

K.S.L.



Bulletin of the
Kate Sharpley Library
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Durruti- Before The Storm

A letter from Durruti: (1935)

In Valencia's Model Prison where Durruti had been an inmate since that August, CNT and FAI prisoners drawn from Catalonia, Aragón, and Levante proper were in the majority. This homogeneity among the prisoners ensured that the internal affairs of the CNT and the FAI were the especial focus of their discussions. Two years on from the split with the CNT and now that the controversy surrounding it had become less impassioned, the notion of a return to the bosom of the CNT, as advocated by J. Peiró and J. López, was beginning to make some headway; precisely how this return to the fold was to be negotiated, no-one yet knew. All such issues and points were passionately debated in the cells and on the landings of the Model Prison.

Durruti, who was more preoccupied with other matters spent his time in prison keeping somewhat aloof from these debates and to judge by one letter written at about this time one might say that he was at daggers drawn with the committees of the CNT.

The letter in question is dated 11.9.35 and was addressed to J. Mira, and was by way of a reply to a letter from Mira. The document he refers to in the course of the letter is one where he outlines his position with regard to the current actions of the CNT. In "Durruti: the people armed" by Abel Paz, Free Life Editions, 1977, this position is summed up as follows- "ammunition shouldn't be wasted uselessly; it was necessary first to put the finishing touches on a social revolutionary organisation, economising scarce resources for the struggle. The militant cadres who were free, should not expose themselves, nor weaken

the movement with useless strikes" [extracts from Durruti's document]

The letter begins like this:

"Got your letter to which I am now going to reply - naturally!- especially as it has to do with matters of some interest to me. From this end I have no news to bring you, except that two comrades were released yesterday. We hope that these releases will continue and that soon we shall all be out.

First of all, let me make this prefatory comment: what any comrades imprisoned with you may think of me matters very little to me. I am true to myself, adhering to the course that I marked out for myself some time ago.

If by chance you have followed my record as an anarchist and revolutionary through the press or in conversations with comrades you will have noticed that the mentality of the vulgar hold-up man or gunman is no part of my make-up. I came to the ideas and continue to profess them because I believed, and still do, that the anarchist ideal is above all pettiness and base resentments.

I have always thought, and think still, that the struggles enjoined by the Confederation in defence of one more peseta and one hour less were skirmishing that the organisation needed, but never advances towards confederal and anarchist goals. The Confederation has well-defined principles: it aims directly at transforming the capitalist system so as to introduce libertarian communism. But for a revolution of this sort, Mira my friend, one needs anarchist ideas and a revolutionary education rather than the education of a hoodlum: much less believe that the CNT should squander all of its

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continued from front page

vitality on one or two conflicts so that those concerned may have a scrap more cod on the Sunday dinner table.

The CNT which is the most powerful organisation in Spain must take up its rightful place in the collective order. Its battles must be in tune with its greatness. It would be laughable to find a lion in the middle of the jungle squatting for hours on end at the entrance to a rat hole, waiting for some little rat to emerge so that he might gobble it up. The CNT is in the same position at the moment. There are those who argue that the organisation's fight in Barcelona represents a manly, revolutionary stance. I, Mira my friend, think the contrary. Sabotage anybody can indulge in, even the faintest of hearts. On the other hand, it takes men of courage to make a revolution, whether on the committees or among the cadres of militants who are to operate on the streets. After the stance of the comrades and of the organisation in the October rising there can be no talk of confederal dignity just because a tram was set alight, or twenty trams. Is it not deplorable to have to recognise in these straightened times through which we are passing that the organisation in Barcelona represents not the slightest boon to the revolution? Can it be that in these times when the chance of revolution may present itself to us at the most unexpected moment, the organisation is incapable of taking up its post as a body? Is it not shameful that the collective interests should be abandoned for two undistinguished disputes from which a handful of people are going to emerge the beneficiaries? I am one of the chosen ones and I am ashamed that the CNT should be jeopardising its revolutionary trajectory over my weekly pay. Some look upon the organisation as just a body that looks to their ordinary economic interests: others as the organisation that works alongside the anarchists to transform society. On these grounds, friend Mira, it is very hard for any understanding to be arrived at between syndicalists short and simple and the anarchists.

Now to the document in question. Of itself, I paid no more attention than it deserved: a suggestion to the National Committee regarding the current situation and nothing more. How this commotion that you speak to me about ever came about I do not understand. It was a personal action: an exercise of the right that any militant enjoys to spell out his views, even to the National Committee. Delegates from the CNT came here and once certain ideas that they claimed needed clarification had been clarified, we came to an understanding. What is more, after I swapped views with the delegate from the CNT, he agreed with me on the basis of the document.

DURRUTI (1896-1996)



The document of itself is merely the expression of the opinion that I have ventilated on No5 landing in Barcelona and then, when we were there, nobody raised any objections and it was only when I was transferred to Valencia that any opposition was voiced.

The Regional Committee of Catalonia also came to see us. And after we had had a full discussion, they could not come up with any objection. There was only a complaint about a few words that offended the sensibilities of the Regional Committee. We

had no difficulty in removing those because they did not in any way alter the substance of the document.

Once the explanations from one and all (the National and Regional Committees and the signatories to the document) were over, we all agreed upon the need to publish, in 'Soli', a note of clarification so as to enlighten the whole membership . We drafted the note and sent it to the Regional Committee for publication, as agreed. The note contained no retraction of any sort of the document since that was the agreement with the organisation's delegate: why, then, was our note not published? And why did the Regional Committee of Catalonia, and the National Committee which had undertaken to publish another one so as to set minds at ease and ensure that our document would not be misinterpreted, not do so? This stance by the Committees is suspicious. What have they to gain by this affair's not being clarified?

I have letters from the comrades in Burgos penitentiary where the document was given a reading at a meeting and, so they tell me, nobody voiced any objection which is not to say that they all agree with it. But before they had sight of it all sorts of nonsense was being said and now that they have seen it, thoughts are more sensible.

There is much that can be said of the results of the Barcelona tactics but one must be wary in a letter. All I can tell you is that after so much sabotage they have been obliged to step a little outside of confederal principles - so as to talk with the water industry employers and the bosses of the Urban Transport Company. I do not criticise them given the exceptional times we are in. But I do think of the great damage that systematic sabotage has done and is doing us. As a system it is something that the organisation cannot countenance. As a tactic it is highly questionable. Collectively speaking, I reckon that it has done us terrible harm, costing us much more than anything there was in the way of gains. Every time we enter into a struggle it is right to consider the benefit and the drawbacks. I have never been one to advocate abandoning strike disputes,

but not abandoning them is one thing: it is quite another to ensure that all our activities revolve around a dispute. That would be to limit the CNT's theatre of action. To confine it to a wage struggle is to demean its ultimate aims.

Luckily the political situation is beginning to resolve itself for us and comrades should be asking themselves how well-equipped we are going to be to bring all our weight to bear in it. On the landings of the jails and prisons the talk now is not of the CNT, and now there are expectations of those whom we have always fought against. At the moment the CNT is no reassurance. In the minds of all the prisoners, these are the only words: "let them open parliament, lift the state of emergency, and get on with the elections". Not a word about the CNT. This is what has been gained by the organisation's stance: confidence in our own strength has been done to death.

The CNT which is the organisation with the most prisoners will not be able to play any significant role either before or after the elections. The CNT's prisoners will have to thank the politicians for their release, and that to me who am an anarchist, has enormous implications. I would like to walk free thanks to the efforts of my comrades and not due to the philanthropy of someone whom I have to fight tooth and nail as soon as I am out."

-Letter sent by Durruti from Valencia prison to the Model Prison in Barcelona where his comrade Mira was an inmate.

Solidaridad Obrera, November 1990, No 213.

KSL NEWS

We have recently received a large shipment of early (1900's) Yiddish anarchist material. Can anyone out there help us with translation? The shipment is mainly books but we have a sizeable selection of Yiddish anarchist papers in need of documenting.

We reiterate our call for anyone who has been involved in publishing anarchist material to contact us with details of publications and the circumstances around their publication.

COLLECTIVISED CINEMA

*Films made by the socialised film industry
(CNT-FAI) in Barcelona during the civil war*

1936

Aguiluchos de la FAI por tierras de Aragón
(documentary) **The FAI's little
eagles in Aragon**
Alerta (documentary) **Alert**
Aragón trabaja y lucha (documentary) **Work
and struggle in Aragon**
Aurora de esperanza (film) **Dawn of hope**
Ayuda a Madrid (documentary) **Help to
Madrid**
Barcelona trabaja para el frente (documentary)
Barcelona working for the front
Batalla de Farlete (documentary) **Battle of
Farlete**
Bombardo de Apies (documentary) **Bombing
of Apies**
Conquista de Carrascal de Chinillas
(documentary) **Capture of Carrascal
de Chinillas**
Criminales (documentary) **Criminals**
Entierro de Durruti (documentary) **Durruti's
funeral**
Estampas guerreras numero 1 y 2
(documentary) **War- no's 1 and 2**
Francisca, mujer fatal (documentary)
Fransisca, lethal woman
Intelectuales (documentary) **Intellectuals**
Liberación (documentary) **Liberation**
¡Nosotros somos así! (short) **That's how we
are!**
Prostitución (documentary) **Prostitution**
Reportaje del Movimiento Revolucionario
(documentary) **Report of the
Revolutionary Movement**
España Gráfica (1936-1938) (documentary)
Siétamo (documentary)

1937

Así nació una industria (documentary) **And so
an industry was born**

Así venceremos (short) **That's how we'll win**
Bajo el signo libertario (documentary) **Under
the libertarian sign**
Barrios bajos (feature) **Low districts**
Cain (feature)
Castilla se libera (feature) **Castile frees
herself**
El cerco de Huesca (documentary) **The siege
of Huesca**
La Columna de Hierro hacia Teruel
(documentary) **The Iron Column
near Teruel**
Congreso de activistas internacionales
(documentary) **Congress of
international activists**
19 de Julio (documentary) **19 of July**
División heroica (documentary) **Heroic
division**
Ejercito de la victoria, un episodio: El caso
Ambrosio (documentary) **Army of
victory, one episode: the Ambrosio
case**
Forjando la Victoria (documentary) **Forging
victory**
Frente de Teruel (documentary) **Teruel front**
El frente y la retaguardia (documentary) **Front
and rearguard**
El General Pozas visita el frente de Aragón
(documentary) **General Pozas visits
the Aragon front**
Homenaje a los fortificadores de Madrid
(documentary) **Tribute to the
fortifiers of Madrid**
Madera (documentary) **Wood**
Madrid, sufrido y heroico (documentary)
Long-suffering, heroic Madrid
Madrid, tumba del fascismo (documentary)
Madrid, tomb of fascism
Manifiesto CNT-FAI (documentary)
Marimba (documentary)
Momentos de España (documentary)
Las negras (documentary) **The blacks**
Nuestro culpable (feature) **Our guilty one**
Nuestro vértice (documentary)
Salvaguardia del miliciano (documentary) **The
militian's safeguard**
La silla vacía (local documentary) **The empty
chair**
Sur-Ebro (documentary) **South-Ebro**

Solidaridad del pueblo con las victimas del
fascismo (documentary) **People's
solidarity with Fascism's victims**
Valencia y sus naranjas (documentary)
Valencia and her oranges
20 de Noviembre (documentary) **20
November**

Teruel ha caído (documentary) **Teruel has
fallen**
Toma de Teruel (documentary) **Capture of
Teruel**
Voluntarios de la libertad (documentary)
Volunteers of freedom



after the barricades, the cinema!

1937-1938

¡ No quiero ... no quiero! (feature) **I won't ... I
won't!**

1938

El acero libertario (documentary) **Libertarian
steel**

Así vive Cataluña. Vida y moral de la
retaguardia (documentary) **Thus lives
Catalonia. Life and morale of the
rearguard**

Bajo las bombas fascistas (documentary)
Under fascist bombs

Bombas sobre el Ebro (documentary) **Bombs
over the Ebro**

Cataluña (documentary) **Catalonia**

Como fieras (documentary) **Like wild
animals**

En la brecha (documentary) **In the breach**

Imágenes de la retaguardia (documentary)
Pictures of the rearguard

1937: Tres fechas gloriosas (documentary)
1937: Three glorious dates

Paquete, el fotógrafo público número uno
(short) **Package, public
photographer No 1**

source: Carlos J. Sanz Alonso, "La
socialización de los espectáculos públicos en
Barcelona durante la guerra civil" in Sin
Fronteras No1 - 19 July 1986 (Suplemento de
Solidaridad Obrera). The author states that
most of the above films are in the hands of
the Spanish state.

Translation PS

Secrets!

....of the Kate Sharpley Library

We are always pleased to receive any questions
or feedback ~ either about the bulletin, our
publications, or the library generally. The latest
questions we have dealt with include:

- ☛* Anarchists against Hitler and in the
Spanish Civil War
- ☛* The publications of the Solidarity group
- ☛* Material from Fifth Estate
- ☛* The Angry Brigade (again!)

On July 19th 1968, thirty-two years after the beginning of the Spanish revolution, the first issue of the Bulletin of the Anarchist Black Cross was published. We reprint here the first page examining the formation of the Black Cross in the Ukraine in 1918.

Makhno's "Black Cross"

It is fifty years since Nestor Makhno organised units of the Black Cross, originally intended as field-working units similar to those of the Red Cross (as used elsewhere in Russia, described in this issue). The Black Cross units in various cities of the Ukraine were for purposes of workers' self defence as well as for purely "ambulance" type activity. The use of Cossacks, the prevalence of White Guards, pogromists, as well as the growing Red Army, made it necessary for city-dwellers to be able to protect themselves in the streets.

They wore no particular uniform except that, to enable themselves to be recognised at times of violence in the streets, they wore denim overalls with a recognisable armband. Their job was to organise resistance to sudden pogroms, whether the conventional type Czarist pogrom, or action by the police, or the sudden onslaught of Red or White Guards.

Those who think of movements for self-defence purely in terms that we think of them in the West today (largely legalistic, like the Council for Civil Liberties, excellent though such a body is for its specific function) will find it surprising that a body organised solely for defence of prisoners, and for the protection of workers in their homes and factories, should have become one of the major adjuncts to the fighting forces of Makhno's peasant army. It was, indeed, the first urban army to be formed in the Ukraine; by 1920, when the Whites were an organised body aided by foreign intervention, the city-Makhnovistas, the Black Cross, was the only force in the towns that could organise military self-defence along with the peasants. They faced three enemies, Petliura in the West, the Bolsheviks in the North and the monarchists in the East and South. But they were able to defend the cities, though they were never a mobile force like the peasant army.

Most certainly, in a revolutionary situation such as existed in Germany when the Nazis

were rising to power, it is highly necessary to have a movement that is able to resist. The mere provocation of the State by protest, when one can only be crushed by the full powers at the disposal of the State, is not enough. It is necessary, when fighting dictatorship, to be able to oppose a monolithic force to it so that it can fight back when attacked.

The Ukrainian "Black Cross" arose out of purely defensive needs, in order to protect workers occupying their places of work, to defend demonstrations in the streets, and so on. Its form of organisation might have been that of the Red Cross (even that of the Salvation Army, as one observer sneered!) but it was able to adapt that form of organisation into a fighting force.



The Anarchist Black Cross is still active internationally in defence of anarchist and class struggle prisoners. ABC:121 Railton Road, London, SE24 0LR. The Bulletin of the ABC later became 'Black Flag', and is due to celebrate it's 30th next year. Black Flag: BM Hurricane, London, WC1N 3XX

"Anarcho-Syndicalism" **- A history of the FAUD**

This video (35 minutes), just recently made available in an English-language version, recounts the history of the Free Worker's Union - Germany (FAUD), from it's origins in the Syndicalist milieu at the start of the twentieth century. It's heyday in the early 1920's saw it's numbers at around 1.5 million.

The film concentrates on one of the FAUD strongholds, Somerda in Thuringia (Eastern Germany) where 2,000 out of the population of 7,000 were FAUD members in the twenties. Somerda was a centre for munitions manufacture, and workers in the FAUD constructed and delivered grenades that were used against the right-wing Kapp Putsch in 1920. Armed workers seized Somerda and disarmed the local police. They also energetically defended themselves against the rise of the Nazis; on one occasion their sports club was attacked, and defended by workers with sundry pieces of athletic equipment!

By 1933, the FAUD was a shadow of it's former strength and numbers. In 1936, however, the Anarcho-syndicalists were able to try fund-raising for the Spanish CNT. In Somerda, members who had survived the Nazi repression saw their resistance claimed by the communist regime: memorials never mentioned the FAUD or the libertarian motivation of its members.

A short review cannot do justice to the amount of information in this film, an excellent introduction to a libertarian tradition still scarcely known.

"Anarcho-Syndicalism" - 15DM from :
Thomas Beckmann
Dorfstrasse 13,
D-16775
Wolfruh
Germany

German Anarchist history

An (incomplete) source list for the FAUD and German anarchism generally:

Black Flag, Vol 3, number 19, April

1975: Albert Meltzer '... only a few intellectuals'

Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review, No2

1977 Andrew Carlson, Notes on the study of Anarchism in Germany

KSL Bulletin, number 5, 'Anarchists against Hitler'

Albert Meltzer, I Couldn't Paint Golden Angels, chapter 3.

also, on the internet at

<http://www.free.de/dada/>

is a site devoted to Anarchism in Germany, in German language but still interesting: among their databases they have one of German-language anarchist papers; between 1933 and 1945 42 were published, from Germany to Spain and Brazil)

Below: Gerd Arntz's Burgerkrieg (civil war), 1928, a representation of the violent upheavals of the Weimar period.



LITTLE KNOWN ANARCHISTS, NUMBER 3- JOHN McARA

"Wee" McAra stands out in the history of the movement in this country as one of its quaintest and pluckiest members. To have known him and heard him speaking on his "native heath" The Meadows, at Edinburgh -where he was always at his best- was a memory which would last a lifetime.

Mc would never use a platform, preferring to deliver his addresses from the ground, and would gather big audiences around him who would stay until he had finished his speeches. As a literature-seller he stood in the front rank, always disposing of large quantities to his hearers.

Unfortunately McAra would never form a group, or belong to one, resembling, in this respect, many other individual propagandists. The consequence was that, when he died, the movement in Edinburgh faded away, and a very large part of his influence was lost- as a permanent effect.

Unlike other Comrades referred to in these sketches, Mc has not found a place in the lighter side of literature. He did, however, win a permanent place in Scottish law-books. When the local authorities tried to regulate and restrict the open-air meetings on the Meadows, Mc resolved to fight boldly for the preservation of the customary rights. A Joint Committee was formed by the I.L.P., B.S.P., and the S.L.P., to fight the question. They refused to invite McAra to join them; the "Socialist" referring to him as "that slum-dweller." When this Committee suspended its meetings, while awaiting the decision of the Court, Mc stuck to his guns and went on with his meetings. McAra was summoned, and contested the case from Court to Court without legal aid. Finally he won, and established the Right of Free Speech on The Meadows. The case, *Rex V. McAra*, has since frequently been quoted in Court cases.

Mc had a further adventure in a Court at Belfast, where he was sentenced to three months imprisonment for a speech to a meeting at the Custom House steps.

His success led to persecution. He was the first to preach Anarchism in Ireland, where the people heard him gladly, as they did the rebel of old. The imprisonment was the consequence of a trap laid for him. A "nark" was employed to ask a question which would compromise him, and McAra "fell for it". There is little doubt that this sentence of imprisonment shortened his life.

He was ageing in years, and his life had been one of continuous poverty, which meant much privation, and his physical powers were no longer equal to the strain.

When he died the cause of Anarchism lost a witty, and fearless speaker and debater. He was a thorn in the sides of socialistic careerists; a bug-bear to the religionists, and was a brilliant example of what one man may do, single-handed, to proclaim the truth to the people.

While not finding a place in fiction, only in law-books, McAra very often drew attention from the newspapers of Edinburgh, Glasgow and Liverpool.

Scotland has produced some "bonnie fighters" for Liberty, but none have surpassed in sterling quality, the "Wee McAra".

-Mat Kavanagh, *Freedom*, May 1934

This edition of the KSL bulletin has been brought to you by the KSL collective in the summer of 1997. We always welcome correspondence, publications or any other sort of **Contact!**

The Kate Sharpley Library can be reached at
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Donations of all sorts are welcome, subscriptions to the KSL Bulletin are available, and an SAE will get you a list of our publications.