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A history of Spanish libertarian youth paper 'Ruta'

Victor Garcia

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Inside Spain the Libertarian Youth had always had a number of mouthpieces, outstanding among them the peninsular organ 'Juventud Libre' (Free Youth) and the organ of the Catalan region 'Ruta'. Among the youth, we find the same mushrooming growth of libertarian papers as among adults. In his 'La Ciudad de la Niebla' that great observer of the Spanish character, Pio Baroja, pointed out that wherever there were three anarchists together, they would found a paper.

'Juventud Libre' which adopted the title Ruta in October 1936, was founded well before the July revolution of 1936 when the Libertarian Youth of Catalonia were the "Cultural and Propaganda Section of the FAI" something which was to bring them into conflict with the rest of the Libertarian

Youth of Spain until the revolution was already a few months old. The latter had grouped themselves into the FIJL (Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth) completely independent of the Libertarian movement's other two branches, the CNT (National Confederation of Labour) and the FAI (Iberian Anarchist Federation) in 1932.

The Libertarian Youth of Catalonia (JJ.LL) were reluctant to break away from the FAR, whereby they appeared to refuse to leave the nest, though they were exceptionally well equipped in terms of experience in struggle and propaganda to do so. Unity of the youth wing was finally achieved by rallying around the FIJL and its supreme body, the Peninsular Committee in Madrid. Until this unity became a fact, of course, the pages of 'Ruta' devoted many a column to defending the stand of the Catalan youth. It is possible that, but for the war and the unitarian spirit it brought, the Catalan JJ.LL would have stuck to their guns and their original positron which was, remember, one of dependence on the FAI.

Although the bond between the three branches was steely and unbreakable, the decision to break away on their own proved to be a good one, for throughout the three crucial years of the civil war between 1936 and 1939 the Libertarian Youth were able to steer clear of the shameful collaborationist blunders committed by the CNT and the FAI. In this way the FIJL weathered the problem years when other organisations of anarchists jettisoned principles for parliamentary seats, ministerial appointments or state government or municipal secretary ships, and did so without compromising its anarchist principles.

Ruta played a leading role in accomplishing a task fraught with such difficulty, and, coercion and threats from the two "sister" organisations notwithstanding, her columns never failed to proclaim the orthodox position of all anarchists: war on the state, authority, privilege, religion, right up to militarism, something which was always very risky, given

whose A.B. Dick offset enabled 'Ruta' to set a standard in no way inferior to a professional job when it came to the difficult art of printing.

When we come to the second stage, we find each issue given over in its entirety to monographs in such a way that with each issue we have a topic exhaustively dealt with by one or two writers. On account of the modest offset machine acquired for the purpose, the format has been reduced to 17cm x 24cm with 28 to 36 pages each issue, depending on the demands of the topic under examination.

In this, the second stage, contributors have also been prominent figures in the anarchist camp. We might mention Peirats again, Fontaura, Victor Garcia, Alberola, Benjamin Cano Ruiz, Floreal Castilla, names well known to readers of 'Ruta' in its first stage. Plus newcomers like Tomas Cano Ruiz, Angel Capelletti, Nicolas Walter, Paul Avrich, David Wieck, Jose Ribas, Francisco Olaya, Murray Bookchin, Juan Gomez Casas, Carlos M. Rama, Eduardo Vlvancos, Salvador Cano Carrillo, Carlos Diaz, Floreal Castilla, Quipo Amauta...

In so far as their means allow, the editorial group behind 'Ruta' in Venezuela have not neglected other propaganda and issue along with the review, a number of what we might call major works such as booklets, books, and even a multi-coloured calendar.² Furthermore, they were part of the group whose initiative made possible the reissuing, for a second time, in French of 'L'Encyclopedie Anarchiste', the idea and largely the work of Sebastien Faure.³

The shift of the Spanish situation towards less obscurantism and more freedom leads one to think that 'Ruta' of Venezuela...

² Among the booklets we might mention: 'Spain Today', 'Franco and the Fifth Commandment', 'Judgement against Franco' all by Victor Garcia, and 'Anarchism' by Kropotkin. And among the books 'The Workers' International', also by Victor Garcia

³ This task has been realised in its entirety thanks to the tenacity of Vicente Sierra.

the wartime conditions Spain was then experiencing. One must add that when it came to the last mentioned campaign, militarism was assailed not on any defeatist grounds, but rather by agitating on behalf of guerrilla warfare, the century (groups of 100 militiamen) and the column, the first organs of defence and attack set up in July to offer resistance to the mercenary army of Moors, Germans and Italians.

Had the Libertarian Youth of Catalonia gone on as the "Cultural and Propaganda Section of the FAI" they would have had less freedom of expression, which would have, had a detrimental effect on the loyalty they always showed to anarchist principles.

[This article is from the 1970's and here a section is deleted on the 70's Japanese and Italian anarchist movements]

Until the Spanish civil war ended, 'Ruta's' management was successively in the hands of Fidel Miro, Jose Peirats, Manuel Peres, Santana Calero, Benito Milla, and Benjamin Cano Ruiz. Gifted writers all of them, who, as we noted earlier, were able to ensure that the youth movement's paper was uncompromising in the orthodoxy of its approach. Oddly enough, with the passing years Fidel Miro has inclined towards a more lax approach, joining the "Zero" group which is outstanding for its revisionist and even collaborationist overtones. Given that Peirats took over the management of 'Ruta' in the early months of the war and his attitude then, as ever, being staunch in its orthodoxy (he is, as the saying then was a 'piel roja' (red skin)¹ 'Ruta' was set along an uncompromising course from the very outset — a course it has yet to waver from, either inside Spain or in exile.

¹ 'Piel Roja' (Red Skin) is still a nickname for anti-collaborationist libertarians, while the moderates and advocates of collaboration are known as 'pajaros carpinteros' (woodpeckers) a term lifted from Rudolf Rocker's work: 'The Curse of Practicality'.

Manuel Peres took over the management of 'Ruta' shortly after his near miraculous escape from the Canaries which had been occupied by Franco's hordes. Born in the nineteenth century he was the oldest of all those who, at one time or another managed 'Ruta'.

Santana Calero's stay at Ruta was exceedingly brief and it took a backseat to meetings, organising groups and the front, until after the war had ended, he met a hero's death at the hands of the fascist rabble, one of the most outstanding members of the Resistance in Andalusia. A loss sorely felt on account of the promise shown by this lad from Andalusia, especially in terms of oratorical gifts.

Benito Millo was a stylish writer who managed 'Ruta' for rather a long time until management of the youth paper passed to Benjamin Cano Ruiz.

The last of 'Ruta's managers inside Spain, where it lasted until 26 January 1939, when the fascists took Barcelona, was Benjamin Cano Ruiz. On the very same day that Franco's rabble entered the southern suburbs of Barcelona, Cano Ruiz delivered a finished test issue of 'Solidaridad Obrera', the organ of the Catalan CNT, ready to go to print, to the premises of that important anarcho-syndicalist paper in the Calle Concejo de Ciento. Forty years on those premises are still there, but they have been transformed into the offices of Solidarid Nacional thanks to the efforts of the fascist victors. 'Rutas' last manager turned out to be 'Solidaridad Obrera's last director during the civil war, in a sort of 'defacto' capacity.

'Ruta's columns featured the finest pens of anarchist thinking. Felipe Alaiz had a column at the foot of the magazine's centre pages. The paper managed to keep to its regular weekly schedule. There was the eccentric doctor Diego Ruiz, Higinio Noja Ruiz, a writer who, had come from the coal pits and whose work was a marvel to us all on account of its profundity and extent. There was the poet Elias Garcia and Fontaura, and Cristobal Garcia whom we lost track of in exile after fleeing

lication of the Spanish anti Franco press. 'Ruta's publication was suspended, something which young libertarians in France attempted to remedy with the publishing of 'Neueva Senda' (New Route) as an internal bulletin with the choice of name attempting to maintain some connection with 'Ruta' (Road), but the paper died out a few years later.

It was at this point that young Spanish libertarians whom exile had brought to the shores of Venezuela decided that the phoenix would rise once more from the ashes and began to issue 'Ruta' from bases in the Americas.

Two test issues in duplicated form were issued until, with 13 October 1962, on the occasion of the fifty-third anniversary of the execution by firing-squad of Francisco Ferrer, the first of what might be considered the current run of 'Ruta' saw the light of day.

There have been many stages in the life of the Venezuelan 'Ruta', the first lasting from the issue mentioned up to issue number 60 in October 1967.

It began life with a crude lay-out and stencilled pages and evolved maintaining the same 21cm x 28cm format; until today it is entirely printed in offset form. It was typified by the variety of its subjects, although a section was set aside for book reviews and revolutionary odds and ends each month. Apart from Victor Garcia, who has occupied the position of editor in chief since its inception, its contributors have included such renowned anarchists as Gaston Leval, Octavio Alberola, Benjamin Cano Ruiz, Fontaura, Jose Vallina, Carlos Zimmerman, Lone, Elgen Relgis, Marcelino Garcia, Ismale Viadiu, Munoz Cota, Cosme Paules, Vladimir Munoz, Pedro Bargallo, Felix Alvarez Ferreras, Floreal Castilla, Hermoso Plaja, Jose Peirats, Campio Carpio, Serrano Gonzalez, Solano Palacio, Panayot Chivicot, Tato Lorenzo and others.

In connection with the first stage, mention must be made of the contribution made by Vicente Sierra, a tireless worker

this work, but particularly outstanding were a group of young people like Juan Cazorla, Raul Carballeira (killed on Montjuich on 26 July 1948 in an encounter with hundreds of killers operating under Qrlintela, the head of the Social Brigade, plus Guardia Civil and the “greys” or uniformed police) Liberto Sarrau, Mejias Pena, Liber Forti and others.

Simultaneously ‘Ruta’ continued to be issued from Toulouse and managed to “scoop” its contemporaries ‘CNT’ in Toulouse and ‘Solidaridad Obrera’ of Paris by publishing first hand reports from inside Spain, from the pen of Julian Fuentes. the pseudonym of a young libertarian who was its correspondent inside Spain up to the time when he too was captured in Barcelona.

In 1947, Jose Peirats came to France as the delegate from Venezuela to the Second Congress of Local Federations of the MLE (Spanish Libertarian Movement) in Exile. While he had been staying in America ‘Ruta’ had published long articles by him, which were later collected and published as ‘Estampas del Exilio en America’ (Portraits from Exile in America). The illustrations for issues of ‘Ruta’ were by Jesus Guillen, “Guilember” arguably, along with Antonio Lamolla, the most outstanding painter and illustrator ‘Ruta’ was able to call upon. Peirats rose to be Secretary General of the InterContinental Committee of the MLJ in Exile and proved of first class assistance in strengthening the Libertarian Youth and ‘Ruta’, being, briefly, the director of that publication. In his capacity as Secretary he made two trips into Spain, thereby becoming the first militant occupying such an elevated position in the organisation to risk the clutches of the enemy.

The ingenuousness of libertarians was not endless. The democracies showed that they could lay their dreams for the post war era to sleep in all conscience with an ally of Hitler and Mussolini still holding sway over South-west Europe. In addition, France went Gaullist in 1958 and one of the first steps taken by the French government was to prohibit the pub-

appearances in the columns of ‘Ruta’ in France and of ‘Cultura Proletaria’ of New York. Not forgetting Lucia Sanchez Saornil, the founder of the feminist movement Mujeres Libres, and Soledad Estorach, another member of that movement and Carmen Quintana likewise; Vicente Rodriguez Garcia (known as Viroga) another lively mind cut down in the fullness of its powers in the early years of exile; Ivar Chevik, a fine Catalan who hid his real name, Roig, behind this Slav-sounding nom de plume. And there was Liberto Sarrau whose regular column “Retratos al minuto” (up to the minute portraits) gave a sort of tongue in cheek biographies of swollen headed libertarian militants or ones who had slipped down what Sebastien Faure called the “slippery slope.” Along with Amador Franco, Liberto Sarrau made up the youngest duo of writers whose work appeared in ‘Ruta’.

As we said earlier, for the whole of the revolutionary period between 1936 and 1939 ‘Ruta’ was a gadfly constantly pricking the exposed flanks of the Spanish libertarian movement, exposing the contradictions into which it had fallen, through collaboration with the Largo Caballero government, picking up decorations and nominating anarchists who were lifelong anti-militarists to military posts, and appointing libertarians to police, ministerial and government posts — libertarians who, out of loyalty to the organisation, accepted what amounted to a reneging on their whole history of struggle and persecution.

In this task, ‘Ruta’ had the backing of other anarchist papers like ‘Ideas’, ‘El Quijote’, ‘El Amigo del Pueblo’, ‘Acracia’ and other organs I cannot recall. The chief difference between

these papers and ‘Ruta’ was that they had, regrettably, only a sporadic existence, whereas ‘Ruta’ was, with few exceptions, faithfully made available to its readers each week as intended.

Exile

Then came the dark years of the great world conflict when all of Europe was plunged into medieval fear and death. In Spain, the Franco repression, which went so far as to shock

even Count Ciano, Mussolini's son-in-law (later shot on the orders of his own father-in-law) continued to reap its deadly harvest of life, by the hundreds. That did not stop the hardening of the arteries of the Spanish Libertarian movement and the first National Committee of the CNT of the Interior — headed by Pallarols, later shot like so many other Confederation members, as secretary was followed by others, in unbroken line, up until the first “tolerated” National Committee after Franco's death.

Meanwhile, in exile, the libertarians did not as Carrillo and Camacho would perversely have it, withdraw to “winter quarters”; but by 1943 under the German occupation (of France) the first National Committee of the CNT in exile arose. Little by little it was rebuilt as the most numerous anti-Franco organisation in exile, overtaking the socialists, republicans, and of course, the communists.

45,000 libertarian militants were represented at the Libertarian Movement's Congress of Local Federations held in Paris on 1 May 1945 and the days that followed.

Before that, like a phoenix that never dies, *Ruta* had reappeared in Marseilles. The Libertarian Youth of that ancient city resolved to publish an organ that would, just as it had done in Spain during the war there, push the classic revolutionary and anti-government line of anarchism, which appeared to be in jeopardy as a result of the decisions taken at the ‘Muret Plenum’ of 9 October 1944 in which it was laid down that the collaborationist path of the civil war in Spain was to be continued.

The first director of this exiled *Ruta* was a Catalan libertarian, Francisco Botey, from Maresma, staunch in his libertarian outlook in which there was no peace for deviations.

Propaganda by ‘*Ruta*’, helped by ‘*Impulso*’ from Toulouse, and ‘*Solidaridad Obrera*’ and ‘*El Rebelde*’, both from Paris, brought about a healthy reaction on the part of anarchist militants and, at the Paris congress alluded to earlier, the Spanish Libertarian Movement ratified the principles, tactics

and objectives which had been the inspiration of the CNT from the congress of “*La Comedia*” in 1919 on.

A few days before the Paris congress in mid-April, the Libertarian Youth of Spain in Exile held its first congress, in Toulouse, as a result of which ‘*Ruta*’ transferred to that capital of Languedoc with Benito Milla taking over its management. It was a task to which, as we said earlier in connection with the papers days in Spain, he was no stranger.

For a number of years the magazine was much read and in demand. The columns of this youth organ carried the best that militants in exile, and based in England, Mexico, Argentina, Africa, Belgium, Venezuela and France, had to offer. Once again it had the backing of old, familiar contributors like

Felipe Alaiz, Jose Peirats, Benjamin Cano Ruiz, Liberto Sarrau, Cristobal Garcia and Amador Franco and its pages were opened now to new talents like Raul Carballeira, Cristobal Parra, Moises Martin, Jose Galdo, Mejias Pena, Liberto Lucarini, Liberto Amoros. G. Germen and A. Roa, with Antonio Tellez outstanding as a talented illustrator without whom ‘*Ruta*’ would not have been what it came to be in that stage of its exile, deserving of a special mention.

When the world war ended, the naive logic of some libertarians among them, led them to believe that it would mean the end of Francoism too, and it was at that time that hundreds of young people from the FIJL went to Spain in a sort of “midwife” capacity, to help with the birth of a free Spain. The role of these young folk, many of whom were never to return, having given their lives in an unequal and suicidal battle with Franco's huge repressive machinery, gives the lie in no uncertain manner to those who claim that, while Franco lived, the anarchists had withdrawn to their “winter quarters”.

These same young people were behind the publication, inside Spain, of our libertarian press. ‘*Juventud Libre*’, ‘*Tierra y Libertad*’, ‘*Solidaridad Obrera*’ and ‘*Ruta*’ turned up regularly in Madrid and Barcelona. A lot of libertarians had a stand in