

The Life Style of Buenaventura Durruti

Buenaventura Durruti symbolised the working class struggle in Spain throughout his life until his premature death on the Madrid front. Bitterly denounced by all political parties as a 'terrorist' and 'bandit', after his death various parties of the Left claimed he was just about to embrace them after all, but nothing would ever have induced him to turn his back on the cause for which he gave his life.

The aim of the Kate Sharpley Library is to bring to the working class in general and Anarchists in particular the unknown or forgotten actions and activists of the past. Durruti (like Makhno) is one of the few Anarchist revolutionary fighters whom historians record, but he is usually vilified or misrepresented. Even those who appreciate and respect the memory of the fighter from Leon have little idea of the lifestyle of the man who became a legend among Spanish libertarians.

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"We have always lived in slums and holes in the walls. We will know how to accommodate ourselves for a time. For you must not forget that we can also build these palaces and cities, here in Spain and America and everywhere. We, the workers. We can build others to take their places. And better ones, we are not the least afraid of ruins. We are going to inherit the earth. There is not the slightest doubt about that. The bourgeoisie might blast and ruin its own world before it leaves the stage of history. We carry a new world here in our hearts, and that world is growing in this minute."

Buenaventura Durruti, in answer to the remark of journalist Pierre van Paassen ("Toronto Daily Star" Aug 5 1936), "You will be sitting on top of a pile of ruins even if you are victorious".

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The town of Leon (Lion) is at the heart of the region of Asturias. The Asturians were great fighters and paid a heavy price for their striving towards freedom. A typical family was that of the Durrutis and Dumanges. Their son Jose Buenaventura Durruti y Dumange (better known as Buenaventura Durruti) became a legend in his lifetime and seemed to personify the entire movement.



(Seated) Emilienne Morin, Rosa Durruti and Ricardo Sanz. (Standing) Colette Durruti, Joaquino and Liberto.

BUENAVENTURA DURRUTI DUMANGE (1896-1936)

Jose Buenaventura Durruti Dumange was born in the Santa Ana district of Leon on 14 July 1896, the son of Santiago Durruti and Anastasia Dumange. He started work at an early age as a metalworker in a variety of workshops (the Melchor Martinez works etc.), beginning in 1916 as a fitter's mate with the Railroad Com-

pany.
Hitherto a habitue of socialist circles, he was

sacked from the company following the 1917 general strike and at the same time severed his connections with the UGT because it had no stomach for the fight. Like many other workers from Leon, he was forced to go away as a result of that strike and after some time in Asturias and in France he was arrested upon his return to Spain and court-martialled in San Sebastian as a draft dodger.

Upon his release (a hernia saved him from military service) he returned to Leon, working in Antonio Miaja's foundry. His strong personality, strict sense of fairness and appetite for the struggle ensured that he was forever in trouble. It became 'advisable' for him to leave Leon because of his union activities (especially in connection with the strike at the Anglo-American Mining Company in Matallana, where he happened to be while installing some coal-washing facilities).

Moving to San Sebastian, he came into contact with the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist practices then making headway against the passivity of the socialists. Along with militants like Gregorio Suberviela, Marcelino del Campo and others, he helped set up the 'Los Justicieros' (Avengers) group at a time when defence against the repression organised by the bosses and the authorities was a prime necessity. In cities like Valencia, Bilbao, Barcelona, Zaragoza, etc., a variety of anarchist defence groups carried the

burden of resistance whilst trying to federate with one another in order to co-ordinate their efforts to protect the threatened CNT.

Los Solidarios

In mid-1922, Buenaventura Durruti, along with Francisco Ascaso, Torres Escartin, Suberviela and Marcelino del Campo made Catalonia the focal point of their activity, setting up the 'Crisol' group. The name soon changed to 'Los Solidarios' as they embarked upon a flurry of activity in reply to the violence from the state, carrying out attentats, robberies, etc. When the Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera came in 1923, the

CNT went underground and many of its militants were obliged to go into exile. Durruti and Ascaso crossed into France where they helped establish a libertarian bookshop and continued to help the anarchists at home.

Towards the end of 1924 they set off for the Americas, embarking along with Gregorio 'el Toro' Martinez (also from Leon) upon an odyssey that was to take them through Cuba, Mexico, Peru, Chile and Argentina in a group called, aptly enough, 'Los Errantes' (Wanderers).

Returning to Europe, Durruti, Francisco Ascaso and Gregorio Jover were arrested in Paris on charges of preparing an attempt on the life of Alfonso XIII. Following a hunger strike and support in the shape of a vigorous international campaign for their release, they were freed from prison.

In the short time he spent in France prior to being deported, Durruti made the acquaintance of the woman who was to be his partner, Emilienne Morin. She followed him

into exile in Belgium where he carried on working as a mechanic.

When the Second Republic was proclaimed in 1931, Durruti returned to Barcelona and threw himself into the intense activity of that time. That same year he travelled back to Leon to attend his father's funeral, availing of the opportunity to hold a meeting under the auspices of the CNT Local Federation in the bullring there.

Rearrested in Barcelona, he was deported to Fuerteventura along with a hundred other prisoners before he was eventually able to make his way back to Catalonia.

The late thirties

Increasingly convinced of the necessity and imminence of insurrection when the Right won the 1933 elections. Durruti joined the Revolutionary Committee that proclaimed libertarian communism in December that year and was arrested once more. After alternate periods of freedom and incarceration, he attended the Congress of Zaragoza in 1936 when



Durruti, pre-1936

the opposition unions returned to the fold and the CNT detailed its conception of revolution.

That revolution was not long delayed for, in reply to the army revolt in July, the CNT took to the streets in defence of the rights of the workers. With the anarchists controlling the streets in Barcelona, Durruti set his face against any agreement to collaborate with other institutions or political forces, and so, when the notion of

"democratic collaboration" proposed by Diego Abad de Santillan was accepted, and the Central Committee of Anti fascist Militias formed, Buenaventura Durruti opted instead to form a column of volunteers and set off to fight on the Aragon front. There, whilst attending to the demands of warfare, the highest example of revolutionary practice was acted out in the shape of the collectives, a success truncated only by the force of Communist Party arms.

In October 1936 when the Republican government resolved to defend Madrid at all costs, it was intimated to Durruti that his presence in the capital was crucial. Although he refused in principle, and some of his comrades and friends advised him against going, he eventually succumbed to pressure and arrived in Madrid at the head of a contingent of his troops.

On 19 November, in circumstances still not completely clear, he was mortally wounded and died the following day. His body was removed to Barcelona and crowds thronged the villages and cities to watch the cortege as it passed. In Barcelona upwards of a million people packed the city in a final tribute along the procession route from the

CNT headquarters to the cemetery.

His wife, Emilienne Morin was handed all his effects: a small suitcase containing a change of underwear, shaving gear, two hand guns, a pair of sunglasses, binoculars and a notebook with a single entry reading: "15 November. Applied to the sub-committee of the CNT for a 100 peseta advance to cover personal expenses."

Durruti as recalled by his sister Rosa Victoria

"Every time he could, Pepe called at the house to see our parents. He called often but did not stay long, just a day or two, and he availed of the opportunity to tidy himself up a bit, because he arrived with his jacket torn. My brother Catero said to him: 'You're a real good for nothing: it's the same every time you come.' And he would look at them with a grin and reply: 'Go on, you've had your bonus so buy me a jacket.' One was made for him at the tailor's that Don Mariango Paniagua had in the Calle Reina Victoria: his brother Santiago fixed him up with shoes and my mother darned his clothes. My mother never got any money from him, neither Spanish money nor French, which is a source of satisfaction for us. Nothing, not one penny.



Durruti in 1936



Anastasia Dumange Soler, Mother of Durruti.

with Santiago he attended Don Manuel Fernandez's school in the Calle Misericordia and took religious instruction from the Franciscans who promoted him for his work and gave him diplomas that my mother kept for years and years. But he was reluctant to take communion there and he nearly blinded one of the friars with his catapult.

"Later they attended the El Cid schools with Don Ricardo Fanjul together up to the age of 14 and he remained affectionate and intelligent, but something of a rebel. Whenever he started work at the workshop that Don Melchor Martinez had in Renuera, he arrived home with a real and said: 'Look at this mother, that I have brought home: see what we get whilst they get rich.'

"My mother could not understand: 'But son, what do you expect if you are learning a trade? What do you want them to give you?' Obviously that was the going rate. I was also paid one real per week at the workshop. But this guy could not bear it and bore a grudge against Melchor. One real a week! (Equivalent about

25p in GB today).

"At the age of 18 or 19 he quit Melchor's workshop and went off to La Robla because they paid better. He was a good grafter and he was there as a mechanic. Meanwhile we moved here to the La Vega quarter because my father was bad with the gout and this house was across the street from his work. Within the year Santiago left to do his military service and my father asked Pepe to take over his job while he was away. He took a practical test and was taken on as a fitter's mate with Constantino Laiz at the railway depot. He was there up until the revolutionary strike broke out in 1917. My brother played a very prominent part in it. He was the first to come out. He became very friendly with Ramon Castro and as the strike dragged on, they threw a scab into the river. The poor fellow was dragged naked through Las Negrillas and my brother and Castro were held for 10 or 15 days in the old jail.

"Even then my mother was beginning to suffer a lot on his account. She went to see the lawyer Moliner who then secured

his release through the good auspices of Don Fernando Merino, who was a great friend of my father who was an election worker for him. My brother could not stand that and was told: 'Come on, with wits as sharp as yours you could be running elections.' But he stuck to his struggle: he said that he had no wish to be a traitor and he became more and more hard line. Once the strike was over he was sacked by the Company and the social-

ists expelled him and his friends from their trade union, as a result of which he underwent a lot of persecution. Then he made up his mind to move away, using his rail pass as it would enable him to travel free and so he went to France.

"About this time he was due for military service and as he was a tall, sturdy lad he was assigned to the artillery garrison in San Sebastian. The fact is that he came back promptly at the start of 1919 on a mission on behalf of the Organisation and was arrested. He was arraigned in San Sebastian as a draft dodger and my mother visited him in the prison there on two occasions. But he was lucky. He had ruptured himself playing pelota and went off to Madrid with my father for an operation: that would take eight or ten days and he did not report to the army.

"Later he returned home: he showed up with an 'Everything is fine' and his wife Mimi who wore a beret French-style. At this time he became very friendly with Cremer and started work in the Miaja

foundry and Miaja sent him to install some coal-washing facilities for the Anglo-Spanish Mining Company in Matallana, and it so happened that there was a problem with an English engineer. My brother could not stomach injustices, and he was on the miners' side, he resorted to force and managed to drive the engineer away. This made him a reputation and the Civil Guard began to look for him.

"We knew how he was because he wrote a lot either to me or to my uncle Mariano who was a railwayman and had moved to Zaragoza. He lived there in the toughest times. He really admired Pepe (Jose, i.e. Durruti).

"What an impression my brother made on me! He had to wear a disguise, let his moustache grow and wore mourning. I did not recognise him.

"He occasionally came to Leon on business. He always called to see our parents, but never stayed long: off he would go to the union or to the Union bar and he would be gone again. Whenever he arrived the police would be



Rosa Durruti, who died in 1992

"Why? Because he was out on his own from boyhood, committed to the social struggle from the strike of 1917: forever committed to his ideas, to the CNT. He adored the CNT. Whenever he was home he would sit there and sing to my little brothers Manolin and Pedro. My mother used to say: 'What sort of an idiot is this guy, you would even sing about your expulsion from the organisation!' It was what he believed and he lived for it!

"As a boy he was restless and intelligent, forever hanging around his brother Santiago: along



Colette Durruti in 1971

The Regueral business was pinned on him too, but it was not his doing: Regueral was killed by a Basque because of his conduct whilst civil governor in Bilbao: he told us so, in our home. But that is how things were, even then: whenever anything happened, they arrested Santiago and tried to arrest my father who was ill, but we prevented that.

"He showed up again in August 1923, having come from Gijon to meet his comrades: then he was off again. But a certain Arias from La Corredera spotted them on the beach at Gijon and when there was a robbery at the bank a short while later, he reported them as having been responsible.

"It was a long time before his next visit: he carried on with his social struggles around the world: he was in the Americas, Germany, France. Once, after the hunger strike in Paris, he wrote to us: 'Mother, Rosa: don't you know I have taken a Frenchwoman as my partner? I'll introduce you soon.' This was Emilienne Morin, a highly intelligent woman who was a great help to him in becoming a more rounded man: he went to live with her in Belgium.

"And he showed up in 1931 with Mimi (Emilienne), who was

around and my poor mother was always thinking about her son the revolutionary, but he told her: 'Don't worry about anything happening to me; I'm well looked after.'

"They pinned the blame for everything on him. The things they said! And my mother would reply: 'How can this be? Whenever he shows up I have to mend his clothes and give him his fare!'



Emilienne Morin and Colette Durruti in Paris (1949)

Tejerina and Monroy asked him to address a rally and he readily did so, in the bullring in El Campo del Patardo. He was edgy, I don't know, ill at ease because Romero wanted to arrest him: I never saw him that way. He had to go to ground, but in the end he addressed the rally and then left for La Robla.

"At home he told us that when he left Belgium the police had told him: 'Good luck Durruti.' He was overwhelmed by that, because he had been living all those years under the name of Juan and the name Durruti was never used.

"When he arrived from Belgium, I insisted on coming to see them. They were living in Clot, but were very poor, with just a few sticks of furniture and their bed had just one blanket and no sheets, with Mimi pregnant. But he was happy and said to me: 'See how Mimi eats? Wait until you see what a sturdy child we'll have.' He was always brimming with optimism and happiness, forever on the move, addressing rallies, giving talks. But he was in custody a lot of times and nobody wanted to

employ him. Mimi had a hard time of it, as they had no money and were able to live only thanks to her work and the solidarity from comrades, and they were forever moving house. They lived in Horta, in Sants or with comrades. Then he stopped coming. Although he passed through in 1935, addressing meetings, it was my mother who took the train to go and listen to him in Barcelona.

"She liked to hear him speak 'Rosa, you should hear your brother speak! And with those hands of his you'd think he was trying to embrace the whole people.' It was Pedro who brought us the news of his death. He arrived at the house in a sweat and told us: 'Mother, Rosa, Don Nicastrato Vela has told me that Pepe's been killed.'

"But my mother was very strong (she saw four of her children die) and whenever she thought of the revolutionary one she would tell me: 'Rosa, do you know what came into my mind tonight? That there is a revolutionary born every so many years and my son was it.' The

then pregnant with Colette. He wanted to see my father and to have a family portrait made, but he found my father dying. He attended his death bed and oversaw the funeral arrangements. He was here for a few days.



Mexico 1925. (Centre, seated) Gregorio Martinez ("el Toto"). Durruti in front (with Dog)

poor woman consoled herself like that. Later, with the passage of time, she travelled to Barcelona by train with a neighbour woman, and at the cemetery there she asked some girls; 'Could you tell me where the rebels' tombs are? One says Ascaso and the other Durruti.' And when she arrived home, she told me: "Do you know Rosa, they were covered with

flowers." (During the years of the Franco occupation the tombstones were placed upside down so that they could not be recognised. But now they are displayed and always covered with flowers. In the reconstruction of Montjuich cemetery the graves of Durruti, Ascaso and Ferrer, side by side, occupy a prominent place).

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