

Comrade Durruti Speaks

CNT

6 October 1936

Contents

Picture of a guerrilla	3
Deported yesterday...	3
The offensive on Madrid	3
Fortifications	4
We are revolutionaries	5
On Discipline	5

We make the war and the revolution at the same time. Militiamen are fighting for the conquest of the land, the factories, bread, and culture... the pickaxe and the shovel are as important as the rifle. Comrades, we will win the war!

Picture of a guerrilla

Durruti was in Madrid. We shook his scarred and strong proletarian hand. We listened to his sincere remarks, in which one can hear the bravery of a lion, the perspicacity of a veteran militant, and the cheerful sparks of youth. He has always been a legendary combatant, a steely fighter; indeed, his natural habitat is the rough and difficult struggle. His hour is ringing in Spain and he had to step forth, with all he has and everything he is worth, in the tragic panorama of the present war.

He was among us for a day. Strong, tall, and burly; weather-beaten by the winds on the Aragón front; victory already shines in his eyes. He is hopeful, and his visit brings us tremendous optimism. With his leather coat and mountaineer's cap, he is the perfect image of a revolutionary guerrilla.

But Durruti—we should note—is nothing like Pancho Villa. The Mexican adventurer fought for the sake of fighting, made war without knowing why or for what, and lacked a political or social program. Durruti is an anarchist in combat, with a clear sociological vision and a powerful revolutionary impulse that makes him far superior to Villa. The former was a warrior, with his old and brutal soul, whereas our comrade is a revolutionary, with his spirit open to tomorrow, enlightened and eager for the best that life has to offer.

Deported yesterday...

Durruti leads thousands of comrades in Aragón and with them he has won a long series of anti-fascist victories. His Column is the model of organization and we have put all our hopes in it. Today our comrade is one of the stars of the war against fascism, although we cannot help but recall that those who have demonstrated their inability to defend the Republic deported him to Villa Cisneros four years ago. We are living in a time of the rectification of errors, when the false coin of empty men disappears from social circulation. While the masses don't think of Casares Quiroga warmly, they drape Francisco Ascaso's name with heroism and Durruti's incites the hope of the Spanish proletariat—especially in Zaragoza which, under the horror of fascist executions, is awaiting the hour of popular justice.

Durruti came to Madrid to attend to questions of extraordinary importance for the war and he achieved his goals to a great extent. When we have defeated fascism and can speak without reserve, the people will know the value of this extremely rapid and effective visit, thanks to which our operations on many fronts will soon improve dramatically.

The offensive on Madrid

We took the opportunity of his visit to ask our comrade about various aspects of the present struggle. With respect to the fronts of the Center, he told us the following:

“It doesn’t take much common sense to see what the enemy is doing. It’s focusing all its attention on attacking Madrid, although that doesn’t mean that its situation throughout the country has improved. The opposite is true. Catalonia and Levante are putting more pressure on the Aragón front daily, and the fascists know that whatever they do, no matter how hard they try, Huesca, Zaragoza, and Teruel will soon fall into our hands. Once that happens, they’ve lost the war. Those three cities are extremely important from a strategic point of view. When we win them, and it’s certain that we will, that will be the end of the enemy front, from Calatayud to Burgos, and they’ll run from the siege of Sigüenza, just like they fled the Sierra offensive.

“For our part, we can mobilize an army of more than 100,000 men. And there’s the situation in Oviedo. We’ll clean the fascists out of Asturias within several days: the comrades there, who fought so bravely in October ‘34, know what to do with Galicia and Castilla. And think of Granada and Córdoba, which our people are about to capture. That’s how the war is going. So, given all that, the enemy would be stupid not to think of saving itself by taking Madrid. Of course! It’s intoxicated by dreams of seizing the Spanish capital, but it will break apart on the fronts of the Center. And it needs to withdraw troops from other fronts to carry out that desperate attack. The resistance in Madrid, combined with our offensives elsewhere, will ruin it. It’s that simple.”

Fortifications

“You don’t fight a war with words, but with fortifications. The pickaxe and the shovel are as important as the rifle. I can’t say it often enough. As usual there are plenty of rearguard slackers and freeloaders in Madrid, but we have to mobilize everyone and must conserve every drop of gasoline. Our principle strength in Aragón lay in the fact that we buttress all our advances, however small, by immediately constructing trenches and parapets. Our militiamen know how to set up their battlefield and understand that not retreating is the best response to any assault. The survival instinct is very powerful, but it’s not true that it causes you to lose battles. We fight for life and apply the survival instinct to the fighting itself. The comrades in my Column don’t budge when the enemy attacks, thanks to the survival instinct. We can only achieve that with fortifications.

“So, in response to your questions about the fronts of the Center, I insist that it’s absolutely necessary that you open a web of trenches, parapets, and wire fences; that you build fortifications; that everyone in Madrid lives for the war and fights to defend themselves. If that occurs, we can be certain that the fascist’s maneuvers that concern you will almost help us, because the enemy will uselessly invest resources here that it needs to resist our attacks elsewhere.”

We are revolutionaries

“What can you tell us about your Column?”

“I’m pleased with it. My people have everything they need and when they fight, they function like a perfect machine. I don’t mean to imply that they’re dehumanized. Nothing of the sort. Our comrades on the front know why and for what they’re fighting. They’re revolutionaries and don’t wage war for hollow slogans, or some more or less promising laws, but for the conquest of the land, the factories, the workshops, the means of transport, bread, and culture... They know that their lives depend on victory.

“Furthermore, and I think circumstances demand this, we’re making the war and the revolution at the same time. We’re not only taking revolutionary steps in the rear-guard, in Barcelona, but right up to the line of fire. Every town we conquer begins to transform itself in a revolutionary way. That’s the best part of the campaign. It’s exciting! Sometimes, when I’m alone, I reflect on what we’re doing and that’s when I feel my responsibility most deeply. The defeat of my column would be horrifying. It couldn’t just retreat like a typical army. We would have to take with us all the inhabitants of all the places that we’ve passed through. Absolutely everyone! From the frontlines to Barcelona, there are only fighters on the path we’ve followed. Everyone works for the war and the revolution. That’s our strength.

On Discipline

We come to the question of the moment: discipline.

“Man! I’m very happy you brought this up. People talk a lot about the topic but few hit the nail on the head. For me, discipline is nothing more than respect for your own responsibility and that of others. I’m against the discipline of the barracks, which only leads to stultification, hate, and automatism. But I also can’t accept—indeed the necessities of war make it impossible—the so-called liberty that cowards turn to when they want to duck out of something. Our organization, the CNT, has the best discipline, and that’s what enables the militants to trust the comrades occupying the posts in the Committees. They obey and carry out the organization’s decisions. People have to obey the delegates in times of war; otherwise it would be impossible to undertake any operation. If people disagree with them, there are meetings where they can suggest their replacement.

“I’ve seen all the tricks of the Great War in my Column: the dying mother, the pregnant *compañera*, the sick child, the swollen face, the bad eyes... I have a magnificent health team. Anyone caught lying: a double shift with the pick and mattock! Discouraging letters from home? To the garbage! When someone wants to return home, claiming that a volunteer can come and go, he must first hear my thoughts on the matter. After all, we rely on his strength. Afterwards, we’ll let him leave, but only after we’ve taken his weapon—it belongs to the column—and he’ll have to go

on foot too, because the cars also serve the war effort. It almost never comes to this. The militiaman's self-esteem quickly surfaces and, as a rule, with an attitude of "No one will look down on me, not even the leader of the Column!" He returns to the battlefield, ready to fight heroically.

"Frankly, I'm happy with the comrades that follow me. I suppose that they're happy with me too. Nothing is lacking. Female comrades can spend two days at the front; after that, they go to the rearguard... The newspapers arrive daily, the food is excellent, there are abundant books, and lectures arouse the comrades' revolutionary spirit during free time. The leisure time isn't easy. You have to occupy yourself with something: principally, being at war, it's with making fortifications. What time is it? One in the morning, right? Well, now, behind their sandbags, my lions on the Aragón front are digging new trenches with the greatest enthusiasm..."

Durruti smiles as he thinks of his comrades in the battle. Even in Madrid he feels the excitement of his faraway Column.

"They don't know that I'm here," he says, as if speaking to himself.

He looks up and stares into the dark Madrid night. He gathers himself quickly and stands up, firm and smiling; under the visor of his leather cap, the penetrating gaze of a revolutionary guerrilla shines with optimism. He puts his rough proletarian hands on our shoulders and, when the interview is over, says:

"We're going to win this war, comrades!"

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Durruti in the Spanish Revolution by Abel Paz.
Originally published in the newspaper *CNT*. Translated by Chuck Morse.

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