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Review: The Friends of Durruti

The Friends of Durruti Group 1937–1939 by Agustin
Guillamon. AK Press. £7.95 116 pages

Anarchist Communist Federation

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The Friends of Durruti (FoD) were the group of Anarchists on the Left of Spanish anarcho-syndicalism who organised against the machinations of the leadership of the CNT-FAI (Confederacion Nacional de Trabajo -the mass Anarcho-syndicalist union and Federacion Anarquista Iberica -the specific anarchist organisation) and against the Stalinist provocations of May 1937.

This book is useful for the wealth of factual evidence, quotes from Friends of Durruti publications, identification of FoD members, that it provides. This is refreshing after all the nonsense that has been written in the past about this group. But on the other hand, it attempts to prove unsubstantiated theories, theories that members of the Friends of Durruti Group would reject themselves. Guillamon's work first appeared in a Barcelona paper called Balance, which AK Press comrades tell us is an anarchist publication. If so, these are anarchists very much under the influence of Left Communism. In short, they are intent on showing that the actions of the FoD made them a revolutionary vanguard, and that they were fighting for a dictatorship of the proletariat, even

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though they themselves never acknowledged this. In other words the FoD were unconsciously arriving at the same conclusions as revolutionary Marxists! Thus the FoD watchwords of all power to the working class and all economic power to the unions put out on a poster in April 1937 led to “the political program implicit in this poster...makes of the Friends of Durruti Group a revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat...” (p.40) We are patronisingly told that “What novelties they introduced to anarchist theory may well have been old Marxist postulates, themselves merely elementary lessons from the class struggle” (p.70) and “ After the necessity of a dictatorship of the proletariat had been acknowledged, the next issue to arise was: And who is to exercise that dictatorship of the proletariat? The answer was; the revolutionary Junta, promptly defined as the vanguard of revolutionaries. And its role? we cannot believe that it can be anything other than the one which Marxists ascribe to the revolutionary party”. (p.68)

Now, Guillamon spends considerable time in his book demolishing the myths that the FoD were under the influence of POUMists and Trotskyists, that they were Marxists, that they were insignificant. For this we should be grateful. But to then make the equation that the FoD’s formulas equalled a form of Marxism is, to say the least, to cloud the issue. The FoD did not use the term dictatorship of the proletariat because it is an ambiguous term. If it means as the FoD proposed, that the working class established its own organisations to suppress the boss class and lead on to libertarian communism, then all well and good. But if it means the rule of a few, even of an “enlightened few” who were somehow the revolutionary vanguard, then we, and the FoD, are right to reject the term. The FoD meant for the whole working class to come to power. This is what they struggled for. Similarly, whilst we recognise that some elements of the working class may well be in theoretical and indeed practical advance of others, and that anarchist communists should strive for a leadership of ideas- that is the widespread un-

derstanding and grasp of anarchist communism- we find the term revolutionary vanguard just as ambiguous.

Read this book with these criticisms in mind. But remember that this book is flawed because of these criticisms. It is a shame that Georges Fontenis’ book on the FoD has not been translated from the French- a far better book in many ways. If you want a good and far cheaper account of the FoD then read our pamphlet Towards a Fresh Revolution by the Friends of Durruti, produced by London ACF in the Stormy Petrel series at only 75p. This offers two texts from the Friends, and a historical and critical analysis- a winner!