

# Revolutionary Education

## The Modern School Movement

Lynne Clive (Marilynn Rashid)

1990

a review of

*The Modern School Movement: Historical and Personal Notes on the Ferrer Schools in Spain*, Contributions by Pura Perez, Mario Jordana, Abel Paz and Martha Ackelsberg, published by Friends of the Modern School, c/o Abe Bluestein, 55 Farmington Rd., Croton-on-Hudson NY 10520, 37 pages, \$3. Available from FE Books.

In 1901 Francisco Ferrer y Guardia opened the first Modern School in Barcelona. Ferrer's intention was to provide co-ed, secular education in a non-authoritarian atmosphere where students were encouraged in self-directed activities.

As Martha Acklesberg explains in her essay on the period, this was an extremely revolutionary act in Spain at a time when the rigid educational system was heavily dominated by church and state, and when the illiteracy rate of the working class was extremely high.

Ferrer was subjected to several prosecutions by the Spanish government. In 1906, he was accused and acquitted of encouraging a young anarchist in an attempt on the life of King Alfonso XIII. Later, Ferrer was falsely accused of instigating the workers' revolutionary strike called "The Tragic Week" and executed, an act which prompted international condemnation.

The Modern School Movement survived Ferrer and flourished in Spain particularly during the 1930s. In addition, a number of schools were founded in other countries including the U.S. The Modern School in the Ferrer Colony at Stelton NJ began in New York City in 1911 before establishing itself in New Jersey where it existed from 1915 through 1953, longer than any other Modern School.

Reunions of the students have continued through to the present and a recent one was the occasion for the discussions printed in this pamphlet. It includes three accounts by Spaniards who studied at one of the most successful of the Spanish schools, The Modern School at Barcelona, later renamed The Nature School, and known affectionately during the '30s, as one student, Pura Perez, tells us, by the Catalan name, "La Farigola," a lovely fragrant flower.

These are genuine, heartfelt accounts of first-hand experiences during this critical time. They give a profound sense of the excitement and revolutionary potential that integrated education with daily struggles for freedom.

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