

**Francisco Ferrer Guardia and Modern Education**

[The Catalan anarchist was shot on 13 October 1909, accused of having led the popular uprising of Tragic Week in Barcelona in which he had not even been a participant. He was the scapegoat chosen by the oligarchy and Church.]

Francisco Ferrer Guardia was never the leader of any popular uprising. Including the one that erupted in Barcelona on 26 July 1909, the one that has gone down in history as Tragic Week, although a court martial, operating without regard to rights under the law, sentenced him to death as the “author and leader of the rebellion”. In actual fact, those who stood Ferrer Guardia up in front of a firing squad on 13 October that year were taking revenge on a secular intellectual, a revolutionary educationist who had defied the church’s control of education.

Labourism, education and anti-clericalism were the banners he unfurled against the oligarchy.

As writer Anatole France pronounced: “Founding schools was his crime.”

The shooting of Ferrer which had a considerable impact around the globe opened up a debate about his person and his intellectual merits. To some he was an anti-clerical fanatic and so-so teacher; to others he was an innovator and secular martyr. One hundred years on and even though the squabbles still rage it is possible to evaluate the man.

Urban Catalonia in the first decade of the 20th century was a teeming cauldron of several traditions – anarchist, federalist, anti-clericalism and anti-centralism – and fresh forms of collective action were emerging, spearheaded by a new populist radical republicanism led by the overpowering Alejandro Lerroux who got the workers to vote republican and who operated as an anti-Catalanist powerhouse in the very heart of Catalonia.

Workers’ *ateneos*, cooperatives, newspapers and secular schools flourished as manifestations of a popular culture that essentially targeted the clergy and the oligarchy, in which such republicanism and labourism (be it socialist or anarchist) joined forces. This was also the backdrop to the emergence in 1907, at the instigation of socialists, albeit with a substantial input from anarchists, of Solidaridad Obrera, the fore-runner of the National Confederation of Labour (CNT) which would be launched three years later. Not to mention the anti-militarist sentiments of much of the population, fuelled above all by the Disaster of 1898 and the retention of

unfair recruiting practices. All of this and much more besides culminated in Tragic Week and virtually all of the paths that led there had been trodden in one way or another by Francisco Ferrer Guardia.

Born into a peasant family in Alella (Barcelona) on 10 January 1859, his interest in education was first awakened in Paris where he was living in exile after having been implicated in a number of republican plots over the last 15 years of the 19th century. Secular or – as the bishop of Barcelona was describing them in a circular published in 1881 – “atheist” schools were regarded by anarchists as avenues to proletarian emancipation and they had a sizable foothold in Catalonia even prior to 1901 when Ferrer Guardia came back from Paris and opened a Modern School in the Catalan capital. This educational experiment, which over subsequent years spread to several dozen locations in the province and elsewhere in Spain such as Valencia or Zaragoza were later – especially after the execution of their founder – credited with all round excellence as libertarian education, a radical and novel alternative to the Catholic Church’s control of and monopoly over education. In Ferrer’s own words, they would look to reason and science for the “antidotes to all dogma.”

Such education would be free, rational and secular, rounded and egalitarian.

Ferrer took the traditional precepts of modern education as enunciated by Jean Jacques Rousseau in the 18th century, with its sights set on authority and religious outlooks, and tailored them to the revolutionary message that anarchists and freethinkers were then peddling to the new social strata thrown up by industrialisation and urban expansion. With this programme, which also included the practice of coeducation of the sexes “let humanity, male and female, mingle from childhood onwards”, it was scarcely surprising that the Catholic Church and ‘respectable folk’ should have bitten back. As Alvarez Junco was arguing a few years ago, Ferrer’s educational endeavours need to be assessed in the light of the dire educational situation in place in Spain at the time and of the obstacles which the Church and other important pressure groups placed in the way of any attempted overhaul. Be it radical like Ferrer’s or more moderate like the efforts of the Free Educational Institute. Authoritarians and churchmen strove to apply the brakes to the influence that these new secular intellectuals were [pto]

## Ferrer

starting to exercise over the populace and they plumped for Francisco Ferrer as the scapegoat in an object-lesson that had the support of many.

Whereas, quite apart from any apologia for or denigration of his activities and person, Francisco Ferrer Guardia has come down to us as one of the leading propagandists of modern education and not merely libertarian education at that, it might not matter that much whether his personal ethics matched what he preached, even though his death cannot be dissociated either from certain other aspects of his endeavours as a theorist of revolution. Take his remarkable fortune, a real rarity among Spanish revolutionaries, bequeathed to him by his disciple in Paris, Ernestine Meunier, a fortune he used to fund things as varied as the bomb that Mateo Morral threw at the royal carriage on the wedding day of Alfonso XIII and Victoria Eugene on 31 May 1906, Lerroix's politicking or newspapers and workers' clubs.

With many other republicans, publicists and intellectuals well-disposed towards anarchism, Ferrer shared the belief that labourism, social issues and anti-clericalism should be the banners under which the fight should be carried to the oligarchy and its political bossism.

No matter how much of a libertine, anarchist or anti-clerical he may have been, or seemed to be, the sentencing to death and execution of Ferrer Guardia on charges of triggering and directing a revolt in which he had not even taken part was made possible by the utter absence of constitutional rights ensured by courts martial and the machinery of repression imposition of a state of emergency in Spain.

The strike and uprising of Tragic Week (Monday 26 July to 2 August 1909) not only left 80 religious buildings torched but cost the lives of 104 compatriots and saw eight Guards wounded. Around 2,000 people found themselves arrested of which 600 would be convicted, 59 of them sentenced to life imprisonment and 17 to death, even of only 5 were actually executed. José Miquel Baró, the only one of these who had had anything to do with leading the popular uprising was the first cut down on 17 August in the moat of Montjuich castle. The last of the 5 was Francisco Ferrer Guardia, on 13 October. Just before the officer barked the order to open fire Ferrer called out "Long live the Modern School!"

There was significant fall-out from Tragic Week. Premier Antonio Maura lost the king's trust and his political career was finished. The Church was reinforced in its ultra-reactionary stance, whilst the Army persisted with its disastrous Moroccan venture which was to have such an impact on Spanish history over the following two decades. The socialists and the republicans emerged from their isolation, embarking upon a "fellow-travelling" that was to hoist Pablo Iglesias into

the Congress of Deputies. And anarchists finally made syndicalism the focus of their activities, launching the CNT, an organisation which in Catalonia very soon became the labour movement's identifying feature.

Outside Spain, there were mass protests in Brussels, Paris and Rome against this "lawful murder" and its sponsorship by "a murderous clericalism and its militarist allies" in a resurrection of the Inquisition. "Founding schools was his crime" the French writer Anatole France pronounced. "Free schools", as Ferrer had written, where the children would investigate "the underlying causes of popular ignorance" and become acquainted with "the origins of all of the conventions that sustain the current dog-eat-dog regime". In the Spain of 1909 this was asking too much. Even the Republic, two decades on, never managed to pull that off, which just goes to show the rawness of the conflict surrounding education and the creation of a secular State.

Julián Casanova. From *El Pais* via [www.christiebooks.com](http://www.christiebooks.com), translated by Paul Sharkey

## René Cavanhie

Born in La Sala (Occitanie, France) on 25 March 1922, the anarchist writer and resistance fighter René Cavanhie was also known as René Cavan. In 1942, under the Occupation, he went underground and orchestrated the smuggling of people out to London via Spain. Later he set up an autonomous resistance group in the Lot department. After a brief involvement with the MUR (United Resistance Movements), contact with which was lost following a German raid on Figeac, his group then joined the FTP (Francireus et Partisans: 'Partisan Snipers') in late 1942. His home was burned down by an SS column as a reprisal. When talk started of militarising the groups, he resigned from the resistance. He joined the Anarchist Federation (FAF) once it was refloated in 1945 and served on its Self-Defence Commission. Settling in Vincennes, his home was listed among those to be kept under police surveillance. From 11 to 19 November 1949, he served as International Relations secretary and took part in the International Congress in Paris. He served on the CRIA (International International Relations Commission) and wrote for *Le Libertaire* using the pen name Cavan. Later, he wrote for Louis Lecoin's paper *Liberté* and for May Picqueray's *Le Réfractaire*. Author (in French) of, among other things, *Révolution au paradis (Revolution in Paradise, 1958)* and *Poèmes et chansons anarchistes (Anarchist Poems and Songs, 1983)*. In 1974 he was awarded an international literary prize. As a student of philosophy he published *Les esprits frappeurs de Vailhauquès* (1988) [a debunking of a "psychic phenomenon" in a small French town.] from <http://anarcoefemerides.balearweb.net/>

## Mexican Anarchists

### The Mexican Comrades at McNeils

[Ricardo Flores Magon, Enrique Flores Magon, Librado Rivera and Anselmo L. Figueroa of the PLM (Partido Liberal Mexicano) were tried in Los Angeles for conspiracy (resulting from the 1911 Magonist Baja California campaign) from 4th-25th June 1912. They served their sentence at McNeil Island Federal Prison, Washington and were freed on 19th January 1914.]

They stood before us in prison garb. One could have singled them out from thousands, for unlike other inmates, the long confinement has not broken their spirit, nor the prison discipline crushed any fibre of their healthy manhood. The light in their eyes shone forth with purpose and determination; their bearing even betrayed a touch of latent defiance, Nor could the close scrutiny and straining ear of the suspicious warden, stem the expression of righteous revolt against the wretched surroundings. "Yes, we have five months, and ten days more to serve," they told us. They need not have said any more, for in those few words they expressed their innermost yearning – to be free, and with renewed hope and energy hurl themselves in the midst of the struggle, to resume the prime object of their lives – the liberation of the Mexican people from the yoke of their oppressors. Freedom! Magic word. Therein lies the salvation of the human race. The smug, the respectable, the dilettante may scoff at the word; some may even wonder if after all is it worth the price to be paid; or whether its champions are not tainted with an exalted idea which may sound lofty and poetic in books, yet unattainable and impractical in real life; its significance may even escape those who prudently follow the beaten paths and have never known the joy of independent thought and action; yet, while we are thusly philosophizing, while we are delving into our minds to seek a plausible excuse for our cowardly reticence and apathy, men of different tongues, in various climes, but whose hearts are beating in unison with the same lofty ideal, are offering their hearts to the spears.

Like all men actuated by noble motives, they felt inspired. They spoke, and in words of unmistakable conviction, they told us of the vicissitudes of the Mexican people. It might have been the history of toiling humanity, for their struggle embodies the same causes and called forth the same tragic effects. The spoliation of the Mexican people, unlike that of his European brethren, is of comparatively recent date. It began in this very age; they saw land wrested from them by force of arms, under their very eyes, under various pretenses, mainly because force was on the other side. The land and the tools were their only asset, the only available means of securing a livelihood. The very buccaneers who are now ruling their country with an iron hand, are directly responsible for their misery, for their slavery. The peon knows full well that while countless numbers

are thusly deprived of their right to a comfortable existence there cannot be peace but war, relentless war. Living close to nature, the people are not contaminated by the germs of political education; the panaceas so dear to the heart of the American reformer are not alluring to them. They have no patience with wishy-washy palliatives which are always converted to the benefit of public-spirited bunco-steerers. No half measures, no compromise, no insignificant side issues. No, they do not emulate our yellow and apologetic attitude towards the powers that be. They entertain no illusion; they see in those who pretend to rule and govern for the common good, shrewd, sleek guys who are trying to hand them a gold brick; sons of sea cooks who are seeking an opportunity to live off their back. They are natural men, whose inborn social instinct makes them accept work and life in common, with equals. Their love for good fellowship their only bond, their only code of ethics; the lawyer's jargon, the politician's oily tongue only arouses their suspicion and is an indication of evil forebodings.

Their revolutionary slogan is "Land and Liberty," for they fully realize that liberty is a word devoid of meaning unless it conveys and implies the opportunity to live fully and satisfy their needs without paying a toll in exertion and blood to men and institutions. This is what the Magon brothers, Figueroa and Rivera stand for; this is why they are expiating at McNeil's the "heinous" offense of loving freedom for themselves and others; this is why they have been hounded and persecuted by the hirelings of the American investor. They recoiled at the thought of ease and personal comfort while myriads of their brothers are offering their life's blood to the cause of human emancipation; while their comrades of misery and toil are contesting inch by inch, rifle in hand, for the inalienable right to gain an undisputed foothold upon mother earth. These four men are prisoners of the class war, and are to be judged by the standards of the future; their personalities tower above the commonplace, above the trivialities of everyday life, above the sordid and mercenary tendencies of this mockery we call civilization. WHY? having in common with the Mexicans at McNeil's both aims and ideals, cannot but join them in hailing the Revolution that is rising Phoenix-like from the blood-stained soil of the Sierra Madre.

*Why?* v.1, n.9 September 1913

### Other news

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<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Kate-Sharpley-Library/103460683397>

## Durruti

### **Durruti in the Spanish Revolution by Abel Paz, translated by Chuck Morse, afterword by José Luis Gutiérrez Molina [Review]**

Buenaventura Durruti is the most famous Spanish anarchist militant. 'Durruti had lived a good deal of his life underground and his trajectory had always been controversial. He was necessarily an enemy and a bandit to the bourgeoisie. But, for revolutionaries, Durruti was a uniquely gifted man who devoted himself body and soul to the cause.' (p598) Durruti was active in some of the most important moments of Spanish anarchist history. He was notorious from the early 1920s as part of the action groups combating *pistolero* (the bosses' assassination campaign against CNT militants). And probably no less notorious for his part in robbing banks to fund the movement, and in the anarchist insurrections of the 1930s. Finally, he was a key figure in building the 'new world in our hearts' in the Spanish Revolution.

Durruti did not leave stacks of diaries and manuscripts, which makes Paz's reconstruction of his life such an achievement. The footnotes show the long and painstaking research that went into the book: Paz has not just looked through pamphlets and periodicals, he searched the Spanish anarchist diaspora for letters and personal recollections. As well as Durruti's own words, there are some excellent quotes from his partner Emilienne Morin and his comrade Francisco Ascaso.

As well as a life of Durruti, this is also the story of the Spanish anarchist movement and its path to the revolution of 1936. Paz provides the essential context for Durruti's life: what happened in 1936 is impossible to understand without talking about the 1934 Asturias revolt, for example. Chuck Morse has done a great job providing extra footnotes for even more background.

This dual focus means that this is a big book (800 pages plus). It's not so much an expanded version as a complete reworking of *Durruti: the people armed* (1976), with much more primary evidence. It finishes with a wonderful biography of Paz by José Luis Gutiérrez Molina, which shows how Paz exemplifies the militant historian 'who is not given to playing with words because earlier he gambled with his life', to quote 'The fight for history - a manifesto' (KSL Bulletin 20), which Paz signed. Apart from some trouble with footnote numbering and military jargon, it's well written, well translated and well presented and produced.

*Durruti in the Spanish Revolution* is essential reading for anyone wanting to know more about Durruti or the history of the Spanish anarchist movement. For the Spanish revolution it ranks alongside *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution* by José Peirats, and the works of Burnett Bolloten. A chapter on the fate of the Durruti column (and its members) would have been good.

*Durruti in the Spanish Revolution* will doubtless feed the political arguments about the nature of

anarchism, and its successes and failures in Spain. This committed, but still critical, study can only improve such debates. Durruti's revolutionary thought and action went hand in hand. His speech in Barcelona (15 September 1932) sums up the challenge thrown down by the anarchists:

'The Republican-Socialists need to understand this and so we'll say it very clearly: either the Republic resolves the peasants and industrial workers' problems or the people will do so on their own. But can the Republic resolve those and other pressing problems? We don't want to deceive anyone and will reply firmly, so that the entire working class hears us: neither the Republic nor any political regime of the sort - with or without the Socialists - will ever resolve the workers' problems. A system based on private property and the authority of power cannot live without slaves. And if the workers want to be dignified, to live freely and control their own destinies, then they shouldn't wait for the government to give them their liberty. Economic and political freedom is not something given; it has to be taken. It depends on you, the workers listening to me, whether you'll continue being modern slaves or free men! You must decide!' (p285)

*Durruti in the Spanish Revolution* by Abel Paz, translated by Chuck Morse, afterword by José Luis Gutiérrez Molina. AK Press, ISBN 9781904859505

### **Report & reflections on the UK Ford-Visteon dispute 2009 : A Post-Fordist Struggle by 'A supporter'**

This is a 'first draft of history' type reflection on the Visteon dispute of March-April 2009. Alongside critical reflections on the role of the union, there's some good first hand accounts. The quote from Alan Woodward about how the food was organised was fascinating. History is happening all the time!

Past Tense

c/o 56a Info Shop, 56 Crampton Street, London, SE17 3AE. <http://www.past-tense.org.uk/>

### **Credit**

This issue of KSL: Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library produced October 2009. We welcome your feedback.

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## French Anarchism Review

### **A History of the French Anarchist Movement 1917 to 1945 by David Berry [Review]**

Firstly let us congratulate AK Press and the author for getting this volume, originally published by Greenwood Press in 2002, out as a relatively inexpensive paperback edition, making it available to a much wider readership. The author has been researching this topic for many years and this presents to an English speaking audience the distillation of that research. The author has drawn on a wide range of resources including the movement's own periodical and pamphlet press, activists' memoirs, police reports, interviews and the wider available literature on the subject. We can, therefore expect this to be an authoritative account, and due to the author's style and ordering the material it is a very readable one too.

Having set up the context in an essential introduction, the author kicks off the account proper by detailing how the events in Russia in 1917 galvanised a movement that had been split by the war, giving new hope to the revolutionary movement. The anarchist and syndicalist movements had been dealt a severe blow by the First World War, hardly surprising when the main unions had rallied around calls to defend the Nation, and many activists and sympathisers had been called up and either gone off to fight or gone into hiding. The French people were sick of the war, the army mutinous, but the prospect of being defeated by an Imperial German army for the second time in 50 years was unacceptable to most people. However in Russia the workers and peasants had risen, in part against the war, in part for food and liberty, and this showed that the revolutionaries had been right in thinking that the war could trigger some form of social uprising.

However as events unfolded in Russia, the anarchists and syndicalists, even after the war had finally ended found themselves in a difficult position. The unions in France were fragmented, the CGT, in which anarcho-syndicalists had played such a part before the war, was now in the hands of those who had supported the war, and with the success of the Bolsheviks, anarchists and syndicalists were confronted with a new force on the left, one that could claim affinity to a successful revolution. The immediate post-war surge in revolutionary feeling passed though in France, without ever reaching a point when it could amount to anything like the Russian intensity, and subsequently subsided. The anarchists and syndicalists were once again demoralised, they split amongst themselves, both in the unions and politically as anarchists. Some militants left to join political parties, others dropped out altogether, whilst the survivors contented themselves with issuing their newspapers and arguing amongst themselves, not least about which unions (if any) to be active in, and how anarchists should organise with the Plateforme being the major focus for disagreement.

However, unlike in Britain, where the movement practically disappeared, in France there were many well-known and principled activists who kept the movement in the public eye, even if it was over more humanitarian causes rather than pure revolutionary ones. The movement kept up its stream of publications, and splitting and reforming into the 1930s. On the fringes of the main organisations there were smaller groups of individualists and on the other hand hardcore class activists, with many being involved in anti-war activity. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and the social revolution caused an initial boost to the movement in terms of participation, numbers, publications and influence, but the combination of the defeat of the Republican forces and the increasing repressive measures by the French Daladier government, not to mention the seemingly impossibility to stop the slide into a war that nobody in France wanted saw the movement demoralised and incapable of offering anything more than token resistance to the impending doom.

Those anarchists and syndicalists who avoided being rounded, used as force labour, being killed in the fighting or even collaborating, took a part in the resistance, although it was mainly on an individual level, and one gets the impression that for many activists the main concern was simply surviving the war to be able to resume activities once the Nazi occupation had been removed. That said there were undoubtedly many who took some part in the Resistance, whether it took the form of armed struggle or other important roles, although there was a certain reticence to talk about the war years post-1945. One did what one could, it seems, to the best of one's abilities, in the particular situation one found oneself in. Even during the war there were efforts in the south of France to keep activists in touch and issue some propaganda and these formed the basis of the reborn movement in the heady days after the Liberation. This is where the chronology of the ends, but the account ends with an attempt to summarise what little is known about the socio-economic composition of the movement, its numerical strength, the place of women and so forth.

This is an excellent piece of work from a respected researcher, well-written and presented at an affordable price. For English speaking readers this will be the definitive account of the French movement for the foreseeable future. Any criticisms are comparatively minor. The index covers personal names, but not subjects; a few photographs of some of the people mentioned might have broken up the text and given an additional way for readers to get a handle on some of the personalities involved in the movement. One issue that may be much more difficult to answer is that I would have liked some account of what it was like to be involved at the grass roots level of the movement, what

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did those who kept the movement going get out of the experience, what motivated them. (Has anyone done a similar work as Paul Avrich's oral history for the French movement?)

However, regarding the book as published it is an exemplary piece of research and one I can recommend to anyone interested in the topic.

Berry, David A *History of the French Anarchist Movement 1917 to 1945* AK Press. Edinburgh, Scotland; Oakland, CA. Pbk. xi, 362pp. Notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 978-1904859826 RRP \$21.95 (US/CAN) / £15.00 (UK)

### New Pamphlet

After Makhno: The Anarchist underground in the Ukraine in the 1920s and 1930s: Outlines of history By Anatoly V. Dubovik; & The Story of a Leaflet and the Fate of the Anarchist Varshavskiy (From the History of Anarchist Resistance to Totalitarianism) by D.I. Rublyov

Translated by Szarapov

Nestor Makhno, the great Ukrainian anarchist peasant rebel escaped over the border to Romania in August 1921. He would never return, but the struggle between Makhnovists and Bolsheviks carried on until the mid-1920s. In the cities, too, underground anarchist networks kept alive the idea of stateless socialism and opposition to the party state.

New research printed here shows the extent of anarchist opposition to Bolshevik rule in the Ukraine in the 1920s and 1930s.

ISBN 9781873605844 Anarchist Sources #12 £3 (£2 to subscribers)/ \$3



### Julia Romera Yañez

The anarchist activist Julia Romera Yañez, born into a working class family in Mazarrón (Murcia) in 1916, perished in Barcelona on 6 September 1941. Julia's father had died on 15 October 1918, at the age of 30, as a result of flu-induced pneumonia. When some other members of the family lost their jobs in 1921 it was determined that the family would relocate to Santa Coloma de Gramanet (Barcelona province) where Julia's aunt, Mariana Romera Rodríguez had been living for two years already with her husband Diego Berruezo Clement and their two children.

By 1930 Julia was working for Baró Bakeries. Come the Republic in 1931, she began to be active in the CNT and, from 1934 onwards, in the Libertarian Youth. When the revolution broke out in 1936, she was appointed secretary of the Santa Coloma Libertarian Youth, a post she handled in addition to serving as treasurer during the civil war. She also looked after the newspaper *Aurora Libre* (*Free Dawn*). A few months after Santa Coloma fell to the Francoist Moroccan Army Corps on 27 January 1939, she was arrested for her Libertarian Youth and UJA (Union of Antifascist Youth) activities, being treasurer of the latter. On 2 July that year she was taken to the Cervantes Theatre in Badalona which had been commandeered for use as a women's prison. On 31 October she appeared before the military judge in Badalona. From then until the Urgent Summary Court Martial held in the Palace of Justice in Barcelona on 2 January 1940 she was held in the women's prison in Les Corts. She was sentenced to life imprisonment, which sentence was confirmed on 7 March 1940. Towards the end of the summer of 1941, after a number of fever attacks, the Les Corts prison doctor diagnosed her with TB, a disease exacerbated by the repeated beatings to which she was subjected. Julia Romera Yañez eventually died at 10.00 p.m. on 6 September 1941, having declined "spiritual comfort", in the infirmary of the Les Corts female prison in Barcelona. She is commemorated by the "Julia Romera People's Ateneo" in Santa Coloma de Gramanet.

from <http://anarcoefemerides.baleaerweb.net/>

Translated by Paul Sharkey

### London Anarchist Bookfair

This year's London Anarchist Bookfair will be held on Saturday 24th October 2009 from 10am to 7pm at Queen Mary & Westfield College, Mile End Road, London, E1 4NS. <http://www.anarchistbookfair.org>

The meetings include:

1PM You making history, we talking history : Celebrating and learning from radical history, linking in to our present and future experience, organised by Past Tense.  
4PM The truth about 'Peter the Painter' by Phil Ruff.

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Antonio Tellez **The assassination attempt on Franco from the air (1948)** 9781873605806 £5 (£4 post free to sub's)

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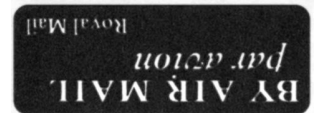
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