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Luis Andrés Edo: Anarchist activist whose life was dedicated to the ‘Idea’ and the struggle for liberty

Stuart Christie

24 March 2009

With the death of Luis Andrés Edo, aged 83, in Barcelona, the anarchist movement has lost an outstanding militant and original thinker, and I have lost a comrade-in-arms, a former cell-mate — and an irreplaceable friend. The son of a Guardia Civil, Luis was born in the *benemérita* barracks in Caspe (Zaragoza) in 1925, but the family moved to Barcelona the following year when his father, Román, was transferred to a new cuartel in the Sants district of Barcelona, where the young boy grew up, educated by nuns, monks and priests. Later, after the social revolution of July 19 1936, the ten-year old Luis became not only a ‘child of the barricades’, but also a ‘son of the CENU’ (el Consell de l’Escola Nova Unificada), the successor rationalist schools to the Modern School launched by Francisco Ferrer i Guardia in 1901 (and forced to close in 1906). The education he received there and on the streets of revolutionary

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Retrieved on 16th May 2021 from www.independent.co.uk

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Barcelona was to prove life-changing. Luis's working life began in 1939, at the age of 14, cleaning machinery and odd-jobbing with Spain's National Railway company, RENFE, where he was apprenticed two years later as a locomotive engineer and, in 1941, aged 16, he affiliated to the underground anarcho-syndicalist labour union, the National Confederation of Labour (CNT). He remained with RENFE until 1946 when, after completing his apprenticeship at the age of 21, he was arrested and spent a short time in prison accused of 'stealing potatoes' from trains as part of the CNT's 'food redistribution' campaign during those years of terrible hunger. On his release he became a glassworker, manufacturing thermometers, a job that was to cause him serious and enduring health problems from ingesting mercury and hydrofluoric acid.

Luis was called up in October 1947 to do his National Service, but by December he had had enough of Franco's army and deserted, crossing clandestinely into France, still dressed in his military uniform. In 1952 he returned to Barcelona following a serious crackdown by the French authorities on the activities of the CNT in exile. This was the result of a bungled train robbery in Lyon the previous year in which three people were killed and nine others injured. Luis was not involved in the Lyon robbery, but the French police went out of their way to make life intolerable for all Spanish anarchist exiles at the time. Back in Spain Luis was arrested on desertion charges in August 1952 and was not freed until October 1953 when he was returned to the ranks — promptly deserting again early in 1954. Re-arrested, he served a further six months in the dungeons of the notorious Castillo de Figueres, a military prison in Gerona, after which, like so many others, he went into permanent exile in France where he threw himself whole-heartedly into the libertarian anti-Francoist resistance movement. In Paris in 1955, Luis became closely involved with Laureano Cerrada Santos, another former RENFE employee and a key figure in the WWII anti-Nazi Resistance and escape and evasion networks. Cerrada was also a master forger and an influential figure in France's crim-

inal demi-monde, especially the Parisian and Marseilles milieux, and was, undoubtedly, one of the most problematic, enigmatic and mysterious figures of the Spanish anarchist diaspora. It was Cerrada who, in 1947, had purchased a powerful US Navy Vedette speedboat used by the CNT's defence committee to transport arms, propaganda and militants from France into Spain; he also bought the plane used in the aerial attack on Franco's yacht in San Sebastian in September 1948. After the fallout from the Lyon robbery in 1951, however, Cerrada was expelled and ostracised by the official CNT for 'bringing the organisation into disrepute' because of his 'criminal connections'. Cerrada had, in fact, been in custody in France on forgery charges for a month prior to the Lyon robbery. That cut no ice with the CNT National Committee in exile in Toulouse who wanted rid of all the 'Apache' elements in the organisation who threatened the legality of their comfortable existence in France. In Paris, Luis's involvement with the Juventudes Libertarias, the Spanish anarchist youth organisation also brought him into contact with most of the other well-known 'faces' of the anti-Franco Resistance, men such as 'Quico' Sabaté, the near-legendary urban guerrilla, and José Pascual Palacios of the CNT's Defence Commission, the man responsible for coordinating all the action groups operating in Spain and described by Barcelona police chief Eduardo Quintela as Spain's 'Public enemy number one'. It was Luis who organised a meeting between 'el Quico' and the former Communist Party army general, 'El Campesino' at the latter's request in 1959, shortly before Sabaté's death at the hands of the Francoist security services. During this time in Paris he worked at the Alhambra Maurice Chevalier Theatre as assistant scene painter to Rafael Aguilera, the famous Andalusian artist from Ronda. What few people knew, however, was that Aguilera — a hero of the Spanish Civil War and the Resistance who had been imprisoned by the Nazis — was also responsible for maintaining an important arms deposit in Paris for CNT Defence Commission. One of these caches was in his workshop in the attic of the Alhambra. When there was

no work to be done in the theatre, Edo and Lucio Urtubia, a close friend and a protégé of Quico Sabaté, would clean and oil these weapons. On one dramatic occasion Lucio was conscientiously cleaning an old Mauser pistol when it went off in his hand, almost blowing Luis's brains out. By the early 1960s Luis was secretary of the Alianza Obrera (CNT-UGT-STV), propaganda secretary of the National Committee of the CNT, secretary of Paris Local Federation of the CNT, secretary general of the Peninsular Committee of the FIJL in Exile, and was closely involved with, among others, Octavio Alberola, García Oliver and Cipriano Mera in the setting up of Defensa Interior, the clandestine section of the Spanish Libertarian Movement in Exile (MLE). The function of Defensa Interior was to plan and implement subversive actions targeting the Francoist regime and to assassinate Franco himself; it was in this role that I first encountered Luis in Paris in 1964, prior to setting off for Madrid with plastic explosives intended for that very purpose.

My next encounter with Luis was two years later, in Carabanchel Prison in Madrid as a result of a betrayal by a police agent, Inocencio Martínez. He and four other comrades were arrested in October 1966 by Franco's secret police, the Brigada Político-Social (BPS) and accused of planning to kidnap the head of the US armed forces in Spain, Rear Admiral Norman Gillette and, allegedly, the exiled Argentinean politician Juan Perón. He was also accused of complicity in the Rome kidnapping, six months earlier, of Monsignor Marcos Ussiá, the 40-year old Spanish ecclesiastical attaché to the Vatican. These actions were carried out under the auspices of the First of May Group, the autonomous international anarchist action group, which succeeded Defensa Interior following its dissolution by the CNT-FAI's Toulouse leadership subsequent to my arrest in 1964.

Luis and I shared a cell in the infamous sixth gallery of Carabanchel, the political wing. I had just turned twenty at the time and in fact it was he who first taught me how to shave. During that time we became close friends as well as comrades. I often recall,

crucijada: Aventuras de un Heterodoxo (The CNT at the Crossroads: Adventures of a Maverick) in which he traces the trajectory of his extraordinary life as a militant.

Although Luis Andrés's death has left those whose lives he touched with a massive sense of regret and loss, he has also left present and future generations a valuable legacy, his memory and his example — *Écrasez l'Infâme!*

Luis is survived by his partner, Doris Ensinger, and his two children, Helios and Violeta.

Luis Andrés Edo, anarcho-syndicalist, born 7 November 1925; died 14 February 2009.

with pleasure, the lengthy discussions we had each evening after lock-up until 'lights-out' in which we seemed to cover every conceivable subject under the sun. Many of these strands of thought he dedicated to fine onion paper in minuscule hand which we later smuggled out of prison. Some of these theses appeared forty years later in his collection of theoretical essays *La Corriente*. Certainly, for an inexperienced and naïve youth such as myself, Luis, with his charisma and strong personality was the ideal teacher, mentor, and role model. They were interesting and educational times indeed and involved two escape attempts which were organised by Luis with help from an action group from Paris. The discovery of the plan, just before his trial, led to our separation and my transfer to the penitentiary of Alcalá de Henares in the summer of 1967. Tried by a civil Public Order Tribunal, something unusual in itself for anarchists who, like myself, were normally charged under military law with 'Banditry and Terrorism' and tried by a drumhead court-martial, Luis was sentenced to three years imprisonment for illegal association (membership of the Juventudes Libertarias), six years for illegal possession of arms, and a 25,000 peseta fine for possessing false identity documents. The sentence would have been considerably harsher had he been tried by a 'Council of War'. Luis was released from Jaén prison in 1972, having run the gamut of many of Franco's maximum security penitentiaries — including Soria and Segovia in which he organised escape committees and mounted a number of hunger strikes and mutinies, for which he spent months in the punishment cells. Arrested again in 1974 on charges of illegal association with the anarchist action groups of the GARI (Grupos de Acción Revolucionaria Internacional) and with complicity in the Paris kidnapping of Spanish banker Baltasar Suárez, Luis received a five-year prison sentence in February 1975 of which he served a little over two years, after being released in 1976 under a royal amnesty during the post-Francoist transition, in spite of having led the first major mutiny during his time in Barcelona's Model Prison. It was a particularly painful period of imprisonment as he was sep-

arated from his partner, Rosita, and his two small children, Helios and Violeta who remained in Paris.

With Franco dead but his cohorts still in the driving seats of power, Luis played a key role in the CNT's re-construction in Catalonia and was one of the organisers of the 'Montjuic Meeting', the first legal public gathering of the CNT since 1939 — an event which attracted 300,000 people, most of them a new generation of young libertarians. He was also a prime mover in organising the 'Libertarian Days', the Jornadas Libertarias, a week-long international anarchist festival which followed the Montjuic meeting and, for five extraordinary days in July, turned Barcelona into a international showcase for — and celebration — of anarchism.

But the transition period between 1976 and 1981 was also a time of major provocations by the rump of the Francoist power elite, the Búnker, desperate to hang on to their power and privileges, and avoid being brought to justice for their reign of criminality and terror. They and their new social-democratic partners were also anxious to discredit and neutralise the radical elements of the nascent CNT and the FAI — the so-called 'Apache sector'. Again it was Luis who was in the forefront of exposing the Spanish State's 'Strategy of Tension', which began in earnest in January 1977 with the massacre of five leftist lawyers in their offices in Atocha and leaving four others seriously injured, by the same Italian neo-fascists responsible for a similar terror campaign under way in Italy since 1968. These terrorists, and other parapoliticals of the SCOE (*Servicio de Coordinación, Organización y Enlace*), operated under the control of Rodolfo Martín Villa, Adolfo Suárez's fascist minister of the interior and his notorious police commissioner, Roberto Conesa Escudero. The hands of Martín Villa and Escudero were also to be seen in the Scala fire of 15 January 1978 in which four people died, and the blame for which was laid at the door of the CNT.

Luis was arrested again in 1980 and charged with '*formación terrorista*' (organising a terrorist group) — conveniently shortly be-

fore the trial of the accused in the Scala case — with the prosecutor asking for a sentence of twenty years, but he was released on provisional liberty in August 1981 after the attempted Tejero coup. The case against Luis was finally dropped in 1984 due to lack of evidence.

In the subsequent twenty five years — right up until the moment of his death, and in spite of a seriously debilitating seven year illness — Luis was supported throughout by his soulmate and partner, Doris Ensinger, with whom he shared his life after finally separating from his first partner, Rosita, in 1981. Luis and Rosita had effectively separated in 1976 when he refused to return to Paris at such a pivotal moment in Spain's history, while she and the children refused to live in Barcelona. Luis and Doris began their relationship in 1978, living together as a couple from the day he was released from prison in August 1981.

Luis Andrés Edo remained always both an untiring activist and an intellectual dynamo of the international libertarian movement, constantly provoking thought and developing new anti-authoritarian ideas. His was the voice — the conscience if you like — of what he was proud to call 'the Apache sector', defending the anarchist principles of the CNT and fighting untiringly for the restoration of the union's property and assets seized by the Francoists in 1939, and for justice for the victims of Francoism, particularly the cases of Delgado and Granado the two young anarchists garrotted in 1963 for a crime of which they were innocent. And for at least two generations of young Spanish anarchists who came into contact with him, Luis Andrés Edo was undoubtedly the inspirational role model of the post-Francoist era. He was, to the clandestine libertarian anti-Francoist movement, what Jean Moulin was to the French Resistance.

In 2002 Luis published *La Corriente*, (originally entitled *El pensamiento antiautoritario*) an anthology of his prison essays in which he explores his ideas on thought and action. and in 2006 he published his autobiographical memoirs: *La CNT En La En-*