

The Anarchists

By the beginning of the twentieth century Spain's anarchist movement was the largest in Europe. The anarcho-syndicalist trade union the CNT was formed in 1911, and the violent radical arm of the movement, the FAI, in 1927.

Drawing on the teachings of Proudhon and Bakunin, the Spanish Anarchist movement was anti-authority, state and God, and believed in the organisation of individuals in a non-hierarchical collectivised society- people cannot be free as individuals, but only as part of a free society. Anarchists believed in revolution, not just revolutionary change in the countryside: collectivisation of land, not just the reform into smallholdings and were thus heavily involved in expropriation during the civil war.

Despite their ideological opposition to the state and in recognition of the gravity of the situation facing the beleaguered democratic regime, four anarchists served in the Largo Caballero government: Juan Garcia Oliver (Justice), Juan Lopez (Commerce), Federica Montseny (Health) and Juan Peiro (Industry). Montseny was the first woman in Spanish history to be a cabinet minister who accomplished a series of significant reforms including the introduction of sex education, family planning and the legalization of abortion.

At the outbreak of the civil war, Anarchist militias were established to counter the uprising. The Anarchist Brigade of Buenaventura Durruti fought to save Madrid in November 1936 where Durruti was killed, in circumstances that remain unclear. During the Barcelona events of May 1937, the Anarchists fought alongside the POUM against the Communists and their republican allies.