Durruti Is Dead, Yet Living

Emma Goldman

1936

Durruti, whom I saw but a month ago, lost his life in the street-battles of Madrid.

My previous knowledge of this stormy petrel of the Anarchist and revolutionary movement in Spain was merely from reading about him. On my arrival in Barcelona I learned many fascinating stories of Durruti and his column. They made me eager to go to the Aragon front, where he was the leading spirit of the brave and valiant militias, fighting against fascism.

I arrived at Durruti’s headquarters towards evening, completely exhausted from the long drive over a rough road. A few moments with Durruti was like a strong tonic, refreshing and invigorating. Powerful of body as if hewn from the rocks of Montserrat, Durruti easily represented the most dominating figure among the Anarchists I had met since my arrival in Spain. His terrific energy electrified me as it seemed to effect everyone who came within its radius.

I found Durruti in a veritable beehive of activity. Men came and went, the telephone was constantly calling for Durruti. In addition was the deafening hammering of workers who were constructing a wooden shed for Durruti’s staff. Through all the din and constant call on his time Durruti remained serene and
patient. He received me as if he had known me all his life. The
graciousness and warmth from a man engaged in a life and
death struggle against fascism was something I had hardly ex-
pected.

I had heard much about Durruti’s mastery over the column
that went by his name. I was curious to learn by what means
other than military drive he had succeeded in welding together
10,000 volunteers without previous military training and ex-
perience of any sort. Durruti seemed surprised that I, an old
Anarchist should even ask such a question.

“I have been an Anarchist all my life,” he replied, “I hope I
have remained one. I should consider it very sad indeed, had
I to turn into a general and rule the men with a military rod.
They have come to me voluntarily, they are ready to stake their
lives in our antifascist fight. I believe, as I always have, in free-
dom. The freedom which rests on the sense of responsibility.
I consider discipline indispensable, but it must be inner disci-
pline, motivated by a common purpose and a strong feeling of
comradeship.” He had gained the confidence of the men and
their affection because he had never played the part of a supe-
rior. He was one of them. He ate and slept as simply as they did.
Often even denying himself his own portion for one weak or
sick, and needing more than he. And he shared their danger in
every battle. That was no doubt the secret of Durruti’s success
with his column. The men adored him. They not only carried
out all his instructions, they were ready to follow him in the
most perilous venture to repulse the fascist position.

I had arrived on the eve of an attack Durruti had prepared for
the following morning. At daybreak Durruti, like the rest of the
militia with his rifle over his shoulder, led the way. Together
with them he drove the enemy back four kilometers, and he
also succeeded in capturing a considerable amount of arms the
enemies had left behind in their flight.

The moral example of simple equality was by no means the
only explanation of Durruti’s influence. There was another, his
In point of truth, there never was such complete oneness in the ranks of the popular front in Catalonia, as from the moment when the news of Durruti’s death became known until the last when he was laid to rest.

Every party of every political tendency fighting Spanish fascism turned out en masse to pay loving tribute to Buenaventura Durruti. But not only the direct comrades of Durruti, numbering hundreds of thousands and all the allies in the antifascist struggle, the largest part of the population of Barcelona represented an incessant stream of humanity. All had come to participate in the long and exhausting funeral procession. Never before had Barcelona witnessed such a human sea whose silent grief rose and fell in complete unison.

As to the comrades of Durruti — comrades closely knit by their ideal and the comrades of the gallant column he had created. Their admiration, their love, their devotion and respect left no place for discord and dissension. They were as one in their grief and in their determination to continue the battle against fascism and for the realization of the Revolution for which Durruti had lived, fought and had staked his all until his last breath.

No, Durruti is not dead! He is more alive than living. His glorious example will now be emulated by all the Catalan workers and peasants, by all the oppressed and disinherited. The memory of Durruti’s courage and fortitude will spur them on to great deeds until fascism has been slain. Then the real work will begin — the work on the new social structure of human value, justice and freedom.

No, no! Durruti is not dead! He lives in us for ever and ever.
you have shirked your self-imposed task." That worked like
good magic. The man pleads to remain. No military brow-beating, no
correction, no disciplinary punishment to hold the Durruti col-
umn at the front. Only the vulcanic energy of the man carries
everyone along and makes them feel as one with him.

A great man this Anarchist Durruti, a born leader and
teacher of men, thoughtful and tender comrade all in one. And
now Durruti is dead. His great heart beats no more. His pow-

erful body felled down like a giant tree. And yet, and yet —
Durruti is not dead. The hundreds of thousands that turned out
Sunday, November 22nd, 1936, to pay Durruti their last tribute
have testified to that.

No, Durruti is not dead. The fires of his flaming spirit lighted
in all who knew and loved him, can never be extinguished. Al-
ready the masses have lifted high the torch that fell from Dur-
ruti’s hand. Triumphanty they are carrying it before them on
the path of Durruti had blazoned for many years. The path that
leads to the highest summit of Durruti’s ideal. This ideal was
Anarchism — the grand passion of Durruti’s life. He had served
it utterly. He remained faithful to it until his last breath.

If proof were needed of Durruti’s tenderness his concern in
my safety gave it to me. There was no place to house me for
the night at the General-Staff quarters. And the nearest village
was Pina. But it had been repeatedly bombarded by the fascists.
Durruti was loathe to send me there. I insisted it was alright.
One dies but once. I could see the pride in his face that his old
comrade had no fear. He let me go under strong guard.

I was grateful to him because it gave me a rare chance to
meet many of the comrades in arms of Durruti and also to
speak with the people of the village. The spirit of these much-
tried victims of fascism was most impressive.

The enemy was only a short distance from Pina on the other
side of a creek. But there was no fear or weakness among the
people. Heroically they fought on. "Rather dead, than fascist
rule," they told me. "We stand and fall with Durruti in the an-
tifascist fight to the last man."

In Pina I discovered a child of eight years old, an orphan who
had already been harnessed to daily toil with a fascist family.
Her tiny hands were red and swollen. Her eyes, full of horror
from the dreadful shocks she had already suffered at the hands
of Franco’s hirelings. The people of Pina are pitifully poor. Yet
everyone gave this ill-treated child care and love she had never
known before.

The European Press has from the very beginning of the ant-
fascist war competed with each other in calumny and vilifica-
tion of the Spanish defenders of liberty. Not a day during the
last four months but what these satraps of European fascism
did not write the most sensational reports of atrocities commit-
ted by the revolutionary forces. Every day the readers of these
yellow sheets were fed on the riots and disorders in Barcelona
and other towns and villages, free from the fascist invasion.

Having travelled over the whole of Catalonia, Aragon, and
the Levante, having visited every city and village on the way,
I can testify that there is not one word of truth in any of the
bloodcurdling accounts I had read in some of the British and
Continental press.

A recent example of the utter unscrupulous news-
fabrication was furnished by some of the papers in regard to
the death of the Anarchist and heroic leader of the antifascist
struggle, Buenaventura Durruti.

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Whoever it was who wrote this preposterous invention he
could not have been in Barcelona. Much less know the place of
Buenaventura Durruti in the hearts of the members of the CNT
and FAI. Indeed, in the hearts and estimation of all regardless
of their divergence with Durruti’s political and social ideas.