

An Interview with Miguel Amorós

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March 26, 2015

Miguel, you have written a lot about Durruti: the revolutionary, the voice of the revolution, the bellwether of the struggle ... what is the contribution of your “reevaluation” of this “personality” of anarchism, libertarian ideas and the libertarian movement in Spain?

*My purpose in writing **Durruti en el Laberinto**¹ was to demystify him as a person and situate him in his historical context. To break down an ideological myth that was the “organic” creation of a particular bureaucratic apparatus, to restore his anarchist and revolutionary identity, visible in every aspect of his everyday practice. In order to do this, I recapitulated almost every day of the last five months of his life.*

I had some older relatives that were on the losing side of the war and more than one of them said to me at one time or another: “Ay! How would the war have turned out if they had not killed Durruti?” What do you say to that?

The outcome of the war did not depend on any one individual, no matter how charismatic that person may have been. It is nonetheless legitimate to speculate that the rolling back of the revolution might not have taken place at such a rapid pace, that the strategy of the CNT might not have been so counterrevolutionary and that the Stalinization of the Republic might not have penetrated so deeply. So, if Durruti had not been killed, a factor that played a role in the defeat, the enormous demoralization experienced by the masses after his death and especially starting in 1937, might not have had such a major impact.

And what might have happened with the revolutionary process ... if Durruti had not died ... what might have been different?

There is no doubt that they would have tried to bribe Durruti with a military command of a division or something like that. As they did with Mera. In any event, the first step of the counterrevolution, the militarization of the militias, once it took place, would have taken place under other conditions. The CNT might not have caved in to “circumstances” with such abandon. Furthermore, the attacks of Líster’s division against the Aragon collectives would have been inconceivable with Durruti in Catalonia or Aragon.

People back in November ’36 began to ask who killed Durruti and some questions are still unanswered ... after all these years: do we know anything for certain?

¹ Miguel Amorós, *Durruti en el laberinto* [Durruti in the Labyrinth], Muturreko burutazioak, Bilbao, 2006. New, expanded edition published by Virus Editorial, Barcelona, 2014 [Translator’s note].

There was a conspiracy of the Soviets to remove Durruti from the Aragon Front and “neutralize” the anarchist influence there. This has been proven by the documentary record. As for his death, it is known for certain that the official version of the stray bullet was as false as the versions of an inside job and an accidental discharge of a “naranjero” [the MP-28 submachine gun used by the Republican forces in the civil war]. Durruti was killed by a shot at close range, from behind, presumably from a group of militiamen who were fleeing from the front lines. Whether this encounter was a result of chance or a set-up is something that we can speculate about, but not prove.

Durruti was for everyone, for all factions, more of an enemy as a revolutionary element and as the advocate of a social uprising than he was an enemy for the military rebels?

The counterrevolution, which was spearheaded in Spain by the communists, considered Durruti to be an obstacle to the creation of a regular army with barracks discipline, gold braid and epaulets and a general staff outside of the control of the workers organizations; in addition, it feared his projects for “libertarian reconstruction” in the rearguard and at the front, which it stigmatized as absurd utopian experiments.

The important thing was to confront the abuse of power that victimized those who always had less, the worker, the farmhand, the peasant, the wage laborer ... and create an egalitarian society ... what was important was the revolution and with the military revolt an opportunity arose ... isn't that what happened?

That is not how the leading officials of the confederal organization saw it, which from the very start advocated collaboration in mixed institutions with other political forces and insistently appealed to the rank and file militants to go back to work and not to go too far.

I understand, based on the little that I have been able to gather from my reading and my conversations, that if people like Ascaso, Durruti, and so forth had not been killed ... the spring of '37 in Barcelona (its impact was more widespread) would not have taken place as it did ... maybe it would not even have had the same outcome.

I make it a point to insist that individuals, as important as they may be, are only individuals. The events of '37 would have taken place in one way or another. Even while Durruti was alive a similar event occurred in Valencia in connection with the funeral of a militiaman from the Iron Column. On the other hand, people whose prestige was unquestionable, such as Federica Montseny and Juan García Oliver, forfeited all their credibility with their “Cease Fire” appeals. It can of course be assumed that with Ascaso and Durruti among the workers on the barricades the defeat of the revolution would not have been so complete. The abandonment of the barricades might not have implied, for example, the dissolution of the Defense Committees and the Control Patrols, the mass imprisonment of libertarians and the suppression of the Council of Aragon.

It is often said—and always to condemn anarchist and libertarian ideas—that they were the ones who proposed the alternative: revolution or win the war ... but I saw this more from another perspective: why don't we ask ourselves whether this was not the idea of others, those who were afraid of anarchist ideas and the development of the revolution, and that these people fought two wars at once, one of which was aimed at the revolution and the other (as in a monologue), the war [against Franco's forces] ... what do you think?

The intervention of the masses against the military rebels expelled the State and the employers from many domains wherever the revolution made rapid progress: farmlands, factories, public order, militias, healthcare, education.... However, the state structures remained intact and thanks to the collaboration of the libertarian organizations these structures were rebuilt within a few months. The forces that sought a return to the pre-July 19 status quo employed the slogan of “first the war and

then the revolution". This meant the recovery of control by a State reinforced with its own army and police, and the liquidation of the revolutionary conquests, first by way of nationalization. The first phase of the process took place under the Largo Caballero government; the second phase, during the Negrín period.

Did Durruti's militiamen frighten them so much that they had to be sent to Madrid? (I ask this question with respect to both the rebel military as well as the communists....) (Because they could have allowed them to do more to "take" Zaragoza, but all of a sudden they are sent to be entangled in the labyrinth of the Madrid Front and the *Ciudad Universitaria*; sorry, but this whole question just seems to me to have too many loose ends.) What can you tell us about this?

*Durruti's arrival in Madrid was quite low-key and did not have a big impact in the press, not even the libertarian press. There was no triumphal procession; that was an **a posteriori** propaganda invention, and was part of the media disputes between the communist and confederal hierarchies. Durruti was stalled about 35 kilometers from Zaragoza due to a shortage of ammunition and weapons, and a lack of artillery and air support. And I will also point out that it was also because of a shortage of combatants (his column did not have more than six thousand men, a few more than fifty "centuries"). The government did not want to compensate for these shortages because it did not want to arm the FAI. Soviet diplomacy had sabotaged all arms purchases because the Soviets did not want to see the anarchist militias well armed, either. Durruti went to Madrid because the leaders of the CNT convinced him that a successful effort there would result in his getting the weapons that he needed in Aragon. But he arrived in Madrid with only one thousand two hundred men (plus another three hundred recruited by **Estat Català**); none of the other available Catalan militiamen who had been assigned to serve with him wanted to fight under his orders. The result was that with meager forces, exhausted from their journey and not accustomed to fighting under air assault and artillery bombardment, he had to try to seal a dangerous breach in a front with courage alone against twenty five thousand militiamen and soldiers. It was not a mission that provided an opportunity for great accomplishments and praise, but a suicide mission. Those who pulled the strings to send him there knew what they were doing.*

What was the profound impact of Stalinism and its men in Spain during the Civil War?

Starting in September 1936 Stalinism was hard at work in the Spanish Republic. The weapons that it contributed allowed it to take control of military operations and the secret services, obtain advantages for the Communist Party, persecute dissidents and put an end to anarchosindicalist dominance. The Spanish revolution was sacrificed and the revolutionaries persecuted and assassinated because the Soviet foreign policy of alliances with the bourgeois democracies required the existence in Spain of an authoritarian bourgeois Republic. Stalinism left in its wake a trail of authoritarianism, perfidy, double-dealing, falsehood, manipulation and crime, in short, totalitarianism. The communist parties inherited its methods and applied them to the degree that they were capable of doing so.

Was there treachery, direct or indirect, in the assassination of Durruti? Was the government behind it, and the hand of Stalin and his agents in Spain?

It can be said unequivocally that Stalin's agents conspired to remove Durruti from the Aragon Front. The Prime Minister consciously or unwittingly played his role in this. And so did some of the other Ministers in his cabinet. The National Committee of the CNT and the Peninsular Committee of the FAI did their part, too, for what must be assumed were their own political reasons.

The disagreements in the CNT, when some took a position in favor of joining the government, a position that we can characterize as indicative of the "bureaucratization" of the CNT, and others were very much opposed to this course of action ... the outbursts of dissent were quite violent,

there were incidents involving what we could consider to be “fighting words” ... maybe this had something to do with his death ... we can only recall what you wrote in your book: that Mariano Rodríguez Vázquez (“Marianet”), at that time the General Secretary of the CNT, “met with all the witnesses and pressured them to remain silent” and you conclude that “Durruti was killed by his comrades; they killed him by corrupting his ideas”.

Durruti did not come out publicly against the entry of the CNT in the republican government, just as he did not publicly oppose the CNT's joining the Catalanian government. He did, however, express his anger at the sinister machinations in the rearguard (see his famous radio speech of November 5). His death was in a way favorable for the development of the anarchist bureaucracy. First of all, it allowed the leaders of the CNT to unambiguously advocate the militarization of the libertarian columns; and later, they put into his mouth words that called upon the workers to renounce the revolution and libertarian principles in order to support the war. The CNT-FAI was bureaucratized as it became integrated into the State institutions, as the odds of winning the war diminished, and as the Spanish proletariat was isolated internationally, as the libertarian organizations felt they had to make an abrupt change of course and make deals with the communists. The class war was buried to the benefit of a war for independence. The militiamen ceased to fight for their class interests in order to fight instead for the defense of “the nation”. Their enemies were no longer the bourgeoisie, the clergy and the military, but rather “foreign invaders”. The mystifying rhetorical excesses of the libertarian leaders transformed Durruti, the proletarian hero, into a national warlord [caudillo nacional], a figure of racial mythology and a xenophobic militarist. That was when they killed him a second time.

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Retrieved on 11th May 2021 from libcom.org

Miguel Amorós, interviewed by Sussanna Anglès Querol on behalf of Cazarabet-El Sueño Igualitario on March 26, 2015. Translated in April 2015 from the Spanish text available online at: www.cazarabet.com “Cazarabet” is the name of a bookstore in Mas de las Matas, Spain; “el sueño igualitario” means “the egalitarian dream”, and is the name of one of the bookstore’s departments that specializes in anarchism and the history of the Spanish civil war: www.cazarabet.com/ [Translator’s note].

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