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Francisco Ascaso
Our Anarchism
1937

*We, the Anarchists! A Study of the Iberian Anarchist Federation
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Our Anarchism

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Our movement is often criticized for its lack of ideological content and this objection is perhaps not without foundation. Nevertheless, we are victims of a lack of understanding and misinterpretation.

If we compare our movement with those in other countries, I sincerely believe that its 'theories' are not brilliant. But if the Spanish proletariat isn't educated at the European level, it has, to even things out, a richness of perception and a far superior social intuition. I have never supposed or accepted that the problem of intellectual improvement can be solved by mentally accumulating a large number of theoretical formulas or philosophical concepts which will never be carried to a practical plane. The most beautiful theories only have value if they are rooted in practical life experiences and if they influence these experiences in an innovative way. This is how we operate, and it is this that allows us to expect a lot from our movement.

I don't pretend, far from it, that intellectual mediocrity is an advantage. On the contrary, I would like every proletarian, every comrade, to exhaust every source of learning. Since this isn't the case, we must then act, taking into account the real possibilities of each person.

Anarchism has gone through various phases during its history. In its embryonic period it was the ideal of an elite, accessible only to a few cultivated souls who used it as a sharp criticism of the regime under which they lived. Our predecessors didn't do so badly since it is because of them that we are today where we are. But comrades, the time for criticism is past. We are in the process of building, and to build, muscular energy is also needed, perhaps more so than the mental agility required for exercising judgement. I agree that one cannot build without knowing ahead of time what one wants to do. But I think that the Spanish proletariat has learned more through the practical experiences that the anarchists have caused them to live through, than through the publications published by the latter, which the former have not read.

One must try to increase, as much as possible, the theoretical content of all our activities, but without the 'dry and shrivelled doctrinalism' which could destroy, in part, the great constructive action that our comrades are carrying forward in the relentless fight between the haves and the have-nots. Our people stand for action on the march. It is while going forward that they overtake. Don't hold them back, even to teach them 'the most beautiful theories.'