

# **Rebels at Ruesta**

**International Libertarian Meeting**

Workers Solidarity Movement

1996

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**LAST SUMMER saw the red and black flag of anarchism flying high in the mountains of Spain. Alternative Libertaire of France organised an international meeting for libertarian socialists, anarcho-syndicalists and anarchists, which saw over 100 delegates gather at the village of Ruesta in the Spanish Pyrenees. Unlike the average holiday resort, this village is owned by an anarcho-syndicalist trade union (the Spanish CGT). Comprising two hostels, two bars, a restaurant, a campsite, a lake, a church which has been turned into a small hall for meetings, a shop and about twenty buildings in need of major renovation, Ruesta is run as a leisure centre for members of the CGT (and anyone else who wants to visit).**

The majority of the delegates came from the CGT, Alternative Libertaire (France), and the Libertarian Socialist Organisation (Switzerland), Smaller numbers came from Libertarian Alternative (Lebanon), the Polish Anarchist Federation, the Italian Libertarian Communism and the Workers Solidarity Movement, as well as from two other anarcho-syndicalist unions: the SAC of Sweden and the Spanish Solidaridad Obrera.

## **France**

AL-F have about 150 members, many of them established activists in trade union and campaigning work, which includes a lot of work in DAL ('Right to Housing'). France seemingly has more empty houses than homeless people, which has given rise to a squatting movement which takes in single people and families, native French and immigrants. A number of AL members hold national and local positions in DAL, which indicates that they are active in the struggle and not just talking about it. Another area of activity is AC! ('Against Unemployment'), which has recently won free public transport for the unemployed in several cities. Other struggles mentioned were abortion rights and anti-nuclear.

In the unions they also seem to be pretty busy, and they say it was AL-F members who took the initiative to form the radical independent SUD union in the Post Office & Telecom, after the CFDT union bureaucracy expelled a branch during a dispute. SUD is now the second largest union in the Post Office. Similar unions have been formed in the health service and tax offices.

On the negative side of things we were bothered by their attitude that supporting candidates in parliamentary elections is just a tactical question. They do not see the massive contradiction that exists between anarchism and involvement in electoral politics. After all, we want to get rid of rulers, not help to prop up the division into rulers and ruled.

They see themselves as *libertarian communist* rather than anarchist, in the sense that they wish to add parts of other traditions to anarchism. They mentioned Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Marx but didn't tell us which bits they wanted, nor what they saw as the 'failings' of anarchism (as opposed to wrong strategies or tactics).

## **Switzerland**

The politics and culture of the OSL appear to be very similar to AL-F. With about 80 members they are active in both the French and German speaking cantons of Switzerland, though they seem to be much stronger in the French speaking regions. They spoke about their involvement in anti-militarism, squatting, anti-racism and opposition to 'workfare' schemes. They said the

libertarian CRT trade union is primarily based on the watchmakers of the Jura (the people who took the anarchist side over 120 years ago in First International!) and is small, but does have some influence on other unions.

We also had any notion that Switzerland is a reasonably progressive country shattered when we learned that the last canton to give the vote to women only did so in 1994!

## **Lebanon**

Very much linked to the French AL, this is a relatively new group. Their situation is one of working in a country which endured 17 years of civil war, where parts are occupied by Israel, where Syria is a force to be reckoned with, where religious sectarianism is institutionalised in law and repression of dissidents is increasing.

A handful of people operating in difficult circumstances, they have just begun distribution of their Arabic translation of Daniel Guerin's *Anarchism*, from theory to practice (towards the production of which the WSM made a donation). They intend to distribute 2,000 copies in the Lebanon and another 2,000 to Arabic speaking workers in France.

## **Poland**

The Polish Federation are a looser body than the others who attended. At a national level they have no common political project, strategy or tactics. Their exact membership is unknown, even to themselves, but they have about 30 local affiliates which vary from 3 or 4 people up to 30 in some cases.

Activity has included big actions and ongoing campaigns on the Russian invasion of Chechnya, pensions, anti-racism/anti-fascism (four people were killed by nazi skinheads last year) and anti-militarism.

These comrades attended because they wanted more contact with Western anarchists, rather than because of any particular interest in *Alternative Libertaire's* desire for an international federation of 'platformist' and libertarian communist organisations.

## **The revolutionary unions**

The people from the SAC, CGT and SO carried no mandates but were an inspiration, a living proof that anarchists can win workers in their tens of thousands. And they are not being won by militant trade unionism alone. At present the SAC is debating the future direction of their union, centring on whether to spend money on more ombudsmen (elected full-time officials who can be called upon by branches if they need assistance) or to improve the weekly SAC newspaper instead. Some members feel that, essentially, this is about whether to be primarily a union or primarily a libertarian political organisation. Whatever we may think about the relative merits of either proposition, it is a healthy sign that members are debating like this. (Not the sort of discussion you come across in SIPTU or IMPACT!)

As well as participating in the debates, the WSM delegates gave a formal presentation dealing with the situation in Ireland. This covered the historical weakness of 'left' politics; the problem of partition; the historical attraction of radical nationalism for rebellious youth, and the activities

of the WSM. The latter covered our work to explain and popularise anarchism; and our activity in the trade unions and campaigns for abortion rights and against the water charges.

## **Conference declaration**

A draft declaration was discussed, which was to be sent to all the participating organisations for discussion. Essentially this would commit the political organisations (not the unions) to further discussion, translation of texts, further meetings in 1996 and 1997, and a common protest at the G7 summit in Lyon next year. The WSM have signed.

Clearly many questions arise: How broad should this project be/what is the minimum political agreement required, what are the immediate objectives of co-operation? What should be the relationship to the revolutionary unions? The question of calling for the building of specific anarchist-communist organisations in Spain and Sweden? How will it be understood in the broader anarchist movement?

The bosses are well organised, we need to be better organised than them. While there is much co-operation across borders by anarchists, and some international bodies (like the syndicalist International Workers Association), the Ruesta meeting was a long overdue event. It brought together anarchists and libertarians who see themselves as coming from a tradition whose points of reference include the Organisational Platform, the Friends of Durruti, and the Manifesto of Libertarian Communism; the current among anarchists known as 'platformism' (which also needs a better name!) Debate, discussion and joint work can only help us move forward.

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## **Declaration agreed at the end of the libertarian conference held in Ruesta (August 1995)**

**This international meeting of libertarians held in Ruesta allowed anarchists, militants, sympathisers, libertarian socialists, libertarian communists, anarcho-syndicalists and revolutionary syndicalists to discuss our analyses of and methods of intervention in the social movements (i.e. the struggles against unemployment, sexism, imperialism, racism etc. and in the unions).**

Discussions from different viewpoints also took place around ex-Yugoslavia and the rebellion in Chiapas. The debates showed there was a common wish to transform a world now dominated by many forms of oppression (Capitalism, imperialism & sexism). They also revealed differences in how we analyse and fight these oppressions.

Exploring these differences opens up a way for improving each group's understanding. It gave each organisation a chance to reflect on its practice and current position. The meeting was a small step forward in the construction of a new international political culture, one based on libertarian and revolutionary values. One also determined to bring together the oppressed to strengthen future revolts and struggles to create a new society.

This meeting is just a start. From it we drew up the following proposals and commitments.

1. In 1996 to hold a meeting to look at improving international co-ordination and collectivise discussions and interventions.
2. To translate our political texts & publish them in French, English and Spanish (at least).
3. To co-ordinate a large mobilisation (to include a counter-summit, demonstration and meeting) in Lyon, France, in June 1996, as part of the week of activity against the G7<sup>1</sup> summit.
4. To co-ordinate anti-sexist struggles. In particular to carry out solidarity actions with the Irish comrades in relation to the fight for divorce and abortion rights. To intervene in the fight of 3<sup>rd</sup> world and immigrant women and to prepare a common initiative for March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1996.<sup>2</sup>
5. To campaign against nuclear weapons and in particular against the resumption of nuclear tests by the French government and against nuclear tests in China.
6. To actively support the march against unemployment planned for Autumn 1995 by parts of the Spanish union movement and unemployed associations.
7. Within two years to hold another libertarian conference, like the one at Ruesta but larger and with more ambitious objectives.

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## **Some comments by WSM on the declaration (September 1995)**

**The Workers Solidarity Movement recognises the need for international co-operation among anarchists and libertarian socialists. Capitalism is an international system, organised on an international basis.**

To combat it anarchists need international organisation. Such organisation would require agreement on major issues such as the role of anarchist organisations, activity within the trade unions and relations with the anarcho-syndicalists, how to combat racism and fascism, the type of struggle needed to advance the movement for women's freedom, how to relate to anti-imperialist conflicts. It would also need an agreed international strategy, the capability of fostering international debate among anarchists, and the ability to give aid to weaker sections or to those engaged in mass struggle.

In order to move towards the building of such an international organisation we welcome co-operation, discussion and debate with other anarchists and libertarians.

We place ourselves within the historic anarchist tradition. Anarchism has identified the goal we desire: a classless society where production is organised to satisfy needs and where people control their own lives in a truly free society. We do not wish to go 'beyond anarchism', there is no need. Anarchists have, of course, made mistakes but that is to be expected. The point is to

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<sup>1</sup> Summit of the seven most powerful imperialist countries.

<sup>2</sup> International women's day.

learn from those mistakes and avoid repeating them, to grow and mature within the anarchist tradition.

It is in the interests of furthering debate and practical co-operation between anarchists and libertarians that we sign the declaration of the international libertarian conference, held at Ruesta in August 1995.

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