

# The first days of the Revolution

from El Acratador #54

El Acratador

16 April 1998

In Barcelona the revolution is triumphant, the government of the Generalitat is purely symbolic, and in the streets businesses are socialized. The military barracks are distributed among the different workers organizations that comprise the Central Committee of Antifascist Militias, which replaces the army, renaming them Bakunin, Espartacus and Salvochea for the CNT-FAI, Lenin for the POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista - Workers Party of Marxist Unification, non-stalinist communist party T.N.) and Carlos Marx for the PSUC (Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya, Catalunya's communist party T.N.). Hotels, tycoons' mansions and employers centers become the headquarters of workers organizations. Luxury restaurants become popular dining rooms.

On July 24 the Durruti Column, made up of 2,000 militiamen leaves Barcelona towards Zaragoza. Minutes before departing canadian journalist Von Passen has a historic interview with Durruti titled: "Two million anarchists fight for the Revolution". Some of Durruti's statements were: "There are only two roads, victory for the working class, freedom, or victory for the fascists which means tyranny. Both combatants know what's in store for the loser. We are ready to end fascism once and for all, even in spite of the Republican government", "No government fights fascism to destroy it. When the bourgeoisie sees that power is slipping out of its hands, it brings up fascism to hold onto their privileges".

The column overwhelmed the enemy in a few days. Local party bosses, large landowners and tycoons escaped in a panic. The first serious combat was the taking of Caspe. In a few days they were 20 km from Zaragoza. Finally the front stabilized at Pina de Ebro due to lack of weapons for the assault on Zaragoza. The column's general headquarters was installed in Bujaraloz. From there it promoted the creation of the Council of Aragon, against the wishes of the CNT's directive that was beginning to cooperate with the republican government. With respect to the ruin caused by combats Durruti said to Von Passen: "We have always lived in shantytowns and if we destroy we are also capable of building. It was us who built the palaces and the cities. The workers can build them again, and better ones; we are not afraid of ruins, we have a new world here in our hearts".

One of Durruti's main worries was the lack of weapons. He travelled to Madrid and Barcelona seeking weapons or funds to acquire them. Faced with Largo Caballero's refusal to allow gold from the National Treasury to be used for the purchase of weapons, Durruti planned an assault on the Banco de España. To that end he sent 3000 catalan anarchists from the "Land and Freedom" column charged with keeping an eye on any government's dictatorial attempts and at the same time to take part in the transport of gold to Barcelona aboard especial trains. The CNT's national committee opposed this action and two weeks later the gold was transported to the Soviet Union, the immense national treasury created by the surplus value of workers toil ended up in the hands of Stalin who in return sent weapons of inferior quality literally paid for in gold.

In October Franco's army concentrated its best troops for the assault on Madrid. At the beginning of November the government moved from Madrid to Valencia, against the wishes of the four CNT Ministers. This government decision was much criticized by the working class as the government was abandoning the people of Madrid at the decisive moment. On the road to Valencia, 40 kms from Madrid, an anarchist batallion stopped and disarmed six ministers and two generals accusing them of cowardice and of abandoning the people, making the intervention of high ranking CNT officials necessary to secure their release.

Durruti was called to the defense of Madrid, but he refused to leave the Aragon front. Later he was persuaded as his presence would lend moral support to the fighters. On November 15 1,800 militiamen from the best centuries of Durruti's column entered into combat at the University City (Madrid). The combat and the bombings were terrifying. Madrid was the first civilized city in the world subjected to a fascist attack as a prelude to World War II. Franco initiated the attack he thought would be the final one. At University City combat was hand to hand. On the 18th only 700 of the 1800 anarchist militiamen remained. On the 19th Durruti was told that some militiamen were deserting their positions as they had been without eating or sleeping for five days. Durruti went by car to the Clinic Hospital and on the way stopped to persuade some militiamen to return to their positions. As he got back in the car he was mortally wounded by a shot to the chest. He died at dawn on November 20.

There have been all kinds of speculations about his death in such unusual circumstances. The official version was death by a bullet from the enemy positions. But the wound showed that it was fired at close range. There was talk of a communist, falangist or even anarchist attempt. The most credible hypothesis says that the bullet was accidentally shot from Durruti's assistant, sergeant Manzana's "naranjero" (sub-machine gun). His funeral on the 22 of November in Barcelona was attended by hundreds of thousands. His death demoralized many anarchists. Most of them left Madrid in fear of the stalinist secret service, who were beginning the purge of trotskyists and anarchists in their private prisons. Durruti's image was used to justify all kinds of counterrevolutionary measures, the return of private property, militarization of the militias, subordinating the CNT to the government, ...attributing to him a sentence he never uttered: "We renounce everything except victory" and forgetting his public declarations a few days before his death such as: "This war we wage is to squash the enemy in front of us. But the enemy is also he who opposes the Revolution's conquests" (Radio speech, November 7) "We make war and revolution at the same time. The militiaman has to know that he fights for the conquest of the land, the factories, culture ..., the pick and the shovel are as valuable as the gun" (Interview October 3).

### **SOCIALIZED INDUSTRY**

Before the civil war the spanish state was mainly structured around agriculture although there were important industrial centers such as Barcelona, Euskadi or Asturias. However, this didn't

impede the development of a very strong syndical movement very active in industry and in struggles such as the Canadiense strike in 1934, which paralyzed Barcelona in solidarity with workers fired from the textile industry. The Employers Association was not as well organized as today, but the use of gunmen, scabs, and repression against union leaders was commonplace. In spite of which nearly 80% of the workers organized themselves in unions and the CNT had one million members. The socializing process within industry was less numerous as far as number of members, but no less important or interesting than that which took place in the agrarian collectives. In fact, during the days following July 19 1936, industry and commerce were for the most part collectivized in Catalunya and to a lesser degree in Madrid and Valencia. In Barcelona all important enterprises and public services, hotels and large stores, as well as large factories were collectivized, all of them being run by elected committees or workplace councils. In August 1936 CAMPSA was socialized, bringing under direct workers control the petroleum monopoly, thus avoiding its waste. There are writings from that time on energy savings as advanced as any ecology text of today. Between 1936 and 1937 the CNT and the UGT collectivized the construction and lumber sectors and salaries were brought to balance. The technicians (architects, designers, engineers) agreed to collaborate with the revolution. Contractors, thugs in the service of the employers who operated in the harbor, disappeared. At the beginning the bosses' attitude was suspiciously calm, as many of them had sent their capital abroad. The 1800 workers of Espana industrial met at the Arenas Theater on August 8 1936 and took over the company, joined by the technicians. The 500 workers from Torras did the same and in fifteen days built six armored vehicles for the antifascist troops. This process happened not only in the production area, but also carried with it an impulse, albeit chaotic and irreflexive, to build a new social organization. Although it didn't exist, a full political consciousness was supplied by a strong voluntarism and by the everyday work, proving that self-managed work is more than a theoretical model. The libertarian economic program was adjusted to the realization of Libertarian Communism as opposed to the reformist marxist positions. Thus while CNT-FAI talked about socializing the banks and the creation of a credit bank as well as work for the social revolution, the political parties proposed nationalization of the banks, centralization of services and more militarization. The clash was evident and the CNT had to give up some of its positions, eventually going from total workers self-management to greater State intervention, much more restrictive. Stalinism was beginning to weigh heavily over the ranks of several parties, promoting cutbacks to the powers of workers committees. Ruiz Ponseti, from PSUC said in 1937 that the great problem of the collectives was their "much too democratic" management. Important debates on the destination of earnings made by the socialized industries took place due to the exigencies of the State and the Generalitat. The revolutionaries crashed against obstacles such as the lack of raw materials, the scant cooperation of some committees, the entrenched opposition of bourgeois catalanism and other reasons such as some enterprises not being socialized because they were foreign-owned, the lack of interest on the part of the anarchists to socialize the banks which resulted in some businessmen's capital continuing to be hoarded. Another mistake was the excessive focusing of industry on the war and the importance given heavy industry, while the people suffered privations.

Finally there evolved a curious model whereby some industries straddled between marxist nationalization and anarchist collectivization, while in other cases the collectivizing process forged ahead until the fall of Barcelona to the fascists, demonstrating the viability of the libertarian economic model, as in the case of the bread industry of Barcelona, which was managed by a workers

committee up to the end of the war, distributing bread to the whole city and the front. There are still many samples of this socializing work in many parts of the state, which remind us of the hard work of the men and women who produced to keep the Revolution afloat. Thus it is possible that the tiles on the roof of your house were made in the socialized factory no. 5 of the CNT-Alicante (one of which we have at the Centro Social Libertario) or that parts of the Hispano\_Suiza model of the 1930s came from the famous socialized factory in Barcelona, or that the rails upon which the train rides came from the socialized foundry at Prat. Industry's collectivizing labor during the Civil War demonstrates that the working class can survive without bosses, working less and using the benefits to improve their lives.

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



El Acratador  
The first days of the Revolution  
from El Acratador #54  
16 April 1998

[https://web.archive.org/web/20060525062301/http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/spain/  
first\\_ea.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20060525062301/http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/spain/first_ea.html)

Translation from El Acratador #54 by Luis J. Prat

**[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)**