order of the CNT or the passing militia-columns. Hardly anywhere in this region has there been actual fighting between the rebels and the partisans of the Generalitat.

There are surprisingly few indications that we are approaching the front. The road is intact and there is less traffic than in peace-time. A few motor-lorries with provisions and still fewer with ammunition are passing towards the front, and others are coming back empty. We did not meet a single ambulance car.

Lerida being the meeting-point of all the roads serving the southern part of the Saragossa front, I expected it to be a centre of activity. But there is very little. Thirty or forty cars and motor-lorries are parked in the *plaza* and some of the militia are to be seen in the town; there cannot be more than a few hundred of them altogether. Many of them crowd into the offices of the civil governor, and



there talk excitedly and enthusiastically of Buenaventura Durruti, the anarchist leader, and his column; he and his men are the popular heroes of the Catalan war, to the detriment of all the other Catalan columns. Durruti has the reputation of being a sort of avenging angel of the poor. His column is known to be more ruthless than any other in shooting the fascists, the rich, and the priests in the villages, and the glory of its self-sacrificing advance towards Saragossa, careless of heavy losses, is told all through the militia of Catalonia. Some of the guards in the governor's offices have served under him. With a naive smile, which has nothing of sadism about it, but rather expresses the satisfaction of a child at a good piece of fun, they show me their dum-dum cartridges, which they have made out of regular cartridges by an incision at the top. "Prisoners....", one man tells me, meaning by that that a cartridge is ready for every prisoner. So that is civil war in Spain. I am inclined to think it is not different in the Franco camp. Only, on both sides, neutral Press correspondents must remain silent, if they do not want to get themselves into serious trouble.

[Franz Borkenau]

"In Russia you have a State like all the rest, but we want freedom," I was told by a member of a patrol wearing a red and black shirt when he inspected my pass. "We are going to establish libertarian communism."

"Libertarian communism!" I can still hear these words echoing in my ears. How many times have I heard them! As a challenge, or as an oath.

To explain the inconceivable behavior of the anarchists, it has occasionally been pointed out that their columns are full of bandits and thieves. It is indisputable that the anarchist ranks have been infiltrated by thieves and common criminals; the party that is in power attracts not only the better elements, but also the scum. At that time, anyone could pass himself off as an anarchist. In September 1936, when I was in Valencia, a century from the anarchist "Iron Column" arrived from the Teruel Front. The anarchists said that their commander had died in combat and they did not know what to do. They found things to do in Valencia. They burned the records of the municipal court and tried to storm the prison to liberate the criminals; maybe some of their pals were being held there.

Nonetheless, the criminal element was not an important factor. In the autumn of 1936 the CNT had three quarters of the workers of Catalonia in its organizations. The leaders of the CNT and the FAI were workers, sincere men for the most part. The worst thing about them was the fact that although they condemned dogmatism, they were themselves typical dogmatists. They tried to force life into the mold of their theories.

The most intelligent men among them understood the discrepancies between the beautiful words in their pamphlets and the crude reality. Suddenly, under a rain of

bombs and bullets, they had to revise their views on what had previously been an unalterable truth for them.

[Ilya Ehrenburg]

During the first few days of the revolution all the churches in Lérida were burned. The day when the Durruti Column passed through the city on its way towards the Aragon Front, the militiamen set fire to the Cathedral, after accusing their comrades in Lérida of being cowards for not daring to destroy the church. The Cathedral burned for two days.

[Anonymous 1]

“The red priest”, “Durruti’s secretary”; these rumors still hound me, but they are not true. I was never an anarchist, and Durruti never had a secretary. I was only a clerical worker in the column’s administrative office. But I must say that Durruti was a just man, and if someone says that he was a murderer and a thief, that person is a slanderer, and I will defend my friend against such lies.

For example, it is said that he and his column burned the Cathedral of Lérida. But when was the Cathedral burned? It was burned on August 25<sup>th</sup>, and the Durruti Column passed through Lérida towards the front on July 24<sup>th</sup>, and I assure you that they did not come back, one month later, to burn a church. What actually happened was that a century of ultra-radicals on their way from Barcelona to the Front passed through Lérida, and they could think of nothing better to do while there than burn down the House of God. When they arrived at the staff headquarters of the column, news of their exploit had already reached us. Durruti, who was very astute when he wanted to be, ordered them to appear before him in formation, and he shouted: “The courageous men who participated in the action in Lérida will step forward”. Then the guilty were punished with the strictest penalties.

[Jesús Arnal Pena 1]

### **Three journalists**

At the end of August and the beginning of September I went with Carmen and Makasseev to Durruti’s command post. At that time he still hoped to conquer Saragossa. His command post was on the banks of the Ebro. I told my companions that I knew Durruti; they could therefore expect a cordial reception. But Durruti pulled a revolver out of his pocket and said that I had slandered the anarchists in my article on the Asturian revolt, and he added that he should kill me right then and there. Durruti did not often say things just to hear himself talk.

“Do as you will,” I responded, “but I think that you have a strange idea of the rules of hospitality”. Durruti was an anarchist, and prone to violent outbursts, too,

but he was also a Spaniard. My response caught him off-guard, and he said, "OK. Here you are my guest. But you will pay for your article. Not here, but in Barcelona!" Because he could not kill me due to his respect for the rules of hospitality, he began to tell me off in no uncertain terms. He shouted that the Soviet Union was not a free commune, but a State like any other, a State full of bureaucrats, and that he would have been outlawed in Moscow.

Carmen and Makasseev sensed that not all was going well; the sudden appearance of the revolver did not require a translator. An hour later I told them, "Everything's OK. He invited us to dinner".

There were various militiamen seated at the table, some dressed in red and black shirts, others in combat fatigues, and all of them were armed with high caliber revolvers. They sat there and ate, drank wine and laughed. None of them looked at us or at Durruti. One of the men brought us food and a bottle of wine. Next to Durruti's plate was a bottle of mineral water. I said, trying to make a joke, "You always talk about absolute equality. But here everyone else is drinking wine, while you are drinking mineral water". I did not foresee the effect my words would have on Durruti. He stood up immediately and shouted, "Take away the bottle! Bring me water from the well!" He spent a long time trying to justify himself. "I don't know why I asked for it. They know that wine doesn't agree with me and they found a crate of mineral water somewhere. You're right, it's unacceptable." We went on eating in silence, and then he suddenly added, "It's hard to change everything all at once. Principles and life do not perfectly coincide".

That night we visited the forward positions. It was very noisy, a convoy of trucks was passing by right next to us. "Why don't you ask me what these trucks are doing here?", Durruti said. I answered that it was not my intention to use this as an opportunity to pry into his military secrets. He laughed. "Secrets? Everyone knows that tomorrow we will cross the Ebro! And so we will!" A few minutes later he continued, "Do you want to know why I have decided to cross the river?" "How am I supposed to know?", I said. "After all, you are the commander of the column!" Durruti laughed again, "This has nothing to do with strategy. Yesterday, a ten year old boy came running towards us from the sector occupied by the fascists. And he asked us, 'What are you doing? In my town the people are shocked that you have not attacked. And now the people are saying that Durruti has chickened out!' Do you understand? When a child speaks like that, he says what the people are thinking. This means that we have to attack. The strategy falls into place on its own..." I looked at his cheerful face and I thought, "You are just a little child, too!"

I subsequently visited Durruti on various occasions. His column had about ten thousand men. Durruti still believed in his ideas, as always, but he was not a dogmatist, and almost every day he had to make some kind of concession to reality. He was the first anarchist to understand that without discipline, you cannot

wage war. "War is a bloody mess," he said, full of bitterness. "Not only does it destroy houses, but also the highest principles." But he would not admit this in front of his men.

One day, several militiamen abandoned their guard posts. They were found in the nearest village, calmly drinking wine. Durruti was furious. "Don't you understand that you have dragged the honor of the column through the mud! Hand over your CNT membership cards." The culprits calmly took their membership cards out of their pockets. This made him even more angry. "You are not anarchists, you are garbage! You are expelled from the column, and I order you to go home." This may in fact have been just what these men wanted to hear. Instead of protesting, they only replied, "Understood". "Do you know who those clothes you are wearing belong to? Take off your trousers, right now! They belong to the people!" The militiamen calmly took off their trousers. Durruti ordered that they should be escorted in their underwear to Barcelona, "so that everyone can see that you are not anarchists, but common trash!"

[Ilya Ehrenburg 1]

Each column of anarcho-syndicalists carries with it some loyal officers or members of the Guardia Civil who are not recognized as officers, (there being no place for officers in a column inspired by Organized Indiscipline,) but are regarded as a sort of mechanic to look after the military machine. If there is real fighting to be done, these men explain how to do it, and if they have time try to organize a field of fire or a bit of barbed wire or something else entirely outside the range of experience of their comrades. Should the rebels attack they often find little but enthusiasm and bravery to oppose them, but as no strategic advantage can come of recapturing Santa Maria, its inhabitants are usually left to discuss the principles of Libertarian Communism with one another and to feed the militia.

Of course when, as sometimes happens, a position of real military importance is threatened, as between Zaragoza and Huesca, real fighting takes place and terrible casualties occur. Then you see the humiliating sight of loyalists disarmed by the pact of non-intervention opposing with nothing but faith, artillery, machine guns, bombs, aeroplanes supplied by the Fascist International.

[John Langdon-Davies]

Bujaraloz, August 14, 1936. "What is the situation like here?", I asked him.

Durruti spread out a map and showed me the location of his units.

"We are stalled at the train station in Pina. The town is in our hands, but the station is held by the enemy. Tomorrow or the day after we will cross the Ebro, advance towards the station and seize it. Then we will free up our right flank and we will occupy Quinto and Fuentes de Ebro, and then on to the walls of

Saragossa. Belchite will surrender, it will be suddenly surrounded. And you”—he nodded his head towards Trueba—“are you still in Huesca?”

“We are ready to leave Huesca to advance and support your attack from the right flank,” Trueba said calmly. “That is, always subject to the condition that the operation is seriously planned.”

Durruti was silent for a moment. Then he responded gruffly, “If you want to help us, help us, if not, don’t! The attack on Saragossa is my operation, both from the military as well as the political and political-military points of view. I am responsible for it. Do you think that we can retake Saragossa with you if you give us a thousand men? In Saragossa libertarian communism will prevail, and if not, then fascism. You can have all of Spain, but let me have Saragossa!”

He soon calmed down and then spoke to us in a civil tone of voice. He recognized that we had not come to see him with ulterior motives, but he responded to blunt talk with even more bluntness. (No one dared to disagree with him, despite all the talk of equality.) He eagerly asked us for detailed reports on the international situation, and for our views concerning the possibility of obtaining aid for Spain, and about strategic and tactical matters. He asked me about our political activity during the Russian Civil War. Later he told us that his column was well-armed and had lots of ammunition. It only had some problems with its command structure. The “technician” was only supposed to perform an advisory function—he, Durruti, would make the final decisions. According to him, he delivered almost twenty speeches a day, and this exhausted him. As for training, he was proceeding very slowly, because the soldiers did not like military drill, even though they were totally inexperienced and had only fought on the streets of Barcelona. Desertions were quite common. The column had about one thousand two hundred men at the time.

He asked us if we had eaten lunch, and he invited us to wait for the soldiers to bring the mess tins. We did not accept his offer; we did not want to deprive any soldiers of their rations. Durruti gave a rations coupon to Marina.

When we took our leave, I said to him in all frankness:

“*Hasta la vista*, Durruti. I’ll see you in Saragossa. If you don’t die here, or in Barcelona fighting against the communists, we might make a Bolshevik out of you yet, in about six years.”

He laughed, turned around and began talking to someone who just happened to be standing nearby.

[Mikhail Koltsov]

## **The diary of a volunteer<sup>9</sup>**

Sunday, August 16: Durruti in Pina.

(Civil Guard—Assault Guard—peasants.) Sevillano. Durruti's speech to the peasants: I am a worker, like you. When it's over, I'll go back to work in a factory.

Durruti in Osera.

Order: Do not ask the peasants for food, or to sleep in their houses. Obey the "military technicians". Violent debate.

Organization: Elected delegates. Incompetence. Lack of authority. They cannot impose the authority of the military technicians on the troops. A peasant complains to a comrade from Oran (Marquet) that the sentinels sleep all night at their posts.

Return to headquarters.

A comrade who escaped from Saragossa. He has an import-export firm there. He was originally from Seville. One man doesn't want to be separated from his friend; the other wants to hand in his weapons.

Three hundred men without weapons, from Lérida, are sent to the front. Five artillery pieces borrowed from the Huesca Column (that is, sent from Lérida, with Durruti's authorization). García Oliver is on his way to Valencia in an airplane. An officer has disappeared. Organizing the team of telephone specialists and telegraphists.

Reinforcements announced: 2,000 armed men, a cavalry squadron, two 15 centimeter artillery batteries, two all-terrain tanks.

Telephone conversation between Durruti and Santillán. The conquest of Quinto will cost the lives of 1,200 men without artillery. With artillery, the column can reach the gates of Saragossa.

He is very excited: Why don't they bomb Saragossa?

(An old man: "Yes, sir.")

Monday, August 17.

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<sup>9</sup> These passages from Simone Weil's notebooks, and all those that follow below, were translated from the Spanish translation [American translator's note].

Headquarters has been transferred to a house in the countryside, right next to a large field of grain (quite a change!). Morning, in a car on the way to Pina. The little driver is going to Pina with his girlfriend sitting right next to him, they are smooching the whole way. I find our group billeted in the school. Fabulous (patriotic books...).

(The hospital is also in the school.) We are eating with the peasants at Number 18. They give me a rifle: a beautiful little carbine. That afternoon there is an air raid in the area. I shout to Boris: "I still haven't even heard a single shot." (It's true, besides the rifle drills.) Right then something blows up. A terrible explosion. "Air raid." We take up our rifles. Order: everyone into the grain field. We take cover. I throw myself on the ground and shoot towards the sky. After a few minutes, everyone gets up. The planes are flying very high, they are beyond range. Half the Spaniards are still shooting at them, one is shooting horizontally towards the river (revolver shots, too?). We find a bomb. Minuscule. It makes a hole about half a meter in diameter. I feel no emotion.

There are still some peasants lounging around in the square, but fewer than before. Louis Berthomieux (delegate): "Let's go, we are crossing the river." We have to burn three enemy corpses. We cross in a boat, after about a quarter hour of discussion. Searching. Finally a body, blue, decayed, horrifying. We burn it. We are still looking for the others. We take a break. Proposal to form an assault team. Most return to the other bank. Later it is decided (?) to wait until tomorrow to form an assault team. We return to the other bank of the river, almost totally in the open. An isolated house in the country. Pascual (from the war committee): "Are we going to look for melons?" (very seriously). We wade through the undergrowth. Heat, and a little anxiety. It seems stupid to me. Soon I understand that this is serious, it is an attack (against the house). This time I am very excited (I don't know the purpose of the attack, but I do know that prisoners are shot). We split into two groups. The delegate, Ridel, and the three Germans crawl on the ground towards the house. We are in the trenches (later we were reprimanded by the delegate: we were supposed to advance towards the house, too). We wait. We hear voices.... The tension is unbearable. We see the comrades coming back, without taking cover, we join them, and we cross the river calmly. Our failure to advance could have cost them their lives. Pascual is in charge. (Carpentier and Giral are with us.)

We sleep in the hay (two boots in a corner, good protection). The medic wants to extinguish the lantern, they tell him to get lost.

It was on this expedition that I was afraid for the first and only time during the whole time I was in Pina.

Tuesday, August 18

Various proposals to cross the river. Around noon it is decided to risk the passage during the middle of the night, just our “group”, and to hold the position on the other bank until the arrival of the Sastano Column. The day is spent in preparation. The most annoying problem: the machine guns. The Pina war committee refuses to give us any. After many requests we finally managed to get one at least, thanks to the help of the Italian colonel who commands the Banda Negra. Finally, we even got two. We did not test them to see if they worked.

In fact it was the colonel’s idea, but the war committee finally authorized our assault team.

It is voluntary, of course. The night before, at 1800 hours, Berthomieux meets with us to ask us what we think.

Silence. He insists that we tell him what we think. More silence. Finally, Ridel: “OK, great, everyone agrees”. And that was all there was to it.

We go to bed. The medic wants to extinguish the lanterns again.... I was lying there with my clothes on, I could not get any sleep. We got up at 2:30 in the morning. My backpack is ready. I am scared stiff. Distribution of equipment (for me, the map and the mess kit). Orders.

We proceed in silence. But a little excited. We make the crossing in two trips. Louis is angry with us, he is yelling (if the enemy was there...). We get out of the boats. We wait. Dawn breaks. The German cooks the soup for us. Louis discovers a shack, he makes us bring our equipment there, I am ordered to stand guard. They leave the soup with me and I guard it. Sentries are posted all around. The shack is put in order, the mess kit is stashed away and the windows are blocked off so they don’t see us.

In the meantime, the others go to the house. There, they find a family. A sixteen year old boy (good looking!). Reports: they have already seen us, during the patrol. Then we have to set guards on the bank of the river. The sentries withdraw when we disembark. One hundred twelve men. The lieutenant has sworn that he will catch us out. They return. I translate these reports for the German. They ask: “What, are we supposed to cross the river again?” “No, we are supposed to stay here, of course.” (Maybe it would be better to make a phone call to Durruti from Pina?)

Order: everyone is to return, along with the family of peasants. (In the meantime the German who has been acting as cook refuses to cook anymore because there is no salt, oil or vegetables.) Berthomieux, furious (it is dangerous to try to approach the house again), calls a meeting of the whole assault team. He says to me: “You! Go to the kitchen!” I did not dare to protest. Besides, the operation did not seem very convincing to me.... I saw them depart, full of anxiety.... (actually, they were not in any more danger than I was).



We took up our rifles and waited. Then the German proposed to go to the small trench below the tree, where Ridel and Carpentier were posted (both of whom participated again in the expedition, of course). We reached the shade, with our rifles (not loaded). Then we waited. Now and then a sigh from the German. He was afraid, evidently.

Not me. How intense everything around me is! A war without prisoners. Anyone who is taken by the enemy is shot.

The comrades return. A peasant, his son and the boy.... Fontana salutes them with his upraised fist, looking at the kids. They return the salute, the boy does so out of a sense of obligation, it is obvious. Cruel coercion.... The peasant goes back again to look for the rest of his family. We sit down again. A reconnaissance plane. We take cover. Louis shouts at the top of his lungs complaining about our carelessness. I lay down on my back, and contemplate the leaves, the blue sky. A very beautiful day. If they capture me they will kill me.... That's what they do because, yes, we have shed a lot of their blood. I am their accomplice, at least morally. Absolute calm. We get up, then it starts all over again. I take cover in the shack. Some bombs are dropped. I come running out of the shack towards the machine gun. Louis says, "There's nothing to be afraid of!" (!) He orders me to join the German in the kitchen, with my gun on my shoulder. We wait.

Finally, the peasant comes with his family (three daughters and an eight year old boy), all of them terrified (there are violent bombing attacks). They are afraid of us, too, and only gradually do they begin to trust us a little. Worrying about the cattle that they left in the barn (we just sent the animals to Pina). It is obvious that they are not on our side, politically.

[Simone Weil]

### ***Faits divers***

One day they brought a man who occupied a high-level position in Saragossa. I prefer not to give his name. They were going to shoot him. Durruti summoned his guards and asked them, "How did this man behave on his farm? How did he treat the farm workers?" The answer was: "Quite well." "So what do you want to do? Are you going to shoot him because he used to be rich? That's stupid." He told me this and he said:

"I want you to make sure that he works as a teacher in the village, and that he does a good job."

[Jesús Arnal Pena 1]

One afternoon in August, a group of performers from Barcelona showed up at Durruti's general headquarters on the Lérida-Saragossa highway. They wanted to sing some songs for the militiamen. One of them was Durruti's wife, Émilienne. Durruti ordered the girls to return to Barcelona. He told his wife, "I am very busy here. First let us win the war. When the others can also bring their wives, then you can come. Not now."

[Ramón García López]

During the siege of Huesca, Durruti went as an observer on a reconnaissance mission over the city in a small Breguet biplane. It was a feast day, people were coming out of the church when the plane flew over them. The pilot of the plane, lieutenant Erguido, known as the Red Devil, asked Durruti if he should drop some hand grenades on them. Durruti refused to bomb the civilian population.

[Jesús Arnal Pena 3]

In August, a car from the Quartermaster's Corps arrived at Durruti's headquarters and dropped off a barrel of wine. Durruti was in front of the building near the front door, saw the wine, and said, "If you don't have wine for the front, headquarters won't drink any, either". He drew his pistol and shot the barrel full of holes, and all the wine poured onto the ground.

[Ramón García López]

Another problem that the column had to deal with was the prostitutes from Barcelona who followed the anarchosyndicalists to the Aragon Front. It wasn't long before venereal diseases claimed more casualties than enemy bullets. Durruti had to set up a clinic in Bujaraloz to treat these cases. He assumed responsibility for everything. I still remember that he ordered us to give a tube of Blenocol to the militiamen who were going on leave in Barcelona.

Finally, he told me:

"We have to put an end to this spectacle, these women mixing with the column, once and for all."

"OK, boss, that's an excellent idea, but how are we going to do that?"

"Contact the transport depot and request that they send all the cars that you think will be necessary. These cars are to be driven to all the centuries where they are to collect all the women. But make sure not to leave any of them behind! Then drive them to Sariñena. There you will escort them to special train cars and you will accompany them to Barcelona."

“That’s a great idea. And for this little job you couldn’t find a better person than Jesús. Do you also want him to go around preaching the Sixth Commandment along the way?”

“No, there’s only one thing I want: I want you to find a way to get me out of this mess.”

It was an order and I had to obey it.

My efforts were not entirely successful, however; it did not take long for suspicious-looking women to begin to appear again in the centuries. They might have been the same ones that I escorted to Barcelona.

[Jesús Arnal Pena 1]

### **The other side of the coin**

In Aragon, after a minor engagement, a small group of internationalists composed of twenty-two militiamen from all over the world captured a fifteen year old boy who was fighting on the side of the fascists. He was still shaking, because he had seen his comrades die right next to him. During the first interrogation he said that he had been forced to enlist in Franco’s army. They searched him; they found a medallion of the Virgin Mary and a Falange membership card. They sent him to Durruti, who, after spending an hour explaining to him the merits of anarchist ideals, gave him a choice between death or immediately joining the ranks of those who had captured him, to fight against his former comrades. Durruti gave him twenty-four hours to think it over. The boy refused, and he was shot. Durruti, however, was an admirable man in certain respects. This boy’s death always nagged at my conscience, although I only found out about this after it had happened.

Another case: in a village had changed hands between the reds and the whites again and again in succession, I don’t know how many times, the red militiamen, having finally really gained control over the place, found a handful of terrified, emotionally hysterical and emaciated figures, including three or four young men. The militiamen argued as follows: if these young men, instead of following us when we retreated the last time, stayed to await the arrival of the fascists, this means that they are fascists, too. This was a good enough reason for them to be shot on the spot. The militiamen gave food to the other people they found in the basement. And because they did that they thought that they were great humanitarians.

One more story, this one about the home front. Two anarchists told me that they captured two priests. One was shot immediately with a pistol right in front of the other; they told the other priest that he was free to go. When he had taken about

twenty steps they shot him down. The man who related this account was very surprised that his story did not make me laugh.

An atmosphere like this, in which such things take place daily, destroys the goal of the struggle. For this goal must not be expressed in opposition to the public good, the good of all men; but in Spain, the life of a man is worth nothing. In a country where the poor are mostly peasants, the goal of every extreme left group should be to improve the situation of the peasants; and the Civil War was at first, and perhaps above all else, a war for (and against) the distribution of land to the peasants. But what happened? These miserable and magnificent peasants of Aragon, who have not lost their pride despite all their humiliations, were not even an object of curiosity for the militiamen from the city. Even if there were no abuses, insults or cases of harassment (I, at least, did not see any such incidents, and I know that the penalty for theft or rape in the anarchist columns was death), the soldiers were separated by an abyss from the unarmed population, an abyss as deep as the one that separates the rich from the poor. This may be noted clearly in the attitude of the peasants, which is always a little humble, submissive and timid, and the self-confidence, audacity and condescending attitude of the soldiers.

[Simone Weil]

In September 1936 the Aragon Front settled into a static war of position. The anarchist columns were so well prepared for such a war that they did not rely on the central government in Madrid. They obtained their own munitions. When there were problems, they contacted the trade unions of Barcelona. Our column was also independent from the financial point of view. The matter of its supply was regulated in the following way: after the grain harvest, our unit bought wheat from the people's committees at the usual price, and we brought the sacks of grain in our trucks to the coast of Levante, in the province of Valencia. There, the price of wheat was much higher. The trucks returned loaded with fruit and vegetables and with enough money to buy more wheat.

In this way the column received everything that was indispensable for trench warfare: food, firewood and lumber, clothing and tobacco. It was quiet at the front, quieter than behind the lines, where the aerial bombardments had begun to intensify. Many soldiers began to think of the war as a pastime. They often abandoned their posts and spent entire days behind the lines. This happened very seldom in the Durruti Column, because our chief knew how to control the situation. On the road to Barcelona, the soldiers always had to pass through Lérida. Once there, they began to "requisition" whatever they wanted from the stores and warehouses. When it comes right down to it, this was nothing but a semi-legal form of looting. The local authorities were powerless. These confiscations gradually reached such a magnitude that no one felt safe in Lérida. The behavior of the militiamen was contagious; soon enough, anyone with a gun went around "requisitioning". Organized groups of "*incontrolados*" were formed that acted on their own account. There were representatives of all the

organizations in Lérida—the parties, the CNT, the UGT, the POUM and the highway patrols—and all of them issued signed passes that were practically nothing but a *carte blanche* to loot the city. People even had passes from Durruti's Column, which had nothing to do with these actions. Durruti never authorized or ordered any such requisitions.

He finally had enough. He summoned me and said:

“This looting is discrediting the column. It has to be stopped. Go to Lérida as a delegate of the column and reestablish order. You will go with two warrant officers who are fully informed about what is going on. Call me every night and report.”

“OK”, I responded, “but why me? It's impossible. A lot of people in Lérida know me. When they find out that a priest wants to stop the requisitions, they won't just stand there with their hands in their pockets, they'll put two bullets in my head.”

“Then I'll give you an escort”, Durruti said, “and a whole century if necessary. And I'll give you full discretionary powers, in writing.”

So I went to Lérida with two warrant officers and two bodyguards. All of them brought automatic pistols and revolvers.

We took rooms in the Hotel Suizo. First I spoke with the delegates of the Generalitat, the government of Catalonia, and they promised that they would help us as much as they could. Their office was inundated by a flood of “receipts” for requisitioned goods. The merchants and shopkeepers submitted them in the vague hope that they might someday be indemnified for their losses. Some of these documents were really strange. On one of them, for example, the following statement was written: “Receipt for so many lipsticks. For the Farlete cavalry brigade. Signature: illegible.” We selected the most expensive receipts, we drew up a list and then we made the rounds of the various offices that had issued these documents. When, among the stolen items, we found something left over that might be useful to us, we sent it as a reserve to our column at the front. We issued the following statement to the donors:

“The Durruti Column will in the future prevent the abuses that are being committed in its name. This is the last warning. If the requisitions continue, we will come with a century to Lérida. Then we won't be looking for stolen goods, but for the thieves. The Column will bring them to justice.”

I had my eyes on one criminal in particular. He was the supply committee delegate for our column. He had begun to engage in a little business for himself on the side. For example, he withdrew several cases of better quality cigarettes from the Tobacco Store, but he did not deliver even one pack to the column. This man was hard to find. I thought that I knew where we could find him, however. I

went with my bodyguards, who were armed with automatic pistols, and we paid visits to all the whorehouses of the city, asking the women if anyone had been giving away good cigarettes, a very rare luxury at the time, and, soon enough, we found our man in a whore's room on Caballeros Street.

He had become so insolent that he even offered us some of the cigarettes. I showed him the documents granting me discretionary powers. He was terrified.

“You have until 9:00 a.m. tomorrow morning to deliver so many cases of high quality cigarettes to such and such a location. If even one case is missing, we will hand you over to Durruti's general headquarters. You can imagine what will happen to you there.”

After our expedition, the “requisitions” in Lérida almost completely ceased. The traffickers were terrified of Durruti; his initiative put an end to the looting.

[Jesús Arnal Pena 2]

## **Machine guns**

Dawn was just breaking when our car was stopped at the entrance to Bujaraloz. A strapping young man emerged from the darkness. His face was olive-colored and he looked like a Moor. With rifle in hand he stood in the middle of the street while the other militiaman examined our papers. He told us that our documents did not authorize us to proceed any further. To go to the Front and to come back we needed a special pass signed by Durruti. “Thank you! Have a good trip!” We drove across the still-sleeping town towards the truck depot, where we knew that the military headquarters was located.

We approached a large group of men gathered around several machine guns. The weapons were lying on the ground. A tall, strong man with a sunburned face, black hair and small, sparkling eyes came up to the group and ordered them to set up the machine guns and test them, in order to bring them immediately to the front line. A few moments later the weapons were ready to fire. Durruti (he was the giant who had approached the group), pointed at a target, and the machine guns rattled away for a few seconds. The target, located about a thousand meters away at the foot of a hill, was blown to pieces. “That is how you have to shoot at the enemy, without shaking”, Durruti said. “It is better to die than to abandon a machine gun. If any of you abandons a machine gun and the fascists do not capture him, I will shoot him myself. Remember that the freedom of the whole people depends on your aim. A lost machine gun is a machine gun that will be turned against us. With these weapons we will take Saragossa and we will march on Pamplona. I will enter the city with the head of the traitor Cabanellas tied to the bumper of my car. And we won't stop until the red and black flag is flying over all the towns of the Iberian peninsula! When we left Barcelona, we swore to be victorious. A man must be true to his word. So take these weapons and take

good care of them. You must not retreat even one step as long as you have one bullet.” Ten minutes in his presence was all it took for people to be swept away by his optimism. It was this optimism that attracted the masses; Durruti possessed an extraordinary courage, absolute sincerity, a deeply rooted sense of solidarity and a good sense of strategy. The Durruti Column owed its victories to these qualities.

[Carrasco de la Rubia]

At that time I was in charge of the Quartermaster’s Corps of the militias in Catalonia and I was based in Barcelona, at the Pedralbes Barracks, which now bore the name of the “Miguel Bakunin” barracks. I spent the whole day, every day, talking on the telephone with the commanders of the columns and I attended to their requests. They wanted men, military equipment and clothing. And each day I sent to the Front everything I could, in trains or in trucks.

Durruti was the most demanding of all the column commanders.

He called me every night around eight.

“Is that you, Ricardo?”

“Yes, what’s up?”

“What’s up? I’ll tell you what’s up—nothing! The spare parts for the machine guns that I asked you for yesterday still haven’t arrived.”

“I can’t send them, because there are no more such parts in the warehouses. I sent an order to Hispano-Suiza. But they have to fabricate them first.”

“I need them right away. Hurry. How many carbines do you have?”

“Two hundred, more or less.”

“Good, send me two hundred.”

“And what about the other columns?”

“Let them look out for themselves.”

“I will give you some, but not all two hundred.”

“What’s the situation with ambulances?”

“We still have six.”

“Send me four.”

“No, one at most, no more. Instead, let me send you two hundred volunteers who have signed up to serve with your column.”

“We don’t need them. Hundreds of men come here every day from the towns and I don’t know what to do with them. What we need is machine guns, artillery and all the ammunition you can possible give us.”

“Alright, I’ll take care of it.”

“Don’t forget the ambulance, and all the carbines you can send me.”

“OK. Hasta mañana.”

“Wait! Don’t forget the spare parts for the machine guns.”

“Yes, yes. You’re worse than a beggar. Hasta mañana!”

With all his tenacity, Durruti managed to provide his column with everything necessary to wage war. He had his own dispensary, a general staff, a camp kitchen, a radio-telegraph station with powerful transmitters that broadcast news and commentaries all over Europe, a field printshop and his own weekly magazine, *The Front*, which he distributed for free to the soldiers of the column.

[Ricardo Sanz 3]

When the Civil War began, our organization, the CNT, said: “Do us the favor of staying here! Not everyone can go to the front, now that the factories are in the hands of the workers, and commerce and everything else, now we have to organize: and you have to remain on the home front.” Because of this I stayed in Barcelona for the first month. I could not stand it any longer, however, because all of a sudden I was running into all kinds of people there. Now everyone wanted to join the organization and they were getting in because they were friends with one person or another. And I did not like this.

I was always a man of action, above all, and I wanted to go to the front. We still had 24 machine guns and a pile of rifles that we had looted in the attack on the San Andrés barracks. We got together, we brought the weapons, we took three trucks and three cars and we went directly to where Durruti was, at the front. When he saw us arrive, he was quite pleased and he shouted, “So now we see everything they have at the home front. Where did you manage to get the machine guns?”

“At the barracks”, we said. “There was a wall around it, we opened a hole in it with dynamite and all the officers died there.”



“But you aren’t going to the trenches”, Durruti said, “I need you here, because everyone is passing through Bujaraloz, and I need to impose order. You will be my lieutenant and you will stay with the column.”

So I stayed there, five or six kilometers from his command post. I had my telephone and he had his, and when something happened we called each other.

Once, Durruti and I were looking outside from the balcony, and suddenly the square filled up with people.

“What the hell!”, he said, “what do these people want?”

And the people shouted: “We want to talk to Durruti.” And he spoke from the balcony to them, saying:

“The people of the home front must remain at their posts”—many of them had come from Barcelona—“we stay at the front. Every man at his post. You don’t have to be afraid, we won’t go until we are victorious. Then the people can pass their judgment on us, you will see. But now I don’t want any discussions, you understand? Now let’s set everything aside except the war.”

I thought he was exaggerating.

“What did you say?”, I asked him, “that we should set everything aside? After having come so far? If you set the revolution aside I will go home right now, what do I care about this war, then?”

“You don’t understand me”, he said. “What do you think? For years and years I thought about nothing but the revolution, but we didn’t have weapons, and now that we have them, do you think that I will set it aside? You don’t know me.”

The people applauded with enthusiasm, and the newspapers published a lot about what he said.

[Ricardo Rionda Castro]

## **Principles**

We left Bujaraloz by night, headed for Pina. In the darkness we could make out the wreckage of vehicles destroyed by German bombing. Combatants in black and red forage caps asked me for the password. It was the column led by the anarchist, Durruti.

Five years earlier, I had discussed justice and liberty with Durruti. The anarchists used to meet back then at a little café in Barcelona. It was a café called “La

Tranquilidad". Durruti was not a café anarchist. He was a worker, he spent the whole day working. He had been sentenced to death in four countries. He was intrepid and was familiar with human weakness. I do not want to recall his ideas: I no longer know how to debate with the past. I was familiar with and I believe in the instinct of the workers. I went to see him in Pina. He was on the phone, he was asking for reinforcements. He showed me the trenches. Then he began to talk about what I call the past. The soldiers were drinking water from a pitcher. On the wall there was a poster: "Drink Negus Wine, perk up your appetite."

Durruti organized the army. He shot bandits and deserters without mercy. When someone began to discuss principles at meetings of the war committee, Durruti would furiously pound his fist on the table: "We didn't come here to talk about programs, we came to fight!" He wanted unity with the communists and the republicans. He told the militiamen: "Now is not the time for debate. First we have to annihilate fascism." The newspaper, *The Front*, the official mouthpiece of the Durruti Column, was published in the town of Pina. It was composed and printed under fire. In this newspaper I read an article about the defense of the fatherland: "The fascists are receiving foreign bombs. They want to exterminate the Spanish people. Comrades, let us protect Spain." The workers at the Ford factory in Barcelona, supporters of the CNT and supporters of the UGT, sent trucks to the Durruti Column. I have seen anarchist workers embracing comrades from the communist youth. These eternal Quixotes have learned much. They no longer speak of the "organization of indiscipline". Now they insist: "Discipline!"

The expression on his face was kind and good, his eyes were dark, yet bright. He spoke with a great deal of emotion: "We have to create a real army."

There were many foreign anarchists at his headquarters. They had come to this shack surrounded with sandbags; on a table inside there was a typewriter. They came with vague slogans from the 1890s. One of them interrupted Durruti: "We support the principles of guerrilla warfare." Durruti shouted, "No! We have to order a general mobilization. We will impose iron discipline. We renounce everything except victory". Outside on the street, trucks packed with weapons were carefully unloaded in the darkness.

[Ilya Ehrenburg 2]

He thought that, because of the imminent threat of fascism, principles should not be discussed. He was in favor of an agreement with the communists and the Esquerra, and he wrote a message of greeting to the Soviet workers. When the fascists were advancing on Madrid, he decided that he had to go where the danger was greatest. "We will show them that the anarchists know how to wage war."

I spoke with him shortly before he departed for Madrid. He was cheerful and in a good mood, as always; he thought that victory was imminent. "You see?", he said, "we are friends. We can unite. We have have an obligation to unite. When

we are victorious, then we shall see.... Every people has its own character. Spaniards are not like the French or the Russians. We'll figure it out.... But first we have to liquidate the fascists." He was overcome with emotion at the end of our conversation. "Tell me, do you know what it is to be divided inside oneself? You think one thing and do another: not out of cowardice, but out of necessity." I told him that I understood it quite well. When we parted he slapped me on the back, as is customary in Spain. His eyes remain engraved in my memory, they were eyes that expressed an iron will combined with an almost infantile disorientation, an extraordinary mixture.

[Ilya Ehrenburg 1]

DURRUTI: No, we haven't got the fascists on the run yet. They are still occupying Saragossa and Pamplona, where the arsenals and munitions factories are. We must conquer Saragossa regardless of the cost. The masses are armed, the old army no longer exists. The workers know what the victory of fascism would mean: famine and slavery. But the fascists also know what lies in store for them if they are defeated. That is why this is a war without mercy. For us, it is about crushing fascism forever. Despite the government.

Yes, despite the government. I say this because no government in the world will fight fascism to the death. When the bourgeoisie sees power slipping from its hands, it resorts to fascism to stay in power. The liberal Spanish government could have reduced fascism to impotence a long time ago. Instead, it hesitated, it made backroom deals, and it tried to gain time. There are actually men in our government who want to treat the fascists with kid gloves. Who knows? (He laughs.) Maybe one day this government will need the rebels to destroy the workers movement....

VAN PAASSEN: So you foresee difficulties even after the revolt of the generals is crushed?

DURRUTI: Yes, there will be some resistance.

VAN PAASSEN: Resistance by whom?

DURRUTI: By the bourgeoisie, of course. Even if the revolution is victorious, the bourgeoisie will not give up so easily.

We are anarchosyndicalists. We are fighting for the revolution. We know what we want. We don't care about the fact that there is a Soviet Union in the world, whose peace and tranquility were so important to Stalin that he delivered the German and Chinese workers over to fascist barbarism. We want to make the revolution here, in Spain, right now, not after the next European war. Right now we are of more concern to Hitler and Mussolini than the whole Red Army. With our example we are showing the German and Italian working class how you have

to deal with fascism. I don't expect help from any government for the revolution of libertarian communism. It is possible that the contradictions within the imperialist camp will influence our struggle. It is quite possible. Franco is trying to drag all of Europe into the conflict. He will not hesitate to launch the Germans against us. We, on the other hand, do not expect help from anyone, not even from our own government.

VAN PAASSEN: But if you win you will be sitting on a pile of ruins.

DURRUTI: We have always lived in shacks and basements. We will have to get used to living that way for a while longer. But don't forget that we also know how to build. We are the ones who built the mansions and the cities in Spain, America and all over the world. We, the workers, can build new mansions and new cities to replace the ones that were destroyed. New and better ones. We aren't afraid of ruins. We are destined to inherit the Earth, of that I do not have the least doubt. The bourgeoisie can blow its world to smithereens before exiting the stage of history. But we bear a new world in our hearts, and this world is growing with each passing moment. It is growing while I have been talking to you.

[Buenaventura Durruti 2]

## **The home front**

### **The new city**

Barcelona, August 5, 1936

Again a peaceful arrival. No taxi-cabs, but instead old horse-cabs, to carry us into the town. Few people in the Paseo de Colon. And, then, as we turned round the corner of the Ramblas (the chief artery of Barcelona) came a tremendous surprise: before our eyes, in a flash, unfolded itself the revolution. It was overwhelming. It was as if we had been landed on a continent different from anything I had seen before.

The first impression: armed workers, rifles on their shoulders, but wearing their civilian clothes. Perhaps 30 per cent. of the males on the Ramblas were carrying rifles, though there were no police, and no regular military in uniforms. Arms, arms, and again arms. Very few of these armed proletarians wore the new dark-blue pretty militia uniforms. They sat on the benches or walked the pavement of the Ramblas, their rifles over the right shoulder, and often their girls on the left arm. They started off, in groups, to patrol the out-lying districts. They stood, as guards, before the entrances of hotels, administrative buildings, and the larger stores. They crouched behind the few still standing barricades, which were competently constructed out of stones and sand-bags (most of the barricades had already been removed, and the destroyed pavement had been speedily restored).

They drove at top speed innumerable fashionable cars, which they had expropriated and covered, in white paint, with the initials of their respective organizations: CNT-FAI, UGT, PSUC (United Socialist-Communist Party of Catalonia), POUM (Trotskyists), or with all these initials at once, in order to display their loyalty to the movement in general. Some of the cars simply wore the letters UHP (Unite, proletarian borthers!), the slogan glorified by the Asturias rising of 1934. The fact that all these armed men walked about, marched, and drove in their ordinary clothes made the thing only more impressive as a display of the power of the factory workers. The anarchists, recognizable by badges and insignia in red and black, were obviously in overwhelming numbers. And no “bourgeoisie” whatever! No more well-dressed young women and fashionable señoritos on the Ramblas! Only working men and working women; no hats even! The Generalitat, by wireless, had advised people not to wear them, because it might look “bourgeois” and make a bad impression. The Ramblas are not less colourful than before, because there is the infinite variety of blue, red, black, of the party badges, the neckties, the fancy uniform of the militia. But what a contrast with the pretty shining colours of the Catalan upper-class girls of former days!

[Franz Borkenau]

It’s hard to believe that Barcelona is the capital of a region embroiled in civil war. Anyone who was familiar with Barcelona in peacetime would not get the impression, getting off the train at the station, that much had changed. You present your documentation at the border post at Port-Bou; you leave the station in the big city like any tourist; you walk around streets that are apparently cheerful and peaceful. The cafés are open, although they have fewer customers than usual, and the same is true of the other shops. Money still plays the same role as always. If there were more police and fewer men walking around with rifles, you might think that nothing was going on. You have to get used to the idea that here there has been a real revolution and that one is really living in one of those historic periods that you read about in books and dream about when you are young; 1792, 1871, 1917. If only the results would be more fortunate!

Nothing has changed, in effect, except for one thing: power belongs to the people. The men in the blue coveralls have taken over. An extraordinary era has commenced, one of those eras that have never lasted very long until now, during which those who have always obeyed take everything under their control. It is obvious that this will not take place without problems. When you put loaded rifles into the hands of sixteen year old boys amidst an unarmed population....

[Simone Weil]

August 8, 1936. The car stops in El Prat, where the airport is located, a couple dozen kilometers from Barcelona. At the entrance to the airport there is a sign hanging over the middle of the road: “Viva Sandino!” On the sidewalks you can

see, more and more often, barricades made of sacks filled with sand and rocks. Red, and red and black, flags are flying over the barricades; next to them, armed men, with big, pointed straw hats, berets, and bandanas, wearing very heterogeneous clothing, some of them are almost naked. Some of them come running towards the driver to ask for his papers, others only salute and wave their rifles. People are eating at some of the barricades, women have brought lunch, there are plates on the stones. After swallowing a few spoonfulls of soup, the children are once again climbing all over the sandbags and parapets, and playing with cartridges and bayonets.

As we approach the city, at the first streets in the suburbs, we plunge into a torrent of burning human lava, in the inconceivable traffic jam of the metropolis that is now living through days of excitement, happiness and audacity.

Was Barcelona ever like this, delirious and drunk on victory? It is the Spanish New York, the most beautiful city on the shores of the Mediterranean, with its dazzling palm tree-lined boulevards, its broad avenues, its shoreline promenades, and its fantastic mansions where the sumptuousness of the Byzantine and Turkish palaces of the Bosphorus is reborn. Endless feverish neighborhoods, the gigantic ships of the shipyards, steel mills, appliance and automotive industries, textile mills, shoe factories and bakeries, printing plants, trolley depots and collective garages. Banks in skyscrapers, theaters, cabarets, amusement parks. Horrible, dismal shacks, the foul and criminal “*barrio chino*” [Chinatown], narrow stone canyons in the middle of the city, more filthy and more dangerous than all the sewers of the ports of Marseille and Istanbul. Everything is overflowing now, blocked by a densely-packed, excited crowd. Everything has been turned upside down and has begun to glow, raised to the maximum level of tension, to the boiling point. I, too, have been infected by this contagious passion that floats in the air, and I feel the heavy pounding of my heart. I make my way with difficulty through this tightly-packed crowd, surrounded by young men with rifles, women with flowers in their hair and glittering knives in their hands, old men with revolutionary armbands, portraits of Bakunin, Lenin and Jaurès, amidst singing, bands playing, and the shouts of the newspaper vendors. I pass by a movie theater, near which gunfire resounds, near street meetings and majestic parades of working class militias, blackened ruins of churches and colorful posters. Under the confluent light of the neon advertising signs, of the enormous Moon and the headlights of the cars, we sometimes bump into the patrons of the cafés, whose tables take up the whole sidewalk. We finally come to the road and then the Hotel Oriente on the Rambla de las Flores.

[Mikhail Koltsov]

The anarchists are out of touch with reality, they still believe in the myths of the last century and their typical audacity. I will never forget the semi-literate laborer Fernán Núñez, who kept repeating, “Why talk about the Second and Third

Internationals? The First International still exists.” For him, comrade Mikhail Bakunin is a contemporary.

There are many anarchist workers in Barcelona. On July 19 they stormed the Hotel Colón along with the communists and the socialists. On the walls of the houses, and on the cobblestones of the streets, there are piles of flowers: here, the heroes of Barcelona died. The unarmed people defeated the army.

“On to Saragossa”; these words are emblazoned on the side panels of the taxis. Delicate girls who have abandoned their sewing are now struggling to carry heavy rifles. Some workers from Barcelona have covered a Hispano-Suiza truck with mattresses and are going into battle armed with revolvers. They are singing revolutionary songs to the musical accompaniment of guitars. They are posing for photographs in their wide-brimmed hats. There are hundreds of Pancho Villas among them. The fascists of Saragossa have tanks and planes.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century still lives on in the garrets and basements of Barcelona. There are signs hanging on the walls that say, “Organization of anti-discipline”. Between two salvos fired into the air, the anarchists are talking about the renewal of humanity. One of them tells me, “You know why our flag is red and black? Red for the struggle, and black because the human spirit is dark”.

[Ilya Ehrenburg 2]

## **Expropriation**

The amount of expropriation in the few days since 19 July is almost incredible. The larger hotels, with one or two exceptions, have all been requisitioned by working-class organizations (not burnt, as had been reported in many newspapers). So were most of the larger stores. Many of the banks are closed, and others bear inscriptions declaring them under the control of the Generalitat. Practically all the factory-owners, we were told, had either fled or been killed, and their factories taken over by the workers. Everywhere large posters at the front of impressive buildings proclaim the fact of expropriation, explaining either that the management is now in the hands of the CNT, or that a particular organization has appropriated this building for its organizing work.

[Franz Borkenau]

The working class organizations have set up their headquarters in the offices and the mansions of the rich. The monasteries, now free of parasites, are being used as schools; in one monastery a university is beginning to hold classes. There are people’s restaurants, established by peasant committees, for the militias and the organized workers. Food confiscated from merchants who speculated on shortages is being distributed.

But the most important transformations have been carried out in the productive sphere. Many entrepreneurs, technicians, directors, owners and managers have fled. Others have been arrested by the workers and are being tried by tribunals. The Textile Workers Trade Union estimates that half of the employers of the textile industry have fled; that 40% were “eliminated from the social sphere”; and that the remaining 10% have agreed to continue working as employees of the workers under the new conditions. The workers councils and committees control the factories and are confiscating the enterprises and other assets of private property. The major means of production have been confiscated by the trade unions, by the collectives and by the municipalities. Only the small enterprises that produce consumer goods are still in private hands.

The transport and railroad companies, the oil companies, the Ford and Hispano-Suiza automotive plants, the port installations, the factories, the big department stores, the theaters and cinemas, the metal-working shops capable of manufacturing weapons, the enterprises involved in the export of agricultural products and the big grocery stores, have also been socialized. The confiscations have taken a myriad of juridical forms. The enterprises are, in part, municipal property, in other cases an agreement is concluded with the former owners, and sometimes they were just confiscated without any other formalities. The foreign firms have been nationalized, and the trusts dissolved. In every case, it was the workers who took over the management of the business operations by way of the intermediary of a control committee on which the two major trade union organizations are represented, the anarchist and the socialist trade unions. Plans are also being elaborated for increasing productivity, building medical clinics and schools in the factories and regulating the sale and consumption of production in a joint agreement with the trade unions.

[Henri Rabasseire]

Undeniably, the factory which I saw is a big success for the CNT. Only three weeks after the beginning of the civil war, two weeks after the end of the general strike, it seems to run as smoothly as if nothing had happened. I visited the men at their machines. The rooms looked tidy, the work was done in a regular manner. Since socialization this factory had repaired two buses, finished one which had been under construction, and constructed a completely new one. The latter wore the inscription “constructed under workers control”. It had been completed, the management claimed, in five days, as against an average of seven days under the previous management. Complete success, then....

But if it would be hasty to generalize from the very favourable impression made by this particular factory, one fact remains: it is an extraordinary achievement for a group of workers to take over a factory, under however favourable conditions, and within a few days to make it run with complete regularity. It bears brilliant witness to the general standard of efficiency of the Catalan worker and to the organizing capacities of the Barcelona trade unions. For one must not forget that



this firm has lost its whole managing staff. I had the opportunity to look at the wages and salary list, which showed that the president, the directors, the chief engineer, and the second engineer had all “disappeared” (which is a mild way of saying that they have been killed). It meant economies for the factory, the members of the committee explained calmly, exactly as the suppression of pensions to private friends of the former management and the fixing of a maximum salary of 1,000 pesetas a month (the wages of the workers had not been increased since socialization).

[Franz Borkenau]

### **The contradiction**

Really, people are sometimes surprising. Representative members of the PSUC express the opinion that there is no revolution at all in Spain, and these men (with whom I had a fairly long discussion) are not, as one would suppose, old Catalan socialists, but foreign communists. Spain, they explain, is faced with a unique situation: the Government is fighting against its own army. And that is all. I hinted at the fact that the workers were armed, that the administration had fallen into the hands of revolutionary committees, that people were being executed without trial in thousands, that both factories and estates were being expropriated and managed by their former hands. What was revolution if it was not that? I was told that I was mistaken; all that had no political significance; these were only emergency measures without political bearing. I alluded to the attitude of communist headquarters at Madrid, which described the present movement as a “bourgeois revolution”; an indication, after all, that it was a revolution. But my PSUC communists did not hesitate to disavow their headquarters. I wonder how it is that communists, who, all over the world, for fifteen years have discovered revolutionary situations where there were none, and done tremendous mischief by it, now do not recognize revolution when, for the first time in Europe since the Russian revolution of 1917, it is really there.

[Franz Borkenau]

### **August 10, 1936**

I paid a visit to García Oliver around noon. He is presently in charge of all the Catalanian militias. The headquarters of his general staff is located in the building that houses the Maritime Museum. A marvelous place, with vast galleries and huge meeting halls, glass ceilings, enormous artistic recreations of old ships, weapons and munitions crates. It is swarming with people.

Oliver occupies a comfortably furnished office, amidst tapestries and statues. He immediately offers me a Havana cigar and a glass of cognac. His face is dark and handsome, with a scar, photogenic but shy, a gigantic pistol on his belt. At first he remained silent and seemed very taciturn, but suddenly he broke out into a

garrulous, passionate monologue that revealed the experienced, impetuous and skillful orator. A long speech in praise of courage, especially the courage of the anarchist workers; he claimed that during the street fighting in Barcelona it was the anarchist workers above all who had saved the day and that now, as well, they are the vanguard of the anti-fascist militias. The anarchists have always sacrificed their lives for the revolution, and they will still be ready to do so in the future as well. They were ready to sacrifice more than just their lives: they were even prepared to collaborate with an anti-fascist bourgeois government. He thought it was hard to convince the anarchist masses, but he and his comrades would do everything possible to discipline the anarchist workers and put them under the leadership of the Popular Front, and they will succeed. Yes, he, Oliver, had been accused at demonstrations of having compromised and betrayed anarchist principles. The communists must take this into account and not be too hard on him. The communists have too much of a monopoly on power. If things go on like this, the CNT and the FAI cannot be held responsible for the consequences. Then he began to backpedal, he was nervous, maybe even a little too nervous. It was not true that the anarchists had stockpiled a lot of weapons. It was not true that the anarchists were only in favor of the militias and against regular troops. It was not true that the anarchists were collaborating with the POUM. It was not true that anarchist groups had been looting stores and shops; those incidents were surely attributable to criminals waving anarchist flags. It was not true that the anarchists were against the Popular Front. Their loyalty had already been demonstrated in words and deeds. It was not true that the anarchists were against the Soviet Union. They loved and respected the Russian workers and had no doubts that the Russian workers would help Spain. The anarchists would also help the Soviet Union if necessary. The Soviet Union must not underestimate the great power of the Spanish anarchist workers in its plans. It was false to say that the anarchist movement does not exist in other countries, even though it was obvious that its heart was in Spain. Why didn't they appreciate Bakunin in the Soviet Union? Here, in Spain, Bakunin was honored, and they should also honor him in Russia. It was erroneous to say that the anarchists do not acknowledge Marx. I must speak with his friend, Oliver's friend, with Durruti; but Durruti was at the front, of course. At the gates of Saragossa. Was it my intention to go to the front?

Yes, I intended to go to the front. Tomorrow, if I could obtain a pass. Couldn't Oliver get one for me? Yes, Oliver would give me a pass, with great pleasure. I spoke with his assistant and the latter gave me a certificate that he typed and Oliver signed. Oliver shook my hand and asked me to provide correct information to the Russian workers about the Spanish anarchists. It was not true that yesterday the anarchists had looted the grocery stores of Pedro Domecq, it was surely a handful of riff-raff who tried to pass themselves off as members of the FAI. It was not true that the anarchists had refused to collaborate with the government....

[Mikhail Koltsov]

## **Intolerable situations**

Our experiences since the July days confirm the old theory that a revolution can only realize what is latent in the consciousness of the masses as need and as understanding of a goal. Only a clear consciousness and a social culture of the masses can prevent narrow-minded views, personal vengeance and the greed of ambitious persons from dominating great revolutionary movements.

A few weeks before the revolt we had already debated these questions in internal meetings of the FAI. García Oliver was then of the opinion that the revolution would shatter the barriers of morality and transform the people into a dangerous wild beast that would plunge into unbridled looting, arson and murder, if an organized force did not stand in opposition to these impulses. I disagreed, and I said that the action of the masses would engender great moral forces; I described the people in arms as I had read about them in books. After the July days I had to change my opinion and admit that García Oliver was right. With regard to the three days of fighting, we had nothing to be ashamed of. They were fantastic. But we later faltered in the face of the unleashed unconscious and the dissipation of the masses. The country just lived for the day, thoughtlessly, without taking into account the visible and irreparable consequences. We saw the catastrophe coming, but we were too weak to stop it. We tried to stop it by way of the Committee of Militias; but for a reaction like that to be effective, it must come directly and spontaneously from the base, and this is only possible when the people have attained a higher level of consciousness.

For example, the people's restaurants, which were improvised in every neighborhood and distributed free food to anyone who asked for it, operated for several weeks and consumed all the reserves of food that were stored in the city and the nearby rural areas. They demanded more and more food from us, and when we could not give it to them, they went directly to the warehouses and stores to get it. They left nothing for the militias at the front. Their "confiscations" ruined the region's economy. They were a constant nightmare that caused us endless trouble and made us very unpopular. The lack of consciousness cannot be attributed solely to certain parties or organizations; it was a general phenomenon. For many people, the revolution consisted primarily in sharing out the loot and enjoying it. Very few thought about restocking the looted warehouses and stores or increasing the productivity of labor in industry and agriculture.

[Diego Abad de Santillán]

## **The FAI takes action against intolerable situations**

Barcelona, July 30

We are the enemies of all violence and coercion. We are disgusted by all bloodshed that is not the result of the decision of the people in their quest to see that justice is done. But we declare coldly, with terrible sincerity and with the

inexorable determination to follow through on what we are saying, that if the irresponsible actions that are sowing terror in Barcelona do not cease, we shall proceed to shoot without exception every individual who is proven to have committed crimes against humanity.

The honor of the people of Barcelona and the dignity of the CNT and the FAI make it necessary for us to put an end to these outrages. And we shall put an end to them!

[Solidaridad Obrera]

What is going on in Spain? Everyone who has been there has something to say, some story to tell or some judgment to pronounce. It has become fashionable to go there and take a look at the Civil War and the revolution and then return with enough material for a handful of newspaper articles. There is no newspaper, no magazine, that has not published reports on the events in Spain. The results can only be superficial. First of all, a social transformation can only be correctly appreciated as a result of its impact on the everyday life of each individual. It is not easy to penetrate into this everyday life of the "people", however. Besides, it is changing with each passing day. Duty and spontaneity, ideal and necessity are mixed in such a way that an immense confusion results, not only in objective conditions, but also in the consciousness of those who are implicated in these events, whether as actors or spectators. And it is in this respect that the real nature and perhaps also the great misfortune of the Civil War resides. This is the first conclusion that one draws after a cursory examination of what has taken place in Spain. What we know about the Russian Revolution is more than adequate to confirm this conclusion. It is not true that revolution automatically produces a higher, more clear and more intense consciousness of the social process. In fact, the opposite occurs, at least when the revolution in question takes the form of a civil war. In the turmoil of civil war, the relation between principles and reality is lost; the criteria according to which one can judge actions and institutions vanish; the transformation of society is left to chance. How is it possible to provide a coherent report after a brief visit, on the basis of fragmentary observations? In the best cases, they will only be able to transmit a few impressions and draw a few conclusions.

[Simone Weil]

I know that I am going to shock and horrify many good comrades. I know that I am going to provoke a scandal. But when one invokes freedom one must also have the courage to say what one thinks, even if no one likes what you have to say.

We follow the day-by-day reports of the battles taking place on the other side of the Pyrenees with bated breath. We try to help our friends. But this does not

absolve us from having to draw conclusions concerning an experience that has cost the lives of so many workers and peasants.

An experience of this kind has already taken place in Europe: the Russian experience. It, too, cost many lives. Lenin had publicly called for a State in which there is no army, police or bureaucracy separated from the population. When he and his friends seized power, they constructed, over the course of a long and painful civil war, the most oppressive military and police bureaucracy that has ever been inflicted on an unfortunate people.

Lenin was the leader of a political party, that is, an apparatus devoted to the conquest and exercise of power. Many doubted his, and his comrades', sincerity at the time; in any event, it may be assumed that there were contradictions between the goals proclaimed by Lenin and the structure of his party. It is impossible, however, to doubt the sincerity of our anarchist comrades in Catalonia. But what is happening right before our eyes in Spain? We see the rise of forms of coercion and we see incidents of inhumanity taking place that are directly opposed to the humane and libertarian ideal of the anarchists. The requirements and the atmosphere of the Civil War are superimposed on the aspirations for whose realization it was begun in the first place.

In our own society, we hate military coercion, the police, coercion in labor, and the lies disseminated by the press and the radio. We hate class distinctions, arbitrary authority and cruelty.

In Spain, however, military coercion rules. A mobilization decree was announced and the military draft reinstated, despite the fact that there was no shortage of volunteers. The Council of Defense of the Generalitat, in which our comrades from the FAI exercise executive functions, has mandated the application of the old military code in the militias.

Coercion also rules in the factories. The Catalonian government, in which our comrades control the economically decisive Ministries, just issued a decree requiring that workers must work overtime if the government deems it necessary. Another decree implies that the workers who do not obey the rules will be considered to be rebels and will be treated as such. This means nothing less than the application of the death penalty in industrial production.

The traditional police, as they existed before July 19, have lost almost all of their power. However, during the first three months of the Civil War, the investigation committees, political leaders and also, all too often, irresponsible individuals, carried out shootings without the least pretense of legal judicial proceedings or the possibility of trade union or any other kind of supervision. A few days ago, the people's tribunals were created for the purpose of trying rebels, real or imagined, in court. It is still too early to tell what kind of effect these reforms will have.

The organized lie has also undergone a resurgence since July 19....

[Simone Weil]

Ever since I was a child I sympathized with political groups that were on the side of the humble and those who were oppressed by social hierarchies; until I understood that these political groups did not deserve any sympathy. The Spanish CNT was the last of these groups in which I had faith. I had traveled in Spain before the Civil War and although I did not have a deep knowledge of the country, I knew it well enough to love those people who were so hard to resist. In the anarchist movement I saw the natural expression of their greatness and their mistakes, their legitimate needs and their legitimate desires. The CNT and the FAI were surprising in their mixture of qualities. Everyone was welcome to become a member of these organizations, and as a result, strictly incompatible oppositions coexisted in their ranks: on the one hand, cynicism, corruption, fanaticism and cruelty, and on the other, the fraternity, love for humanity and yearning for dignity that characterize simple folk. The former were inspired by the desire for disorder and violence, but the latter sought to realize an ideal: they were the ones who determined, it seems to me, the path chosen by the CNT.

In July 1936 I was in Paris. I do not like war, but what seemed to me to be the most horrible thing about war was the situation of those who remained behind the lines on the home front. When I understood that, against my intentions, I could not refrain from participating spiritually in the war, that is, I yearned every hour of every day for the victory of one side and the defeat of the other, I had to recognize that as far as I was concerned, Paris was the home front. I took the train to Barcelona to enlist as a volunteer. That was in early August, 1936.

An accident forced me to interrupt my stay in Spain. I spent a few days in Barcelona; then I was in the countryside, in Aragon, on the banks of the Ebro, fifteen kilometers from Saragossa, at the very same location where Yagüe's troops recently crossed the river; then I was at the palace in Sitges, which is now being used as a hospital; then I was in Barcelona again; about two months in all. I had to leave Spain unwillingly; it was my intention to return. Now I have decided not to go back. I feel no inner need to participate in a war that is no longer, as I had thought at first, a confrontation between starving peasants and the big landowners and their accomplices, the priests, but is instead a confrontation between the European powers: Russia, Germany and Italy.

[Simone Weil]

## **Shortages**

When the second column departed for Aragon we already had a disagreement with some of the most outstanding military officers of the libertarian organizations themselves. While it was our opinion that the most capable and

popular comrades should depart for the front at the command of the centuries, battalions and columns, certain comrades expressed the view that we should preserve our most outstanding militants for after the war.... [as a result] commanding officers are chosen almost at random, with a corresponding reduction of their effectiveness.

We had very few military officers on our side and the ones that we did have performed for the most part the functions pertaining to General Staff operations and technical advisors. Furthermore, the militiamen did not want professional officers, and distrusted them, a quite understandable attitude after what had just taken place.

But the overriding concern of almost all the high-level leaders of our organizations was the same as that of the leaders of all the parties, none of which wanted to send their leading figures to the front, all of them reckoning with the same faulty reasoning that their chickens were already as good as hatched. A predominant environment of mean-spirited, backroom politics thus arose in the rearguard that would have nauseated the professional politicians of the old regime....

We cannot remain silent about the attitudes of our own people as well as those of other organizations that made it impossible for us to do what we should have done, and which promised to deliver definitive victories during the first few months of the war; the dispatch to the front of strong contingents of mobile assault forces, since the units we had in Aragon, for example, comprised no more than a thin skirmish line. Thirty thousand rifles, twenty or twenty-five artillery batteries, very few machine guns; this was not enough materiel for such a long front.

We cannot remain silent concerning the fact that, while we had only thirty thousand rifles on the Aragon front, there were around 60,000 rifles in the civilian areas behind the lines, in the possession of parties and various organizations, more armament than at the front, where the enemy was.

Not only once, but dozens of times, we pleaded with the libertarian movement to surrender the military weaponry that it possessed. Or that if it did not want to hand over the arms, then some of the men who bear those arms might at least volunteer for service at the front. To keep order in the rearguard, women, children and stones would be enough. They argued that we could not disarm our own people, while the other parties and organizations were getting ready to stab us in the back. We disagreed. The day when our comrades, possessors of the greatest quantity of weaponry, would decide to hand over their guns or go to the front, that same day we would also commence the disarmament of all the other parties and we promised to employ those who were most suspicious about the fulfillment of this promise to help implement it. We would also disarm or assign to frontline duties all those men enrolled in the various institutions of public and judicial

order, the Civil Guard, the Assault Guard, and the *carabineros*. But we would not have the moral basis to proceed against the others as long as we did not take the first step ourselves by adopting a resolution to do the same.

The danger of counterrevolution to which our comrades alluded, was, as far as we were concerned, represented for the most part by those 60,000 rifles in the civilian areas behind a front that only had 30,000 rifles and that had to severely curtail its operations due to the lack of the most indispensable materiel for combat, since there was usually a shortage of ammunition for the guns at the front.

The complaints of the combatants were constant, strident and completely justified. Durruti, whenever he came to Barcelona and saw so many people with guns on the streets, roared like a lion. One day, he discovered that there were eight or ten machine guns in Sabadell. He politely asked for them and his request was denied. Then he organized a century and sent it to Sabadell to obtain by force what the people with the machine guns in Sabadell would not voluntarily hand over to the war effort. Since Durruti told us what he intended to do, we were able to arrive in Sabadell before him and prevent a bloody battle, and we compelled the people in Sabadell to hand over a couple of machine guns, under the threat that if they refused we would join forces with Durruti's century that would soon arrive.

These machine guns were in the hands of communist elements, but in Barcelona there were perhaps fifty machine guns in the hands of our own comrades. We did not have that many machine guns on the whole Aragon front. And that is not counting the machine guns under the control of the other parties and organizations.

[Diego Abad de Santillán 3]

And when they finally sent the machine guns, we had no ammunition for them. And when the ammunition arrived, the machine guns didn't work. Then Durruti made a thousand telephone calls, and finally he went to Barcelona to look for what he needed, not only in the government armories, but also in the stockpiles of the CNT. He stole the pistols from our pockets, from his own comrades, and in the end we had to defend ourselves, but in vain. "Why do you want a pistol on the home front?", he shouted. "Give it to me or come to the front with us, if you don't want to hand it over". That is how he treated the anarchists, his own people.

[Manuel Hernández]

Durruti's offensive stalled for a lack of munitions and supplies. He yelled like a madman on the telephone, demanding more munitions, more rifles and more artillery. His interventions on the home front were unsuccessful. If, in July and August, instead of the 25,000 or 30,000 men we sent to the Aragon Front, we had sent the 60,000 or 80,000 men we could have sent if we had access to all the weapons hoarded behind the lines, our victory would have been assured.



I recall one day when the former Minister of Education, Francisco Barnés, returned from a meeting with Durruti in Bujaraloz. He just happened to be there when enemy forces made an attempt to break through the front, and he saw Durruti cry with rage when the militiamen ran out of ammunition and had to repel the attack armed only with hand grenades. If the enemy commanders were apprised of the situation of the column, and if they found out that it had run out of ammunition, they would have been able to annihilate or capture it. Incidents like that happen every day.

[Diego Abad de Santillán 1]

All the weapons that we bought during the Civil War were paid for by the CNT itself. We could not count on any help at all from the Madrid Government. Even if Largo Caballero had been a little more willing to help us, it would have been useless, because it was Negrín who controlled the finances of the State. Much could be said of the role played by Negrín. In any event I am sure that from the very beginning he was on the side of those who wanted to prevent the anarchists from playing a decisive role.

On this, everyone agreed: we must be given as few weapons as possible; our men were assigned to the most difficult sectors of the front with the intention of using every means to sow discord in our ranks by making us face impossible predicaments.

As for Durruti, they were unsuccessful. He always complied with the directives of the CNT, with the Regional Committees of Catalonia and Aragon, and also with the Council of Aragon. Only once was there disagreement: when Durruti wanted to attack Saragossa from Yelsa. His old friend García Oliver, who was at that time the Secretary of the Committee of Militias of Catalonia, was opposed to this plan. Durruti was outraged.

[Federica Montseny 1]

### **The exhortation**

Durruti was right when he told his comrades: “Indiscipline on the front and bourgeoisification on the home front will hand victory to the fascists, unless we take immediate measures against them. At the front, every order leads to an argument. No one wants to obey. Behind the lines, the new rich have moved into beautiful bourgeois houses and drive around in luxury cars. The cafés, the cabarets and the dance halls are full, as if we were living in the best of all possible worlds, and even our comrades from the FAI are increasingly more prone to participate in this dirty business.”

[Jean Raynaud]

Durruti, back on one of his rare visits from the front in the most ramshackle car he could find, broadcast a speech on the 5<sup>th</sup>; and all Barcelona was out under the loudspeakers on the Ramblas. Already he had sent a message of greeting to Stalin with the Spanish delegation to the celebrations of the nineteenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution. No one had realised better than he the necessity for unity. Some of the more doctrinaire Anarchists considered that he, their most publicised, and most deservingly publicised, figure, was going too far in concessions to what POUM called the “Stalinist bureaucrats”.

[Frank Jellinek]

### **The first version of Durruti’s speech**

Workers of Cataluña! I am speaking to the Catalan people, to the generous people that four months ago defeated the soldiers who tried to crush them beneath their boots. I send you salutations from your brothers and comrades fighting on the front in Aragón, who are only kilometers from Zaragoza, within sight of the towers of Pilarica.

Despite the threat that is closing in on Madrid, we must always remember that the people have risen, and nothing in the world can make them retreat. We shall resist on the front of Aragón, against the Aragonese fascist hordes, and we call upon our brothers in Madrid to resist, because the militiamen of Cataluña will know how to do their duty, just as they did when they went into the streets of Barcelona to crush fascism. The workers organizations must not forget their imperative duty at the present time. At the front, as in the trenches, there is only one thought, one goal. Our gaze is fixed, we look forward, with the sole purpose of crushing fascism.

We ask the Catalan people to stop the intrigues and bickering. You must rise to the occasion: stop quarreling and think of the war. The people of Catalonia have the duty to support those fighting on the front. We have to mobilize everyone, but don’t think that it will always be the same people. If Catalan workers have assumed the responsibility of going to the front, it’s now time to demand sacrifices from those who remain in the cities. We have to effectively mobilize all the workers in the rearguard because those of us who are at the front need to know that we can count on the men behind us.

To the organizations: stop your rows and stop tripping things up! Those of us who are fighting on the front ask for sincerity, above all from the CNT and FAI. We ask the leaders to be genuine. It is not enough for them to send encouraging letters to us at the front, and to send clothing, food, rifles and ammunition. It is also necessary for them to face the facts, and plan for the future. This war has all the aggravating factors of modern warfare and is proving to be very costly for Catalonia. The leadership has to realize that we’ll need to start organizing the

Catalan economy, and imposing rules on the economic order, if this lasts much longer. I do not feel like writing any more letters so that the comrades or the son of a militiaman can have one more crust of bread or pint of milk, while there are Ministers who do not have to pay to eat and have no limits on their expenditures. We call upon the CNT-FAI to tell them that if they as an organization control the economy of Catalonia, then they must organize it as it should be organized. No one should think of wage increases or reduced working hours now. It's the duty of all workers, especially the workers of the CNT, to make sacrifices, to work as much as necessary.

Of course we're fighting for something greater and the militiamen will prove it. They blush when they read about fund drives to raise money for them in the press, when they see those posters asking you to make a donation. The fascist planes drop newspapers on us that publish lists of donations for their soldiers, and they are neither more nor less than what you give. That is why we have to tell you that we are not beggars and therefore we do not accept charity in any form. Fascism represents and is in effect social inequality, and if you do not want those of us who are fighting to confuse those of you in the rearguard with our enemies, then do your duty. We are waging war now to crush the enemy at the front, but is this the only enemy? No. Anyone among us who is opposed to the revolutionary conquests is also an enemy, and we must crush them as well.

If you want to neutralize the threat, you must form a granite front. Politics is the art of obstructionism, the art of living [like parasites], and this must be replaced with the art of labor. The time has come to invite the trade union organizations and the political parties to put an end to this business once and for all. In the rearguard we need capable administrators. The men at the front want responsibility and guarantees behind us. And we demand that the organizations look after our women and children.

They're mistaken if they think that the militarization decree will scare us and impose an iron discipline on us. You are mistaken, Ministers, with your militarization decree. Since you have so much to say about iron discipline, then I say to you, come to the front with me. At the front we do not accept any discipline, because we are conscious of doing our duty. And you will see our order and our organization. Then we shall return to Barcelona and we shall ask you about your discipline, your order, and your control, which does not exist.

Remain calm. There's no chaos or indiscipline at the front. We're all responsible and cherish your trust. Sleep peacefully. But remember that we've left Catalonia and its economy in your hands. Take responsibility for yourselves, discipline yourselves. Let's not provoke, with our incompetence, after this war, another civil war among ourselves.

Anyone who thinks that his party is strong enough to impose its policy is wrong. Against the fascists we must marshal one force, one organization, with a unified discipline.

The fascist tyrants will never cross our lines. That is our slogan at the front. To them we say: “You will not pass!” To you: “They will not pass!”

[Buenaventura Durruti 3]

## **The second version of Durruti’s speech**

The time has not yet come for thinking about a shorter work week or higher pay. It is the duty of the workers, and especially the members of the CNT, to sacrifice everything and work as hard as they are asked to work.

I call upon all the organizations, I implore them, to put an end to their divisive conflicts and conspiracies. We, the fighters at the front, are calling for sincerity, above all on the part of the CNT and the FAI. We want our leaders to be straightforward. It is not enough for them to send us letters with exhortations to fight the enemy; nor is it enough for them to send us clothing, food, arms and ammunition. This war is very difficult, because it is fought using the most modern technical equipment; it will be very expensive for Catalonia. Our leaders must understand that it will be a long war; they must therefore begin to organize the Catalonian economy for such conditions. We must establish order in our economy.

[Buenaventura Durruti 4]

“Sleep quiet!”: it was all very well for Durruti to say this in Barcelona, where a “civil war amongst ourselves” might be provoked by “incompetence”; but it seemed that Largo Caballero’ Government in Madrid was also sleeping quiet although faced with a far more imminent danger. As for the General Staff, it was either incapable or treacherous. Jesús Hernández, Minister of Education, stated publicly later that one member actually told Caballero that all the militias were good for was to solve the unemployment problem and only fought for their 10 pesetas a day. This unworthy cynicism was soon to be contradicted in the most emphatic manner....

[Frank Jellinek]

## **The peasants**

### **Liberation**

Let us follow the C.N.T. column into Santa Maria, any typical village of the Aragon desert. It is a gathering together of perhaps two hundred dwellings round a parish church and a local government building and prison. It has a small amount of cultivated land thanks to an intermittent stream which dries up by July, it has some olives and perhaps a few figs. Its climate is “tres meses de invierno y nueve meses de infierno”, three months of winter and nine of hell.

The inhabitants of this composite Santa Maria are all anti-fascist except one rich landowner—rich that is in that he extracts perhaps a hundred pounds a year out of some property—who lives in Zaragoza most of his time and certainly hurried off there in July; one or two officials, either a Guardia Civil, a carabinero, or a local government clerk; a “capitalist” with some little factory, or electric light plant or olive oil refinery; and the priest. One or two of these—not the priest—will have a son or two who buys suits in Zaragoza, sits longer than the rest at the café and pays attention to any girl who comes his way. This señorito may be small beer in Barcelona or Zaragoza but he is arrogant enough in his own village. He may very well belong to the Falange, and, trusting to the forces of law and order, air his reactionary views.

Durruti’s column arrives full of enthusiasm but not very well armed. The first step is to *limpiar* or clean away any fascism that may be in Santa Maria; in other words to shoot any of those individuals who have not hurried off to Zaragoza in time. If the villagers give on or other of them a good character he escapes. The second thing is to remove all registers of property from the archives to the village square and to burn them. This is both a practical and a ritualistic act. It is followed by the summoning of all the inhabitants into the square so that they shall have the principles of Libertarian Communism explained to them, with a few warnings, no doubt, as to the dangers of Stalinism which would please even the Liberty League. A general feeling of hope and freedom having been established....

[John Langdon-Davies]

When the Durruti column came to a village during its advance, the first measure taken by its political delegates was to dismiss the local judge. Local problems were resolved with these three questions: “Where is the municipal courthouse?”; “Where is the land record office and where are its records stored?”; and “Where is the jail?”. Then they burned the legal documents and liberated the prisoners.

[Manuel Benavides]

... whole villages ... banded together to send cartloads of provisions to the front. So enthusiastic were some that they almost bankrupted themselves by killing off their best cattle and poultry. In Aragon, surprisingly enough—for the Aragonese had little regional patriotism and might have been expected to resent their province becoming the cockpit of the Catalans and Navarrese—the peasants voluntarily provided the advancing columns with huge meals and apologised with

melancholy courtesy to later comers that they could give them no more than wine and bread, but that must be accepted under pain of insult.

[Frank Jelinek]

My motor cycle carried me south through the rich regions of the Mediterranean coast, past one barricaded village after another. Everywhere work was being done as usual, and for a hundred miles one forgot the horror so near in the blue day and the olive trees which “seem only to live in moonlight”.

The curious behavior of my cycle began to preoccupy me. I had left it in charge of a garage run by communist militiamen, and I had asked them to overhaul it. This they had done so thoroughly that the controls refused to be gentle, and I found myself rushing at twenty-five miles an hour on my lowest gear at the very bayonets of a barricade.

“Satat,” I said, “is there a mechanic in your village who could help me?”

It was an idle question, there are mechanics in every village of Spain, competent and helpful. When I told the Marquis about my adventure afterwards he beamed with pleasure, for it showed that even an anarcho-syndicalist militiaman in a burned church was a Spaniard, a mechanic and a gentleman. The head of the barricade turned to a lad with a blunderbuss. “Juan,” he said, “take the *compañero* to the Mechanized Transport Industry Centre.” Juan and I pushed the bike down the village street and round the corner to the Mechanized Industry Centre. A month ago it was still the Parish Church. Now in each of the niches that had been chapels was parked a motor lorry; two men in overalls armed with pick and shovel were destroying the last fake marble and gilt horror and dimming the air with stucco dust. I stood and watched; and the militiamen watched my face to see how I was reacting.

“They built the houses of their saints very well,” at last one said, as the column showed fight still, “and yet the saints never existed. If it were a worker’s home that was being pulled down there would be no difficulty, for they did not build living men’s homes so well.”

“You have a fine garage,” I said.

“A very fine garage, *compañero*.”

“Will it always be a garage now, thank you?”

“Not always. Only until we have destroyed Them. See outside, *compañero*.” I looked across the village square at a line of men vigorously digging a trench towards the ex-church.

“This is going to be our village market, and we are already laying on the water. Our women have always had to sell in the street, with flies everywhere. Now we shall have a sanitary market. It will be better for the village health.” [...]

Meanwhile the bike was ready. It appears that my over-enthusiastic helpers at the last garage had cleaned everything, including the control cables, with oil, and I gather that this should not be done.

“How much do I owe you?” I asked.

“It is very difficult to answer that, *compañero*,” said the mechanic. “It was such a little thing. I do not like to ask you to pay.”

“Ah, *compañero*, you have given me two hours of your life and that is not a little thing; you must allow me to make a contribution to the anti-fascist militia funds.” And so it was arranged.... And so I went on....

[John Langdon-Davies]

## **The collectives**

### **August 13**

In the village tavern a general assembly of the peasants is being held; it is a continuation of yesterday's assembly and they are discussing the same problem. Yesterday, a group of anarchists called upon the peasants to attend a meeting and proclaimed the commune in Tardienta. No one dissented. But the next morning there were some disagreements, and some peasants had gone to see Trueba and asked him to resolve the problems in his status as commissar of war.

The most important problems were the distribution of the land and of the harvest and the organization of agricultural operations. Almost everywhere, the land confiscated from the fascist landowners had been distributed to the poor peasants and farm workers. The peasants and the farm workers collectively harvested the crops and distributed them in proportion to the labor contributed by each person. Sometimes other guidelines were observed: the number of mouths that needed to be fed in each family, for example. But groups of anarchists and Trotskyists appeared behind the front lines. They demanded, as the first thing on their agenda, the immediate collectivization of the rural economy; secondly, the requisition of the harvest of the fields of the landlords by the rural committees, and third, the confiscation of the properties of the middle level peasants, who possessed five or six hectares of land. On the basis of orders and threats they have already formed some collective economies.

The first floor of the tavern, with its dirt floor and wooden beams, is packed with people. A kerosene lamp is smoking; electric power is reserved for screening films. The air is thick with the odors of leather and strong Canarian tobacco. If it were not for the three hundred Basque berets and the paper fans that all the men have, one might think that we were in a village of Cossacks on the banks of the Kuban.

Trueba opens the assembly with a short speech. He declares that this war is a war against the fascist landlords and in favor of the Republic, for the freedom of the peasants and for their right to live and to work as they see fit. No one can impose their will on the peasants of Aragon. As for the commune, only the peasants themselves can decide, only them, and no one but them. The troops and the commissar of war as their representatives can only promise to protect the peasants against all dictatorial measures, regardless of their origins.

General satisfaction. Shouts: "Very good!" Someone in the crowd asks Trueba if he is a communist. He answers: Yes, he is a communist, that is, more accurately, a member of the unified socialist party, but this is not important now, here he represents a league of struggle and the Popular Front.

He is solidly built and short, he was a miner, and then a cook, he did time in prison; he is still young; he is dressed in semi-military style, with a leather belt and pistol.

The following motion is proposed: only the peasants and the farm workers of Tardienta will be permitted to participate in this assembly. Another motion: that everyone may participate; but that only the peasants may speak. This motion is approved.

The chairman speaks of the Tardienta trade union (the union of day laborers and small-scale peasant proprietors, a kind of committee of poor peasants). He expresses his view that the resolution approved yesterday concerning collectivization was not decided by the majority, but by a small number of peasants. In any event, it would have to be discussed again.

The assembly agrees.

From the floor a voice explains that yesterday, while people were lining up to buy tobacco, some of them complained about the committee. The speaker invited the critics who expressed such views the day before to come forward. There is an uproar in the room, protests and applause, whistles and shouts: "Very good!". No one comes forward to speak.

An older peasant timidly recommends that they should continue to work as individual farmers and that after the war they can discuss the matter. Applause. Two speakers express their agreement.



A discussion ensues concerning the distribution of the year's harvest from confiscated land. Some call for an egalitarian distribution for each farmer, others want the trade union to distribute it according to need and the number of members in each farmer's family.

There is still grain in the fields which has not been harvested due to the war. A young peasant proposes that anyone who wants to harvest as much wheat as he wants, may do so at his own risk. The more risks you take the more wheat you will harvest. More applause. Trueba intervenes. He disagrees with this proposal. "We are all brothers and we are not going to take any unnecessary risks for a sack of grain." He advises that they should all join in the harvest of the fields located near the front lines; the armed column will protect the peasants. The grain will be shared out in accordance with the amount of labor contributed by each and by need. The assembly approves Trueba's motion.

It is eight o'clock and the assembly will soon come to an end. A new speaker, however, shatters the tranquility of the meeting. With emotional and passionate words he tries to convince the inhabitants of Tardienta that they should overcome their egotism and share everything equally. Isn't that what this bloody war is all about? They should approve yesterday's resolution and immediately establish libertarian communism. Not just the lands of the big landowners must be confiscated, but also those of the rich farmers and middle peasants. Shouts, whistles, insults, applause, exclamations: "Very good!"

After this first speaker, five other anarchists join the attack. The assembly is confused, some applaud, others are silent. Everyone is tired. The chairman of the trade union proposes to submit the proposal to a vote. The first anarchist speaker is opposed: can such a problem be resolved with a vote? What is needed is a collective advance, a united effort, impetuous and enthusiastic. When voting, everyone only thinks about himself. Voting reveals egotism. We don't need to vote!

The peasants are confused, the echoing words fill them with enthusiasm. Although the majority is against the anarchist speaker, order cannot be reestablished and no vote is taken. The assembly gathers momentum. Now there is no way to stop it. However, Trueba suddenly finds a solution. He proposes that, since for the moment it is not possible to reach an agreement, those who want to cultivate the land individually should do so. On the other hand, those who prefer to establish a collective economy should meet here tomorrow at nine in the morning. The solution satisfies everyone. Only the anarchists are discontented.

[Mikhail Koltsov]

**The Durruti Column. Friday, August 14 and Saturday, August 15**

A conversation with the peasants of Pina: Are you in favor of a collective economy?

First response [various people]: We will do what the committee decides.

An old man: He agrees, that is, on the condition that he receives everything he needs, and he does not have to always be at his wits' end, like now, trying to pay the doctor and the carpenter....

Another man: We will see how it turns out....

Do you think it is better to cultivate the land all together, or individually?

Better all together. [Not very convincingly.]

How did you live before?

Work, from sunrise to sunset, very bad food. Most don't know how to read. The children work. A fourteen year old girl has been working as a laundress for two years. [She laughs as she tells me this.] A twenty year old woman makes 20 pesetas a month, or maybe 17, or 16.... They are barefoot.

The rich landowners of Saragossa.

The priest: They don't have money to give him alms, but they give him chickens. Do they want him? Many do. Why? No clear response.

The people we talked with had never been to Mass. [People of all ages.] Was there a lot of hatred for the rich? Yes, but even more among the poor. Don't you think that this situation could jeopardize labor in common? No, because there will be no more inequality.

Does everyone do the same amount of work? Whoever does not work enough will have to be forced to work. Whoever doesn't work, will not get food.

Is life in the city better than life in the country? Much better. Less work. Better clothes, more entertainment, etc. The workers of the city are in touch with what is going on.... One of the inhabitants of the village went to the city, got a job, and returned three months later with new clothes.

Do they envy the people of the city? They don't think about them.

Military service: one year. His only thought is to come home as soon as possible. Why? Bad food. Boredom.

Discipline. Beatings (if someone defends himself, they shoot him). Punches, kicks, etc. For the rich, better conditions, they are set apart. Should military service be abolished? Yes, that would be very good.

Those who are in favor of the priest have not changed their minds, but they keep quiet.

The situation of the peasants: tenant farmers, who pay rent to the landowner. Many were evicted from their lands because they could not pay the rent. They have to work as laborers for two pesetas a day.

A vivid sense of their social segregation.

[Simone Weil]

### **Village anecdotes**

After the conquest of Monegrillo, some militiamen went into an abandoned house and looted the clothing of the absent residents. They threw clothes all over the floor. When the refugees returned to their home, they complained about the looting to the committee. The guilty individuals were identified. Durruti issued the order to shoot them. At the very last moment he pardoned them. He said, "You are my men and I will grant you your lives this time. But if you go fishing again, I will have you shot. I don't need thieves or bandits".

[Jesús Arnal Pena 3]

What my companion had to tell me about the *policy* of the Durruti column was really unpleasant. It seems that amidst the general enthusiasm of the peasants for the republican cause they have found the strange secret of how to make themselves hated. They had to leave the village of Pina for no other reason but the silent resistance of the peasants, which they were unable to overcome. It seems that they had been so ruthless, both in requisitions for the militia and in executions of both real and pretended "fascists", that they very nearly provoked a rebellion of the village. Neither had the executions yet stopped. They are, it is said, a more or less regular feature of the activities of Durruti's men. My friend had been invited to watch one, as if it were a pleasant sight.

[Franz Borkenau]

August 28 is the Feast Day of Saint Augustine, the Patron Saint of Bujaraloz. An open-air dance is traditionally held on the village streets on that day each year. On the eve of the festival the people were a little nervous and did not know what to do. They did not seem to be very willing to forego the dance, even if it did not exactly harmonize very well with the new situation. They went to see Durruti to discuss the problem with him.

“OK”, he said, “you used to have a festival in honor of Saint Augustine, but starting tomorrow you will have a festival to celebrate the glory of Comrade Agustín, and your problem is solved. As for the religious question, it never bothered me; once I even bought a Latin Bible that I found somewhere.”

[Jesús Arnal Pena 1]

One day some peasants from Monegros appeared at Durruti’s general headquarters. They came to propose an exchange: sugar and chocolate for some church bells that they had brought with them.

Durruti couldn’t stop laughing.

[N. Ragacini]

A quiet period at the front allowed Durruti to attend to the problems faced by the people behind the lines. In his section of the front, the discussions focused above all on the peasant question. At Monegros he established an agricultural collective with the agreement of the peasants, and since the area was in urgent need of better communications, Durruti organized a road-building brigade. He assigned the volunteers who had come to the front but were not fit for combat to this brigade. The brigade was also used for bringing fallow land under cultivation. One of the roads it built extended from Pina de Ebro (a village located near the main Lérida-Saragossa highway) to the isolated hamlet of Monegrillo. Even now the inhabitants of the area still call it “the gypsy road”. It just so happened that Durruti found some gypsies in his zone of operations, and persuaded these quintessentially nomadic people to devote themselves to building roads. A marvel to some people, the gypsies call it “God’s punishment”.

Durruti always helped the peasants whenever he could. When the vehicles and tractors of the column were not being used at the front, he put them at the disposal of the peasants so they could cultivate previously fallow lands. The column’s trucks transported wheat and fertilizer and brought water to the cisterns when they were dry.

[Ricardo Sanz 3]

While the Durruti Column was advancing towards Aragon, it encountered a gypsy camp along the way. Whole families were camped out in the open air. This was a problem, because these people did not care the least about the location of the front and passed from one side to the other whenever they wanted. It could not be ruled out that they might be used as spies by Franco. Durruti reflected on the problem. Then he went to see the gypsies and he said to them, “To begin with gentlemen, you will change your clothes and dress like us”. At that time the militiamen wore “*monos*” [blue coveralls] despite the July heat. The gypsies were not exactly

enthusiastic about this proposal. “Take off those rags! You will wear the same clothes as the workers.” The gypsies saw that Durruti was not in the mood for joking, and they changed their clothes without any complaints. But he was not done with them yet. “Now, since you are wearing workingmen’s clothes, you can also work”, Durruti continued. Now there were groans and the gnashing of teeth. “The peasants have founded a collective in their town and have decided to build a road so that they can have access to the highway. Here are your picks and shovels, let’s go!” The gypsies had no choice. And now and then Durruti used to come to see how the work was coming along. He was exceedingly pleased with having induced the gypsies to work with their hands. “There’s Señor Durruti”, the gypsies would whisper with their Andalusian accent, and they would raise their fists in the anti-fascist salute, that is, they raised their arms with clenched fists, and Durruti understood quite well what that gesture meant to them.

[Gaston Leval]

## **One last attempt**

At the end of September the Regional Committee of the CNT held an assembly in Bujaraloz attended by militants from Aragon and delegates from the anarchist centuries and columns. It was proposed to organize a directive institution in which all the parties and organizations would be represented. This “council” was conceived for the purpose of rehabilitating, unifying and rationally developing the region’s economy, which had been seriously damaged by the war, and to confront the predominance of the Catalonians in Aragon. In addition, it would protect the population against the abuses of the militias, which had on occasions behaved like an occupying power and had gotten entirely out of control.

Durruti made a speech in favor of creating such a council. The proposal was approved by a large majority. In this way the CNT sought to counteract the propaganda of the Marxists (POUM and PSUC). The Marxists claimed, for example, that the agricultural collectives were illegal. Joaquín Ascaso was elected president of this would-be revolutionary provincial government. Immediately, the anarchists of Aragon contacted the socialists and the region’s few republicans. The socialists were hesitant and even hostile, whereas the republicans agreed in principle, but preferred to wait. Nonetheless, the Aragon CNT decided to establish the council, which met for the first time in Fraga in October 1936.

The anarchists of Aragon thus attempted something that had always eluded their Catalanian comrades: the seizure of total power. They attempted to do this despite the devastation caused by the war, despite the presence of the armed contingents of the POUM, the PSUC and the Catalanian nationalists, despite the impact such a course of action might have in foreign countries and on the central government in Madrid, and even against the will of the CNT itself, whose national committee was neither consulted nor informed about the decision. The national committee therefore faced a *fait accompli*.

It is not surprising that the Council of Aragon became the target of general disapproval: republicans, socialists and communists depicted it as an instrument for a disguised anarchist dictatorship and accused it of harboring separatist tendencies. The CNT also joined the chorus of attackers.

Later, in December 1936, the Council was recognized after long discussions with the governments of Barcelona and Madrid, but it had to accept representatives from the other parties, restrict its plenary powers and submit to the authority of the central government.

[César M. Lorenzo]

### **Proclamation of the Regional Defense Council of Aragon**

Regional Defence Council of Aragón. General ordinance.

With exceptional frequency protests are reaching us from the villages regarding acts perpetrated by certain columns or fractions thereof. This council feels obliged to nip these factional outrages in the bud, our object being first and foremost to ensure that the Aragonese peasants, who today feel pride at the effective contribution made to their liberation by their antifascist comrades, do not find this comradely affection turned into hatred by misplaced political conduct. And secondly, because the Regional Defence Council cannot, by virtue of the mandate conferred upon it by the vast majority of Aragón, tolerate trespasses against Aragonese rights and our unchallengeable entitlement to govern ourselves in accordance with our traditions and political and economic temperament, while never losing sight of our responsibilities in the popular antifascist struggle for liberation. In a gravely mistaken way, which demonstrated an ignorance of the free spirit displayed by the Aragonese people through the centuries, certain column commanders of a specific political persuasion persist in conducting themselves in our region as if they were on captured terrain facing an internal and an external enemy. Consequently, these commanders impose political and social norms wholly at odds with the will of our people, who, with the consent of all their fellow-inhabitants, have prescribed social norms attuned to the transformation being carried out by the antifascist struggle in Spain.

Committees freely elected by the popular vote are deposed; men who give their lives for the revolution are disarmed; threats are issued of shootings, imprisonment and corporal punishment; and, by way of corollary, new committees are imposed, tailor-made in the image of the political creed responsible for these outrageous acts. It has been affirmed that anyone returning to contravene their orders will feel the brunt of armed force. The terror dispels the noble aspirations which sparked off the grand struggle of a people determined to

rediscover the liberty that had so long been trampled underfoot by tricksters and bigwigs and conjures up counter-revolution in the service of a party with absolutist ambitions.

Another factor, every bit as serious and full of implications as the one outlined above, impels us to make public this edict-decree. Requisitions of food-stuffs, livestock and items of all sorts occur in a lunatic and unsupervised fashion, without the slightest heed being taken of the barest needs of the village. Such an absurdity can only bring ruination. Nobody, and the columns themselves are best placed to confirm this claim, has encountered any opposition from the peasants and the general populace of Aragón to allowing the militias that which they need to prosecute the cruel struggle in which they are engaged. Without needing to ask or demand it, the militias have had all of their needs met voluntarily. Since this incontrovertible act roundly testifies to the fervent desire of Aragón to see the swift triumph of the revolution, requisitioning has no justification, not even as a wartime measure, and it must end, both at the front and at the rear, for our people is the ally of the army of liberation.

Today Aragón should be planting but, like in other regions, there is no seed, no money and no machinery for that purpose. If these things are to be procured, we need money or tradable goods and, having neither the one nor the other, the outlook is bleak, not merely for the people of Aragón but for all Spaniards fighting for a better society. With no appreciation of the needs of tomorrow, systematic ruin will befall living, breathing villages, which will be full of hatred and bitterness.

So, watchful, as we said, lest the interests commended to us be defended with less efficiency than they deserve, we draw the attention of column commanders to, and expect of these, the following:

1. That all applications for items of basic necessity, livestock and equipment and other items be forwarded directly to this council which will comply in so far as the capabilities of theregion allow. Meanwhile sporadic acts of requisitioning, whoever might be the authors, will be strenuously disowned, except in circumstances of extreme urgency which preclude adherence to the normal channels established by this council.

2. That antifascist columns must not interfere in the socio-political life of a village which is, *per se*, and by virtue of its own authority, free. And, so that the villages and their committees know the procedures to adopt and the line to follow, we hereby decree:

1. Without prior authority from the appropriate department of this council, none of the weapons in the villages may be given up, nor shall the removal of the current committees be accepted, until such time as the council may finalise and determine new ones.

2. In so far as it lies within the power of the villages affected, they shall refuse any requisition of produce, livestock or goods that is not endorsed by the pertinent department of the council, though agreeing in cases of extreme urgency on condition that such requisitions be carried out with the signed and sealed authority of the column commander.

3. Instances in breach of these provisions are to be reported speedily to the Regional Defence Council, together with the identity of the person or persons involved. We hope that everyone will comply with the above, thereby averting the paradoxical and dismal circumstance of a free people despising its liberty and its liberators. And the no less dismal spectacle of a people utterly ruined by the revolution of which it has always dreamed.

On behalf of the Regional Defence Council of Aragón: the president, Joaquín Ascaso.

Fraga, October 1936.

[José Peirats 2]

### ***Fifth Commentary: The Enemy***

Where is the enemy? In this story he only appears in the background and on the margins: he is an indistinct blur in a window behind the machine gun, a shadow on the other side of the barricades, an old man in an office, a silhouette in the trenches. He is almost always anonymous. But at the same time, he is ubiquitous. He is not a figment of our imagination. The revolution and the war are two different things. For anyone who wants not only to defeat a military adversary, but also to revolutionize the society in which he lives, there is no single front where friends and enemies can visibly identify each other from afar.

The Spanish revolution had to confront not just Franco and the army under his command. Its enemies were also active from the very first day within the camp of the revolution itself. In July 1936 the anarchists found themselves implicated in an alliance with their long-time enemies. The weakness of this alliance was obvious. The CNT-FAI fought against the fascists, side by side with the remnants of an army and a police force that only shortly before had engaged in armed attacks against their membership. Lluís Companys sat there in his government palace across from men whom he had been sending to prison for years. Throughout the entire Civil War, the Spanish Republic loudly proclaimed its legitimacy and loyalty to the constitution; it distinguished between “rebels”, that is, the generals who led the coup, and “loyalists”, that is, the defenders of the Republic. The main force of the resistance against the rebels, however, the



anarchists, were totally alien to this loyalty to a State which they had previously utterly despised and fought with all their strength. Only for the authentic “republicans”, that is, the centrist bourgeois parties and their allies, the social democrats, was the armed conflict a defensive war: they wanted to preserve the *status quo ante*, and to keep State power in their hands, and therefore they wanted to preserve class rule, which they defended, contrary to the claims of the fascists. However, they were not totally opposed to a compromise or agreement of some kind with the enemy. The CNT-FAI, on the other hand, as the organized vanguard of the urban and rural proletariat, wanted to make a clean slate. Its struggle was offensive. Its goal was a new society. To attain this goal it had to get rid of the weak and manifestly dysfunctional State of the petit bourgeoisie and its parties. Faithful to their principles, the anarchists proposed to abolish the State as such, and to create a realm of freedom in Spain. To achieve this goal they could not rely, of course, on the small Spanish Communist Party; from the very start of the Civil War, the Communist Party had clearly taken the side of the bourgeois republicans. The contradictions in the one camp were irreconcilable; the civil war within the Civil War was a constant threat. Franco, on the other hand, could conceal and repress the conflicts within his camp (between the military junta and the Falange, and between the supporters of the Bourbons and the Carlists). Externally, Franco’s Spain assumed the appearance of a monolithic unity: “One State. One country. One *caudillo*.”

The generals never seriously considered the possibility that the Spanish people would go to war against them. Their confidence was based on the material superiority of the army. Every assessment of troops and economic resources, rifles and munitions, planes and tanks, comes to the same conclusion: that resistance against Franco was futile. But all revolutions have to confront a militarily superior enemy. People who resolve to violently overthrow state power always have to face an army that is incomparably better armed and equipped than they are. As long as the troops remain “loyal” and obey their officers, the revolution has no chance of success. Political power is therefore decisive for the outcome of the struggle. “There can be no doubt that the fate of every revolution is decided, at a certain point, by a break in the morale of the army”, Trotsky says in his *History of the Russian Revolution*. “Most of the soldiers are more likely to turn their bayonets on their officers or to go over to the side of the people, as they become more convinced that the revolutionaries are really serious; that it is not just a demonstration, after which they have to return to the barracks and account for their actions; that it is a life and death struggle and the people can be victorious if they join them.”

We may therefore conclude that Franco’s victory cannot be explained, or in any case it cannot be exclusively explained, with reference to his material superiority, the aid he received from foreign powers and his reign of terror in Spain. It is obvious that fascism set in motion, in Spain as well, powerful ideological motivating forces. The role played by this factor in the defeat of the Spanish revolution has often been underestimated. But it must be taken into account.

The ideological platform of the anarchists was simple to the point of being primitive, it was understandable at first glance for anyone who worked for a living, and it was so rational that it stood the test of practice; it not only allowed for an immediate critique, but it also encouraged such a critique in the most ingenuous way. The anarchists were always disdainful of the prudence of the Marxists, who reckoned on incalculable and unintelligible periods of transformation. Their absolute conviction and the spontaneity with which they promised to leap into the realm of freedom, strengthens them and fuels the imaginations of its adepts, as long as it does not have to stand the test of practice. As soon as the revolution wins its first victories, however, and runs up against the endless problems of construction, it displays its political weakness. The faith of the masses is transformed into demoralization when the great promise cannot be fulfilled, when practice belies ideology.

The anarchists' attachment to their principles therefore turned against them. The leaders of the CNT-FAI were not corrupt; this is obvious. Most of them were workers; they were not paid by the organization; they were altogether the opposite of a hierarchy, traitors or bureaucrats. But the unconditional moral imperatives that they imposed on themselves and on the movement helped bring about their downfall. These imperatives turned against them in the form of corrosive doubts and suspended scruples as soon as they had to face the first tactical step along the road to power. They were incapable of developing a policy of alliances. They were entangled in the inexorable choices imposed on them by their own ideology.

The promises made by fascism, on the other hand, extended beyond all possible practice from the very start. Any possible conflict with social reality was immediately excluded. Who could rationally define what was demanded by the honor of the Spanish nation, or precisely what the Holy Virgin wanted? Heaven seldom disavows its ideological beneficiaries. The more transcendental the values invoked by an ideology, the greater the unscrupulousness of its advocates. Franco's Christianity was, in effect, one of the most solid ideological pillars of Franco's Spain; the other was "nationalism", which was manifested in the internationalization of the war. Thirdly, the nationalist camp also knew how to brandish the attractive bait of tradition, of the glorious past, which it sought to transport to the present by realizing a large part of its sophistry as undeniable realities.

It was precisely the total irrationality of its slogans that favored fascism's ideological power of fascination. In Spain, as in Italy and Germany, fascism stimulated unconscious forces whose existence the left had overlooked: fears and resentments that also exist within the working class. What the anarchists promised but could not deliver was a completely secular world, a world that is entirely of the future, in which the State and the Church, family and property, will disappear. These institutions were hated, but the anarchists were also familiar with them, and the future of anarchy evoked not only yearnings, but also deeply-rooted fears full

of elemental force. Fascism, on the other hand, offered the past as a refuge, a past that, naturally, never existed. The hatred directed against the modern world, which had treated Spain so unfairly ever since the Century of the Enlightenment [*Siglo de las Luces*—the eighteenth century], could find a stronghold to defend in a fictitious version of the Middle Ages, and a beleaguered sense of identity took refuge behind the institutional bars of the authoritarian State.

The anarchist theoreticians were incapable of understanding these mechanisms. Their horizon was limited to the next barricade. They did not understand the internal structure of fascism, nor did they understand the international dynamic within which fascism operated. Although the anarchists had been talking about world revolution and professing internationalism ever since the time of Bakunin, they were unpleasantly surprised by the way the western democracies, in a tacit understanding with Mussolini and Hitler, staged the farce of non-intervention. They had read about the international organization of capital in their pamphlets, but they did not reckon on its consequences; they had themselves succumbed, to a certain extent, to a nationally-oriented mystification. When it came right down to it, their experiences of struggle were for decades restricted to their own towns and cities, to the factory and the neighborhood with which they were familiar. The extremely decentralized organizational form they possessed often redounded to their advantage; but they paid for this advantage with a restriction of their field of action. The anarchists helplessly watched the maneuvers of the Soviets, who had long before learned to make plans on a world scale. The supply of arms by the Soviet Union to republican Spain was in fact quite limited; it nonetheless had a decisive importance at certain moments. The political price the Soviets demanded, however, and which had to be paid, was astronomical. The influence of the Communist Party grew daily, although it never had much of a presence in the Spanish proletariat; Soviet agents and commissars appeared in Madrid, Valencia and Barcelona, and performed the functions of “advisors” in the military and police apparatus. Stalin manipulated the Spanish revolution as if it was a pawn on a chessboard. It became an instrument of Russian foreign policy. The anarchists, caught by surprise, were faced with a very special kind of internationalism. When they realized what was happening, it was already too late. The CNT-FAI was sidelined, not only militarily, but also politically; when a revolution allows itself to be ideologically disarmed and goes into a defensive mode, it has reached the beginning of its end.

## **The militias**

### **A bizarre illustrated book**

The first thing a foreigner notices when he comes to Catalonia these days is the militiamen. You see them everywhere, with their distinctive, multi-colored and motley uniforms. You could compile the material for a bizarre illustrated book with the portraits of the men and women of the militias. They are not all alike, the

monotony of the regular army has disappeared; there are swarms of the most outlandish and varied specimens.

It is impossible to describe their formation and composition.

Of the several branches of the armed forces of the old Spanish military, only the air force and an insignificant number of other units remained loyal to the Republic. The regiments that had revolted against the people were dissolved and their soldiers sent home. Only a very small number of officers remained loyal and could be mobilized for the struggle against fascism.

The problem of the police was resolved by sending most of them to the front. However, the revolution was based above all on volunteers. The trade unions, parties, working class organizations and the government organized their own columns. Local trade union halls and party headquarters were transformed into recruitment centers for the militias, and the masses heeded the call. Men and women lined up to enlist. Many were rejected. The first columns departed to seek out the enemy forces in trucks and buses. No one knew where the enemy forces were, because the front did not yet exist. Twenty-four hours later they realized that no one had thought about supplies of ammunition and food. The food was sent later in trucks.

Very few of the militiamen had any military training, and most were poorly armed. Many only carried pistols. They kept their bullets in their pants pockets. There were no tents. Many militiamen wore rope sandals. Shortly afterwards, the classic Spanish two-peaked military forage cap made its appearance: the red and black of the anarchists, the red of the socialists and communists, and the blue of the Catalanian Esquerra. The blue "*mono*" [coveralls] worn by mechanics became a kind of uniform.

The leaders of the political groups performed the functions of officers (if you could use that word in this context)—the proletariat in arms had the same confidence in these men as they did before the war, during strikes and assemblies. These leaders did not have any military training, either, of course; they did not even know the ABCs of military tactics. During the course of the war the militiamen learned the arts of digging trenches and laying barbed wire, throwing hand grenades and taking cover. Their instructors were often foreign revolutionaries who were veterans of the First World War. A growing number of such men came to Spain to fight for the world revolution and against fascism.

At first the conduct of military operations was not informed by any strategy. The workers were only familiar with fighting in the streets and the war of barricades. Eventually they learned that piles of rocks do not offer any protection against modern weapons. They only really felt that they were in their element when they were defending a village, especially if it was their hometown. They had not yet

had any experience that impressed upon them need to perform maneuvers and to develop a mobile tactic.

There were no general staffs, general headquarters or telecommunications networks. Each column looked out for itself with regard to supplies. When they needed ammunition or food, they sent some of their delegates to Barcelona to obtain what they needed.

As one would expect, at first these troops committed every imaginable error. They launched night attacks with cries of "*Viva la revolución!*", and they often placed their artillery on the front line with the infantry. Now and then grotesque incidents took place. One militiaman told me how, one day after lunch, his whole unit went to a nearby vineyard to eat grapes; when they came back they found that their positions had been occupied by the enemy. This army of volunteers had, however, conquered half of Aragon and stopped the advance of the fascists, whose hand-picked troops comprised almost the entire regular army of Spain.

[H. E. Kaminski]

The first volunteers arrived from France in early August. They were French and Italian anarchists. They had come to Barcelona by way of the Pyrenees to participate in the struggle against international fascism. They enlisted in Spanish units and fought on the Aragon front. Shortly thereafter, more numerous groups of Italian anti-fascists of every tendency came to Barcelona: anarchists, socialists, syndicalists and liberals. The Italian volunteers formed the Garibaldi Brigade. This Brigade fought with distinction at the battle of Huesca. Numerous Italian anarchists, socialists and liberals lost their lives in that battle. In September 1936, the Sacco and Vanzetti Column was formed, composed of combatants from all over the world, which merged with the units led by Durruti. There were no more than 3,000 of these international militiamen. Hardly anyone knew anything about them outside of Spain. They were not answerable to the international brigades organized by the communists.

By the way, the anarchosyndicalists had no interest in attracting foreign combatants to Spain. They did not need men; they had enough soldiers in their trade unions. More or less the same was true of the socialist UGT. What they needed was weapons.

The situation of the Communist Party was different. The communists had so few supporters in Spain that they could not mobilize more than two or three columns in the whole country. They were therefore interested in reinforcing their combat units and extending their influence with the help of the foreign communist parties.

During the first three months after July 19, Catalonia was totally in the hands of the anarchosyndicalists, and the Catalonian border was controlled by the FAI. The FAI's men allowed their fellow anarchists to cross the border, but hesitated before

opening the border to the numerous communists who were trying to enter Spain. The anarchist García Oliver, who later served as Minister of Justice in Largo Caballero's Cabinet, was in charge of organizing the anti-fascist militias of Catalonia. Oliver issued the order to totally close the border to foreign volunteers.

[Augustin Souchy 2]

Coercion and rigid discipline are not necessary in the militias. Everyone knows what they are fighting for. They are not fighting against a faceless or objective enemy, so to speak, but against an enemy that the workers and peasants know and hate. They also know that the fascists do not spare the lives of wounded men or prisoners, and that surrender or reaching a compromise solution are out of the question. The soldiers of this political army are not fighting the Civil War to defend abstract values, to conquer provinces or colonies or to pave the way for imperialist domination, but to defend their own lives.

The enemies are the military officers, the members of the fascist organizations and the capitalists. For them, they have no mercy. They almost always spare the common soldiers they take prisoner, however; they think that they have been intimidated and coerced. And that is often the case. It is common for enemy officers and Falangists to take up positions behind their own troops with pistols in their hands, to force them to attack. Every day, however, deserters and draft evaders show up who declare their desire to fight in the ranks of the militia. This is why propaganda plays such a decisive role, even, and above all, at the front lines.

Civil War has its own rules.

[H. E. Kaminski]

In autumn we left Barcelona for the front with Emma Goldman, the famous American anarchist, to visit Durruti. At the time, Durruti had around 9,000 men under his command, he was an anarchist general, so to speak (although he never would have laid claim to such a title). He told us: "I have been an anarchist all my life and now I don't even consider disciplining my people with an iron fist. I won't do it. I know that discipline is necessary in war, but this discipline must be internal and it must arise from the goal for which we are fighting." And in this respect he was unlike any other general in the world. He lived with his men, slept on the same pile of straw, wore sandals like everyone else and ate the same food. And his men said: he is one of us. A military commander who had graduated from a military academy would never have been able to lead a whole division without military coercion. But Durruti was not a professional officer, but a mechanic.

[Augustin Souchy 1]

A group of young militiamen from the Durruti Column abandoned their position and wanted to return to Barcelona. Durruti caught up with them on the road to Barcelona, stopped his car, got out and approached them while drawing his pistol from its holster. He made them stand up against a wall. Another militiamen who happened to be passing by asked Durruti for a pair of shoes. "Take a look at the shoes these guys are wearing. If they fit, take a pair. Why should we bury shoes, so they can rot in the ground?"

Durruti did not shoot the deserters, of course. He always used to say: "No one has any obligation to stay here. Anyone who is afraid can leave whenever they want." But all he needed to do most of the time was speak a few stern words to those who wanted to go home, and they almost always asked him for permission to return to the front.

[España Libre]

### **The Soviet example: two versions of a letter**

CNT-FAI. Anti-fascist Militias, Durruti Column, General Headquarters. To the proletariat of the Soviet Union:

Comrades, I am taking advantage of this opportunity to send you fraternal greetings from the Aragon Front, where thousands of your brothers are fighting just as you did twenty years ago for the liberation of our class that had been oppressed and humiliated for centuries. Twenty years ago, the workers of Russia hoisted the red flag in the East, the symbol of the international brotherhood of the workers. You placed your hopes in the international working class, trusting that it would help you in the great work that you had begun. The workers of the world did not betray you, but helped you as much as they could.

Today a new revolution has broken out in the West and it is raising the same flag that represents our common and victorious ideal. Fraternity unites our peoples who have been so long oppressed, one by Czarism and the other by a despotic monarchy. We place our trust in you, the workers of the USSR, for the defense of our revolution. We cannot trust the politicians who call themselves anti-fascists and democrats. We only believe in our class brothers. Only the workers can defend the Spanish revolution, just as we fought for the Russian revolution twenty years ago. Have faith in us. We are workers like you. In no event would we renounce our principles or dishonor the symbols of the proletariat, the tools of our labor, the hammer and sickle.

Greetings from all those who are fighting on the Aragon Front, arms in hand, against fascism.

Your comrade, B. Durruti

Osera, October 22, 1936

[Buenaventura Durruti 3]

To the Russian workers:

There are numerous revolutionary workers in Russia who feel and think like we do. But they are not free. They are in cells, in political prisons and forced labor camps. Many of them have expressly demanded that they be released to fight in Spain, on the front line, against the common enemy. The international proletariat cannot understand why these comrades are imprisoned. Nor do we understand why the aid and weapons that Russia is prepared to send to Spain are the object of political horse-trading that entails the denial of the freedom of action of the Spanish revolutionaries.

The Spanish revolution must follow a different course than the Russian Revolution. It must not develop under the slogan, "One party in power, and everyone else in jail". It must to the contrary seek the victory of the only slogan that really favors the united front and doesn't just amount to a con job: "All tendencies to work, all tendencies to fight against the common enemy. And the people will decide what regime is best for them!"

[Buenaventura Durruti 5]

August 14, 1936

Bujaraloz is decorated with red and black flags; I see decrees signed by Durruti everywhere, or simple notices: "Durruti orders...." The market square is called "Plaza Durruti". Durruti and his general staff are billeted in the cottage of a road construction laborer, two kilometers from the enemy lines. This is not exactly very prudent, but here everyone tries to show off their bravery. "We shall die, covered in glory, before the eyes of the whole world", these slogans can be read on banners, posters and leaflets.

The famous anarchist seemed amused at first, but he noted with interest the words, "Moscow, Pravda", in the letter from Oliver. Immediately he began a violent, polemical discussion, right there on the road, with his soldiers all around him and with the evident intention of attracting their attention.

His speech was replete with a somber and fanatical passion:

"It is possible that only a hundred of us will survive, but these one hundred will enter Saragossa, they will annihilate fascism, they will raise the flag of anarchosindicalism and they will proclaim libertarian communism. I will be the first to enter Saragossa to proclaim the free commune. We shall be subject to neither Madrid or Barcelona, to neither Azaña or Giral, to neither Companys or



Casanovas. If they want, they can live in peace with us, or else ... we will march straight on to Madrid.... We will teach you, you Russian and Spanish Bolsheviks, how to make a revolution and how to lead it to its ultimate consequences. You have a dictatorship there, and in your Red Army there are colonels and generals. In my column there are no commanders or subordinates, we all have the same rights, we are all soldiers, and I, too, am only a soldier.”

He is wearing coveralls and a red and black soldier’s forage cap. He is tall and athletic. Good-looking, some gray hair. Durruti imperiously dominates his surroundings, but in his eyes there is something that is excessively sentimental, almost feminine, and at times he has the look of a mortally wounded animal. It seems to me that he lacks will power.

“With me no one fights out of a sense of duty or from a love of discipline. Those who are here have volunteered to fight, and because they are ready to die for freedom. Yesterday two of them requested that I give them leave to go to Barcelona to visit their families. I took their rifles and I told them they were discharged. I don’t need men like them. Then one of them said that he had thought about it and that he wanted to stay, but I would not accept him again. That’s how I will proceed with all of them, even if only a dozen are left! This is the way, and there is no other way, that a revolutionary army must be organized. The population is obliged to help us, when it comes down to it we are fighting for everyone’s freedom and against every kind of dictatorship! We will annihilate those who do not help us. We will annihilate all those who block the road to freedom.”

“That smells like a dictatorship”, I said. “When the Bolsheviks on various occasions dissolved people’s organizations which had been infiltrated by the enemy, they were accused of being dictators. But we did not hide behind words about freedom in general. We never denied the existence of the dictatorship of the proletariat, we always publicly avowed it. Besides, what kind of army can you organize without commanders, without discipline and without obedience? Or do you really have no intention of seriously fighting, or are you just pretending, while you really have subordination, but under another name?”

“We have organized indiscipline. Each person is responsible to himself and to the collective. We shoot cowards and looters, the committee judges them.”

“That doesn’t mean anything. Who’s car is that?”

Everyone turned to look in the direction that I was indicating.

In the square, near the main road, there were about fifteen dilapidated and wrecked cars, Fords and Adlers. And among them there was a luxurious Hispano-Suiza, with shining chrome and elegant leather seats.

“That’s my car”, Durruti said. “I need a fast car so I can reach various sections of the front as quickly as possible.”

“Very good!”, I replied. “The commander must have a better car, if possible. It would be ridiculous for a common soldier to be driving around in this car while you go on foot or drive around in a dilapidated old Ford. Besides, I have seen your orders, they are displayed all over Bujaraloz. Every one of them begins with the words, ‘Durruti orders...’.”

“Yes, someone has to be in charge,” Durruti responded, smiling. “Those are signs of initiative. It is a utilization of the authority that I have towards the masses. Of course, this is not welcomed by the communists....”

He gave a sidelong look at Trucha, who had kept his distance the whole time.

“The communists have never denied the value of individual personalities and individual authority. Personal authority does not by any means inhibit the mass movement, and it often even strengthens and unifies it. You are a commander, so don’t pretend to be a common soldier, it is unproductive and does not enhance the military effectiveness of the troops.”

“With our death”, Durruti said, “with our death, we will show Russia and the whole world what anarchism really is and what the Iberian anarchists are made of.”

“With death you prove nothing,” I replied, “you have to prove it with victory. The Soviet people want the Spanish people to be victorious with all their heart, and they also want with equal enthusiasm the victory of the anarchist workers and their leaders as well as that of the communists and all the anti-fascist combatants.”

He then turned to face the crowd of people that were all around us, and he shouted, now not in French, but in Spanish:

“This comrade has come to convey to the combatants of the CNT and the FAI a warm greeting from the Russian proletariat, that they eagerly hope for our victory over the capitalists. *Viva la CNT y la FAI! Viva comunismo libertario!*”

“*Viva!*”, the crowd shouted.

The looks on their faces became more relaxed and more friendly.

[Mikhail Koltsov]

## **Militarization**

On August 1, the central government in Madrid ordered the mobilization of the reservists from the 1933 and 1935 conscription classes; the Generalitat agreed with this measure. Catalonia, or more accurately the only political force of importance in Catalonia, opposed the government: the CNT refused to support the formation of a regular, uniformed army, with the traditional hierarchies. Ten thousand young men and soldiers met on August 4 at the Olimpia Theater and declared that they would obey no orders issued by the military authorities. “We will join the militias. We will go to the front. But we will not be barracks soldiers. We will not abide by any discipline or obey any orders that do not proceed directly from the people in arms.”

[John Stephen Brademas]

On September 4, the new leader of the government, the socialist Largo Caballero, declared to the foreign press: “First we have to win the war, then we can talk about the revolution.”

On September 27, the [Catalonian] government was reorganized; from then on it would be called the Council of the Generalitat. Three anarchosyndicalists participated in this Council. In the political declaration of the government, we are told that, “We shall concentrate all our efforts on the war and we shall do everything possible to rapidly bring it to a victorious conclusion: unified command, coordination of all combat units, formation of militias on the basis of compulsory military service, and more rigorous discipline”.

When the Council of the Generalitat was formed, the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias was dissolved: “Now we no longer need the Committee; the Generalitat represents all of us,” García Oliver declared. After the war, Santillán explained the reasons for this change of course: “We knew that the revolution could not be victorious without victory in the war. Therefore we sacrificed everything to the war. Ultimately, we also sacrificed the revolution itself, without noticing that this also implied sacrificing the goal of the war.... The Committee of Militias guaranteed the autonomy of Catalonia, the legitimacy of the war and the resurrection of the true Spain. But we were told repeatedly, ‘If you continue to assert the power of the people we will not send weapons to Catalonia; we will not give you foreign exchange to buy arms from foreign dealers; we will not send you raw materials for your industry....’ This is why we allowed the Committee of Militias to be dissolved, and why we joined the government of the Generalitat. So we became Cabinet Ministers, of Defense and other Ministries of vital importance, only to try to prevent losing the war and everything else along with it”.

[José Peirats 1]

Santillán is one of the few intellectuals of Spanish anarchism. He studied philosophy in Madrid and medicine in Berlin. During the Republic he was imprisoned five times in two and a half years; he spent a lot of time in jail.

“The tragedy of my life”, he says, “is the fact that I had to participate in the war, I was obliged to do so, with all the consequences that this participation entails. I was always a pacifist.”

He was, however, one of the most active leaders during the street fighting on July 19, and the militia is largely the result of his efforts. He nonetheless told me:

“The militia has fulfilled its role. It has to merge with the new revolutionary army. There is no such thing as an anarchist war, there is only one kind of war, and we have to win it. We will win it but we will have to sacrifice many of our principles. Anarchism accepts neither war nor its necessities, and vice-versa. Anarchism is incompatible with war.”

[H. E. Kaminski]

At that time, in August, there was a lot of speculation in the propaganda offices of the CNT-FAI about something that Durruti said in a radio broadcast from his headquarters in Bujaraloz: “We renounce everything except victory.” The anarchist troops tenaciously resisted militarization, and the enemies of the anarchists used every means to try to make them see reason. They claimed that what the great warrior meant by these words was that he was ready to sacrifice the revolution for the war. This allegation is absolutely false. Anyone who was familiar with the temperament and convictions of Durruti could not believe it. The revolutionary transformations that he introduced in his own sector of the front are enough to prove the contrary.

[José Peirats 1]

The nature of the combat units had radically changed compared to the first few weeks and months of the revolution. They were no longer composed of proletarians equipped with improvised weaponry who considered their units merely as branches of their trade unions or parties. This army has spontaneously militarized itself: the militiamen have become regular soldiers. In practice, the centuries have become companies and the columns, regiments. The old names only have a theoretical value.

The officers are still called “delegates”. Each group (platoon), century (company), section (battalion) and column (regiment) elects a representative; the system of election is from the bottom up: the delegates from the smaller military units elect the delegates of the larger units. But the authority of the officers is increasing, and is becoming more widespread. The fact that they are elected seems like a relic of the past; the system of election is gradually dying out.

Everyone understands that war cannot be waged without discipline. In theory, the militia is based, as before, on the free will of its members, but in practice this voluntary character is a fiction. The hierarchy that rules every army is slowly being imposed. I have read the regulations in the trenches; their stipulations automatically pose the problem of punishments for infractions of discipline. Strictly speaking, in a volunteer army there should be no punishment; in practice, however, this is not possible. It is true that the militiamen reject the old military code that the government has provisionally reimposed. But there are already military tribunals. Punishments for minor infractions are determined by the section delegates; more serious cases are brought to the column commander. Death sentences have already been pronounced. A telephone specialist who was caught sleeping during an attack was executed.

The problem of desertion has not been clarified theoretically. It is not explicitly set forth whether a volunteer has the right to go home whenever he wants. In fact, this right is only conceded to foreigners. If a Spaniard wants to leave the front, first they badger him and they threaten to denounce him to his organization to make trouble for him at home. Then, if this does not work, they do not provide him with means of transport to get home.

[H. E. Kaminski]

A kind of Catalanian army was gradually created, which was more under the control of the government of the Generalitat than of the central government in Madrid. This proved that the much-ballyhooed slogan of discipline was only used to deceive the people with false appearances. The Catalanian politicians interpreted it as they saw fit. As for the central government, it has been demonstrated that its promise to send weapons to the anarchist militias as soon as they were militarized, was nothing but blackmail. Even after the government had achieved its ends, the anarchist units were still the most poorly armed units in the army.

[José Peirats 1]

## **The beginning of the end**

INTERVIEWER: Is it true that the regulations and hierarchy of the old army are going to be reestablished in the militias?

DURRUTI: No, that's not what is happening, not exactly. Some instructional classes have been introduced and a unified command has been established. With respect to discipline, it is logical that combat in the streets imposes fewer demands than a long, hard campaign against an army equipped with the most modern weapons. It was necessary to do something along these lines.

INTERVIEWER: And just what does this reinforcement of discipline consist in?

DURRUTI: Up until a short time ago we had an excessive number of different units, each with its own commander, and troop strengths that fluctuated wildly from one day to the next. Each unit had its own equipment, supply services and sources of food, its own policy with respect to the civilian population, and also, often enough, its own idea about how to fight the war. This could not continue. We have improved the situation and we are trying to improve it even more.

INTERVIEWER: And ranks, saluting, punishments and rewards?

DURRUTI: We can do without all that. Here we are all anarchists.

INTERVIEWER: But recently the Madrid government reimposed the old military code.

DURRUTI: Yes. This government resolution has had a regrettable effect on the troops. This decree displays an absolute lack of any sense of reality. They represent a tendency that is completely opposed to that of the militias. We do not want conflicts, but it is evident that these two mentalities are so diametrically opposed that they are mutually exclusive. One of them must disappear.

INTERVIEWER: Don't you think that if the war lasts much longer militarization will become entrenched and the revolution will be in danger?

DURRUTI: Of course. That is why we have to win the war as soon as possible.

Durruti smiled as he said this and shook hands with us, and said goodbye.

[A. and D. Prudhommeaux]

The Civil War is increasingly being transformed into a battle between two huge armies that are utilizing the most modern technical means. A militia will always be numerically limited, because it is composed exclusively of conscious revolutionaries. That is why they were forced to organize a large regular army (separate from the militias), and for this purpose they have drafted several conscription classes. This kind of mobilization is totally contrary to the voluntary character of the militias. Simple draftees cannot be conceded the same rights that are enjoyed by politically reliable volunteers.

Militarization is being extensively debated. Some of the militiamen do not agree with it, above all the anarchists, who see this process as the beginning of the end of the revolution. The anarchists are fascinated by the example of the Russian anarchist, Makhno, the leader of an army of volunteers; the Bolsheviks forced him to dissolve his militia and emigrate. With the expulsion of Makhno, who died in exile in Paris in 1934, Russian anarchism suffered a mortal blow. The Spanish

anarchists feared that the organization of a new army would subject them to a similar fate.

But they also had to admit that a modern war cannot be waged with small units of comrades held together by shared convictions, which operate their own supply networks, independently make their own decisions, seldom coordinate their maneuvers with other units and zealously defend their autonomy.

[H. E. Kaminski]

## **Towards a people's army and soldiers councils**

The German comrades of the international group of the Durruti Column voted in favor of a resolution on the problem of the militarization of the militias in general and of the Durruti Column in particular. The principles that are to be applied by virtue of this militarization were elaborated behind the backs of the comrades at the front. We consider the measures implemented to impose this militarization to be provisional, and we only recognize their provisional validity. We demand that new regulations should be promulgated as soon as possible, to put an end to the present state of permanent confusion. We shall only abide by regulations that meet the following conditions:

Abolition of the salute.

Equal wages for all.

Freedom of the press for the newspapers at the front.

Freedom of expression.

Soldiers councils organized by battalion (three delegates for each company).

Commanding officers may not serve as delegates.

The soldiers council will convoke a general assembly of the soldiers of the battalion, if two-thirds of the company representatives want to do so.

Each regiment will also form a soldiers council, whose representatives may convoke an assembly of soldiers.

A delegate will be sent as an observer to the brigade general staff.

The organization of the representation of the soldiers must be extended to the entire army.

The general soldiers council will be represented on the general staff of the army by a delegate.

The courts martial at the front will be composed exclusively of soldiers. Only in cases where an officer is being tried by a court martial will an officer be allowed to participate as a member of the tribunal.

This resolution was unanimously approved on December 22, 1936, and ratified in Barcelona on December 29, 1936 by the FAI Plenum.

[A. and D. Prudhommeaux]

The question of whether the rebel generals will impose their form of struggle on the Spanish revolutionaries, or whether, to the contrary, our comrades will destroy militarism, is being posed with increasing urgency. But the latter outcome is possible only if other methods are adopted, if the “front” is dissolved, or if the main front of combat spreads the social revolution to all of Spain.

The fascists enjoy the following advantages: superiority with regard to military equipment, draconian barracks discipline, total military organization, and police terror against the population; in addition, the tactics of a war of positions, the stability of the front and the ability to transport troops and main battle forces to the strategic points where decisive battles are taking place.

The factors that favor the cause of the people are of an absolutely contrary nature: abundant manpower, the passionate initiative and aggressiveness of the politically conscious groups and individuals, the sympathy of the working class masses throughout the country, and the economic weapons of the strike and sabotage in the zones occupied by the enemy. These moral and material forces, very much superior to those of the enemy, can only be employed in a guerrilla war in which surprise attacks and ambushes spread throughout the entire country.

However, certain sectors of the Spanish Popular Front are of the opinion, which is politically very well argued, that militarism must be fought with militarism, that the enemy must be defeated with his own weapons and that a regular war of army corps and technological battles must be waged, calling for a military draft, a unified command structure and a strategic battle plan, in short, copying fascism with greater or lesser precision. Even some of our own comrades, influenced by Bolshevism, are calling for the creation of a “Red Army”. To us, this attitude seems dangerous from every point of view. At the present time we do not need a professional army in Spain, but a militia that wages guerrilla warfare.

[L’Espagne Antifasciste]

***Sixth Commentary: The decline of the anarchists***



The Spanish Republic was always a bourgeois State, from its proclamation in 1931 to its fall in March, 1939.

There never was a “Red” government in Madrid. The Spanish revolution of 1936 neither destroyed nor took over the existing State apparatus: at first it found a place within that apparatus, only to be expelled from it later. The anarchist workers movement was its only organized force. The initial victories in the Civil War were due to its capacity for mobilization.

From the beginning, therefore, two intransigent and irreconcilable adversaries confronted each other in the free part of Spain: on the one side, the regime of revolutionary democracy, whose political branch had spontaneously given birth to councils and committees, whose military branch was the militias, and whose economic expression was collective production in agriculture and industry; on the other side, the old bourgeois state of the Republic with its political administration, its regular army and its capitalist structure of property and production. Their strategic methods were diametrically opposed. Each side thought that its own way was the only right way. While the traditional state apparatus, with its hierarchically organized army led by professional generals, wanted to wage a conventional campaign, the victors of July 19 aspired to a people’s war, whose final victory would only be attainable with politically motivated militias and guerrilla methods.

The result of this situation was dual power, which lasted from July until well into the autumn of 1936.

The contradiction upon which this dual power was based was antagonistic. It could only be resolved by violence. The consequence was a civil war within the Civil War, at first assiduously concealed, but later increasingly more openly manifested. The contending forces were the following: on the one side, the CNT-FAI, supported by the POUM (Workers Party of Marxist Unification), a left wing group that split off from the communists; on the other side, the bourgeois parties of the Republic, led by the social democrats under Largo Caballero, and the Communist Party of Spain, backed by the massive aid sent by the Soviet Union. In their turn towards the right, the communists took full advantage of the social democrats, and sought to be the real party of the petit bourgeoisie. They therefore obeyed, naturally, the instructions they received from Moscow; the interests of the Spanish workers were not their concern.

The leadership of the CNT-FAI was by no means prepared to meet the challenge that it faced in the autumn of 1936. Caught between the pincers of the fascist offensive on one side, and the counterrevolution on the other, it could only continue on its course by means of a series of betrayals of the simple and traditional principles of anarchist doctrine. It was retreating step by step in the face of reality. It is an old error of the anarchists to persistently ignore the political instrument *par excellence*, that is, the mediation between loyalty to principles and

tactical necessities. This is what happened in this case as well. Once they strayed from the “straight and narrow road” of immediate revolution, there was no stopping them. The concessions that the CNT-FAI made to their political enemies in their own camp were transformed into catastrophic defeats. Their strict adherence to principles was transformed into a boundless opportunism. Within a few months, the anarchist leaders squandered the revolutionary essence of their mass movement. Let us enumerate a few of the phases of this runaway process.

September 8, 1936: the leader of the CNT, Juan López, in Valencia, notifies the central government in Madrid that it will have his cooperation and his support for the government’s policy.

September 26, 1936: the CNT accepts three token Ministries in the regional government of Catalonia.

October 1, 1936: the CNT consents to the dissolution of the Central Committee of Militias.

October 9, 1936: the Catalanian government decrees the dissolution of the local councils and committees; the CNT declares its agreement with this measure.

Early December, 1936: violent clashes take place in Madrid between CNT detachments and Communist Party units.

December 4, 1936: the CNT joins the central government in Madrid. The anarchists are placated with minor Cabinet positions (Justice, Health, Commerce and Industry); they do not obtain any Cabinet positions with real power.

December 15, 1936: the Superior Security Council centralizes the political police.

December 17, 1936: the Moscow newspaper, *Pravda*, publishes an editorial that says, “The purge of the Trotskyists and anarcho-syndicalists has now begun in Catalonia; it is being implemented with the same rigor as in the Soviet Union”.

December 24, 1936: civilians are forbidden to bear arms in Madrid.

Late December, 1936: the Communist Party launches its campaign against the POUM.

February-March 1937: serious disagreements emerge between the leadership and the rank and file of the CNT-FAI. The revolutionary opposition within the anarchist movement organizes its own fraction: the “Friends of Durruti”.

During the last days of April, 1937, the government publicly announced its intentions to disarm the workers of Barcelona and to restore its former monopoly of violence to the police. Thus, the last act of the drama of the CNT-FAI

commenced, “the bloody week of Barcelona”. The first skirmishes took place as workers and police tried to disarm each other. The street fighting began on May 3. Armed communists raided the central offices of the telephone company, in a building which was in the hands of the CNT. Immediately, without waiting for it to be officially proclaimed, the workers of Barcelona implemented the general strike. Barricades were erected, and the most important points in the city were occupied by the workers. The leadership of the CNT capitulated. The central government sent five thousand men from the Assault Guard, who entered Barcelona on May 7. The last revolutionary movement of the Spanish working class was suppressed: it remains the last one up to the present [1971]; more than five hundred people were killed. The CNT declared: “The only thing we can do is await the development of events and adapt to them in the best way we can.”

The backbone of Spanish anarchism was broken; from then on, the CNT led an unreal life and looked on helplessly as the remnants of the Spanish revolution were liquidated. In May, the FAI itself was declared illegal! The communist Minister Uribe demanded the outlawing of the POUM and thus provoked a government crisis in Madrid; Largo Caballero had to resign, because the communists considered him too leftist; he was replaced by Negrín, an inveterate enemy of collectivization and an true champion of private property. In June 1937, the members of the central committee of the POUM were arrested; the witch-hunt against “Trotskyists” reached its peak (not even Trotsky himself, however, cared about them), and its leader, Andrés Nin, was assassinated by agents of the NKVD. In August, all criticism of the Soviet Union was prohibited by government decree; the new Military Investigation Service (SIM), in which the Communist Party held all the key positions, built its own jails and concentration camps, which rapidly filled up with anarchists and “ultra-leftists”. Also in August, the central government ordered the dissolution of the Aragon Defense Council; this Council was the last remaining institution of revolutionary power. Its president, Joaquín Ascaso, was arrested; the communist 11<sup>th</sup> Division attacked the village committees of Aragon and destroyed the agricultural collectives. In September, 1937, the headquarters of the CNT-FAI Defense Committee is attacked and occupied by government troops supported by artillery and tanks.

In 1938 the big landowners returned and demanded that their property be returned to them. Collectivization was repealed; workers control in the factories of Catalonia was abolished. Managers and foremen were reinstated in their old positions. Dividends were once again being paid to foreign stockholders. The pay of the common soldier was reduced from 10 to 7 pesetas, while the officers’ pay was increased from 25 to 100 pesetas. Ranks, saluting and military drill were reintroduced; the death penalty was introduced for showing disrespect for superiors. The militants of the POUM and the CNT-FAI were behind bars. The revolution had been liquidated; the bourgeois state had been reestablished; the Civil War was lost. During the last few days of March, 1939, the government of the Spanish Republic fled to France. And what is the result of our investigation?

“... the Bakuninists had to throw the whole of their old programme overboard. First they sacrificed their doctrine of absolute abstention from political, and especially electoral, activities. Then anarchy, the abolition of the State, shared the same fate. Instead of abolishing the State they tried, on the contrary, to set up a number of new, small states. They then dropped the principle that the workers must not take part in any revolution that did not have as its aim the immediate and complete emancipation of the proletariat, and they themselves took part in a movement that was notoriously bourgeois. Finally they went against the dogma they had only just proclaimed—that the establishment of a revolutionary government is but another fraud another betrayal of the working class—for they sat quite comfortably in the juntas of the various towns, and moreover almost everywhere as an impotent minority outvoted and politically exploited by the bourgeoisie.

“... the ultra-revolutionary rantings of the Bakuninists either turned into appeasement or into uprisings that were doomed to failure, or, led to their joining a bourgeois party which exploited the workers politically in the most disgraceful manner and treated them to kicks into the bargain.”

This judgment was pronounced in 1873 by Frederick Engels. Its intention was to subject the anarchists to merciless criticism. But its true irony consists in the fact that, in the context of the Spanish Civil War, the “bourgeois party” to which Engels referred was none other than the Communist Party.

## **The defense of Madrid**

### **A visit to the capital**

In the autumn of 1936 I worked in Madrid as a correspondent for *Solidaridad Obrera*. In mid-September, Durruti came to Madrid for the first time since the start of the Civil War. My brother Eduardo served as his guide and host. That night, shortly after his arrival, they paid me a visit in the newspaper's offices on Alcalá Street.

Durruti was wearing his usual leather forage cap, which was later named after him, a belt and a revolver. It was the first time that I had ever met the famous “gorrilla” of the anarchists. He was tall, with a swarthy complexion and dark hair; his gaze was steady and penetrating, his manner amiable and spontaneous. Despite his energy, his gestures seemed somehow childish. He was good looking and muscular and his skin was tanned by the sun. He had large, sinewy hands. There was always a good-natured, confident smile on his lips. His way of being simple and spontaneous immediately won your sympathy. His voice was serious and persuasive, his hair wavy and very black, his mouth large and his lips fleshy, his torso colossal, and his gestures gentle, cheerful and expressive. He walked

rather slowly, but he seemed to have unstoppable momentum. He gave one the impression of a typical son of the Castilian plateau.

[Ariel]

Many of our comrades like to be photographed and interviewed; they always want to be in the newspapers. Durruti was not like that. He did not want his personality to be a publicity feature story. He hated theatrical attitudes. In Madrid he conducted himself with the same modesty as always.

“This forage cap and this leather jacket”, he said, “are now being made for all my men. All of them wear the same kinds of clothing. We are like brothers, there are no differences.”

He laughed like a child and flashed his big white teeth, like a tame wolf.

“I’ve come here to get weapons for the comrades in Aragon. If the government gives us the arms we need, we can take Saragossa in a few days.”

“It’s not true that there are no weapons. I know people who are offering us every kind of weapon we would ever want. They only have one small requirement: that we pay them in gold. These bourgeoisie do not have any human feelings when it comes to money. Our government, however, has piles of gold. And what is all this gold being used for? To win the war? That’s what they say. Now we shall see if what they are saying is true. Tomorrow we are going to have a discussion with them at the Ministry of War. I will tell them where we can get weapons, if they will pay for them. Otherwise, what good is all that gold stored in the Bank of Spain?”

We went to eat at a restaurant on the Gran Vía run by the Gastronomic Trade Union. It was a simple meal. Durruti spoke to us about the battles in Barcelona and on the Aragon Front. He laughed a lot and seemed to view the future with confidence.

After our meal we went to the Ministry of War, where Durruti spoke with Largo Caballero; afterwards he was received by Indalecio Prieto at the Ministry of the Navy. At that time the government placed great hopes in Russian aid. Largo Caballero was commonly depicted at the time as the “Spanish Lenin”. Durruti was very disappointed by the discussions. He was treated well, they made promises to him and they offered all kinds of explanations to justify why there were no weapons for the anarchists. But nothing changed. It was soon revealed that their promises were empty.

[Ariel]

One day, Largo Caballero (who can corroborate this account) summoned Durruti to Madrid to offer him a Ministry in his new Cabinet, which also had other anarchist members. Durruti had never seen Largo Caballero before; he did not even know what he looked like. When I asked him about his impression of his conversation with Largo Caballero, Durruti told me:

“I expected to meet a forty-year old man, and suddenly I found myself face-to-face with an elderly man. I always thought he was just another politician like all the rest, but his political convictions were so rigid that I was almost intimidated.”

Durruti did not accept a Ministry. He thought that his presence at the front was more important. And he was certainly irreplaceable at the front. His column was fanatically devoted to him and obeyed him blindly.

[Antonio de la Villa]

Buenaventura Durruti came to Madrid precisely when everything seemed to indicate that we were incapable of waging war, attacking, or even mounting a defense, at the very moment when our defeats were beginning to make us lose our heads. He came backed by the prestige of several columns that had never retreated, but which had conquered hundreds of square kilometers of terrain in Aragon. We therefore decided to ask him if he would allow us to interview him.

Durruti referred first of all to a problem that could not be discussed publicly at the time. He had come to Madrid for a personal interview with the Minister of War; he wanted to talk about the two million cartridges that he needed to put the finishing touches on his planned offensive against Saragossa. He informed our editor-in-chief of these discussions. Facts were disclosed that we cannot reveal even today. Later, Durruti spoke of his strategic conceptions, of the revolutionary character of the militias and of his categorical position on the problem of discipline.

DURRUTI: You only need a little common sense to clearly understand the purposes of the enemy's maneuvers: the enemy is staking everything on one card—the conquest of Madrid. They are intoxicated by the idea of conquering the capital. But their forces will be broken on our defensive lines, and since, in order to be able to launch this desperate attack, they will have to withdraw reserve forces from other sectors, the defense of Madrid, as long as we combine it with attacks on other fronts, will allow us to crush and defeat the enemy. That is all there is to it.

But you must understand that a city is not defended with words, but with fortifications. The pick and the shovel are just as indispensable as the rifle. In Madrid there are too many shirkers and parasites. All of them have to be mobilized. Not one drop of gasoline must be wasted. Our power in Aragon is based on the fact that every conquest of territory, no matter how small, is

immediately consolidated with the construction of trench systems. Our militiamen have learned that when the enemy attacks there is nothing more dangerous than retreating; the safest thing to do is stand your ground. It is not true that the instinct of self-preservation leads to defeat. One always fights to live. This instinct is very strong and we must take advantage of it in combat. The instinct of self-preservation enhances the capacity for resistance of my soldiers. But this demands that we seriously address the problem of fortifications. Therefore, I think that here, too, in the central sector of the front, it is absolutely necessary to construct a trench network that is well-protected with barbed wire and advance posts. Madrid must be transformed into a fortress, the city must be exclusively devoted to the war and to defense. Only in this way will we be able to decimate the enemy forces here, which will also make it possible for us to obtain victories on other fronts.

INTERVIEWER: What can you tell us about your column?

DURRUTI: I am satisfied with it. My men have everything they need, and when the moment comes they attack with great courage. I am not saying that the militia has been transformed into a mere military machine. No. They know why, and for what, they are fighting. They are revolutionaries. What impels them to fight is not empty words or more or less promising legislation. They are going to conquer the land, the factories, the means of transport, bread, and a new culture. They know that their future depends on our victory.

We are waging war and carrying out the revolution at the same time; in my opinion, this is what the circumstances require. Revolutionary measures of concern to the people do not apply only to the home front, in Barcelona; they are valid at the front line, too.

In each village we conquer we immediately revolutionize everyday life. This is the best part of our campaign. A great deal of passion is required for this. When I have some time to myself I often think about the enormous scale of the task we have taken upon ourselves and which we have now begun to carry out. Then I understand the magnitude of my responsibility. A defeat of my column would be terrible, because we cannot just retreat like any other army. We would have to bring with us all the inhabitants of the places we occupied, without exception. Because between our advance posts and Barcelona, there are only combatants. Everyone is working for the war and for the revolution. That is our strength.

INTERVIEWER: Let's talk now about the most widely-discussed topic of the moment: the problem of discipline.

DURRUTI: Why not? There is a lot of talk about this, but very few of those who are talking about it really go to the heart of the problem. For me, discipline means respecting one's own responsibility and that of others. I am opposed to all barracks discipline, because it leads to brutalization, hatred and mechanical functioning. But I don't endorse a misunderstood freedom that cowards profess to

absolve themselves of all responsibility right from the start. In our organization, the CNT, there is a correct understanding of discipline; that is why the anarchists respect the decisions of the comrades in whom they have placed their confidence. In times of war the chosen delegates must be obeyed, or else all operations are condemned to failure. If the men do not agree with them, they must recall their delegates at an assembly and replace them with others.

My experience in the column has allowed me to get to know all the tricks that the soldiers resort to in war: the sick mother, the dying mother, the wife who is having a baby, the baby that has a fever.... But I have my own home remedies to counteract such excuses. A few extra days of hard labor for the liar! Demoralizing letters—into the wastebasket! Anyone who insists on going home because, of course, he joined as a volunteer, must listen to a sermon from me first. I make him understand that he is letting all of us down, because we counted on him. Then we take his weapons away from him, which, when all is said and done, belong to the column. If he still insists on leaving, he can walk home, because we need the motor vehicles exclusively for the war. But this seldom happens, because the militiaman also has his self-respect. In general, it is enough for me to tell them they can't pull the wool over my eyes, and that I am the commander of the column, and they immediately return to the front line and fight like heroes.

I am satisfied with my comrades, and I hope that they are also satisfied with me. They lack nothing. Their wives and girlfriends can visit them for two days on the front. Then they go home. The newspapers are delivered every day, the food is very good, there are books, all the books we want, and when the front is quiet we engage in discussions to fan the flames of the comrades' revolutionary spirit. We are not lazy, there is always something to do. We must extend and improve the fortifications, above all. What time is it? One in the morning? At this time my men will be digging trenches, and I assure you that they are doing so energetically.

We will win the war!

[Durruti 7]

One day we flew together to Madrid, I don't remember why, in André Malraux's airplane. It was a very small plane and it was a rough ride. In Madrid we passed by the police headquarters, and they got a kick out of asking Durruti for his papers and checking his criminal record. The Spanish police also did me the honor of telling me they knew all about me, too. They had even obtained my police file from Paris. We were very amused.

[Émilienne Morin]

## **The transfer**



I must say that I was possibly the first person to think that Durruti should come with his column to Madrid. The National Committee of the CNT embraced this idea. Mariano R. Vázquez, its secretary, told Durruti: “Yes, we need you in Madrid, the time has come. The Fifth Regiment is getting all the attention here and the arrival of the international brigades is imminent. What are we doing to counteract their influence? You have to capitalize on your prestige and the fighting prowess of your column, otherwise we will be politically marginalized.”

[Federica Montseny 1]

I was totally against transferring Durruti to Madrid. On the way to Barcelona, I was discussing the question with Federica Montseny. I asked her if it was not more important for the revolution to keep him alive instead of sending him to die in Madrid. We were familiar with his courage and audacity. To me it seemed absurd to send him to the capital, above all because he had so few troops. It would have been another thing entirely if we were able to send an expeditionary force of 50,000 militiamen to the front, but this was impossible.

[Juan García Oliver 2]

Durruti went to Madrid reluctantly. At a meeting of all the commanders on the Aragon Front it was resolved to organize our own column under Durruti's command to break the siege of the capital. This column was also supposed to include socialists and other units. Durruti argued up to the very last moment for a decisive offensive against Saragossa. But there was a shortage of arms and ammunition, and that is why it was decided to transfer the column to Madrid. This column was to be composed of 6,000 men and several batteries of artillery. Durruti had to yield. The social democrats refused to fight under his command.

[Diego Abad de Santillán 1]

I don't know whether or not it is true that in Madrid General Miaja called Durruti's troops cowards. If he really did say that, and if it is true that those troops fought badly in Madrid, we must take the following facts into account: most of them had no front line experience and they had been sent unprepared into a veritable inferno.

I can state with certainty that the bulk of the Durruti Column never left their sector on the Aragon Front, and that the troops Durruti brought to Madrid were mostly volunteers that the anarchist organizations of Barcelona had recently recruited and trained.

I remember the last night that Durruti spent with his column in Aragon. After dinner he spoke of his departure and asked, “Does anyone want to come with me?”

They did not take me into account, of course. Durruti said that he only wanted to bring a few of his loyal friends for his escort and to command the reservists that he would be bringing to Madrid.

[Jesús Arnal Pena 2]

I had a daughter who was getting married then, and of course I went home, to Badalona. I took a one-day leave to attend the wedding. At the time, you did not need a priest. We signed the document and that was all. We had prepared a small banquet. I had to make a speech, and I said, "I hope that all goes well with you, that you will both get along with each other and that you will be happy. You will have good luck, the situation is favorable, because the people have taken power". Etcetera, etcetera. Suddenly I heard a car pull up outside, and two comrades walked into the room and said, "What's going on here, Rionda? We have to talk to you". "Look, my daughter is getting married." "Durruti has summoned us from Barcelona, he needs you, the column is leaving today for Madrid." "What? To Madrid? I had no idea!" So I had to leave the newlyweds and everyone else, I took my revolver, we got in the car, and we made our escape.

[Ricardo Rionda Castro]

Before his departure for Madrid, Durruti told his men, "The situation in Madrid is critical, almost desperate. Let's go, we have some killing to do, we have no other choice but to die in Madrid".

[Ramón García López]

The situation was terrible: we were caught in an impossible conundrum. The communists had vastly augmented their influence due to the supply of arms from the Soviet Union. We were afraid that the same fate awaited the Spanish anarchists as befell the Russian anarchists. This was enough to convince Durruti, he understood that we needed to be present everywhere. We had to prevent any kind of deal with the fascists. (From the very first day of the Civil War, the republicans had been considering the possibility of a peaceful resolution.) I am certain that without us the war would never have lasted three years.

The arrival of Durruti and his division had a major impact on the morale of the defenders of Madrid. When the column marched down the streets of the city the people seemed to be electrified. Everyone was saying, "Durruti is here!"

[Federica Montseny 1]

Immediately after he arrived, Durruti presented himself to the commander in chief of the armed forces, General Miaja, and the Chief of Staff of the General Staff, Major Vicente Rojo, and announced the imminent arrival of his troops.

That same day he inspected the defensive line, situated a few kilometers from the heart of the city. He was appalled by the condition of the defensive fortifications. From his command post he called the Minister of War, Largo Caballero, and bluntly described the situation. "If Madrid is not yet in the hands of the fascists, this is due only to the enemy's lack of resolve; the city is defenseless. At some points a heroic battle is being waged, but in other places no efforts are being made to repel the enemy. It is hardly surprising that the enemy forces are constantly gaining ground, especially in the Ciudad Universitaria, the Cerro de los Ángeles and in Carabanchel Alto and Carabanchel Bajo."

The Minister of Defense promised Durruti all the support the government could possibly give him and assured him that he would be given full powers. He also informed him that new international brigades were on the way and that the defenders could also count on air support and tanks.

[Ricardo Sanz 4]

He proposed to the leader of the government, Largo Caballero, that he should promote him [Durruti] to the rank of General and entrust him with the defense of the capital. I don't think that General Miaja's actions can be blamed; Madrid, after all, was still in the hands of the anti-fascists and the revolution. But I am certain that Durruti would also have been successful.

[Juan García Oliver 2]

When the republican government departed from the besieged capital on November 6 and fled to Valencia, its prestige suffered a hard blow. After the heroic proclamations that Largo Caballero had so often made, this sort of abdication seemed quite strange to the population of the city.

If the anarchists had wanted to do so, this would have been the right time to definitively get rid of the central government once and for all and proclaim the Commune of Madrid. It is another question entirely to ask whether this would have been prudent. Such a measure would have enjoyed the support of the working class masses and of the combatants on the front, but it surely would have earned them the enmity of Russia and of the groups controlled by the Russians.

In any event, with the departure of the government to Valencia the moment of truth had arrived. All the ostentatious rhetoric about unity and discipline was replaced by an authentic dynamism and a feeling of responsibility and initiative. From then on, no one would place their trust in heroic speeches, but only in the convincing power of example. Now, the real work of defense began; the masses were in charge. The disappearance of the Ministers had a salutary effect.

[A. and D. Prudhommeaux]

He had just arrived in Madrid, and Durruti broadcast over the radio a vehement and resounding speech denouncing shirkers, false revolutionaries and those who were all talk and no action. He offered each inhabitant of Madrid a rifle or a shovel and he called upon them to dig trenches and build barricades. Almost immediately, something was achieved that all the communiqués and speeches by the government were unable to attain: a euphoric enthusiasm swept over the city. Up until then, the evacuation of the members of the population who were incapable of participating in combat or civil defense had been ineffectively organized, because the government was afraid that these measures would undermine the morale of the city. Durruti and the CNT Defense Committee, however, treated the *madrileños* as responsible adults. The success of the evacuation proved that they were right to do so. The CNT, whose members were the left wing of the working class, set an example by organizing a brigade for civil defense.

[A. and D. Prudhommeaux]

A soldier's value is diminished when he does not believe in the policy of the government. That is why the anarchists generally make poor soldiers. They do not want to fight for Caballero, for Negrín, or for Martínez Barrio, or for the government that these men represent.

A few days after I enlisted as a volunteer, André Marty posted some guards who were armed to the teeth in front of the camps of the international brigades. He had found out that Durruti was on his way to Madrid with a column of 10,000 anarchists from Barcelona, and that he had already reached Albacete. Later it was discovered that the column had only 3,000 men and that they harbored no hostile intentions towards our brigade. They were extraordinarily impetuous men, but apart from that they harmed no one. The communist Marty had a perverse mistrust towards these men.

[Louis Fischer]<sup>10</sup>

When the fascist gangs closed in on Madrid, Durruti immediately departed for the front with a unit of 5,000 men. He declared that he was ready to submit without hesitation to the leadership of a unified and centralized command for the defense of Madrid. Influenced by the lessons of the revolutionary struggle in Spain, Durruti was moving closer and closer to the line of the Communist Party. In a conversation with a representative of the Soviet press, he said, "Yes, I feel like a Bolshevik. I am ready to hang Stalin's portrait in my command post". Durruti's letter to the proletariat of the USSR is imbued with an extraordinary love for and a profound faith in the power of the organized proletariat.

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<sup>10</sup> I was unable to locate these passages in the English edition of Louis' Fischer's book, *The War in Spain*, so I translated them from the Spanish translation [American translator's note].

[Communist International]

The column arrived in Madrid in three special trains and a long convoy of trucks, and was billeted in the Granada barracks. It was composed almost exclusively of volunteers. It was armed with new weapons and equipment that had recently arrived, especially very powerful Winchester rifles, which were, however, single shot rifles and very dangerous to handle.

[Ricardo Sanz 3]

## **Deliberations**

On the evening of November 13 the Durruti column enters Madrid. It is welcomed with enthusiasm. The troops are exhausted. They are immediately billeted in the barracks on Granada Street, where they are fed and where they will sleep tonight to recover from their exhausting journey.

The soldiers had hardly settled into their barracks when the news came that enemy forces had conquered most of the buildings of the Ciudad Universitaria and that, having met no serious resistance, they are on the verge of advancing towards the Modelo prison and Moncloa Square.

General Miaja summoned Durruti to his headquarters and asked him to lead his column to the front immediately, without taking into account the exhaustion of the troops. Durruti replied that this was impossible; he knew his men. He warned that a hasty attack could have fatal consequences. Miaja understands Durruti's objections, but sees no other solution. The chief of staff of the general staff agrees with him: the column must depart for the front at the first light of dawn to prevent a decisive invasion by the enemy forces.

Durruti interrupts the discussion, goes to his general headquarters on Granada Street, summons his men to a meeting and explains the situation to them. On that very same night the column assembled in the courtyard of the barracks and marched towards the front.

[Ricardo Sanz 4]

November 14, 1936. The troops arrive from Catalonia, led by Durruti.

Three thousand men, very well armed and equipped, impossible when you think of the bizarre-looking soldiers that Durruti had in Bujaraloz.

He embraced me, beaming, like an old friend. And immediately he began to crack jokes.

“You see, I haven’t taken Saragossa, they haven’t killed me, and I still haven’t turned into a Marxist. Everything’s still up in the air.”

He has lost some weight, he looks more like a soldier, more military, he no longer speaks with his assistants as if he were at an assembly, now he has the tone of a commander.

Durruti asked for an officer to serve as an advisor. Santi was proposed. He asked if he could rely on him, and he accepted. Santi is the first communist to serve in Durruti’s army corps. When Santi arrived, Durruti told him:

“You are a communist. Good, we’ll see. You will always be at my side. We will eat together and sleep in the same room. Now we’ll see.”

Santi responded:

“I expect to have some free time, no? In war there is always some free time, once in a while. I ask your permission to withdraw during these free moments.”

“What do you want to do during those moments?”

“I would like to use that time to teach your soldiers how to operate the machine gun. They are very bad with the machine gun. I would like to train a few groups and organize a brigade with machine guns.”

Durruti smiled:

“I want you, too. Teach me how to operate a machine gun.”

García Oliver, who is now the Minister of Justice, also arrived in Madrid at the same time. The two famous anarchists, Durruti and Oliver, met with Miaja and Rojo. They declared that the anarchist troops came from Catalonia to save Madrid, and that they would save Madrid. But after they are done, they do not want to stay there, they want to return to the walls of Saragossa. They requested that Durruti’s troops should be sent to a special section of the front, where the anarchists can show what they can do. Otherwise their presence could give rise to misinterpretations. Yes, it might even happen that other parties would claim responsibility for the achievements of the anarchists.

Rojo proposed that the troops should remain at the Casa de Campo, so that in the morning they can attack the fascists and drive them out of the park towards the southwest. Durruti and Oliver agreed. Later I spoke with them. They were convinced that their troops would perform their mission to perfection.

[Mikhail Koltsov]

On November 15 I was in Madrid. I went to the Ministry of War to speak with general Goriev, who had assumed military command. I asked an orderly where I could find general Goriev. The man indicated that I should follow him; while we walked down long corridors, he asked everyone we met, “have you seen the Russian general? Where is the Russian general?” Goriev’s presence there was a secret; but Spaniards hate secrets.

The night was well advanced when I met with Goriev in the general headquarters. The general was awaiting the latest news from the front. Durruti and his column had already launched their attack. His assistant was an officer in the Red Army, a tall Circassian. The anarchists had occupied a position on the front near the hill at the Casa de Campo, where they dominated the access points to downtown Madrid. They were fresh troops; Goriev had entrusted them with an important sector.

Shortly after midnight the Circassian came and reported that the anarchists had fled, panic-stricken, from an attack by a small Moroccan unit. As a result, the university zone was now defenseless, at the mercy of Franco.

Durruti demanded that his men stand and fight. This made him unpopular. I often saw him at night in the Gran Vía Hotel. He was surrounded by a strong personal escort, all of them with their fingers on the triggers of their machine pistols.

[Louis Fischer]<sup>11</sup>

The Durruti column arrived with the somewhat arrogant boast that they would save Madrid. And they wanted to save Madrid as soon as possible, so they could return as soon as possible to Aragon. They asked to be posted to the sector of the front where the enemy’s forces had penetrated most deeply; they wanted to drive them out of their positions. They were assigned to the Casa de Campo sector.

I met Durruti on November 18 or 19. We met in Miaja’s headquarters, during a staff meeting that was attended by some of the commanders of the sectors of the Madrid front. At this meeting Durruti asked for replacements for his troops so they could return to Aragon. Various officers, myself included, objected that it would be most unfortunate to replace troops who had hardly spent three days in combat. The immense majority of the soldiers had been fighting on the same front since the first day of the war, without having received or asked for even one day of leave. However, we agreed to allow Durruti’s column to depart if he insisted. With him or without him, we would continue to defend Madrid as we had done before his arrival.

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<sup>11</sup> I was unable to locate these passages in the English edition of Louis’ Fischer’s book, *The War in Spain*, so I translated them from the Spanish translation [American translator’s note].

Durruti immediately offered some explanations about the character, the customs and the ideas that prevailed in his unit with respect to discipline and the prerogatives of command. I understood the tragedy of this strong and good man, a brave combatant, the victim of the very ideas for which he was fighting. He promised to do everything in his power to get his men to understand the need to stay and defend Madrid. We left the meeting together and we said goodbye to each other amicably; each of us returned to our respective sector of the front.

[Enrique Lister]

## **Pure barbarians**

Yes, we went to Madrid, and what did we see right in the middle of the street? Some idiot was drilling four or five guys, right, left, right, and all of them had rifles in their hands. This was too much! We soon put an end to this situation. “What’s going on here? Do you have bats in your belfry? We did not come here to get exercise, we are going to the front!” This annoyed us right from the start, of course. Everyone began to tremble with fear, including the government, and they shouted, “These men are a gang of shameless thugs!” One time, we left the barracks: “Let’s have a drink before we eat!” “Where?” “There, next to the telephone company building, they have lobsters, too.” “What? Lobsters?”, shouted the owner of the restaurant. “Where are you from?” “We’re from the Durruti column!” Then he immediately brought us the lobsters. When we left we came across a wounded woman on the street. Someone had shot her from a window. And another woman shouted, “There, up there, a sniper, a fascist”. And we ran up the stairs, we found the guy and we threw him out the window onto the street. And the government said, “They are barbarians!” But we let them complain and we went on our way.

[Ricardo Rionda Castro]

In Madrid the Durruti column made extensive use of the so-called FAI bomb. It was a very heavy hand grenade, it weighed about a kilo and had a lot of explosive power. It was especially suited to street fighting. But it was no good in the open field. It could not be thrown very far because of its great weight. It usually blew up in the air before hitting the ground. On the other hand, it was very effective when it was thrown from rooftops and balconies. Due to its great explosive force, in Madrid it was even used against enemy tanks. In a command post on Miguel Ángel Street, Durruti had stockpiled 35,000 FAI bombs in a pyramid of crates, in the garage of the palace. When the neighbors discovered the existence of this arsenal they complained to the Minister of War about the danger posed by this stockpile in case of aerial attack; but just after a month they were able to transfer the FAI bombs to a more secure, isolated basement.

[Ricardo Sanz 3]



In October 1936 I led a group of doctors from Catalonia. The Director of the Barcelona department of health had recommended us for a mission to Madrid to set up Military Hospital No. 21 there, in the Hotel Ritz, along with some doctors from Madrid.

We were, of course, due to our background, our education and our mentality, members of the bourgeoisie. But the anarchists were immediately convinced that we wanted to help them with all the knowledge and conscientiousness of which we were capable, and that we were not traitors. From then on, they trusted and respected us.

Although we did not subscribe to their ideas, I must say that in all my life I have seldom met anyone as generous and as self-sacrificing as the anarchists. They had a very special morality. For example, it seemed very wrong to them that a man should have more than one woman. They thought that it was immoral to have two amorous relationships at the same time. On the other hand, they were totally against bourgeois marriage. When a man did not get along with his girlfriend, he looked for another one, without any regrets. But to have two girlfriends at the same time: no.

They also had some peculiar ideas about property. They possessed almost nothing, and were in favor of expropriating the bourgeoisie. But they hated theft. For example, one day they summoned me to the general headquarters of the Durruti column in Madrid. On the ground, there was a dead militiaman; I even remember his name, Valena. I had to produce a death certificate so that he could be buried. I asked about the cause of his death. They coldly responded that they had shot him twice because during a search of a house he had stolen a watch and two bracelets. Imagine: at that time there were constant shootings in Madrid, and practically no trials. Besides, these searches were organized by the anarchists themselves. They were trying to collect money for the CNT. But beware: if someone tries to keep some of the loot in his pocket, they shoot him on the spot. That was the morality of the anarchists.

[Martínez Fraile]

Twenty-four hours before the demolition of the French Bridge, in the middle of the battle of Madrid, I met with Durruti. We shared a soldier's rations: bread and a little tinned beef. Durruti was in a good mood, and, referring somewhat ironically to the position that I occupied at the time, he laughed and said, with his mouth full of food, "A meal fit for a government Minister!" A sceptical militiaman answered him, "No way, Ministers never eat like this. They don't even know what goes on here". Durruti laughed even harder. "Look", he said, "one is right here, this is a Minister". But the militiaman refused to believe that a Minister would eat bread and bully beef in a trench.

[Juan García Oliver 2]

## **The battle**

November 19, 1936. The rebels are furiously attacking the Ciudad Universitaria. They bring in ever more reinforcements, more artillery and grenade launchers. They pay a very heavy price for their attacks, and their losses, especially among the Moroccans, are enormous. The squares between the buildings of the Ciudad Universitaria are covered with bodies. Durruti is very despondent, because it was precisely his unit that afforded the enemy the opportunity to infiltrate into the city. But he wants to compensate for this setback with another attack at the same point where the anarchists retreated. The constant bombings and the murder of defenseless civilians has driven him blind with rage. His big fists are clenched, his tense, crouched figure seems to personify an old Roman gladiator possessed by a desperate desire for freedom.

November 21, 1936. It rained all day, again.

At midday, along with some republican units, I managed to penetrate to the university medical clinic and the Santa Cristina nursing home. Both buildings have been taken in a frontal assault with hand grenades and bayonets.

The Moroccans and the regular troops have retreated two hundred meters, but not another inch. They are still firing on the buildings they had to evacuate. We have to crawl on the ground, communication trenches have not yet been dug.

One of the buildings of the medical center complex, next to a building that was under construction, is totally destroyed. The walls and floors are riddled with bullets, the furniture has been destroyed and broken into pieces. The beds are all tossed about, and the floors are covered with shards of glass and rubble.

In the basement, in the mortuary, I suddenly came face to face with the old undertaker. He managed to survive unscathed after three successive assaults and retreats during the course of which the building had passed from the control of one side to the other several times. He had asked the soldiers to bring their dead so they could be laid out in the mortuary, and he was offended when they refused. It is obvious that he is not in his right mind.

Who would have thought that his modest little morgue would ever be so full? Who could have predicted that the quietest corner of the university would be turned into the arena where the most bitter and bloody battles would be fought?

Poor Madrid! You considered yourself to be such a carefree, safe and happy city.... You were untouched by the First World War, which took place far away. Now, in fifteen days, you have suffered more than the capital cities of Europe did during four years of war. The city has become a battlefield!

When we returned, crawling back to the second line, exhausted, drenched, filthy and silent, although content, someone ran up to us and told us that Durruti had been killed in the adjacent sector, at the Parque del Oeste. That very same morning we had crossed paths with him on the stairs at the Ministry of War. I invited him to come with us to the Santa Cristina nursing home. Durruti shook his head. He had to attend to his own sector, he had to protect his units from the rain, above all.

I cracked a joke: “What, are they made of sugar?”

He responded angrily: “Yes, they are made of sugar, they dissolve in water. Of every two, one remains. They threw away their lives in Madrid.” Those were his last words to me. He was in a bad mood.

[Mikhail Koltsov]

Between November 13 and 19, 1936, sixty percent of the troops that Durruti commanded in Madrid were killed in action against enemy forces, including most of his general staff. The survivors were completely exhausted and sleepless.

[Ricardo Sanz 2]

Militarily, it was a disaster. A column with that mentality couldn't do anything in Madrid. Simply because they lacked any sense of discipline, each person did whatever he wanted. When they began to understand their mistakes it was already too late. The units with a different ideology, I mean the communists, functioned differently; their military discipline was very strict. Among the anarchists there were no cowards, most of them were extraordinarily courageous, but as a whole they were a disaster from the military point of view.

[Martínez Fraile]

### ***Seventh Commentary: The hero***

The history of Spanish anarchism can easily drive the lover of the truth to despair. Anyone who looks for the facts will come across many versions. What was the total membership of the CNT in 1919? 700,000, 1,000,000, 550,000. Three sources, none better than the others, offer three different numbers. In 1936, at the start of the Civil War, the estimates varied between 1,000,000 and 1,600,000. One year later, the editors of *Solidaridad Obrera* scoffed at academic curiosity and the desire to accommodate future researchers with a single blunt statement: “Enough miserable statistics! They weaken our understanding and paralyze our blood!”

Reality becomes even more vague when we approach the figure of the hero. Durruti's biography is a special case. The contradictions of the oral tradition weave an impenetrable knot of rumors. Did Durruti participate in the attempt to

assassinate President Dato? What countries did he visit in Latin America, and what happened to him there? Who burned the cathedral of Lérida? Was there a rapprochement between Durruti and the communists in the autumn of 1936? There are no answers to these questions. Or there are too many.

The two basic works on the Civil War only devote a few pages to Durruti; but even the scarce information that these two books offer is inconsistent. The Englishman, Hugh Thomas, says that Durruti had been sentenced to death in four countries; that at the end of July 1936 his column was composed of thousands of men; that he was killed by a stray bullet fired from the enemy lines. The Frenchman, Pierre Broué, however, refers only to one death sentence, pronounced in Argentina; he estimates that the column had three thousand militiamen; and he mentions the possibility that Durruti was assassinated by his own men.

These discrepancies are not surprising and these historians must not be held accountable for them. Not even the most zealous critic of the sources will be able to unravel the knot of this tradition; at most, we will be able, with this critic's help, to trace the genealogical roots of the different versions. We will thus be able to observe how, in such genealogies, an obscure propaganda pamphlet acquires a certain respectability by being quoted in a scholarly study. From there, it finds its way into serious accounts, basic works, and encyclopedias. The blind faith in the printed word is very widespread; what is often quoted acquires the validity of a fact.

It is not hard to explain why the history of an organization like the CNT, and even more so, the FAI, unfolds on such an unstable terrain. When the masses themselves intervene in history, instead of leaving their affairs in the hands of "distinguished" politicians, their intervention is generally not accompanied by the publication of the minutes of its proceedings. Only seldom is anything written about what happens in the streets. One must also take into consideration the long periods of underground and illegal activity, which became second nature to the Spanish anarchists. The class struggles in Spain were not news for the daily papers. The clandestine conditions in which men like Durruti operated did not allow for a lot of interviews with photo sessions. Since the Spanish police have good reasons not to open their archives to public scrutiny, we have to rely on two main sources: the propaganda of the CNT from that era and the memoirs of the survivors. Many of those who were there still prefer to remain silent. Those who talk about those times do so with a certain amount of circumspection; furthermore, the passage of time between the 1930s and the 1960s renders memories blurry. The old pamphlets and magazines of the twenties and thirties, many of which have disappeared, have long outlived their objectives; their purpose was immediate agitation, self-justification and denunciation. In these sources the accusations of the police are indignantly denied and the innocence of the comrades is emphatically asserted; often, however, a page or two later they relate their glorious gunfights and successful assassinations and robberies.

The contradictions of this tradition are inseparable from the contents of these sources. These materials do not lend themselves to passive reading. Reading in this context means differentiating, judging and taking sides.

The strange twilight that enshrouds the history of Spanish anarchism becomes more dense as we approach the main theme of this book. Even after having read everything that is known about him, Durruti remains what he always was: an unknown man, a face in the crowd. It is shocking to see how the same negative definitions are repeated in all the accounts: “He was not a public speaker”, “He didn’t think about himself”, “He was not a theoretician”, “I don’t think of him as a general”, “He was not arrogant”, “He did not act like the leader of a party”, “There was nothing military about him”, “Organizational work was not his strong point”, “In our movement there were many Durrutis”, “He was not a functionary, an intellectual or a strategist”. We do not know what he really was. The essential is inexpressible. It is impossible to grasp what is typical of Durruti in his individual peculiarity. What stands out in the anecdotal details is his social attitude, even in his most private actions. The descriptions retain an unmistakably proletarian profile; they sketch a silhouette without giving it any psychological content.

Our understanding is not equal to the task of understanding Durruti. This was precisely why the masses felt reflected in him. His individual existence was entirely absorbed by a social character: that of the hero. But the history of a hero obeys laws that the bourgeois novel of individual development<sup>12</sup> does not comprehend. Its metabolism is oriented by needs that are even more powerful than mere facts. The legend gathers anecdotes, adventures and secrets; it seeks out what it needs and discards what is of no use to it; and in this way it attains to a concordance that it tenaciously defends. The enemy who stubbornly persists in demolishing and “unmasking” the hero comes to grief in his collision with the synoptic nature of these collective narratives, against their consistent character and their density. The scientific refutation of certain details affects the history of a hero even less. This immunity grants the hero a strange political influence, which even the most devoted grandmaster of political realism has to take into account; such people do not oppose the hero, but rather attempt to exploit his authority, above all when he is dead and cannot defend himself.

The dramatic schema of the heroic legend has now been established in its essential features. The hero’s origins are modest. He emerges from his anonymity as an exemplary individual fighter. His glory is united with his valor, with his sincerity and with his solidarity. He prevails in desperate situations, in persecution and in exile. Where others fall, he always escapes, as if he were invulnerable. However, only by way of his death will his existence be complete. A death like that always has something enigmatic about it. Basically, it can only be explained by betrayal. The end of the hero seems like a portent, but also a consummation.

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<sup>12</sup> In the original German text: *Entwicklungsroman*.

The legend is crystallized in that precise instant. His funeral is turned into a demonstration. His name is displayed in the streets, his portrait appears on walls and political posters; it becomes a talisman. The victory of his cause would have led to his canonization, which almost always means abuse and betrayal. In that case, even Durruti would have been turned into an official hero, a national hero. He was spared this fate by the defeat of the revolution. So he remained what he always was: a proletarian hero, a defender of the exploited, the oppressed and the persecuted. He belongs to the anti-history that is not presented in textbooks. His grave is in the suburbs of Barcelona, in the shadow of a factory. There are always flowers on the white stone slab. No sculptor chiseled his name. Only if you look very closely, you can read what some unknown person scraped with a knife in the stone: the word, "Durruti".

## **Death**

### **The news**

I returned from the front with my men and when I reached Moncloa Square someone called out to me: "Rionda, come here." "Who, me?" "Yes, you". I approached and he told me, "Rionda, come right away, Durruti is dying". It was one of the members of his escort who told me this, Ramón García, a short-sighted man with a narrow face.

[Ricardo Rionda Castro]

I was sitting at my typewriter. It was evening when suddenly I saw Durruti's chauffeur come through the door. His name was Julio Graves, a young man of average height who always stood up straight. He asked me about the whereabouts of my brother, Eduardo, whom he had known well since the time of the revolutionary battles in Barcelona. I told him that Eduardo was sleeping in the next room. I did not pay much attention to the chauffeur, but I noticed that he seemed very agitated and also sad. I attributed this to the hard times we were undergoing at the time.

When my brother woke up I heard them exchange a few words. Soon, both of them began to cry. I got up immediately and went to the room next door.

"What's going on?", I asked.

"Durruti is mortally wounded. Maybe he's already dead."

"It's better that no one finds out", added comrade Julio Graves.

It was 5:00 p.m.

The three of us went to the Hotel Ritz; the hospital of the Catalanian militias was located there. Very few people had heard the news. In the hospital I found Dr. Santamaría, an anarchist physician who had come to Madrid with Durruti's troops from the Aragon Front. Tall and thin, wearing his white surgeon's smock, he informed me about the nature of Durruti's wound. He could not save Durruti's life.

A nurse left Durruti's room. They were talking about a catheter, which they had inserted twice.

I went to the offices of the National Committee of the CNT. Some rumors had already begun to spread. The comrades said that it was necessary to keep the matter secret. I did not dare to make a phone call to Barcelona to convey the news until very late that night.

The anarchist leadership met to deliberate; we had to keep the results of this meeting secret. We discussed the defense of Madrid, above all. Durruti was a man whose name alone could win a battle, even after his death, like El Cid.

[Ariel]

I don't recall the exact date, but one afternoon, around 3:30, they brought this anarchist leader to the hospital, seriously wounded—mortally wounded, in my view. At that time there was no cardiac surgery with adequate methods and techniques. And I informed my colleagues. We could not operate; a fatal outcome was certain. The very eminent doctor Bastos corroborated my prognosis and also recommended that surgery should not be attempted.

As for the entry point of the bullet, it was located in the upper rib cage, between the sixth and seventh ribs. The internal lesions were very serious, especially in the pericardial area. There was no room for doubt that the patient would die of an internal hemorrhage.

[Martínez Fraile]

When I got there he was still alive. He recognized me, he was in pain, he wanted to talk, but the doctor would not let him. Then he said something, I could not make it out. Something about the committees. Too many committees! He was always talking about that, ever since we arrived in Madrid. Everywhere you look there is a committee; they have to be flushed out of their holes. Too many committees! Those were his last words.

[Ricardo Rionda Castro]

How our comrade Durruti met his death:

Our departed comrade left for the front around 8:30 in the morning, to visit the advanced positions of his column. Along the way, he came across some militiamen who had abandoned their positions on the front. He ordered his driver to stop his car; just when he was getting out of the car, a shot rang out. It is assumed that they were firing from a window in a small hotel on Moncloa Square. Durruti immediately fell to the ground, without saying a word. The fatal bullet had gone right through his back. The wound was fatal, there was no hope.

[Solidaridad Obrera]

## **Suspicion**

That night, the atmosphere was extremely anxious, highly charged with emotion. The imminent death of Durruti made people lose their bearings; there was a growing fear of possible confrontations and fratricidal struggles within the organizations.

[Martínez Fraile]

The lobby of the Hotel Ritz was full of supporters of the CNT. Many of them were crying. We did not know how to answer their questions. After a while they left. Manzano and Bonilla are ordering the withdrawal of our troops from the front; they expect that conflicts will erupt when they are told about Durruti's death. Our troops were concentrated in the barracks in the Vallecas district and they were ordered to remain there. On the 21<sup>st</sup>, Durruti's death was officially announced. On that same day those of us who were witnesses were summoned by Marianet, who made us swear that we would remain silent about the circumstances of his death.

[Ramón García Castro]

Durruti's death was a hard blow, of course. He was on his way back from the front, heading towards the city, he got out of his car and he was mortally wounded. In the first official version, that of the CNT, it is said that a Civil Guard, an enemy sniper, had picked him off from a balcony with a Mauser. This presupposed an incredibly perfect aim, he was hit almost right in the heart. It seemed incredible to us. Because he was not alone, he was surrounded by his bodyguards, his friends. Where did the bullet come from? We had our doubts.

[Jaume Miravittles 1]

On the day after I arrived in Madrid I went to the Granada barracks, where the surviving soldiers of the column were billeted. They were gathered in a large open hall. Federica Montseny, who was at that time a Cabinet Minister, came with me. She spoke first and told the troops that I had been appointed to be Durruti's successor.



The crowd grew restive. Besides the death of Durruti on the previous day, two comrades from the column had been killed as they walked down a street far from the front lines. The militiamen shouted:

“No, Sanz, not you!”

“What’s going on?”, I asked.

One of the soldiers answered:

“Comrade Sanz, don’t be surprised that we are angry. We are all convinced that it was not the fascists who killed Durruti. It was our enemies within our own ranks, our enemies within the Republic. They killed him because they knew that Durruti was incorruptible and would not make shady deals. The same thing will happen to you if you are not careful. They want to liquidate those who represent revolutionary ideas. That is what is happening here. There are people who are afraid that the revolution is going too far. Yesterday they shot two of our comrades in the back as they were walking down the street. They will kill you, too, if you stay in Madrid. We want to get out of here as soon as possible, we want to go back to Aragon. There we know who we are fighting against, there we don’t have enemies who attack us from behind.”

That is what more or less all of them thought.

As it turned out, a large part of the column returned to Aragon. The others remained in Madrid.

[Ricardo Sanz 3]

As soon as he was dead, the lies began to spread. So-and-so told me that the communists killed him. Didn’t you hear it on the radio? The men of the Durruti column could hardly be restrained. They wanted to throw away their guns and go home, they were afraid that they would be killed, too. It was the fascist radio broadcasts that spread these despicable lies. First it was said that it was the communists. That is what the fascist’s spokesman, Queipo de Llano, said. Then they changed their story, they said it was not the communists but Durruti’s own bodyguards. What an uproar this unleashed! In Madrid, the military command centers and the government were plunged into an extraordinary state of confusion, everyone was saying the most outrageous things and repeating the most incredible rumors. This made us very angry. I went myself to our newspapers, the newspapers of the CNT, and I told them: “We are at war and we cannot go on like this, you have to write a refutation, and soon, you have to put an end to this chaos!” And that is what they did.

[Ricardo Rionda Castro]

At first we did not discount the possibility that it was a skillfully planned assassination. This theory found support in the deep-seated rivalries that prevailed between the various parties and groups. With the death of Durruti, one of the last notorious men of the revolution who had influence over the masses disappeared. His life was the stuff of which legends are made. Precisely because he aroused such strong feelings in the people, many believed that he was assassinated, even though this conjecture could not be confirmed, given the circumstances.

The radio broadcasts of the rebels, of course, took full advantage of our demoralization and confusion. The committees of the CNT and the FAI viewed these broadcasts as part of a Machiavellian plot and refuted them on November 21 in the following communiqué:

“Workers! The schemers of the so-called ‘Fifth Column’ have spread the rumor that our comrade Durruti was the victim of an insidious and treasonous assassination. We are warning all our comrades against these infamous calumnies. This despicable fiction constitutes an attempt to shatter the powerful unity of action and thought of the proletariat, which is our most effective weapon against fascism. Comrades! Durruti was not the victim of treason. He fell in battle, in the heroic performance of his duty, like other soldiers of freedom. Reject the miserable rumors that the fascists are spreading to break our indestructible alliance. Neither doubt nor discouragement! Do not listen to those irresponsible charlatans whose falsehoods can only lead to fratricide! Those who spread such lies are the enemies of the revolution!

“The National Committee of the CNT. The Peninsular Committee of the FAI.”

[José Peirats 1]

## **Valencia, November 23**

The National Committee of the CNT and the FAI released the following communiqué:

As a result of the death of our comrade Durruti a series of rumors and allegations have been circulating which the committee, with full knowledge of the circumstances, must deny. Our comrade was murdered by a fascist bullet and not, as some people might think, as a result of the schemes of a certain party.

We must not forget that we are at war with fascism, against whose hordes the Spanish proletariat is engaged in a common struggle, side by side with all the anti-fascist forces.

The supreme institution of the anarchist working class of Spain therefore calls upon everyone to refrain from saying things that could be prejudicial to the

success of our operations and could even destroy the sacred unity of the Spanish working class in its struggle against the beasts of reaction.

We hope that this declaration will convince all the comrades and motivate them to remain at their posts.

Forward, to the annihilation of fascism in Spain!

The Committee.

[Solidaridad Obrera]

### **The seven deaths of Durruti**

I am convinced that he was assassinated. Shortly after Durruti died, the most important leaders of Spanish anarchism left Madrid. The political atmosphere underwent an abrupt transformation.

Many anarchists were suddenly subjected to persecution—we need not mention that it was the communists who were behind it. During those nights, it was much more dangerous to carry a CNT-FAI membership card in your pocket than a membership card from one of the political parties of the extreme right.

[Martínez Fraile]

A few days after the disaster of the anarchists at Garabitas Hill, Durruti was killed at the front. They shot him in the back; it is assumed that his own men murdered him, because he was in favor of the active participation of the anarchists in the war and collaboration with the Largo Caballero government.

Many anarchists cherished above all the goal of establishing an ideal libertarian republic in Spain; they did not plan to work with the socialists, the communists or the bourgeois republicans. They did not want to risk their lives for the Largo Caballero government. According to them, it was not “important”.

[Louis Fischer]<sup>13</sup>

Durruti was undoubtedly the victim of his own carelessness. That afternoon he was on his way to the Ciudad Universitaria sector of the front. Absolute calm prevailed there. And it was precisely for that very reason that it was so dangerous, because men were walking around without taking precautions.

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<sup>13</sup> I was unable to locate these passages in the English edition of Louis' Fischer's book, *The War in Spain*, so I translated them from the Spanish translation [American translator's note].

His big Packard sedan stopped near the firing line of his troops. The line faced the University Hospital, a big building with six or seven floors that dominated a wide zone of fire. The enemy occupied the upper floors, while our troops held the lower floors.

When the enemy forces, who were evidently very alert, saw the car stop less than a kilometer away, they waited until the occupants got out; when they were out in the open, without protection, they fired a salvo from a machine gun that mortally wounded Durruti and also slightly wounded two of his bodyguards.

[Ricardo Sanz 3]

The next day, the rumor spread that Durruti, in an attempt to stop a panic-stricken retreat by his troops, was murdered by one of his own men. Once the tragic news was confirmed a short time later, our grief at the loss of this brave officer and fighter was only magnified by the circumstances of his death. As for his unit, not only did it fail to dislodge the enemy forces from their positions, but, to the contrary, the enemy forces drove it out of its own positions. After Durruti's death these troops had to be immediately dismissed. They posed a real threat to the entire Madrid front.

[Enrique Lister]

Durruti's chauffeur told me what happened. He came with me to the Madrid office of *Solidaridad Obrera*, so that we could have a confidential discussion.

"Tell me the truth", I said to comrade Julio Graves.

"There isn't much to tell. After lunch we went to the front, to the Ciudad Universitaria. Comrade Manzana came with us. We came to Cuatro Caminos Square. I turned the corner at Pablo Iglesias Avenue at top speed. We passed by a series of small hotels at the end of the Avenue and then we took a right.

"Durruti's troops had taken up new positions after the serious losses they suffered at Moncloa Square and before the walls of the Modelo Prison. It was a clear day, the autumn afternoon sun was shining on the streets. We came to a side street and then we saw a group of militiamen walking in our direction. Durruti immediately saw that many of these men wanted to abandon the front. He ordered me to stop the car.

"We were within range of enemy fire: the Moorish troops, who occupied the Hospital, had a clear view of the Square. To be safe, I parked the car at the corner of one of the small hotels. Durruti got out of the car and walked towards the fleeing militiamen. He asked them where they were going. They didn't know what to say. Durruti harshly reprimanded them with his rough voice and bluntly ordered them to return to their posts. The soldiers obeyed and turned back.

“Durruti then turned around and started walking back towards the car. The gunfire intensified. The enormous red brick mass of the Hospital Clinic was right in front of us. We heard the whistle of the bullets. As he was grasping the handle of the door to the car he collapsed. He was wounded in the chest. Manzana and I quickly got out of the car and put Durruti in the back seat.

“I did a U-turn as quickly as possible and drove at high speed back to the city, towards the hospital of the Catalanian militias. You know the rest. That is all.”

[Ariel]

In fact, we were operating on a terrain of hypotheses. I only know, from hearsay, of course, a close friend of mine told me, undoubtedly a very well-informed person, in short, I know that Auguste Lecoer, one of the most important men in the French Communist Party, the second in command of the Party after Thorez, until his expulsion due to controversies over Stalin, anyway, this Lecoer, who is currently an anti-Stalinist, said quite openly to his former friends, the communists: it was you who killed Durruti.

[Gaston Leval]

The Anarchists Are Instigating a Saint Bartholomew's Night in Barcelona

Paris, November 23.

According to the *Echo de Paris*, Durruti, the Catalanian anarchist leader who was the soul of the resistance in Madrid, was not killed fighting against the nationalist troops, as the Bolsheviks reported, but was assassinated by the communists.

In Madrid there were clashes between the communists and the anarchists concerning the distribution of the loot after the mansions of the nobility were pillaged. In one of these disputes, Durruti threatened the communists that he would go back to Barcelona with his anarchists and abandon Madrid to its fate. That same afternoon, Durruti was attacked and gunned down at the door of his house by a group of communists.

As the *Echo de Paris* also reports, from Barcelona, the anarchists imposed a reign of terror on the Catalanian capital. Once they heard the news of the assassination of their leader at the hands of the Madrid communists, the anarchists organized a kind of Saint Bartholomew's Night.

Finally, the terrible disorders appeared to have gone too far (!! ) even for the leadership of the anarchist leagues, which is why the latter have issued urgent appeals calling for an end to the bloody terror.

[Völkischer Beobachter]

A telegram from the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Spain:

“We have been notified of the profoundly painful news of the glorious death of our comrade Durruti, the self-sacrificing son of the working class, and the enthusiastic and energetic defender of the unity of the proletariat. The criminal bullet of the fascist gangs has robbed us of a young life, but a life full of sacrifices. We must unite more than ever in the defense of Madrid, until the extermination of the fascist gangs who are drenching our country in blood! For the united struggle on every front in Spain! Avenge our heroes! For the triumph of the Spanish people!

“José Díaz”.

[Solidaridad Obrera]

Later, Durruti’s widow (or was it the Central Committee of the CNT?) sent me the shirt for an exhibition in memory of Durruti, the shirt that he was wearing the day he died. I carefully examined the hole made by the bullet; I also consulted an expert. We concluded that he was shot at point-blank range, because the fabric of the shirt clearly showed traces of burn marks and gunpowder.

We were very well acquainted with the mentality of the anarchists. We knew that in Madrid Durruti was no longer the guerrilla fighter he was in the past; he had become a proper military man. We also knew that he had no qualms about disciplining the leaders of anarchist units who had not performed their duty. He had even ordered some of them to be shot. We therefore concluded that it might have been an act of revenge.

[Jaume Miravittles 1]

One year after Durruti’s death, an exhibition was staged in Barcelona in honor of the heroic defenders of Madrid. Among other things, the shirt that Durruti was wearing when he died was on display. It was in a glass showcase. People gathered around to get a good look at the hole surrounded by burn marks that the bullet had made in the fabric. I was in the exhibition hall when I suddenly heard someone say that it was impossible for that hole to have been made by a gun six hundred meters away. That same night I summoned specialists from the Institute of Forensic Medicine to examine the shirt. Their unanimous conclusion was that the shot had been fired from a maximum distance of ten centimeters.

A few days later I had dinner with Durruti’s French wife.

“How did he die?”, she asked me. “You must know the truth.”

“Yes, I know all about it.”

“What happened?”

She looked me in the eyes.

“Up until the day I die”, I said, “I will abide by the official explanation: that a Civil Guard shot him from above, from a window”—and then, in a whisper, I added: “But I know who killed him. It was one of the men who were with him at the time. It was an act of revenge.”

[Jaume Miravittles 2]

Durruti was a man who breathed and lived the atmosphere of the anarchism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He considered himself an heir of Bakunin, and therefore an inveterate enemy of the Marxists. He was also a very intelligent man, a man who wanted to help the Republic defeat the supporters of general Franco.

There was not much movement on the Aragon Front. In Barcelona, the anarchists had hoarded a large quantity of automatic weapons that would have been very useful in the battle for Madrid, in the vain hope of successfully resisting the communists. They had already backed down from some of their ideological positions to join the government. But their military position was indisputable: they were still capable of winning street battles, occupying radio stations and other communications facilities, or, if it was demanded by their anti-authoritarian principles, to let the enemy forces pass through their lines, to prevent the communists from gaining control of the Republic. (The communists, however, were in no position to obtain this control, because their victory in Spain would surely have unleashed a world war that Moscow did not want at the time.)

A situation therefore arose in which the “ideological purists” in both sectors (the heirs of Marx, on the one side, and the heirs of Bakunin on the other) were obliged to make deals with men who were less pure than they were, who wanted above all to win the war.

It is very much to Durruti’s credit that he declared that he was prepared to go to Madrid to enter into an agreement with the Communist Party and the central government. He appeared with his heavily armed bodyguards in the downstairs restaurants of the Gran Vía, while outside, up on the streets, the grenades of Franco’s troops were exploding. The residents of Madrid had never before seen fighters like them, armed to the teeth; the idea that such dashing, well-equipped men were finally coming to their aid filled them with enthusiasm. Durruti left his escort. He went alone to meet the communists. Fifteen minutes later he was dead, gunned down right in the middle of the street by the agents of an anarchist group that, to top it all off, called itself the “Friends of Durruti”.

The historians of the Civil War falsely depict this episode when they accept the explanation that Durruti went to the front and that he was killed there by unknown persons. For obvious reasons, the republican government and the Communist Party disseminated this version: both of them had an interest in downplaying the conflict between the anarchists and the communists. It was even maintained that Durruti had fallen victim to a stray bullet fired from Franco's trenches. None of this is true. In fact, he was killed on the street, and he was shot in the back. Numerous witnesses were present when he was shot. His death can perhaps be interpreted as an extreme manifestation of the anarchist way of thinking. In any event, it proves that the conflict between the anarchists and the communists was unresolvable.

The Friends of Durruti had organized long before the assassination. This group represented the spirit of the "real" anarchism and the opposition to the authoritarian tendencies of communism. From this point of view, it is logical that his own "friends" would kill him. His death was the final act in the dispute between Bakunin and Karl Marx.

[Anonymous 2]<sup>14</sup>

When they kill a man on the street during a war, it is not odd that his death should be attributed both to the enemy and to his own side. The fatal shot was fired in a neighborhood from which nationalist troops were being expelled. It is impossible for his killer to have recognized him and to have shot him in the understanding that his target was Durruti, because Buenaventura Durruti did not wear any distinctive marks on his uniform. The shooter was firing on any militiamen who advanced within range; so it had to be someone from Franco's side. It is true that they shot Durruti in the back, but the shot came from above, from one of the buildings that were still in the hands of the enemy.

Later there were polemics concerning this incident among the republicans. Some anarchists claim that Durruti was assassinated by the communists. This is unlikely. It is true, however, that his death worked very much in favor of the tactics of the communists. With Durruti's death, the only figure in the anarchist movement whose prestige would have sufficed to counteract the growing influence of the communists disappeared.

The Friends of Durruti Group was founded many months after Durruti's death. This may be deduced from the name of the group: it is an anarchist tradition to name their associations after deceased members of the movement, a philosopher or a political leader, but they never used the names of living persons in this way. The first group of this name was formed in Paris. The second was founded in Spain. They opposed the CNT's policy of compromise and its retreat before the blackmail of the communists. And it is not true that Durruti was prepared to make

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<sup>14</sup> Translated from the Spanish translation [American translator's note].



a “deal” with the communists. Just before he was killed, the communists were by no means in any position to put strong pressure on the anarchists. This only became possible later, after Durruti’s death, with increasing Russian influence in Spain. In the interviews granted shortly before his death with the veteran anarchist, Emma Goldman, a Russian, he clearly expressed his position. When she asked him if he was not too confident, he responded: “If the Spanish workers have to choose between our libertarian methods and the kind of communism that you saw in Russia, I am sure that they will make the right choice. In this sense I am very content.” Emma Goldman asked him what would happen if the communists were to have such force at their disposal that the workers would have no choice in the matter. Durruti replied: “We will easily stop the communists once we have gotten rid of Franco, and if necessary we will stop them before that.” Perhaps this would have happened if he had lived.

[Albert Meltzer]<sup>15</sup>

I never believed, and I emphatically reject, the allegation that Durruti was assassinated from behind by his own bodyguards. This is an infamous lie. None of his men would have been capable of such a crime.

Later, the rumor spread that it was the communists. I tell you with all sincerity that I do not believe this version, either. The lie that Durruti was killed by anarchists was fabricated by certain journalists and historians who are puppets of the communists. The communists did everything they could to discredit the anarchist movement. Others repeated these lies. There are people who will believe anything they are told.

[Federica Montseny 1]

### **Eyewitness testimony**

It was thirty-five years ago, but I still remember everything exactly, not just the date, but the time and all the details.

We were parked in front of 27 Miguel Ángel Street, where Durruti’s headquarters was located. It was the palace of the Duke of Sotomayor, a nephew of King Alfonso XIII. That afternoon, it was November 19, a messenger came from the front. The Hospital Clinic had fallen into the hands of the enemy. We immediately got into the car. It was around four o’clock, give or take ten minutes. We drove directly to the front, as close as possible to the hospital, to assess the situation. Up front, the chauffeur Julio was at the wheel, and at his side, as always, was Durruti. He did not like riding in the back seat. That was where Manzana, Bonillo and I were sitting.

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<sup>15</sup> Translated from the Spanish translation [American translator’s note].

We drove through the city and, by way of the Rosales Parkway, arrived at Moncloa Square, just at the corner of Andrés Mellado Street. We heard the bullets whistling around us. We stopped, we could not go on. The car was too big a target for enemy snipers. So Julio stopped and got out of the car to study the situation. Durruti wanted to go with him, so he grabbed his machine pistol, a *naranjero*, opened the door, and his gun hit the frame of the car door as he was getting out. A shot rang out, the shot hit him in the middle of his chest and went right through him.

I was just getting out of the car, I was the only one still in the car.

We lifted him up, there was an enormous amount of blood, we tried to staunch it, it was impossible, we put him in the car, we got in and we drove as fast as possible towards the Hotel Ritz, where the militia hospital was located.

We left Durruti in the care of the doctors; they did everything they could to save him. He remained fully conscious until two in the morning. I don't know if he said anything, I wasn't there. But I do know that he died at around four in the morning, eleven or twelve hours after the accident. Durruti's death had such a huge effect on us that we almost couldn't believe it, even those of us who were eyewitnesses. No one dared to spread the news, no one wanted to tell the truth. That is why the communiqué said that he was killed by an enemy bullet. It was easily plausible, but not true. Then rumors began to spread, of course, some said that the communists were responsible, others that we, his bodyguards, killed him, others blamed the fifth column, etc., etc. It never occurred to anyone to consider that it was actually an accident, that Durruti had killed himself.

[Ramón García López]

I used to support the theory that Durruti was the victim of an assassination plot. I drew this conclusion because I had a kind of *corpus delicti* in my hands: his shirt. This shirt proved that the shot had been fired from very close range. I also knew that his widow harbored some doubts about the official version. Since then, I have discussed the matter with many people, including Émilienne's friends. It seems that what happened was totally different from the way I had imagined it, it seems that, as he was getting out of the car, Durruti's automatic rifle, the kind of gun called a *naranjero* (I never knew why it was called that), discharged and wounded him. If this is what happened, the CNT's attitude is then understandable. This kind of death would have left an aftertaste of lethal irony; the masses would not have believed or accepted such a version. A man who was as familiar with the use of weapons as a secretary is with a typewriter! Of course, the anarchists had no interest in destroying with such a banal explanation the myth that had arisen around Durruti. Such a thing was inconceivable. It could not be.

[Jaume Miravittles 1]

No one ever discovered the truth, for the simple reason that all of us swore to keep it secret: up to the end of the war, we had to remain silent and say nothing to our families, wives or friends; partly because this death was a little ridiculous for an anarchist leader, and also in order not to give rise to the suspicion that Durruti was assassinated by his own men. Federica Montseny, who was a Cabinet Minister at the time, and Marianet (that is, Mariano R. Vázquez, the general secretary of the National Committee of the CNT) made us swear an oath of silence.

Dr. Santamaría, with whom I spoke, could not identify the source of the bullet. But he assured me that it had been fired from a distance of no more than fifteen centimeters.

[Jesús Arnal Pena 3]

Even now there are people who do not want to talk about this or hear anyone else talk about it, because they don't like it, but they know the truth as well as I do. We listened to the comrades who were with him, that is, Manzana, his chief of staff in Madrid, the chauffeur Estancio and the others who were with him—and what do they say? They say that his gun went off accidentally and shot him. He was sitting like this (Rionda imitates Durruti's posture] and he was holding the gun like this, with the barrel pointed up. He took it and as he was getting out of the car, the trigger got caught on the door frame and, boom, a shot was fired and it went right through his lung.

I know quite a lot about guns. For twenty-two years I never left my house without my pistol. Never, as far as I know, especially in the afternoon and evening. I never went to an assembly without my pistol, I always had it within reach, on my belt. One must be ready to defend oneself at any moment. But Durruti was always careless, that was his weakness. I told him so on several occasions. He was too casual; Manzana also thought so. When you are traveling in a car you must not hold your gun that way, with the barrel pointed against your body, much less when you are getting out of the car.

But Manzana assured me that is what happened. The *naranjero* is a very dangerous weapon, its trigger is very sensitive. I know it well, because after Durruti died I used his gun myself, the same one that was involved in the accident; I kept it until I went to France. When I escaped from Spain I had to leave it at the border.

[Ricardo Rionda Castro]

## **His personal possessions**

It was incredible, he possessed nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing. Everything he ever had belonged to everyone. When he died I looked for some clothes in

which he could be buried. I finally found a very worn-out old leather jacket, a few pairs of khaki pants and a pair of shoes with holes in them. In a word, he was a man who gave everything away, he did not have even a penny to his name. He possessed nothing.

[Ricardo Rionda Castro]

In his suitcase I found the following effects: a change of underwear, two pistols, a few pairs of binoculars and some sunglasses. That was the entire inventory.

[José Peirats 1]

Durruti's death had a major emotional impact on the people of Madrid. The comrades transported his body to the headquarters of the National Committee of the CNT, where the funeral chapel was installed. On November 21, at four in the morning, the coffin was placed in a hearse and taken to Valencia, accompanied by a large convoy of cars. The population of the various cities through which the convoy would pass were waiting all along the roads of the convoy's route. In Chiva the convoy was received by the Cabinet Ministers, García Oliver, Álvarez del Vaya, Just, Esplá and Giral. The population gathered in every town with red and black flags and brought wreaths for the coffin. In Valencia, the representatives of the Regional Committee of the CNT in Levante deposited wreaths and flowers in the hearse carrying the mortal remains of our deceased comrade. In both Levante and Catalonia the people of every town paid their last respects to Durruti. Shortly before 1:00 a.m., on November 22, the coffin arrived at the headquarters of the CNT-FAI in Barcelona. The chapel was set up in the lobby of the building, and it was decked with flowers and draped in red and black flags. Above it, and on the giant banner that hung above the chapel, the acronym that synthesized the essence of his life was emblazoned, the initials for which he had died: CNT-FAI.

[Durruti 6]

The funeral was held in Barcelona. It was a cloudy, gray day. The city succumbed to a kind of collective hysteria. People were kneeling on the street while the funeral cortege passed by with an honor guard of anarchists in combat fatigues. They cried. Half a million people had gathered in the streets. Everyone had tears in their eyes. For Barcelona, Durruti was the symbol of the anarchist idea, and it seemed unbelievable that he had died.

On that day a strange lull reigned over the city. The black and red flags hung from their poles. The sun was concealed by clouds. I have never seen such a silent, solemn and sad day.

[Jaume Miravittles 2]

The enormous building that once housed the offices of the Catalan employers' association (the *Fomento Nacional del Trabajo*), now known as the *Casa CNT-FAI*, headquarters of the Catalan Regional Committee of the CNT, is located on the Vía Layetana, the broad, modern avenue that connects the port of Barcelona with the new part of the city. During the last few months of his life, Durruti was in very close contact with the institutions housed in this building; it was by way of the radio transmitter located there that he had delivered his last address to the Spanish people, and it was along this street that his coffin was taken to Montjuïc.

At the request of the Local Federation of the CNT of Barcelona, this street is now known as Buenaventura Durruti Avenue.

[Durruti 6]

When he went to Madrid, I went with him to the airport. It was the last time I saw him. I called him in Madrid every day; one afternoon they told me that he wasn't there. Later I found out that by then he was already dead.

I wasn't there, I can't say anything about it. But of course they couldn't tell the people that it was an accident, for the simple reason that no one would have believed it. So they said that he was killed at the front. One more casualty, that's all. A man like Durruti doesn't die in bed, of course.

Yes, I had my doubts. But finally, it was his friends, García Oliver and Aurelio Fernández, who told me that it was an accident. They were his comrades in the struggle. Why would they lie to me? So we settled that. Anyway, there's nothing that can be done about it.

[Émilienne Morin]

### ***Eighth Commentary: The revolution grows old***

Thirty-five years have passed since the defeat of the Spanish revolution. Anyone who wants to follow its course, day by day, should read *Solidaridad Obrera*, the most important daily newspaper in Barcelona in its time. In a basement in the Herengracht in Amsterdam you will find its yellowing sheets, in large, dusty folders; and on the four upper floors you will find everything that has been written, printed and published about the Spanish revolution. The International Institute of Social History preserves the history of its victories and its defeats. Posters and pamphlets, decrees and eyewitness reports, fragile leaflets; a melancholy immortality. But not only the dead letter, but also the traces of the survivors may be found there: personal accounts, memoirs, letters; references that lead very far: to the miserable shantytowns of Mexico City, to the remote villages of provincial France, to the garrets of Paris, to the back courtyards of the working

class neighborhoods in Barcelona, to the shabby offices of the Argentinian capital, to the farms of Gascony.

The woodworker Florentino Monroy, in exile in France, travels at the age of seventy-five from one castle to another. He does not qualify for an old-age pension. He makes a living repairing the inlaid cabinets and cupboards of the decrepit aristocrats of the region.

Behind a pharmacy, in the sleepy Paris suburb of Choisy-le-Roi, on a courtyard at No. 6 Rue Chevreuil, the Spanish anarchists have set up a small printshop. There they print movie posters for the villages of the province, and invitations to masquerade balls, but also their own magazines and pamphlets.

Somewhere in Latin America, Diego Abad de Santillán is working at a small publishing house. Once one of the most influential men in Catalonia, and then a bitter critic of the CNT within its own ranks, he is today an unassuming man, always ready to lend a hand, an avid pipe smoker.

Ricardo Sanz, a textile worker from Valencia, formerly one of the members of *Los Solidarios*, lives alone on an income of 300 francs in a gloomy house in the country on the banks of the Garonne; more than thirty years ago he commanded, as Durruti's successor, a division of the anarchist militia. He shows his visitors some relics of the revolution: Durruti's death mask, the photographs he keeps in a drawer and cupboards full of copies of his own books, which he published himself with his own printing press.

Most of them are dead, however. It is thought that Gregorio Jover is still alive, somewhere in Central America. The whereabouts of the others is unknown.

The headquarters of the CNT in exile is located on the courtyard of a factory in Toulouse. After climbing some worn stairs you come to the "Intercontinental Secretariat". Next to a small bookstore, in which one may find rare pamphlets from the thirties and forties and the unique and edifying novels of the Ideal Library, Federica Montseny has established her office, where she is still drafting her speeches and publications, as indefatigable as she was decades ago.

It is a world apart, very scattered geographically, but nonetheless very narrow; a world with its own rules, its code of preferences and aversions; where everyone knows what everyone else is doing, even when years have passed without seeing each other. This world of old comrades is not immune to frustrations and jealousies, disputes and estrangement, the stigmata of the exiles. Their average age is very high; rumors and news spread easily and persist tenaciously; memories crystallized a long time ago; everyone can recall the role they played during the decisive years; and they also pay their tribute to the stubbornness and the failing memory typical of old age.

But this defeated and aging revolution has not lost its integrity. Spanish anarchism, for which all these men and women fought their whole lives, was never a sect on the margins of society, an intellectual fashion or a bourgeois “playing with fire”. It was a proletarian mass movement, and has less in common with the neo-anarchism of today’s student groups than all those groups’ manifestos and slogans might lead you to believe. These octogenarians contemplate with contradictory feelings the rebirth of their ideas in May in Paris and elsewhere. Almost all of them worked with their hands their whole lives. Even today, many of them go to work every day in a factory or workshop. Most work in small printshops. They declare with true pride that they depend on no one, that they make their living with their own labor; all of them are experts in their specialties. The slogans of the “society of free time” and the utopias of leisure are foreign to them. In their small houses there is nothing superfluous; they know neither dissipation nor the fetishism of consumption. They only possess what they can use. They live a modest life that does not oppress them. They tacitly ignore the norms of consumption, without entering into polemics.

They are disturbed by the relations of the young people with culture. The scorn expressed by the situationists for everything that bears the traces of “enlightenment” seems incomprehensible to them. For these old workers, culture is a good thing. This is not at all surprising, since they conquered their literacy with blood and sweat. In their small, dark houses there are no televisions, only books. Never in their wildest dreams would it occur to them to throw art and science overboard, even if they are of bourgeois origin. Nor do they understand the illiteracy of today’s “stage”, whose consciousness is determined by comic books and rock music. They pass over sexual liberation, which is a faithful copy of the oldest anarchist theories, without comment.

These revolutionaries from other times have grown old, but they do not appear to be worn-out. They do not know what it means to be intellectually inert. They do not talk about their morality, but it does not permit ambiguity. They are not unacquainted with violence, but they view the taste for violence with a profound mistrust. They are solitary and viewed with suspicion; but once the threshold of their exile is crossed, which separates us from them, a world of generosity, hospitality and solidarity opens up. When one gets to know them, one is shocked to discover how little disorientation and bitterness there is among them; much less than in their young guests. They are not sad. Their amiability is proletarian. They have the dignity of people who have never surrendered. They are not indebted to anyone for anything. No one “sponsored” them. They accepted nothing, nor have they been awarded any grants or subsidies. They are not interested in welfare. They are incorruptible. Their conscience is intact. They are not failures. Their physical condition is excellent. They are neither beaten men nor neurotics. They do not need drugs. They do not feel sorry for themselves. They regret nothing. Their defeats have not discouraged them. They know that they made mistakes, but they never gave up. The old men of the revolution are stronger than the world that succeeded them.

## **Epilogue: Posterity**

For many people, the death of Durruti meant the end of their hopes. As long as they believed that they were fighting for the revolution, their morale was strong. When they saw that it was all about winning the war and that everything else would go on as before, it was all over. Many saw in Durruti the embodiment of their hopes for a new society. Durruti's death was a terrible blow; with his death the revolutionary spirit declined in the factories and the agricultural collectives.

### **Two versions of the speech delivered by Lluís Companys at Durruti's funeral**

Comrades! At this tense moment I appeal to your unity, discipline, austerity and courage.

For a moment our eyes fill with tears. But why should we cry? Are we crying over the death of a man who did his duty and to whom we render the tribute of our admiration? Let us cry instead over the cowards and the scoundrels. Let us dry our tears, lift up our arms and continue on our road forward, without stopping. Let Durruti's name serve us as an example. The road that we must follow is still a hard one. Forward! Forward!

[Solidaridad Obrera]

Durruti died the way cowards die, or the way heroes die at the hands of a coward: from behind. From behind is how all those who desert die, or those who, like Durruti, do not find anyone who would dare murder them face to face. Durruti, we salute your courage! Your name was impregnated with a profound popular emotion. Here we will give ourselves a watchword: Forward! Every man at his post where his duty calls him, more unified than ever in the struggle against fascism and for freedom! Forward, no looking back!

[El Pueblo]

Whether or not we agree with his Durruti's ideas, one must admit that he led a life that was absolutely faithful to his principles. He was an anarchist and he died as a disciplined member of the Spanish people's army.

The story of Durruti's life corresponds precisely with the development of Spanish anarchism as a whole. Just as the reactionary police considered Durruti to be a common criminal, the bourgeois press tends to speak of the CNT and the FAI as if they were merely gangs of murderers, looters and arsonists. In reality, the Spanish anarchist movement has very strong idealistic features. Many anarchists do not smoke and are vegetarians. Many abstain from alcohol. They categorically reject



all kinds of excess. In Madrid one sees everywhere the giant posters of the FAI and the CNT calling for the closure of bars and cafés, which are considered to be the gateways to the whorehouse. These days, the anarchist idea of personal sacrifice is being realized in practice with a feverish energy in Madrid.

The Marxist worldview is different in its basic principles from the anarchist worldview. This does not mean, however, that the sincere idealism of the CNT-FAI does not also have its merits, or that they do not employ all their forces in the struggle against fascism, a struggle that imposes severe sacrifices. Durruti's death is a serious loss for democratic Spain.

Durruti fought energetically for the merger of the two industrial trade unions of Spain. He was one of the most important advocates of a disciplined people's army. All the parties of the Popular Front, the government and the population of republican Spain feel his death as a very hard blow.

[Hugh Slater]<sup>16</sup>

Who is their leader, Durruti? In Montevideo it is known that he was an international gangster. His criminal record includes his participation in the assassination of the Archbishop of Saragossa, and the armed robbery of the Bank of Gijón, which netted 550,000 pesetas.

The Spanish and Chilean police were looking for him all over the world. The Chileans, for the robbery of the branch office of a bank in Chile. The Cuban police wanted him for a similar crime.

In 1925 he robbed a bank in Buenos Aires. After making a clean getaway, he was sought by the French for his participation in the attempt to assassinate Alfonso XIII.

When the Spanish Republic was proclaimed, Durruti returned to Spain. Later his own men shot him in the back. This was because they were fighting over loot, and La Pasionaria, that horrible woman of the Madrid government, praised him during his ostentatious funeral by calling him a model liberator.

Such are the subhumans who are being unleashed in Spain by comrade Dimitroff and the others. At his side were the criminals of the Iron Column, the Carlos Marx Division, who cut prisoners to shreds with dum-dum bullets.

[Karl Von Stackelberg]

In November of 1936 a small group of anarchist syndicalists traveled to the Soviet Union. The trade unions of that country wanted to show us what they had

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<sup>16</sup> Translated from the Spanish translation [American translator's note].

achieved since the revolution; we were interested in explaining to our hosts and to the Russian people the difficult situation into which we had been dragged by the Civil War and international fascism.

From our very first meeting with the representatives of the USSR, we could see that Durruti was not unknown there. The articles about him that appeared in the Soviet press not only mentioned his activities in the Civil War, but also discussed his career many years before July 19. The Russian journalists had gone to see him in the factories of Barcelona and had published some interviews with him. The Russian people even knew that Durruti was an anarchist, an exceptional case, because concerning the other anarchists the Russians did not say a single word. On the other hand, the Spanish communists like La Pasionaria, Díaz and Mije were more popular in Russia than they were in their own country. This is understandable, because in Russia there are only communist newspapers, and all other newspapers are prohibited. They always praise their own people. Only for Durruti did they make an exception.

In Kiev, the civilian and military authorities and the representatives of the universities and schools welcomed us with a reception at the grand ballroom of the best hotel in the city. All of Ukraine's officialdom was there. The commander of the Kiev garrison, an old Bolshevik, delivered the keynote address. After greeting his guests, he told us about the death of Durruti and invited those who were present to stand and observe a minute of silence in honor of the "great Spanish warrior".

But it was not just the official figures who expressed their admiration for Durruti. During our stay in Moscow we went to visit some workers who lived in a proletarian neighborhood of the city. In a small shack we met a metal worker who had participated in the struggles of 1918. He had to feed a large family and he lived in poverty. He had followed with great interest the course of the war in Spain. He gestured that we should follow him to a corner of his house, and he took out an old book from a drawer. It was an old, faded edition of the works of Korolenko. In the book he had inserted a few pages cut from newspapers: a photograph of Durruti that had appeared in *Pravda*, and an article containing an account of his life.

"Why do you keep this", we asked him.

"Because I had faith in him, because he was sincere. He was not an impostor, he was not one of those people who deceive the working class."

He thumbed through the book some more and found another cutting, this one even older. In the vague photo we recognized Nestor Makhno, the old anarchist leader. The worker told us about some of Makhno's actions during the Russian Revolution, and he told us about his downfall.

“Makhno was one of the greatest revolutionaries”, he said, “and now they want to make us believe that he was a bandit. Take care to see to it that the same thing does not happen to Durruti’s memory.”

We promised him that we would.

[Anonymous 3]

Today there are many people, even from the bourgeoisie, and even from the Catholic Church, who are ready to enthusiastically embrace Durruti, now that he is dead, as a prodigal son. All of a sudden they discover his good points and try to use him for their own purposes. The Spanish priests want to turn him into a Red Christ. While he was alive they were shooting at him. They had barricaded themselves in the churches of Barcelona. They were veritable fortresses, those churches, and they shot at us, they shot at anything that moved. And the bourgeoisie were screaming bloody murder: the anarchists are burning the churches! We were only defending ourselves. And the same people who persecuted him as a criminal while he was alive, now want to turn him into a saint!

[Émilienne Morin]

For me, his heroism did not consist so much in what the newspapers talk about, but above all in his everyday life. Few people knew him in his private life, of course, only those who knew him from the corner café, at his home or in jail.

Millions of pesetas passed through Durruti’s hands, but I have seen him mending his own shoes because he did not have enough money to take them to the cobbler. Sometimes, when we met in a bar, he did not even have enough money to buy a cup of coffee.

When we went to visit him at his house he would often greet us at the door wearing an apron, because he was peeling potatoes. His wife had a job. This did not bother him; he was not “macho” and he did not feel that his pride was wounded because he did the housework.

The next day he would take his pistol and go out onto the streets to confront a world of social repression. He did so with the same naturalness with which he changed the diapers of his little daughter, Colette, the night before.

[Francisco Pellicer]

Some people say that if Durruti had not been killed we would have won the war. That is a great error. Our war was not a war between two sides, it was an international conflict, and the Spanish military would never have revolted, they

would never have had a chance, if they did not know that international fascism would help them, the Italians and the Germans.

[Ricardo Sanz 1]

For us he is neither a hero nor a messiah. We don't need leaders or *caudillos*. Such things do not exist among anarchists.

Durruti's role cannot be interpreted in the framework of hero-worship. He had a true dignity and a true valor without which it is impossible to live. In our time, Che Guevara played a very similar role. Durruti was no theoretician, he was not the kind of person who would sit at a desk while others fought. He was a man of action, he went out into the streets to fight, and he could always be found where the danger was greatest.

[Federica Montseny 1]

I immediately understood that Durruti was a born anarchist. It was obvious that he came from the provinces, there was something rustic about him. He often engaged in reflection and thought his own way. He was certainly no intellectual, and in Barcelona he acquired a certain degree of theoretical training.

He was from León, from the Castilian Plateau, and he possessed something of the power and hardness of his fellow countrymen. He was a man of the mettle of a Padilla or a Pizarro, the old conquistadors.

In Barcelona he read a lot, especially our anarchist classics, Anselmo Lorenzo, Elisée Reclus, Ricardo Mella, and above all, Sebastien Faure, the French philosopher of anarchism. His cultural horizon was always somewhat limited, but nonetheless had a solid foundation.

In addition, he was always a man who was capable of anything when necessary. His ideas were not just a hobby for him, he wanted to realize them. This explains what would later be called his heroism. He undoubtedly acted instinctively. Perhaps he was also a little narrow-minded, but at the same time he had a kindly temperament, and by this I mean that his most essential impulse was solidarity.

His resources were enormous from every point of view. This was demonstrated, for example, when he was in prison, where he helped the broken and the downcast. Durruti was unacquainted with either physical disability or spiritual depression. It did not matter how critical the situation was—strikes, street fights, under the blows of repression—he always faced it with decisiveness, and often successfully. And when he failed he did not succumb to despair. He immediately thought of the next stage, the next attempt.

We have only spoken of Durruti, all the time, as if there was no one like him. In fact, there were thousands of anonymous Durrutis in our movement. Some were well-known, others were not. But many died, and no one speaks of them. They were no less courageous, however, and no less resolute, and they were no less bold in risking their lives, than Durruti or Ascaso. How many comrades have we lost in the war, how many died in 1919, in 1920, how many lost their lives under the repression of Martínez Anido! Five hundred, at least. They were our best people. If we were to shed tears for our dead and pay our respects, we would be very busy, indeed. It is better to follow their example and do the best we can to try to realize our ideal.

I think there is no other solution. It does not matter if we are few or many, we are right and right is on our side. We have to prove this again and again, each and every day, with words, with the pen, and with deeds. But our publications do not reach the masses, our publishing houses are small, we live in exile, the language of this country is not our language, our influence in France is minuscule. We must overcome this situation. We must overcome these obstacles.

[Juan Ferrer]

He lived for his ideas. He is marvelous. Sometimes I envy him. His life was a full one. I don't think he lived in vain.

Now that he is dead, of course, everyone wants to lay claim to him for themselves. While he was alive they persecuted him like a criminal. Now, even the bourgeoisie sees his good side, and the priests want to embalm him. A dead revolutionary is always a good revolutionary.

[Colette Marlot]

I don't know, if he was here with us he would tell us to shut up. He would not let us talk this way, he was very modest. He would have said: "Talk about the CNT, talk about our ideas, but do not talk about me." That is what he would have said if he was here.

[Manuel Hernández]

Yes, Durruti was peaceful and violent at the same time. But this is not a contradiction. All of us are in that situation. Our ideas are correct, no one can refute them. We have debated with the most intelligent people, and finally they have always said to us: "Yes, your ideal is very beautiful, but it cannot be realized, you are utopians." But we tell them, that is not true, even here and now part of this utopia is being realized. We have before us the power of capitalism and the system of repression of the State, and this power still exists in communism. So we either give up, or we confront them. Anyone who confronts

them, however, has to pay the price. And even if one is very good, one is obliged to fight like a wild beast. It is a struggle that is imposed on us. We did not want it.

[Juan Ferrer]

I intend to return as soon as possible to Spain. No, not for my family, but because I am thinking of resuming the struggle. The same struggle as before, when we were young. Today, just as before, at the age of seventy-five. Maybe it's an obsession, but I will return to León.

Fascism is only an episode, an interruption. I have no illusions. When Franco dies there will be another dictator who will be no better. Maybe he will be worse. Do you know why I say that? Because that's the way it's always been in history. It's all the same whether it's a right wing, left wing, or centrist government, you overthrow it because it's a bad government, and what do you get? Another one that's even worse. If it wasn't like that, the world would be a paradise. But I think that it's upside down. It's just that people don't realize it, although even a blind man could see it. And you vote and vote and vote. It's always the same. But when Franco, whom I consider to be responsible for the deaths of a million human beings, when he is gone, I can return to León, and then we'll see what can be done and what I can still achieve.

[Florentino Monroy]

Yes, of course, the Spanish émigrés were very well organized. They paid their membership dues every month. The newspaper is still published, the daily paper of the anarchists. I would like to believe what it says, but there are things that seem too simplistic, too naive. It might seem harsh to say so, but I say what I think: I cannot follow them. Most of them imagine that all they need to do is return to Spain, when the time comes, and to take up where they left off in 1936. But the past is the past. You don't make the same revolution twice.

[Émilienne Morin]

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A significant part of the documentation used in this book is taken from the interviews cited in the following list. I must also express my thanks to the CNT of Toulouse and Ángel Montoto and Luis Romero of Barcelona. With respect to the written materials, I was the beneficiary of the patient assistance of the staff of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. The radio station, "Western Germany", in Cologne, provided me with the financial means to carry out my extensive research. In the spring of 1972 I screened a film about Durruti for the "Western Germany" Third Program. I would also like to express my thanks to the staff of the radio station. Some of the interviews I used in this book are taken from the materials collected for the film. Cristoph Busse recorded the

interviews and Rubén Jaramillo transcribed them. In Paris, Abel Paz, Durruti's biographer, assisted me with countless references. His book about Durruti, which (unlike mine) was intended to conform to certain scholarly standards, will soon be published in France. It is an indispensable book for anyone who wants to learn more about Durruti.

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