# Francisco Ferrer and His Work

by **Louis C. Fraina,** ***The Daily People*****, Vol. 10 No. 111, October 19, 1909.**

*BARCELONA PROFESSOR INAUGURATED MODERN SCHOOLS IN SPAIN WHICH, DESTROYING THE INFLUENCE OF THE CATHOLIC POLITICAL HIERARCHY, AROUSED ITS IRE–WAS MURDERED BY CATHOLIC CHURCH MACHINE.*

The clerico-capitalist government of Spain, reactionary, brutal, inheriting the traditions and ferocity of the Inquisition, has capped the climax of its persecution of Prof. Francisco Ferrer by an act that is as cowardly as it is dastardly and ferocious, albeit in perfect harmony with the policy of the Plunderbund of Spain. The noble-minded pedagogic-reformer has been shot, assassinated.

The activity of Francisco Ferrer had long been a thorn in the flank of the ruling class of Spain. His efforts to enlighten the working class were resented; so that, when he founded, in 1901, the Escuela Moderna (Modern School) at Barcelona, the clericals and all the other reactionary elements were immediately up in arms against the project. Efforts were made to destroy the educational movement inaugurated by Ferrer, and he himself gotten rid of. No opportunity of doing this, however, presented itself until the bomb outrages of 1906 occurred, when an attempt was made to assassinate the King and Queen of Spain, Ferrer was immediately arrested, charged with complicity in the plot. The true reason of this act was disclosed when the government made an attempt, following the incarceration of Ferrer, to suppress all educational movements of a liberal and rationalist nature, it even going so far as to seize funds intended for the Modern School of Barcelona.

No formal statement of a charge was made against Ferrer, and not a shred of evidence produced to prove his connection with the attempted assassination of the royal couple. Yet in spite of this, he was kept in prison for thirteen months.

The liberal influence emanating from Ferrer's rationalist schools immediately started an agitation for his release. The liberal and radical press of Europe also espoused the cause of the wrongfully imprisoned pedagogue, and a storm of indignation swept over the continent. A number of demonstrations protesting against the atrocious act were held. Noted scientists, such as Lombroso and Sergi; Socialists, Liberals, reformers, all joined in giving expression to the horror' felt by the universal civilized conscience at the nefarious crime of the Spanish government. The universities of Europe sent a delegation of protest to the governmental authorities, to intercede in behalf of the great scholar. And so widespread was this flange of protest that the clerico-capitalist government of Spain was forced to bring Ferrer to trial. Despite the forgeries that were sprung upon the court, the government prosecutor utterly failed to make a case, and the noted educator was acquitted of all the charges levelled against him.

Even in the prison of Modelo, wherein he was incarcerated, Ferrer continued his writings, among which is found the following: "All the world knows I will be acquitted except the Chief Justice–Beccera del Toro. It is laughable. Think of such a question as this: 'Who will be the victor, Truth or Beccera del Toro and his Jesuits?" The sentiment thus expressed is correct. Nothing can stamp out the movement for human emancipation, for which Ferrer, in his own particular line, was a staunch fighter. It but gains new strength from its defeats; the blood of its martyrs but invigorates it, giving it new strength and enthusiasm until the final day of triumph shall have been reached.

Acquitted, Ferrer at once set to work continuing the carrying-out of his plans for the rationalist education of the youth of Spain. He founded new schools, established pedagogic reviews in French and Italian, as well as Spanish, and published a constant stream of books, educational and scientific. He sought to educate the people out of age-long ignorance and superstitions by making them acquainted with the radiant world of modern science and thought. It is for this reason that the clericals hated him with a bitter and undying hatred; and why the efforts to destroy him have been crowned with success. To shoot a man for having sought to EDUCATE the people–what a comment upon Capitalistic society!

The conditions in the Spanish schools, to the betterment of which, by the establishment of sanitary and modern institutions, the efforts of Ferrer were directed, were terrible in the extreme. They have been thus described by William Heaford:

"This journal (La Escuela Espagnola) shows the dreadful condition under which the schools of Spain found themselves under the clerical regime. It appears that there were in Spain during the month of July, 1907, 24,000 government schools, all of which were in a shocking condition, "without light or ventilation," the abodes of death, ignorance, and poor education.

"Each year there are fifty thousand children who die of maladies contracted in these schools. Two hundred and fifty thousand come out of these schools broken in health. Besides this there are 480,000 children running the streets without any instruction whatever, given up to habits which make for their mental and moral deterioration. Thirty thousand blind children, 37,000 deaf mutes, 65,000 children afflicted with mental disorders, and 45,000 delinquents are absolutely without any provision of any kind for their care or maintenance.

"Add to this that the instructors are so ill paid that they often have to eke out their meagre salaries by outside work, and the fact that there are in Spain ten million illiterates and 50,000 conscripts who enter the army every year unable to read and write, and you have the picture of what clericalism has done for the schools of Spain. There are only sixty institutes and ten universities in the whole country, and, as in the case of the common schools, the hygienic conditions of these schools is simply frightful. The contemplation of this sordid condition of education in Spain fixed the purpose of Ferrer to found the Modern School, as an example to a government at once negligent, ignorant and superstitious."

But tyranny ever needs an ignorant people to flourish upon; hence the efforts of the Spanish government to stamp out the new movement.

The movement inaugurated by Ferrer in 1901, by the founding of the Modern School of Barcelona, was slowly but steadily crowned with success, in spite of the opposition of the clerico-capitalist reaction. In the fourth year of its existence forty schools had copied the manuals and methods of the new school; in 1906 their number had increased to over sixty; and at the present time they number over one hundred. The success of the new movement exasperated the government, and it once more determined to make an effort to stamp out the last vestige of it. Under cover of a law ostensibly directed against terrorism, but really intended as a weapon with which to suppress the educational movement, the Spanish government, headed by Maura, concocted a scheme whereby to suppress the liberal and educational movement. Several explosions of bombs took place in Barcelona, and there is certain proof that these outrages were the work of thugs in the employ of the clericals. This was seized upon as a pretext; and under the mask of guarding the public safety, the government delegated exceptional powers to the local authorities; wholesale arrests followed; the right to trial was abolished, and a desperate effort made to suppress the rationalist educational movement, by charging its adherents with complicity in the bomb-explosions.

The whole scheme, however, turned out a failure, as no pretext could be found to imprison Ferrer. bring him to trial and summarily punish him.

The long-sought-for opportunity to assassinate Ferrer arrived when the revolutionary General Strike recently occurred in Barcelona. Ferrer was immediately arrested in a little village near Barcelona, and charged with being responsible for the revolutionary outbreak; and that, furthermore, he as an Anarchist, had incited the bomb-outrages that took place in Barcelona during the progress of the general strike. With him were arrested the whole personnel of the Modern School; the professors, their wives, sons, and daughters. The schools were closed; the series of books issued from the press of the Modern School seized, and the plant and machinery destroyed.

It would have been no disgrace for Ferrer to have been connected with the general strike, a spontaneous and mighty protest from the working class against the barbarous and iniquitous war in Morocco a war whose only purpose was to enrich the capitalists of Spain. by cementing their hold upon the stolen mines of Melilla with the blood of the starved and exploited workers of Spain. But to say that Ferrer was an Anarchist is to defame the man. “Francisco Ferrer was no Anarchist. Ferrer grasped the necessity of organization, and of the headship that organization implies–no ANARCHY in such a man’s head. As a consequence, none better than Ferrer realized the folly, if not criminality. of individual acts of violence as the means of mass-emancipation–no MURDER in such a man’s heart.” Not only was he too intelligent to be an Anarchist, but by training and temperament Ferrer was the last man to expect social salvation from barricades and bombs; this salvation, he believed, could only be achieved by a system of scientific and rationalist education. A wealthy man, with the cares and responsibilities of a large publishing house, pouring

out a constant stream of scientific books; a widely ramifying system of schools, requiring his time and careful attention, Ferrer had nothing to gain and everything to lose from violence. He was sowing in the present that posterity might reap the harvest.

There was not a shred of evidence to prove Ferrer's connection with the revolutionary uprising; but the opportunity of suppressing the liberal and educational movement was thought too good to let escape, and Francisco Ferrer was shot–assassinated by the clerico-capitalist reaction of Spain.

Francisco Ferrer strove to overthrow a system of education "that unbrained his countrymen, that unspined their backs, and reduced them to Loyola's ideal, living corpses." He thus stated the aim of his movement: "We will have real men and women when we give our children a practical and scientific education, not before. It is a pleasure to watch the boys and girls grow up in a spirit of CAMARADERIE, with feelings of respect and friendship for each other. This has always been to me a touching spectacle. MY WHOLE AN HAS BEEN TO PRODUCE AN EDUCATION WHICH SHOULD BASE SOCIETY ON AFFECTION AND FRATERNITY." The fame and influence of this movement was not confined to Spain; it extended to foreign countries; and at San Paulo, Brazil; Lausanne, Switzerland, and at Amsterdam, schools were founded based on the principles of the Modern School at Barcelona,

This, then, was the "crime" of Fran cisco Ferrer; that he sought to EDUCATE the people of Spain along modern and rational lines, to the end of realizing a society based "on affection and fraternity." Such an idea, however, is contrary to the interests of the Capitalist class, which believes not in a society based "on affection and fraternity," but in one based on greed, competition, and brutality; to realize the ideal of Ferre meant the end of Capitalist society; hence the enmity manifested towards Ferrer. And the abstract education of the new movement not having solidified in a concrete organization strong enough to resist the brutality and encroachments of the clerico-capitalist Plunderbund, the assassination of Ferrer was the logical result.

But the Revolutionary Proletariat will remember the Fortress of Montjuich and the bullets-riddled body of Ferrer. Ferrer consecrated his life to the task of enlightening the working class of Spain; from his fertile mind radiated forth the light of systematic Education. He labored to free the minds of the people from current ignorance and superstition to the end of making them destroy the injustice and iniquity rampant wherever the Beast of Capitalism has its haunt. But in so doing, Ferrer threatened the existence of the Capitalist class of Spain; he struck terror to the hearts of its members; for Usurpation ever fears intelligence in the minds of its victims. As a consequence, the death of Ferrer was decreed; from the start of his educational movement he was destined for a drum-head court martial and death. After a secret trial, at which Truth was strangled and falsehood reigned supreme, the noble-minded educator was shot on the ramparts of the Fortress of Montjuich, Barcelona. Shot without compunction, without a qualm, by the clerical and capitalist freebooters of Spain; killed for having sought to EDUCATE the people. Yet none need wonder at this; for human life is cheap; and when it is a question of human life and intelligence, on the one hand, and money and profits on the other, the clerical capitalist Plunderbund will ever be on the side of the latter, as against the welfare of humanity.

As in every country where Capitalism reigns supreme, the class war is being virilely waged in Spain; there the workers are organizing for the abolition of wage-slavery. The murder of Ferrer is an incident in this war; for, though he was not allied with the Socialist-Labor movement of Spain, yet he sought to educate the people, and in the sight of tyranny, which ever fears intelligence, this was a crime the enormity of which was only punishable with death. And the penalty was paid.

The Capitalist class of Spain, along with its ally, the Catholic political hierarchy, has shown its claws; it has demonstrated its determination to continue its rule of organized plunder at all hazards, even at the cost of the life of noble lover of humanity. "No mercy, No quarter": such is the slogan of the International Plunderbund; and the assassination of Ferrer attests its determination to adhere to the slogan, And to him who has harbored the illusion of solving the Social Question peaceably, of putting an end to the class war without the MIGHT requisite to enforce the RIGHT of our demands, let this be a lesson that shall enlighten and warn. The bullets that laid Ferrer low bear testimony to the ferocity of the Capitalist class; to its determination to continue, in spite of all opposition, its rule of plunder, murder and rapine; it has amply shown that no qualms of mercy and compassion will influence its actions.

The militant Proletariat of Europe is aflame with protest at the dastardly and cowardly murder of Ferrer. The European workers demand reparation, aye! will see to it that Ferrer is avenged. And the International Proletariat should rise in its might; protest against this hideous outrage, and in so doing assert its determination to destroy Capitalism, and, along with it, its brood of murderous vipers, whether lay or clerical.