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Paul Sharkey
The Friends of Durruti — A Chronology
1984

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Paul Sharkey

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20.11.37.

El Amigo del Pueblo no.11. A commemorative issue on the anniversary of Durruti's death. On page 2, it is noted 'Durruti told the politicians and his own comrades; You demand discipline. But what are you doing in the rearguard? And on more than one occasion, he gave assurances that once having triumphed on the fields of battle the militias would turn their gunsights upon the rearguard.'…'The temperament of our lost leaders is the same as that which moves the "Friends of Durruti" group. Durruti knew that, unless the enemy was crushed, the path of revolution could not be followed.' On page 3 'Durruti was a 100 % proletarian. Had he lived until May, he would not have endorsed the "ceasefire" but swept aside every compact, every compromise behind the scenes and would have placed himself at the head of that class revolt.'

mid-1938.

Appearance of 'Towards a Fresh Revolution', a fuller exposition of the views and aims of the FoD. The decision to issue the brochure was taken in mid-1938 at what Jaime Balius described in 1972 as 'the group's last session'.

A Note

This text is taken from a pamphlet edition originally printed in 1984 by Editorial Crisol, Tokyo, Japan. The publisher included the following note in the inside cover:

> By the way, during the Spanish Revolution some Japanese were involved in the actual battles. Only one person's identity has already been recognised. He was Jack Shirai (alias Sirai, Sherai or Jacky), a communist who died at the Brunete front, July 11 1937. About him see next matter.
>
> a. The Volunteers by Steve Nelson, New York, 1953.
>
> b. The Book of the XV Brigade, Madrid 1938.
>
> According to a certain Japanese journalist, who visited Spain those days, several more Japanese participated in both the Republican camps and the Nationalist camps. But as a matter of regret, neither their names nor doings have been known down to date. If anyone has information, documents or testimonies concerning the above mentioned Japanese, please send them to [the publisher]. They, even though trivial or uncertain, would be appreciated invaluably.
>
> Publisher — contact; ISOYA Takero, c/o Tokiwa-so, Minami-kase 2516, Saiwai-ku, Kawasaki-shi, 211 Japan.

Preface

My hope is that the chronology which follows may go some of the way towards shedding some light upon the facts about

the FoD group. Because the fact is that, although nearly every textbook on the Spanish revolution feels obliged to mention the group in connection with the May events of 1937, the scrupulous reader will be confused rather than informed by the wide variety of assertions encountered. Even historians who might be expected to be scrupulously diligent in their research have penned remarks that can easily be refuted or can't be sustained by the evidence. One of the earlier misrepresentations of the FoD group came in a pamphlet on the subject of the May days which was published by Ediciones Ebro. In reply, the FoD (in El Amigo del Pueblo, no. 7, 31 august 1937) accused the authors of '…slipshod work, poor documentation or an attempt to excuse the warped attitude adopted by the committees concerning our intervention in those days of fighting.' Those features are readily discovered in even more recent authors.

The principal allegation against the FoD group is that, with its talk of a 'revolutionary junta' it was flirting with Bolshevism, Leninism, Marxism. Some have seen it as presumption in the establishment of such a junta. Yet, it was never set up, and a reading of the FoD manifesto, 'Towards a Fresh Revolution' will show why. The junta was to be elected by and accountable to the union rank and file. Functions were to be rotated and membership of limited duration. Repeatedly authors refer to manifestos announcing the formation of the junta. According to the FoD newspaper and to Jaime Balius, it was never formed. This fact alone makes nonsense of the further claim that the FoD wanted a junta to which the POUM would be admitted. One author[1] has suggested that '…the junta would have assuredly have had to comprise the POUM and the "Friends

[1] Helmut Ruediger, El Anarcosindicalismo en la Revolucion Espanola, Barcelona 1938, p.32. Elsewhere (p.29) Ruediger attempts to explain away the emergence of a disaffected libertarian press (including El Amigo del Pueblo) by alluding to the '…unduly bland nature of certain official organs.' For Ruediger's own adherence to the precepts of anarchism, see Manuel Azaretto, Las Pendientes Resbaladizas (Los Anarcquistas en Espana), Montevideo, 1939.

been formed. Two; The said Junta not having been set up we could not have invited a place in it for the POUM comrades. Three; We salute the POUM because we saw them on the streets defending the working class's interests.'

21.9.37.

El Amigo del Pueblo no.8. Reports a raid by armed police with tanks and artillery on the premises of the CNT Food Union, a union in which the FoD had much support. 23 individuals on the premises were arrested. The FoD state 'Once again, for the hundredth time, the committees opted to compromise, on the basis of who knows what complications at national level… For tactical reasons we are against confrontations with the security forces. These receive their orders from someone and carry them out. In this specific instance we must discover who gave the order. No matter who he may be, he must be hunted down at gunpoint in the streets as a threat to public peace, even if he is in government.'

8.11.37.

El Amigo del Pueblo no.10. Criticises the collaborationists of the CNT for allowing the government to creep back and to consolidate its hold 'To think that for six months all of the interests of the organisation have played second fiddle to this bagatelle. The "Friends of Durruti" maintain that only a congress can change the CNT's tactics. Anyone so unscrupulous as to sidestep this requirement makes himself a likely candidate for the label "traitor".'

no.4 carries an article by Juan Santana Calero, the press and propaganda secretary of the Catalan Regional Committee of the Libertarian Youth.[7]

20.7.37.

El Amigo del Pueblo no.5 appears. It contains a review of the dispute between the FoD and the 'superior committees' and the text of the document 'To the comrades, to the confederal Columns' (Gelsa, 16 January 1937).

12.8.37.

El Amigo del Pueblo no.6. It is indicated that this issue has been printed by the Imp. Libertaria, Perpignan, France. Much of the content deals with the prisons, probably the result of the observations of the jailed Jaime Balius who continued to write from confinement.

31.8. 37.

El Amigo del Pueblo no.7 contains a critique of a pamphlet on the May Events published by Ediciones Ebro. The pamphlet had the FoD announcing 'A revolutionary Junta has been formed in Barcelona', and adding 'The POUM must be admitted to the Revolutionary Junta because it stood by the workers.' The FoD move on in this critique to make the following points 'One; We could not speak of a Revolutionary Junta having been set up because in point of fact none had

[7] Grandizo Munis (op. cit. p.385) notes that 'El Amigo del Pueblo the organ of the "Friends of Durruti" and La Voz Leninista the Trotskyists' organ easily distributed tens of thousands of copies', and he adds '…even though anyone arrested with one of those papers in his pocket would have received a sentence of between 10 and 30 years.

of Durruti"', though he goes on to admit '…though this is not stated; it cannot be otherwise.' A reading of the final lengthy statement from the FoD might have explained to him that it could indeed have been other wise.

Others[2] have perceived in the statements of Jaime Balius and the FoD group the impact of Marxist activists, such as Hans Freud-Moulin. Yet one has only to compare the record of such as Pablo Ruiz, Jaime Balius and Francisco Carreno with that of the youthful Moulin, or to read the admission by those very same authors that they themselves needed an interpreter in Spain and that Moulin had despaired of the Bolshevik-Leninist's factionalism, and review Balius's consistent outlook from 1936 onwards to realise that such as Moulin were influenced by the FoD and not vice versa.

What of the proprietary of anarchists calling for a revolutionary junta? Some of the harshest criticisms have come from the leading lights of the CNT-FAI and their apologists. Before entering the republican government in November 1936, the CNT had been calling for a National Defence Council. From May 1937 on the FoD were calling for a revolutionary junta. In their brochure of mid-1938 the FoD described that as '…a Revolutionary Junta or National Defence Council.' So who had departed from CNT policy? The FoD spoke of seizing power and have been condemned for it. Yet Solidaridad Obrera (13 July 1937) approvingly quotes Camillo Berneri as saying: 'Anarchists accept the use of political power by the proletariat, but they take that political power to be the ensemble of communist management systems, cooperative organisms, communal, regional and national institutions, freely constituted outside of and against the political monopoly of one party and with a view to minimal concentration of administration.' Read the

[2] Pavel and Clara Thalmann, Combats pour la liberte; Moscou- Madrid-Paris, Quimperie, 1983.

FoD brochure and Balius's articles in 1936 — 37 and spot the difference between what he advocated and the words of Berneri.

Where, then, did the FoD err? Not in departing from accepted libertarian objectives and practices but in clinging stubbornly to them, in refusing to be seduced by 'circumstances'. They believed, with Evelio G. Fontaura that 'To invoke the CNT or even the FAI is not enough, if actions turn out to be equidistant from the revolutionary trajectory which the letters in question stand for' (Ideas, 14 January 1937). Even in the matter of their expulsion the FoD had occasion to remind the CNT-FAI 'leadership' of the accepted norms of their organisations and that sovereignty resided with the rank and file. Andre Prudhommeaux regarded the FoD's policies as approximate to the views advanced by Bakunin after the battle of Sedan in 1870[3].

The chief fault of the FoD appears to been their too steadfast revolutionism. They refused to yield to the argument of 'circumstance'. They refused to be bullied by their own organisation. They were not deceived by the Stalin of the Popular Front era, nor by the Moscow Trials. Nor were they afraid to acknowledge the revolutionary credentials of Marxists. Yet they sorely resented the description marxist when applied to themselves. In short, they were unlucky enough to have held that anarchism was and had been and still would be their goal. In

[3] Letter to Union Communiste, dated 17 November 1937 (quoted in H. Chaze, Chronique de la Revolution Espangnole, Ed Spartacus, Paris, 1979). In Cesar M. Lorenzo Los Anarquistas Espanoles y el Poder, Paris, 1972, Lorenzo speaks of Union Communiste speaking on behalf of the FoD , the POUM and some elements of the Libertarian Youth and calling for the formation of these groups into a unit for the 'elaboration of the programme of the proletarian revolution.' (p.219, n.32) Lorenzo is misleading here. He ought to know that Union Communiste was a small group which had grown out of the Ligue Trotskyste in France and was urging this amalgamation rather than reporting it, and also that the manifesto he quoted was a handbill distributed at a meeting in the Velodrome d'Hiver, Paris, 18 June 1937, its purpose being to expose and embarrass the speakers, Garcia Olivier and Federica Montseny, who had 'pacified ' the anarchists in Barcelona in May 1937.

Local Federation of CNT unions, the Local Federation of the Libertarian Youth and the Youth Defence Committee had both endorsed the FoD interpretation of the May Events. It notes, too, that the PSUC organ, Treball had reported the FoD to the police for issuing El Amigo del Pueblo clandestinely. On page 4 there is a reprint of a report from Castilla Libre, the CNT daily paper in Madrid, alleging that 'The "Friends of Durruti", originally set up as a cultural body whose purpose was to propagate the ideas of the people's caudillo, has been led astray by provocateur elements formerly active in the Communist Party.' The FoD comment 'This is not worthy of a reply. Members of this group are CNT and FAI members of long standing. Their lives are a rosary of sufferings and deprivation.'

17.6.37.

In the paper Ideas, a Dr Ludovici writes on behalf of the 'Errico Malatesta' group to refute the claims made by Il Grido del Popolo on 29 May 1937 regarding Berneri. He states that '…comrade Berneri did not belong to the "Friends of Durruti" group, not that there would have been anything wrong in that…'

22.6.37.

El Amigo del Pueblo no.4 appears. It reports the arrest of Jaime Balius (as a result of the information given by Treball?). Replying to an article in Las Noticias (18. 6. 37.), the FoD) deny that they and the Libertarian Youth spearheaded the May fighting … 'Had the groups named been behind the revolt, we should not in any way have given up control of the streets.' An article from Balius angrily insists that the allegation (by Fragua Social, a CNT paper in Valencia) that he is a Marxist, be substantiated or withdrawn. Like the preceeding issue,

1.6.37.

A report from the CNT National Committee (dated 29 May ’37) appears in the Boletin de Informacion CNT-FAl relating the proceedings~ of a National Plenum of CNT Regionals at which ‘Catalonia reported the decision reached with regard to the “Friends of Durruti” and the Plenum unanimously resolved to remove from the organisation the leading lights of the “Friends of Durruti” group and that, come what may, the fomenting of any split as a result, must be averted.’ In El Amigo del Pueblo, no.5, the FoD dispute that the agreement to expel them was unanimous ‘… there was no unanimity for the Andalusian Regional voted against.’

11.6.37.

A joint circular from the regional committees of the CNT and the FAI endorses the order for the expulsion of members of the FoD from their organisations.

12.6.37.

El Amigo del Pueblo, no.3 appears. On page one it carries a retraction (‘as agreed at the Plenum of FAI groups and in anticipation of the CNT and FAl committees doing likewise’)… ‘We did not use the word “betrayal” in the sense of sell-out or bad faith but rather to signify incompetence and cowardice … we retract to day in expectation that the committees will also retract the label of “agents provocateurs” they used against us.’ The paper also carries a note of support from the anarchist group ‘Margalef’, signed by (former Durruti Column member?) Antonio Bonilla expressing solidarity with the FoD despite the disavowals by the committees. It also notes that, in a memo sent to the CNT and FAl Regional committees as well as to the

El Amigo del Pueblo, no. 3 (12 June 1937) Ada Marti paid tribute to a POUM member, Francisco Jorda Montana, who had proven her revolutionary credentials by her actions. Fittingly it was Ada Marti, writing elsewhere who encapsulated what the FoD were so painfully to discover throughout their existence and in their dealings with the CNT’s ‘circumstantialists’. ‘And I tell you this; there are no friends in high places. Fear of losing their “dignity” makes them strike majestic poses which distance them from remembrance of their friends.’ (Esfuerzo, Barcelona, 7 October 1937)

Paul Sharkey April 1984

8.9.36.

Writing in the Solidaridad Obrera, Jaime Balius gives his opinion that ‘The costs of the present war must be borne by the bourgeois… But in addition to the monies seized from the enemy, we must impose a compulsory charge on every township. No one is to be exempted from this charge. In this grave hour we must prepare ourselves for greater sacrifices so that the social revolution may triumph. And it should not be forgotten that the comrades on the front are counting upon the conduct of the workers left behind in the rearguard.’

October 1936.

The war committee of the Durruti Column decides to send a delegate to the celebrations of the anniversary of the October Revolution in Moscow. Sceptical as to the purpose of the invitation received from the Soviet Consul in Barcelona, Antonov-Ovsenko, Durruti nonetheless draws up an open letter addressed to the soviet workers. Francisco Carreno, the former teacher who belongs to the Column’s War Committee and has special responsibility for propaganda is chosen as the del-

egate. The open letter says 'We have no confidence in politics even if it goes by the name democratic or antifascist. We trust in our class brothers (…) not for anything in the world are we going to renounce our principles, the principles of the working class's struggle for liberation.' Carreno visits the Soviet Union with Martin Gudell. Carreno will be an FoD member.

6.10.36

Balius who, in 1935 had published a book (Octubre Catalan!) on the subject of the October 1934 uprising in Catalonia writes in an article in Solidaridad Obrera enjtitled 'We cannot forget; 6 October' a propos of Catalanist attempts to mark the second anniversary of the revolt. 'On the second anniversary of the October event we have to urge all workers to ensure that the revolution permeates every aspect of life. The consequences will be deplorable if the transformation inaugurated on 19 July should be nothing more than an outward show… 6 October deserves to be passed over in silence. Set aside the feats of July, there is no comparison possible.'

10.10.36

A government decree establishes the Popular Army and makes provision for the militarisation of the volunteer militias.

15.10.36

In Solidaridad Obrera, Jaime Balius complains of the counter-revolutionary undertones of the petit-bourgeois press and warns against applying a break to the revolution. 'The Revolution has to be served without selfishness… Let any who feel unable to follow us step aside and leave us a clear path.'

29.5.37.

Il Grido del Popolo, the paper of the Italian Communist Party in France refers to Camille Berneri '…one of the leaders of the "Friends of Durruti" group which … provoked the bloody uprising against the Popular Front government in Catalonia … got his just deserts during that revolt from the Democratic Revolution whose right of self-defence no antifascist can deny.' In Solidaridad Obrera, Joaquin Aubi and Rosa Munoz write an open letter to the paper's director stating '… having learned of the dispute that has arisen between the CNT and FAI and the "Friends of Durruti" group, to which I belonged, I find myself obliged publicly to quit that association, being against the power struggle which it is waging against the specific and confederal bodies … I continue to look upon the comrades belonging to the "Friends of Durruti" as comrades … but … "The CNT was my womb and it shall also be my tomb".'

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edly with our stand. ' The FoD also speak of a Local Plenum of Groups at which the matter was raised again. '…certain elements asked unsuccessfully that we absent ourselves from the premises before the debates began.' At that group meeting the FoD explained what they understood the word 'betrayal' to signify and '…it was agreed that both parties would retract the terms they had used in the published note and manifesto.' This was done in El Amigo del Pueblo, no.3 (12 June 1937), but '…has yet to be done by those who unhesitatingly, unfairly and improperly endorsed our expulsion from the organisation for which we have sacrificed so much.' In El Amigo del Pueblo, no.4 (22 June 1937) Jaime Balius stated 'In our last issue, we of the Friends of Durruti withdrew the charge of betrayal for the sake of anarchist revolutionary unity. And we hope that the committees will retract the charge of "agents provocateurs". ' The FoD claims of grassroots support seem to be confirmed by Grandizo Munis, leader of the Spanish Bolshevik-Leninists, the Spanish section of Trotsky's Fourth International, who writes (Jalones do Derrota, Promesa de Victoria, Editorial Lucha Obrera, Mexico DF, 1948, p.290–291) '…the local committees refused to implement a resolution from the superior committees expelling the chief (FoD) leaders.'

26.5. 37.

Issue no.2 of. El Amigo del Pueblo appears. It records contribution towards the paper's cost from Group X on the Aragon front, from Miguel Chueca, Gregorio Jover, the committee at Bellver de Cinca and comrades at Pina de Ebro. It records also the death of FoD member Manuel Sanchez of Salient, a mining town. The paper also notes the formation of new branches of the FoD and the imminent opening Of new FoD locals in Sans, Tarrasa, Gracia and Sabadell. Issue no.2 is not censored and there is an announcement of the 'El Amigo del Pueblo Graphics Workshop at the disposal of revolutionaries.' On the front page it is announced 'The absurd treatment meted out to us by the censors obliges us to give them the slip.' In the face of threats to that effect, the FoD warn 'Plenums of Locals and Comarcals are not empowered to expel any comrade. We invite the committees to raise the "Friends of Durruti" case in the union assemblies, the seat of the organisation's sovereignty.'

28.5.37.

In Solidaridad Obrera, the Regional Committees of the CNT and FAl and Local Federation of CNT unions note the decision on 22 May by the Plenum of Locals and Comarcals and state 'Over double the period of grace given ... for the substantive proof to be produced now having elapsed ... we notify both organisations, confederal and anarchist that they should proceed to expel from their midst all members of the "Friends of Durruti" association who do not publicly dissociate themselves from the stance adopted by said grouping.'[6]

[6] The FoD claim (El Amigo del Pueblo no.5, 20 July 1937) that 'the Secretariat of the Local Federation of Groups and the Committee and the local Federation of the Libertarian Youth refused to endorse this note ... indeed, the Libertarian Youth made an official protest about it in a note sent to the Regional Committee, while also intimating that they sympathised wholeheart-

24.10.36.

In Solidaridad Obrera, Balius urges decentralisation and devolution to district level. 'Let us not forget that there must be decentralisation. Let us remember that should any centralising organ come into extistance, the creative opportunities which have cost so much blood and for which so much blood has yet to be shed... will largely be lost to us.'

November 1936.

Interviewed by L'Espagne Antifaciste, Durruti says of the government decrees relative to the regularisation of the militias '...This decision by the government has had a deplorable effect. It is absolutely devoid of any sense of reality. There is an irreconciliable contrast between that mentality and that of the militias... We known that one of these attitudes has to vanish in the face of the other one.'

5.11.36

Solidaridad Obrera prints a radio broadcast made by Durrit over the CNT-FAI radio station and addressed to the workers of Catalonia. 'The time has come to demand sacrifices also from those living in the cities. There must be effective mobilisatioon of all workers in the rear, for we who are already on the front want to know what sort of men we can rely upon in our rear... If the object of the militarisation decree announced by the Generalidad is to intimiodate us and foist an iron discipline on us, that is a mistake and we invite the authors of the decree to come out to the front to get a taste of our morale and discipline. Then we shall go and compare those with morale and discipline in the rearguard... We who have left Catalonia en-

trust the management of the economy to you. You must also live up to your responsabilities and discipline yourselves.'

20.11.36

Durruti was killed on the Madrid front. (Over half a million people attend his funeral in Barcelona.)

2.12.36

Jaime Balius writes in Solidaridad Obrera, 'The so-called Catalan question as such has been resolved... Let us be equal to the demands of the present moment.'

6.12.36

Writing in Solidaridad Obrera on the subject of 'Durruti's testament', Balius asserst, 'Durruti roundly stated that we anarchists require that the revolution be of an all pervasive (totalitario) nature, so comrades so streadfastly resisting fascism on the fields of battle will not tolerate anyone tampering with revolutionary and liberating content of the present moment.'

December 1936.

The German volunteers in the Durruti Column's International Group express their objections to militarisation imposed from without and list a number of factors they insist should be incorporated into any new military code; they want the delegate system to be retained along with egalitarian features and want Soldier's Councils to represent the army as a whole.

sued by the regional committees of the CNT and Libertarian and the Liaison Committee of the FAI groups in Catalonia on 11 way l937 spelling out their attitude to the May events. The purpose was to enable readers to make up their own minds which view was the most correct. No less than 109 lines of the FoD document have been obliterated by the censor. The FoD note that their manifesto has received the endorsement of a group of wounded comrades in the Rumania hospital and another group of comrades from Hijar. Repeatedly the FoD insist (as Jaime BaIius entitles his article on page 4) 'We are no agents provocateurs.'

22.5.37.

A regional Plenum of CNT Local and Comarcal Federations meets in Barcelona. On the agenda is the FoD question. This followed the summoning of the FoD before the local Federation of CNT unions, when, according to the FOD (El Amigo del Pueblo, no.5, 20 July 1937) it waS agreed '...and not on our instigation that our case should be debated in the union assemblies. But this was not done. Those with an Interest in our attitude's being sanctioned found it more convinient to raise the matter before a Plenum of Locals and Comarcals.' The meeting on 22 May 1937 gave the FoD a period of grace in which to substantiate their charges of 'betrayal' by the Regional Committees. That period of grace was 48 hours. 'Our answer was that we stood by what had been agreed at the audience we had had with the comrades from the Local Federation, namely that our case be debated in the union assemblies, insofar as these alone were empowered to judge in such instances and to prescribe what should be done.' (El Amigo del Pueblo, no.5)

jectives we have increased our weaponry.'... 'Let us be on the alert for coming events. Let us not be dismayed, let us keep up a solid revolutionary morale. Let us not forget that we are playing a trump card. Let us not be deluded by the alleged threat of an attack from with ships of the English fleet, when in point of fact the democratic powers are blatantly supporting fascism. '...'Let us not abandon the streets.'...'Comrades, on a war footing. Do not lose heart. Be on the aIert for the first summons issued to you. Long live the social revolution! Down with the counter-revolution! All praise to our fallen comrades.'

9.5.37

'This manifesto is reported in Solidaridad Obrera with the words 'The body called the "Friends of Durruti" has issued a new manifesto which a fresh display of provocation adorned with demagogy. The CNT and the FAI must excise this intolerable demagogy and provocation by the roots and immediately.'

17.5. 37.

The Regional Committee of the UGT, meeting in Barcelona demand that members of the POUM be expelled from the UGT, the party be disbanded outlawed, its press shut down and its printing and radio facilities confiscated... 'acting in the same fashion against organisations of the type of the "Friends of Durruti" disowned by the CNT's Regional Committee.'

20.5.37.

The first issue of the FoD paper El Amigo del Pueblo appears. It has been printed at the Impremta Laietana, Bou de Sant Pere, 9, The FoD have attempted (page 2) to present their publications (the manifesto 6? May 1937) alongside the statement is-

17.12.36

In Solidaridad Obrera, Jaime Balius says of opportunists and upstarts that 'The revolution must be harsh, we might even say brutal... The time has come to purify the cadres of the revolution. Unless we do this we risk making a superficial revolution, a revolution in name only. The parvenus must be stopped.'

29.12.36

Issue number 1 of Ideas the mouthpiece of the libertarian movement in the Bajo Llobregat area, an area notorious for its intransigent revolutionism. A list of contributors to its columns names Jaime Balius and Francesco Carreno, both of whom will be members of the FoD.

1937.

After the new year the government will issue no pay and no equipment except to regularised (i.e. militarised) combat units.

16.1.37

On behalf of the Durruti Column the following units... the no. 4 Gelsa detachment, the 'Accion y Alegria' Group, the International Group, the artillery batteries, the machine-gunner sections and other centuries issue a statement 'To the comrades, to the confederal columns' protesting at militarisation and offering a specific structure acceptable to the fighting men. They claim to speak 'On behalf of every one of the centuries of the Durruti Column' ... 'Apparently the government is making the provision of equipment conditional on our militarisation...According to what the committees themselves say, they cannot give us any assurances that the Madrid government will

supply us with the equipment even if we do militarise. That being the case, the trespass against our principles would be rewarded with nothing more than an empty promise.' This manifesto is published in the paper Acracia of Lerida. In the FoD newspaper El Amigo del Pueblo, no. 5, 20 July 1937) this manifesto is reprinted and it is stated… 'On the date given at the foot of the manifesto, the Friends of Durruti group, composed for the most part of comrades from the Aragon front, Durruti Column (Gelsa Section) published opinions regarding militarisation which the passage of time have endorsed against the 'majority' who opposed it'… 'Even from the front line, amid the mud of the trenches, amid the cold and the thirst, watching our comrades fall day in day out, we opposed the anti-revolutionary suicidal course followed by those who were the mentors of our organisation.'

18.1.37

The Generalidad government of Catalonia passes 58 decrees severely curtailing the revolution.

5 — 8.2.37

Delegates from the anarchist militias meet in congress in Valencia to discuss the question of militarisation. The objectors from the Durruti Column (Gelsa Sector) are represented by Pablo Ruiz, who helped Durruti storm the Atarazanas Barracks in Barcelona on 20 July 1936. The Gelsa objectors were several times instructed to adhere to the decision taken regarding militarisation. Injunctions to this effect from the Regional Committees of the CNT and FAI were ignored. So was the order that the refractories should lay down their weapons and quit the front. Hostility between the compliant and refractory sections of the Durruti Column was so serious that a commis-

headed with the words 'CNT, FAI, Friends of Durruti Group, Workers'. It reviews the fighting, (then still in progress) and the FoD's earlier alerting of the workers to the imminent attack. It names the provocateurs as the PSUC, Estat Catala, the Esquerra and the Generalidad-controlled security forces, with the Valencia government and Generalidad government in the background. 'We have won the streets which we have no wish to surrender, for they belong to us, we having taken them in an open and resolute battle.' Speaking of the May fighting, the FoD explain that 'We have not taken to the streets simply to request that the armed corps be disarmed. No. We want the due recompense for the blood which has been spilled.' … 'The (Generalidad represents nothing. Its continued existence is a bolster to the counter-revolution.'… 'It is inconceivable that the CNT's committees should have acted so cravenly as to order a cease-fire and indeed have imposed a return to work just when we were on the very brink of total victory.'… 'Such conduct must be described as a betrayal or the revolution… one that no one ought to commit or encourage in the name of anything. We cannot find words to describe the harm done by Solidaridad Obrera and the most outstanding militants of the CNT.' … The disavowal from the CNT's so-called responsible committees has come as no surprise to us. We knew in advance that those committees could not do anything other than retard the proletariat's advance. We know the TRIENTISTAS on the Regional Committee only too well. We are the "Friends of Durruti" who have moral authority enough to disown these individuals, who have betrayed the revolution and the working class, as being incompetents and cowards.'… 'There was no knowledge of how to mount a thoroughgoing attack nor was there any coordination of effort as far as the insurrection was concerned. Time and ammunition were wasted on mere sniping instead of a speedy and daring attack being planned. Understanding and leadership were missing. '…'The cessation of fighting doesn't presuppose defeat. Though we may not have achieved our ob-

5.5.37

As the fighting continued, Solidaridad Obrera carried a notice from the Regional Committees of the CNT and FAI, the FAI's Peninsular Committee, the Local Federation of CNT unions, the Regional Committee of the Libertarian Youth and the Local Federation of anarchist groups complaining of apocryphal leaflets circulating, allegedly signed by the POUM, the CNT and the FAI. Their contents are found objectionable by the above committees. 'What we wish to have clearly understood is that neither the CNT nor the FAI has signed any sort of leaflet, handbill, manifesto or document of any other description along with the Worker's Party of Marxist Unification (POUM).'

6.5.37

Solidaridad Obrera carries a note from the Regional Committees of the CNT and the FAI dated 5 May 1937. We are taken aback by some leaflets circulating in the city and endorsed by an entity called "The Friends of Durruti". Its contents are utterly intolerable and contrary to the decision made by the libertarian movement; this obliges us to disown it in full and in public. Let this be noted by all comrades and by the public in general. We categorically disown this leaflet and point out that yesterday we found ourselves obliged to disown another by that very same body. We of the regional committees of the CNT and FAI are not disposed to let anyone speculate with our organisation, nor may anyone flirt with dubious attitudes or maybe the intrigues of outright agent provocateurs. Let everyone adhere to the specific watchword of these committees. The Generalidad Council having been formed, everyone must accept its decisions for we all are represented in it. Get the guns off the streets.' Also on 6 May, the F0D issues a larger manifesto

sion from the column, headed by Jose Manzana spoke with the regional committees on the subject. As a result the militiamen at Gelsa were invited to resolve the situation by one way (by militarising) or the other (by quitting the front). They agreed to quit the front and give up their weapons within 15 days. Later the FoD would explain (in El Amigo del Pueblo, no 5, 21 July 1937) 'Our withdrawal from the front was due to the fact that we had no desire to assume responsibility for a mistaken attitude whose failure we foresaw. Now, back in the rearguard, we remain combatants.'

4.3.37

A decree from the Generalidad dissolves the control patrols. In the POUM paper La Battalla, Andres Nin reprints large extracts from an article by Jaime Balius published in the CNT evening paper La Noche. (Balius was director of La Noche which, along with Catalunya, sold around 45,000 copies daily… figures from Solidaridad Obrera, 2 April 1937). In that article, welcomed by Nin, Balius had written 'We anarchists have arrived at the limits of our concessions… Not another step backward. It is the hour of action. Save the revolution.' And 'If we continue to give up our positions there is no doubt that in a short time we shall be overwhelmed and the revolution will be simply another souvenir. It is for this fundamental reason that it is necessary to develop a new orientation in our movement.' Balius also wrote that he was gratified to find that 'Our anxiety is now shared by the evening paper of an organisation with which we are in fundamental agreement concerning the present revolutionary epoch and the role of the working class.' Clearly that organisation was the POUM.

5.3.37

Solidaridad Obrera carries an announcement of the formation of the FoD group. 'The Friends of Durruti is not just another club. We aim to see the Spanish Revolution pervaded by the revolutionary acumen of our Durruti. The FoD remain faithful to the last words uttered by our comrade in the heart of Barcelona in denunciation of the work of the counter-revolution… To enrol in our association, it is vital that one belong to the CNT and show evidence of a record of struggle a love of ideas and the revolution. On a temporary basis, applications may be made at Rambla de Catalunya, 15, principal (CNT Journalists' section) between 5.00pm and 7.00pm.'

8.3.37

The formation of the FoD is announced in the pages of Frente, the organ of the Durruti Column, printed in Pina de Ebro, Aragon.

17.3.37

A FoD meeting scheduled for 9.30pm that day in what is described as the group's 'social premises' at Rambla de las Flores, 1, 1 is announced in Solidaridad Obrera. The purpose of the meeting is to elect a new steering committee and lay down the statutes governing the group. 'At the same time we appeal to militants of some standing and various organisms with a view to forming a group that will live up entirely to the precepts bequeathed us by the martyr of the ideal, the idol of the People.' 20.3.37 Solidaridad Obrera carries notice of a FoD meeting scheduled for 11.00 am 21 March 1937. This notice is repeated on the following day.

Disarm all the armed corps. Socialise the economy. Dissolve the political parties which have turned against the working class. Let us not surrender on the streets. The revolution above everything. We salute our comrades of the POUM who have sided with us on the streets. Long live the Social Revolution! Down with the Counter-Revolution!'[5] This leaflet approvingly reprinted in La Batalla on 6 May.

[5] Again according to Ravel and Clara Thalmann (op. cit. p.190), They met with Moulin at the headquarters of the FoD. There was a heated argument Involving Jaime Balius, Moulin and some of Balius's friends. That evening (4 May 1937) they agreed on the text of a handbill which Thalmann reconstructs from memory as approximately 'Immediate formation of a Defence Junta, a defence council made up of all revolutionary elements from the FAl, CNT, POUM and the Libertarian Youth, whatever revolutionary committees remain and the control patrols. All power to the workers' and peasants' committees and unions; withdrawal of the anarchist ministers from the Valencia government. Disarm the Communist party organisations in the rearguard. Greater pressure on the central government to secure recognition of a new, revolutionary autonomous government in Catalonia ….. signed the Friends of Durruti.' The Thalmanns speak of 4000 — 5000 such handbills having been printed at gunpoint in the Barrio Chino around midnight on 4 May 1937. In none of their publications did the FoD ever acknowledge the above text or anything close to it. Given Balius's newspaper connections (he had been an editorial staff member on Solidaridad Obrera and Tierra y Libertad and the Barcelona correspondent for the Madrid-based CNT.) it seems odd that coercion should have been necessary. When it came to the printing of the first issues of the FoD newspaper El Amigo del Pueblo (20 May 1937) this was done in a regular way by the Impremta Laietana, Bou de Sant Pere, 9. The Thalmanns claim (op. cit. p.191) to have persuaded the FoD 'henceforth to operate from the underground', yet the first issue of El Amigo del Pueblo (20 May 1937) was mutilated by censorship so it had clearly been published overground See also (on p.3) the announcement that 'Overall director is comrade Jaime Balius, while the editorial staff includes comrades Roig, Ruiz and Domingo Paniagua.' The same issue notes that the FoD premises in Rambla de las Flores, 1,1 are still functioning. That address, with telephone number (18721) was given on every masthead as the administrative and editorial offices of El Amigo del Pueblo.

1.5.37[4]

2.5.37

The FoD hold a public meeting in the Goya Theater, barcelona. They warn that an attack on the workers is imminenet, pointing to the funeral of Roldan Cortada, the revolt by the Carabineers in Ripoli and other provocations as part of a series of incidents planned in government circles by representatives of so-called antifascist groups.

3.5.37

Rodriguez Sala of the PSUC seizes the Telephone Exchange in Barcelon. This signals the start of the May Events which pit the CNT, FAI, FIJL and POUM against the PSUC, the republicans and Catalanists and the official security forces. The revolutionary forces had soon secured the city, all except the city centre. Just as CNT-FAI Defence Committee had resolved to make a final assault on the Generalidad building, Police Headquarters and the Hotel Colon there came radio appeals by Garcia Oliver and Marano Vazquez of the CNT for a ceasefire (4 May). The reformist forces availed of this chance to renew their attacks. The conflict broke out again.

4.5.37

The FoD issue leaflets, reading 'CNT, FAI, the Friends of Durruti Group, Workers! A Revolutionary Junta. Shoot the culprits.

[4] According to Ravel and Clara Thalmann (Combats pour la Liberte Moscou-Madrid-Paris, Editions la Digitale, Quimper, 1983), '(Hans Freund) -Moulin, some Friends of Durruti and ourselves drew up a leaflet that we aimed to distribute outside the building where the (May Day) festivities were taking place. We denounced the Stalinist's policy as well as the hesitancy of the anarchists and of the POUM.' (p.196)

31.3.37.

Issue no. 6, vol. II of the POUM's English language organ, The Spanish Revolution (31.3.37) notes a move by the CNT to centralise authority in its regional committees. These committees only are empowered to decree mobilisations, issue orders and watchwords, etc. 'All who do not act according to these rules and agreements will be publicly expelled from the organisation.'

[Original publisher's note: The paper The Spanish Revolution from which the author quotes here was the POUM's English-language organ published in Barcelona under the editorship of the American Charles Orr. And besides, there was another paper called The Spanish Revolution published in New York by the United Libertarian Organisations. Each of them was reprinted. Interestingly Sam Dolgoff (pseud. Sam Weiner), who was an editor of the anarchist The Spanish Revolution and writes the introduction to the reprint of the anarchist paper, says in Soil of Liberty that Russell Blackwell, who writes the introduction to the reprint of the POUMist paper, was a member of the Friends of Durruti during the May Days in Barcelona in 1937]

1.4.37

Ruta, the organ of the Libertarian Youth in Catalonia carries an article by the FoD entitled 'On behalf of the anarchist concept of the revolution.' It says 'We point the finger at no one. We feel a burning love for our precepts and our organisations. But as militants of them, we have an indisputable right to speak out. There is still time for us to rescue the revolution and revitalise our precepts but we must press on with the revolution.'

8.4.37

Balius article 'Let's make the revolution' appears in Ideas, no. 15. Speaking of the presumption of Companys, Balius says 'It is intolerable that an individual without the slightest support in the workplaces should try to arrogate to himself the power which rightly belongs only to the working people… But the bourgeois politicians are not to blame for this, for after all this is their stock in trade. No. To apportion the blame for the revolution's not having swept aside the foes of the working class, one has to look to the worker's ranks … to those whose indecision in the early stages allowed the forces of counter-revolution to grow to the extent that now it will be a costly business to cut them down to size.

14.4.37

As the birthday celebrations of the Second Republic approach, the FoD issues a leaflet addressed 'To the working people'. It records the dangers posed to the revolution by the State, parliamentary socialism, government-controlled security forces and an attempt to shift attention away from July 1936 to April 1931. 'A wave of reaction is fed by those elements of the middle class which rely upon the praetorian corps spawned by the bourgeois stage for backing.' … 'If we retreat in the face of our enemies we will be ousted from the whole Peninsula. Let us not waver.' … 'We possess the organs which must replace the state which is in ruins. The unions and the municipalities must take charge of the economic and social life of the Peninsula. THE CLEAR AND OBVIOUS SOLUTION … FREE UNIONS AND FREE MUNICIPALITIES.' … ' parliamentary socialism … has a content more bourgeois than worker.' … 'We are not prepared to tolerate the shameful situation whereby fascists stroll through our streets and a nest of place-seekers is respected while our comrades linger in jail awaiting their appearance in the dock.' … 'We want no part of 14 April. Its memory is obnoxious. Only the parasites of politics can commemorate it.' … '14 April is not a day for demonstrations. We know the meaning of the April masquerade. And because we do not want July to end up like the hopeless early days of the Republic we resolutely oppose those who espouse the April anniversary and the figure of a lawyer raised to the heights of presidential office.' (a reference to Companys)

16.4.37

Solidaridad Obrera carries a notice concerning the funeral arrangements for one Francisco Garcia, which it says, will be '… of especial interest to the "Friends of Durruti".'

19.4.37

The FoD hold a public meeting in Barcelona in the Poliorama Theatre. It is attended by Jaime Balius, Pablo Ruiz, Francisco Pellicer (of the Iron Column) and francisco Carreno (of the Durruti Column's War Committee). Balius, Ruiz and Pellicer belonged, along with Bruno Llado, to the same anarchist group, the 'Renacer' group of the FAI.