

Anarchist Activity in France during World War Two

Following is a summary of material from the C.I.R.A., Marseille, BULLETIN No. 21/22

(Summer, 1984), which had the theme Anarchists and the Resistance.

Jean Rene Sauliere (alias Andre Arru) was one of the anarchist participants in the French resistance to the Nazis and their Vichy collaborators during World War II. He was born in Bordeaux in 1911 and became an orphan during the First World War. In early adulthood he made his living as a traveling salesman. He belonged to the Bouches-du-Rhone section of the Federation of Free Thinkers, and was elected its president. He also joined the anarchist movement and became a pacifist. Several years before the outbreak of the 1939-1945 conflict, he decided that he would never participate in any war. Like other pacifists and revolutionaries, he saw war as a solution worse than the evil it was supposed to combat. By 1939, Sauliere decided that he would not voluntarily submit to arrest for refusing to serve in the military if called. He intended to escape in order to continue the struggle as a pacifist and anarchist. This was a common attitude in the left libertarian and revolutionary syndicalist circles of the time.

In an article entitled "Reflections on Some Tall Tales," written in the late 1970s and published in issue 21/22 of the C.I.R.A. Marseille BULLETIN, Sauliere noted that the history of the French anarchist movement between 1939 and 1945 has been almost completely neglected, and when dealt with at all, has most often been distorted.

One of the examples he cited was from Jean Maitron's HISTORY OF THE ANARCHIST MOVEMENT, Volume 2, 1914 to the Present (published in France in 1975). Maitron dispensed with the period 1940-1945 by asserting that the French anarchist movement was inactive and disorganized until 1943 because it was "leaderless" at the beginning of the war. He also asserted that some of the anarchists were "Germanophiles," others were Gaullists, and most were simply involved in individual survival during the war. But Sauliere, who was an active participant in the anarchist and anti-Fascist movement during the war, asserted that the charges that some anarchists were "Germanophiles" or Gaullists were definitely untrue. Sauliere did note that the pre-war

anarchist movement was suppressed in France, after the general mobilization was declared in September of 1939. Its members were either inducted into the military, refused the draft, went into hiding, or were put under police surveillance. Louis Lecoin and a large number of other well-known anarchists wrote, signed and distributed a leaflet titled "Immediate Peace" a few days after the declaration of war, for which they were all arrested. At the same time, all anarchist literature was banned because it was basically anti-militarist and anti-war.

Nevertheless, Sauliere indicated, there were a number of individuals and groups who began rebuilding the movement soon after the start of the war. Neither lack of "leadership" nor lack of motivation were hindrances. The number of French anarchist activists had been small before the war relative to the numbers of activists involved in authoritarian left groupings. So, although many of them began undertaking activity, their criticisms of the established unions and political left, and their small numbers, left them relatively isolated. This, in combination with the severe repression and police surveillance, made organized anarchist activity during the war years very difficult.

Before the war Sauliere was actively involved in the Bordeaux anarchist group. A number of other members in the group held the same anti-war, anti-military position as he did, and a number of the other young men had also decided to avoid the draft if war came. But Sauliere was the only one in the group who followed through when the general mobilization was announced. He went into hiding for five months in Bordeaux, until he was able to get papers that identified him as a person medically unfit for military service. With these, in February 1940, he went to Marseille, where he was less well known by the authorities.

Adopting the name on his papers, Andre Arru, he contacted French, Italian and Spanish anarchists living in the area. Later he was joined by a Bordeaux anarchist comrade named Armand, who had been discharged from the military. They formed a libertarian group and began writing leaflets and pamphlets which they printed themselves. In the center of the city, during the nighttime curfew, they put up posters and distributed the leaflets in mailboxes and other places. In the beginning there were only two activists regularly involved; but their numbers grew to twelve as the war went on. At first, they were only able to print a few dozen small leaflets using very simple techniques, but later, with the help of activists in other cities, they were able to do professional printing of one to five thousand copies. From early 1940 on, they produced literature attacking the Fascists and all those responsible for the war, including capitalists and the Stalinist dictatorship. The Marseille group put out at least five different publications of one thousand or more copies each: a leaflet titled "[To All Intellectual and Manual Workers](#)", a poster headed "Against

Fascism and Dictatorship," a poster headed "[Death to The Brutes](#)", a 45-page pamphlet titled THE GUILTY ONES, and a 12-page bulletin named REASON.

The Marseille anarchists also made and maintained regular contact with anarchist groups in other cities and individuals in the area who worked with them. They were in touch with people in Paris, Nimes, Lyon, Montpellier, Toulouse, Foix, Var and elsewhere. They made contact with the anarchist printers Henri and Raoul Lion in Toulouse, who were actively involved in the French Resistance movement. The brothers printed posters, leaflets, the first issue of REASON, and the pamphlet THE GUILTY ONES for the Marseille group, as well as books and other anarchist literature. They were eventually arrested and sent to a concentration camp, where both died. The Marseille group's literature was distributed locally and in the other cities where anarchists were active.

The bulletin REASON: ORGAN OF THE INTERNATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY SYNDICALIST FEDERATION, issue No. 1, June, 1943, contained discussions of the Katyn Forest massacre, the Spanish Revolution and current events in France from a libertarian perspective.

The Russian anarchist Voline was living in the Marseille area. Even though he was under police surveillance, he was able to evade the authorities in order to participate in the work of the group. He helped to put together and distribute the pamphlet THE GUILTY ONES, among other things. Sauliere/Arru also received assistance from Pierre Besnard, former secretary-general of the Revolutionary Syndicalist General Confederation of Labor (C.G.T.S.R.), in working on this project.

In his book, Maitron asserted that the anarchists did not have very many meetings during the war, especially before 1943, and that the meetings they had were not very serious. But Sauliere, in "Reflections on Some Tall Tales," noted that he attended quite a few meetings, many of them before 1943, both in Marseille and in other cities, along with anarchists from a number of places. The discussions they had were quite serious, including analyses of current events and debates about whether they should cooperate directly with non-anarchist anti-Fascists in their ongoing activities or remain separate and independent from the rest of the organized resistance. Many individual anarchists chose to be involved in the establishment Resistance as well as taking part in separate left libertarian group activities. Others preferred not to subject themselves to the hierarchical command system of the Resistance, in which they would have to follow the orders of Gaullists, non-Gaullists, Communists and other authoritarians. Because of their resistance activities a number of anarchists were arrested, imprisoned and, like the Lion brothers, sent to

concentration camps.

The French anarchist groups worked closely with the underground Spanish anarchist movement in France and inside Spain opposing the Franco regime. They also had cooperative working arrangements with people and groups outside the anarchist movement.

In 1943 there was a clandestine anarchist conference in Toulouse. It was organized and attended by delegates from Marseille and the other cities mentioned above, plus a representative from the underground movement of Spanish libertarians living in the departments of Ariège and Haute-Garonne. The group formed at the conference published literature under the name International Revolutionary Syndicalist Federation, F.I.S.R. was the French acronym. See their text "To All Intellectual and Manual Workers" below. It advocated revolution by means of the general strike, which would be a prelude to a new social order founded on universal human solidarity in the place of exploitation of human being by human being.

One of the posters the Marseille group wrote and published, "Death to The Brutes," is translated and printed below. The title was intended to catch the eye of passersby. The "brutes" referred to were the heads of the Nazi, Fascist, Francoist, Stalinist, Vichy, British and American states, the generals and their accomplices. The poster argued that they were all responsible for the war and the horrors that resulted from it.

One of the examples of distortion of anarchist wartime history which most disturbed Saulière appeared in the best-selling book **EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE: THE FRENCH LEFTISTS 1929-1944** by Jean Rabaut (published in France in 1974). The book primarily recounted the history of the French Trotskyists, but also mentioned anarchist activity during World War II. Rabaut referred to the poster "Death to The Brutes," although he did not reprint its text. He offered his readers a very distorted description of its contents, stating that it urged people to nail all "brutes" to doors, including those wearing the symbol of the "five-pointed star." He went on to note that this supposed contempt for the wearers of the "five-pointed star" did not stop Saulière and his comrades from risking their freedom and perhaps their lives by making forged identity papers to help Jews. In fact, the only truth in Rabaut's statement was that the Marseille group did, indeed, produce papers to help Jews and politically involved people evade Nazi and Vichy persecution.

Saulière was very disturbed by the false charges. He asserted that the text of the poster was not at all anti-Semitic, as implied by Rabaut. In fact, it did not refer to wearers of the "five-pointed star" at all, but to those who wore the red star, symbol of the Bolshevik state. The point was

that the rulers of the Soviet state should be viewed like all other rulers.

Sauliere insisted that anti-Semitism never existed among the anarchists involved in the Marseille group, and to imply that it did was a gross falsification. When challenged by Sauliere, Rabaut, in a letter, admitted that he had not checked the facts relating to his charge, apologized for his misstatement and promised to correct it in future editions of his book.

Sauliere and his anarchist comrades in Marseille, as noted above, produced forged identity papers to help political refugees and Jews. They also sheltered a number of people who were fleeing the Vichy government and Nazi occupation authorities. A couple they had assisted were arrested by the Vichy police and were intimidated into revealing the source of their false documents. Because of this, on August 3, 1943, Sauliere, his companion Julie Vinas (who was a Spanish political refugee) and another French anarchist, Etienne Chauvet, were arrested by the Vichy police. When the police broke in, the three had just printed and were preparing to put up the poster "Death to The Brutes." Three other comrades who were planning to help with the pestering were warned by a neighbor in time to avoid capture.

The arrested anarchists were interrogated for five days, but luckily were not tortured. The men were sent to the Chave prison in Marseille and Vinas to a prison hospital.

In prison Sauliere/Arru and Chauvet met Communists, socialists and Gaullists, who had also been arrested for resistance activities. The two anarchists openly criticized the Petain regime and refused to go along with the celebration led by the Communists to mark the October Bolshevik revolution, or to sing the patriotic songs the Communists sang to impress the Gaullists with their loyalty to the French nation-state.

In March of 1944 some of the Communists, led by one Charles Poli, organized an escape, and invited the Gaullist prisoners to join them. The escape was a success; but seven of the political prisoners were left behind, five, including the two anarchists, for purely ideological reasons. In her book HISTORY OF THE PARTISAN GROUPS (M.U.R.) OF BOUCHES-DU-RHONE FROM SEPTEMBER 1943 TO THE LIBERATION (published in 1962) Madeleine Baudoin included an interview she had with the Communist Poli. He confirmed to Baudoin that the Communists purposely left the anarchists behind in prison because of their anti-patriotic attitudes. He was aware that the two had participated in the resistance in various ways, including forging papers to help people fleeing the Nazi and Vichy authorities. But, he asserted that, as Communists, he and his comrades loved France and were true patriots. They could tolerate differences of opinion and would have been willing

even to help monarchists who shared their love of France, but not anti-patriotic anarchists.

After the escape, the political prisoners left behind were transferred to the prison at Aix, from which they escaped, at the end of April 1944, with help from the local resistance organization. Many years later, Sauliere learned that he and Chauvet had been scheduled to be sent to a concentration camp from the prison at Aix.

On their way to safety, two of the escaped prisoners had to be left behind because they were too sick to walk the distance to the rendezvous point arranged for meeting their local resistance guide. Those who made it were taken into the countryside, where a maquis unit was forming. The escaped prisoners were asked by the F.T.P. leader if they wanted to join or go their own way. The two anarchists decided to go off on their own to rejoin their own contacts. So, after a few weeks of rest, they were given forged identity papers and food and were escorted to a town. Sauliere then contacted other anarchists and was joined by his companion Vinas, who had been released six months earlier. Together they went to Toulouse at the end of June, 1944 and re-contacted other anarchist comrades there.

The groups in the region had been inactive since the August 1943 arrest because of fear of police surveillance; but activity was renewed as soon as Sauliere and Vinas became involved again. In August, 1944, the Toulouse group put out a pamphlet, which was printed and distributed the same day the German army evacuated the city. They had great hopes for the future--everyone "assumed that the Francoist regime would now be overthrown and a republic could be restored in Spain.

Although Sauliere understood fairly clearly that the end of the Second World War would not bring the rule of social justice, at first he believed that things would surely be better than before the war. He felt that things would have to be different because people had learned from the mistakes of the past and because all of the political ideologues had been discredited. But he later recognized that he and his comrades had been naively optimistic; and, by the 1970s, he sadly acknowledged that there was less social justice after the war than before. Despite this, Sauliere continued to believe that he and his anarchist comrades had acted as they had to. When interviewed in Marseille in 1970 by Madeleine Baudoin, he asserted that, given the same situation, he would do it all again, but would try to learn more lessons from history and not repeat mistakes.

After the war Sauliere continued his anarchist activities, settling in Marseille again. In 1948, because of his wartime draft resistance, he was

sentenced to a five-year prison term. But this was suspended because he was able to produce twenty- eight affidavits from people who had known him in the resistance.

From SOME NOTES AND INFORMATION ON ANARCHIST OPPOSITION TO WAR

Translations and Summaries by Charlatan Stew

CHARLATAN STEW, Seattle, U.S.A., 1995

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