

Birth of the FAI

The Origins Of The Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI)

Edgar Rodrigues

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For some time now I have been of the opinion that our historians afford little if any attention to the Portuguese-speaking movement and anarchists (in Brazil and Portugal). Most of them simply are not familiar with the writings of militants from those countries, do not translate their writings, the Anarchist Encyclopaedia ignored their existence and FAI writers are still ignorant of their origins: where did it come from? Whose idea was it to set it up? Who sketched its essential guidelines? Who tabled the original proposal for an 'Iberian Anarchist Federation' for discussion and prior consent?

The FAI - and this needs saying - was an idea, a proposal that emanated from the Portuguese militant Manuel Joaquim de Sousa, with backing from Manuel Peres Fernandes who had been deported from Brazil in 1919 by the Epitacio Pessoa government and found refuge in Lisbon in 1923-1924 with Doctor Pedro Vallina and his family.

The launching of the FAI was first mooted at the Congress of workers' organisations from Portugal and Spain held in the Portuguese town of Evora in 1923.

Manuel Joaquim de Sousa was an Oporto-born militant who was extremely active and wrote books of great historical import. the congress was attended by CNT representatives Manuel Peres, J. Ferrer Alvarado and Sebastian Clara: the Portuguese CGT was represented by Manuel Joaquim de Sousa and Jose da Silva Santos Arranha.

It was in fact at this get-together of representatives from the Iberian libertarian trade union organisations that the Portuguese Manuel Joaquim de Sousa suggested that the confederal libertarian movement in the Iberian peninsula amalgamate, uniting Portuguese and Spanish anarchists into a single body. From the outset he had support from Manuel Peres who had been born in Spain but raised in Rio de Janeiro, where he had discovered Anarchism.

In May 1926, having completed his project, Manuel Joaquim de Sousa represented the Portuguese CGT at the Marseilles Congress: Manuel Peres was representing the Portuguese Anarchist union (UAP). Thirty delegates from French and Spanish groups and from the IWMA attended. Armando Borghi attended as representative of the Italian Syndicalist Union (USI).

The congress debated topics like:

- the reorganisation of anarchist forces in Spain and France;

- disagreements on organisational matters; non- recognition of the so-called Revolutionary Alliance which advocated dealings with politicians;
- and the strengthening of the prisoners aid committees.

Finally, at that congress, Manuel Joaquim de Sousa, with Manuel Peres's support, mooted once again 'unification of the Iberian movement' and (this time) succeeded in securing agreement on the following points:

- ”1) Congress agrees to launch an Iberian Anarchist Federation, notifying Portugal's Anarchist Union of this decision:
- 2) in view of the abnormal and dangerous situation obtaining in Spain, the liaison committee is to be based in Lisbon:
- 3) its launch is a matter for the Portuguese Anarchist Union, the latter being entitled to seek aid and support as well as collaboration from Spanish anarchists resident in that place:
- 4) whensoever it sees fit, that committee will summon an Iberian congress in order to put the finish touches to said federation:
- 5) the liaison committee will be provisional, pending that congress:
- 6) Spanish anarchists are to be consulted so that they may give their endorsement to these resolutions.”

”The Portuguese Anarchist Union's congress will be attended by a delegate representing the Spanish anarchists' movement”

(unpublished memoirs of Manuel Peres, in the possession of Edgar Rodrigues, published in the Lisbon newspaper 'O Anarquista' of 20 June 1976).

To escape from repression at home, the Spaniards were scattered across the world just then.

On 28 May 1926, a military coup in Portugal forced Portuguese anarchists to bring forward their planned congress and to relocate it to Valencia, where it proceeded surreptitiously on 25 July 1927. It was attended by Francisco Nobrea do Quintal, as the secretary of the Portuguese Anarchist Union. Germinal de Sousa, son of the author of the draft project to launch an Iberian Anarchist Federation, and a refugee in Spain at the time was also on hand. From the outset, he was a member of the new anarchist body and was a participant, along with other Portuguese delegates, in the National Plenum of Regionals held in Madrid on 30 and 31 October 1927. several delegates from the Portuguese Anarchist Federation and from exiles were also present at the FAI meeting on 31 January and 1 February 1936.

It is, as I see it, very important for the historical record and for ourselves that we call to mind these true stories that sometimes have a tendency to slip from our memories.

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