

The logo for the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI), consisting of the letters 'FAI' in a bold, white, sans-serif font on a black rectangular background.

We, the anarchists!

*A study of the Iberian Anarchist Federation
(FAI) 1927-1937*



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WE, THE ANARCHISTS!

THE IBERIAN ANARCHIST FEDERATION (FAI) 1927-1937

by **Stuart Christie**

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SINCE THE OFFICIAL BIRTH of organised anarchism at the Saint Imier Congress of 1872, no anarchist organisation has been held up to greater opprobrium or subjected to such gross misrepresentation than the Federación Anarquista Iberica, better known by its initials - the FAI.

There are two dimensions to this book. The first is descriptive and historical: it outlines the evolution of the organised anarchist movement in Spain and its relationship with the wider labour movement. At the same time it provides some insight into the main ideas which made the Spanish labour movement one of the most revolutionary of modern times. The second is analytical and tries to address — from an anarchist perspective — the problem of understanding and coping with change in the contemporary world; how can ideals survive the process of institutionalisation?

In tracing the history of the CNT and FAI it is clear that anarchist organisations, like all other organisations and civilisations before them, are subject to a process of rise and fall. Whether or not they achieve their short- or long-term objectives — unless they are that rarest of things, a genuinely *ad hoc* body whose members know when to ‘hold and fold their cards’ — even the most committed libertarian and directly democratic organisations degenerate. From being social instruments set up to meet real social needs they become transformed into self-perpetuating institutions with lives and purposes of their own, distinct to and in tension with the objectives which called them into being in the first place.

‘This work has a much broader relevance than the title would suggest. It offers an introduction to the revolutionary activities of the Spanish labour movement, from the First International to the rise of the National Confederation of Labour (CNT) — the context in which the anarchist militants of the FAI operated. A full history is given of the development of the FAI, taking the opportunity to debunk some of the gross misrepresentations erected by hostile writers, according to which members can be described as criminals or visionaries, but never working class militants.

‘Christie also attempts to analyse the role that the FAI — as much as a rallying cry as an organised body — played in the Spanish libertarian movement. The CNT’s role as a trade union led to the formation of a layer of reformist officials, more interested in the security of their positions than the revolutionary change of society. Naturally these reformists wished to move the CNT towards a less combative stance. Opposition to dictatorship (and collaboration with other forces) led to an increasing desire to be ‘practical’ and engage with the world of politics. The trend came to be identified with Angel Pestaña and *treintismo*. However, the grassroots anarchist militants felt ‘it was not the job of the anarchists to resolve the problems of capitalism or to negotiate mutually acceptable solutions between boss and worker... but to nourish the spirit of revolt against exploitation and all coercive authority.’ It was the grassroots militants who bore the brunt of the bloody repression used against the CNT — and defeated it by attacking the hired guns of *pistolero* and their employers. They were also the forces that defeated the reformist trend represented by *treintismo*.’

Kate Sharpley Library

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