

# **Cuba: The anarchists and liberty**

Frank Fernández

February 1987

# Contents

Introduction . . . . .	3
<b>1. Colonial Times and Separatism . . . . .</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. The First Republic . . . . .</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. The Second Republic . . . . .</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4. Castroism and Exile . . . . .</b>	<b>10</b>

In this little essay our esteemed comrade Frank Fernandez traces the influence of anarchist ideas on the Cuban people, the development of the Cuban labour movement traces back to at least the middle of the 19th Century, Anarchism was not a small and isolated sect. It was a real people's mass movement. The anarchist movement and the labour movement were inseparable. They grew up together. A history of the Cuban people is not worth reading If it does not include the history of anarchist struggles for the free society.

Although brief, this essay reveals information which I did not have in my book about the Cuban Revolution ['The Cuban Revolution' by Sam Dolgoff (200 pages), not yet available in electronic form, but it can be ordered from AK Press. An author search on 'Dolgoff' in their catalog should find it. They also carry this pamphlet. -Greg] and would have gladly included in the chapter "ANARCHISM IN CUBA". I refer for example, to the influence of the tobacco workers in the WORKERS ALLIANCE in Tampa and Key West, Florida during the great strikes. I am glad to note that comrade Fernandez points out that while anarchists took a very active part in Jose Marti's movement for independence of Cuba, they did "not renounce their ideals of liberty and social justice".

Our comrade Fernandez rightfully deplores the anti-anarchist and pro-Castro sentiment of many sections of the anarchist movement who learned nothing from the disastrous degeneration of the Russian Revolution into a totalitarian dictatorship. They ignored appeals for elementary solidarity with our embattled, oppressed anarchist comrades and workers in Cuba. While there has been, as the author points out, "a certain change in the pro-Castro sentiment In the 1970s", Augustin Souchy, whom I met in 1976 or 1977 while he toured the U.S. for the CNT-FAI, informed me that total ignorance of Cuban affairs and history and pro-Castro sentiment still existed in many anarchist groupings. And this reminds me of anarchists who are very enthusiastic about the false "Nicaraguan Revolution" which follows the pattern set by the Castro counter-revolution.

Thus far there is no really thorough and reliable history of anarchism in Cuba. In writing such a book our comrade is making a very great contribution to our movement. We wish him all success in this difficult, but necessary task. The Cuban anarcho-syndicalist movement has in a century and a half of struggle written a glorious, indelible page in the history of the revolutionary movement, from which new generations of militants will continue to draw inspiration.

Sam Dolgoff,  
New York, Autumn 1986

## **Introduction**

This work is a brief overview of the influence libertarian ideas have had upon the Cuban people. We believe that we have the duty to faithfully report the annals of the Cuban anarchists, who for more than a century have struggled and sacrificed in defence of liberty and for the interest of the most downtrodden classes in our society. The accomplishments of the Cuban anarchists were of decisive importance in social and union struggles. We will briefly review the actions of a group of men and women, who, totally without resources, without aid or protection, forgotten and persecuted, not only influenced the history of the working class and campesinos, but also the history of the entire Cuban people. They certainly were the forerunners of the Cuban proletariat.

## 1. Colonial Times and Separatism

The Ideas of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon made him one of the most important thinkers of the nineteenth century; his economic theories had a great impact in Europe, and exercised a decisive influence on Cuban anarchism. Proudhon, without a doubt the foremost modern anarchist theoretician, has a following among progressive artisans and workers on the island. In 1857 the first mutualist (Proudhonian) Society was founded in Cuba. However, it was only when Saturnine Martinez founded the weekly *La Aurora* in 1865 that the ideas of Proudhon really took root. The first "free associations" of cigar-makers, typesetters, wage-labourers and artisans, what we consider an incipient Cuban proletariat, were organised in that period. Cuba is indebted to Proudhon for, among other things, the creation of regional centres, schools, health facilities and mutual aid associations.

The first Cuban attempt to break from Spain, which ended in defeat, was the Ten Years War (1868-1878). Some anarchist elements from the tobacco industry participated. In the case of Vincente Garcia and Salvador Cisneros Betancourt, both sympathisers of Proudhon's federalism, they took an important role in the direction of the war. These events received inspiration and solidarity from certain Spanish comrades persecuted in Europe for their revolutionary ideas and who found refuge on the island.

During these years anarchist thought had taken a decisive influence among the workers and peasants of France, Italy, Spain and Russia. The most prominent organiser and advocate was another important figure of the time: Mikhail Bakunin. Despite his death in 1876, his ideas and arguments circulated and penetrated Europe with surprising vigour. The foundation of the Socialist Revolutionary Alliance (1864), the International Socialist Democratic Alliance (1868) and a Declaration of Principles written by Bakunin, influenced the more revolutionary elements in Cuba, which had already absorbed the concepts of Proudhon on labour organisation and the new ideas of Bakunin gradually displaced that of Proudhon's upon the working class. The Cuban workers were beginning to develop class consciousness.

Towards the end of 1885 the most prestigious figure in Cuban anarchism came upon the scene in the person of Enrique Roig de San Martin (1843-1889), founder of the weekly *El Productor* and the new theoretician and organiser of the Cuban proletariat. The strikes which occurred at the end of the 1880's were all inspired by anarchists and were organised via *El Productor*. This publication and Roig de San Martin helped to create a revolutionary organisation called the Workers' Alliance of obvious Bakuninist inspiration.

This Workers' Alliance was strongly supported in two tobacco industry locations in the United States, Tampa and Key West. In 1887 the first Federation of Tobacco Workers was organised in Havana, this federation had replaced the Union of Tobacco Workers, and it embraced almost all the workers in that industry. Tampa and Key West followed, in these two small American towns its most outstanding activists were Enrique Messonier and Enrique Creci, in addition to anarchist activists such as Leal, Segura and Palomino. In 1889 a general strike was declared in Key West which ended with the triumph of the workers in the first days of 1890. From Havana, the Alliance and the Cuba workers had shown solidarity with the strike, and through *El Productor* they encouraged and helped orient the strikers even after the death of Roig de San Martin.

Also from the shores of Florida, the Cuban independence movement was preparing for the struggle for independence. Tampa and Key West were genuine strongholds for independence partisans, anarchists and enemies of imperial Spain in general. During those years, Jose Marti,

the patriotic apostle of the struggle against the colonial power, recruited followers and militants within the best-organised groups of Cuban émigrés. However the anarchists grouped within the tobacco industry viewed the Cuban problem from a socialist and internationalist point of view, Martí spoke with them and made concessions in the social sphere to them with the purpose of attracting them to the separatist cause. The anarchists, influenced by the persuasive power and eloquence of Martí, began to gather in Martí's revolutionary clubs and some of the most responsible, such as Creci, Messonier, Rivero y Rivero, Sorondo, Rivera Montessori, Blanco, Blaino, Segura, etc., united behind Martí's independence movement, without renouncing their ideals of liberty and social justice.

The aid and support given to Martí by the anarchists was enormous both in a moral sense as well as politically and economically. Martí then decided to found a revolutionary party, with a majority of the exiled tobacco workers whose unions were "revolutionary socialist", a euphemistic term adopted by the anarchists of the time especially after the tragic Haymarket events of Chicago, in 1886, when a group of anarchist labour organisers were executed for their supposed involvement in a bombing incident.

May Day 1890 was celebrated by the Workers' Alliance in Havana with a rally and public act in remembrance of those executed in Chicago in 1886 there was a call for a congress, and in January 1892 the anarchists celebrated the first Cuban Regional Congress. They recommended that the Cuban working class join the ranks of "revolutionary socialism" and take the path of independence as proclaimed by Martí in a final "Manifiesto" they wrote a phrase which has passed to history "...it would be absurd for one who aspires to individual freedom to oppose the collective freedom of the people...". The Spanish authorities suspended the congress, closed down the anarchist press, declared illegal the Alliance and deported or imprisoned the better-known congress's participants.

The war of independence advocated by Martí exploded in Cuba in February 1895. Anarchists joined the struggle for freedom, among them Enrique Creci, who died in combat in 1896. Lamentable for everyone, the promises and social paths promised by Martí disappeared with him, when the apostle of Cuban independence died while fighting Spanish troops in May 1895. The war ended with U.S. intervention in 1898 and the defeat of Spain. Both in exile and in Cuba, the anarchists during this period acted ceaselessly to raise funds, to support the struggle, and in addition, to carry out campaigns in anarchist circles in the U.S. and Europe. Two young Italian anarchists joined the war: Orestes Ferrara and Federico Falco. The assassination of Spanish Prime Minister Canovas del Castillo by the Italian anarchist Angiolillo in 1897 with the direct participation of Emeterio Betances, a Puerto Rican doctor representing the Cuban exiles in Paris, was without doubt one of the most important factors in Spain's defeat. Canovas declared upon Cuba a war of systematic extermination, "suppress the revolt", he proclaimed, "to the last man and to the last peseta". At the same time he withstood pressure from the U.S. State Department and the N.Y. press. In the heyday of European colonialism and imperialism, Canovas belonged to the same elite of Emperors, Kings and politicians who not only oppressed its own people but also extended their domination to the less advanced world. His influence and reputation was not only among the Vatican, the Austro-Hungarian, the Russian or the German Empire but also in the high circles of power and money in England, France and Italy, who certainly approved Canovas's repression in Cuba.

The three shots which terminated Canovas's life also put an end to his criminal tactics in Cuba. His successor, Mateo Sagasta, was a weak and inept politician, without respect or sympathy

among his peers either in Spain or in the rest of Europe. His policies of "appeasement" toward the U.S. escalated inexorably the provocations of the new American imperialism. The Spanish empire ceased to exist. Indifference prevailed in Europe.

During the U.S. intervention in 1899, the anarchists fermented a strike in the bricklayers' guild. It was suppressed violently, even though in the end the strikers obtained some increase in wages. This strike had the complete backing of the weekly *!Tierra!* edited by Abelardo Saavedra and Adrian del Valle.

## 2. The First Republic

Important strikes took place under the first independent Cuban government: cigar-makers, bakers, carpenters, masons, were fiercely repressed, just as during the worst times of colonial rule. The republic of liberals or conservatives did not address itself to "social problems" and had forgotten the promise made by Marti "with everyone and for everyone".

The Mexican revolution has a serious impact on Cuban workers and campesinos; the writings of Richardo Flores Magon and the guns of Emiliano Zapata were a spur to the consciousness of the long forgotten sugar cane workers, employed in the country's largest industry. In 1915 the *Manifiesto de Cruces* was proclaimed, which, by its literary qualities, was a hymn of anarchist combativity: "We must sustain our cry with the force of our arms" and "Silence is compromise" are the best representative statements of a group of workers that asserted the right to better destinies than that of the hereditary hunger they suffered for generations, especially when they were the most productive force on the island. In this same year the first Peasant Federation (*Federacion Campesina de Cuba*) on Las Villas province was founded, among its organisers being: Fernafido Iglesias, Laureano Otero, Manuel Lopez, Jose Lage, Benjamin Janeiros, Luis Meneses, Santo Garos, Miguel Ripoll, Francisco Baragoitia, Andres Fuentes, Tomas Rayon and Francisco Ramos. Due to the abuses committed by the U.S. and Spanish sugar companies which controlled the lion's share of national production, the anarchists attempted to conduct several strikes, but failed because of the repression unleashed by the government in Havana under President Garcia Menocal, using the pretorian army and the Rural Guard to murder and persecute the strikers. This was the most active period in the entire history of the Cuban Libertarians and lasted for more than twelve years and ended with the physical liquidation of the anarchist movement's most selfless members.

In that period there were many regular periodicals of a libertarian orientation, although many of those responsible for publishing were eventually deported: *La Batalla*, *Nuevos Rumbos*, *Espartaco*, *Via Libre*, *Voz Rebelde*, *Solidaridad*, *Memorandum Tipografico*, *El Boletin Tabacalero*, and of course *!Tierra!*. The most outstanding anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist figures collaborated intensely, Marcelo Salinas, Antonio Penichet, Manuel Ferro, Jesus Iglesias, Ernesto Illas, Francisco Montanes, Pauline Diez and Adrian del Valle among others. Some held to the ideas of Peter Kropotkin, Elisee Reclus, others were sympathetic to Malatesta or Pietro Gori, others maintained the tradition of Bakunin; and the rest and the majority moved toward the incipient anarcho-syndicalism that came from the Spanish National Confederation of Labour, *Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT). In 1922 Alfredo Lopez, an anarcho-syndicalist from the Printers' Union, organised the Labour Federation of Havana, *Federacion Obrera de La Habana* (FOH), in which the most combative workers' unions, groups and Labour associations of the capital were incorporated. Alfredo Lopez initiated the most dynamic stage of a long social and labour process;

he helped to organise unions, libertarian schools, workers' centres, nature clubs and a workers' college, Popular University Jose Marti, Universidad Popular Jose Marti. In those troubled and turbulent years, the anarchists, without economic resources and without any help, first organised, gathered and oriented the majority of the workers, rural and urban, throughout the island.

In 1925 and under the responsibility of Alfredo Lopez, backed by three workers' congresses in Havana, Cienfuegos and Camaguey respectively, created the National Labour Confederation of Cuba, Confederacion Nacional Obrera de Cuba (CNOC), an umbrella organisation of all the unions, fraternal associations, guilds, brotherhoods and mutual aid associations in Cuba: 128 collectives and more than 200,000 workers were represented by 160 delegates. The most outstanding members in addition to Lopez, were Pascual Nunez, Bienvenido Rego, Nicanor Tomas, Jose A. Govin, Domingo Rosado, Florentino Pascual, Luis Trujeda, Pauline Diez, Venancio Rodriguez, Rafael Serra, Antonio Penichet, Margarito Iglesias and Enrique Verona. The most important element of the CNOC bylaws was "the total and collective rejection of electoral action". There were in addition, other labour-related accords and slogans: the classic demand for an eight-hour day, and for the right to strike, and a unanimous pledge not to bureaucratisise the newly-established organisation.

The new president of Cuba, Gerardo Machado, a typical caudillo considered the political attitude of the workers "not very patriotic" and unleashed a relentless and merciless persecution against the CNOC and its leading militants. Machado ordered the cowardly murders of Enrique Varona, the organiser of the railway workers, Margarito Iglesias, Secretary of the Factory Workers' Union and Alfredo Lopez, General Secretary of the CNOCC. Machado jailed or deported every anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist activist, member or militant, he could lay his claws on, and declared illegal any union or guild he desired. For over eight years Machado attacked the work of the anarchists, providing an opportunity for the recently founded Communist Party to set itself in a position of force, within the ranks of the CNOC. Years later, toward the end of his regime, the Communists even signed a pact with Machado.

All of this vicious harassment couldn't prevent the anarchists from gathering within a new organisation, created in 1924, called the Federation of Cuban Anarchist Groups, Federacion de Grupos Anarquistas de Cuba (FGAC). It promulgated strikes, circulated propaganda and contributed to the violence and disorder of the most confused and bloody periods of Cuban history, 1930-33. Machado's tyranny lasted only until August 12th, 1933, and was brought down by a general strike fermented and maintained by anarchist elements of the Transport Union, first and then by the Streetcar Worker's Union and finally by the masses of people.

Despite this triumph, the anarchists did not fare well, they had been badly hurt by the despotic Machado government. Their most outstanding thinkers and activists had been victims of government repression or had been deported. After Machado's downfall, the Communists manoeuvred to retain their lost influence, and began violently attacking the anarchists. Subsequently, when a coup took place against the provisional government on September 4, 1933, the Communists tried a strategy of seeking official support from one Colonel Pulgencio Batista, one of the leaders of the coup and a rising figure among the new military. This manoeuvre would later be known as "the Popular Front".

With the object of regrouping and re-organising, the anarchists tried to find allies within the revolutionary opposition to Batista and some of the more experienced militants became affiliated with a socialist organisation called Young Cuba, Jovan Cuba, led by an archenemy of the Communists, Antonio Guiteras. This time the repression came from the same Colonel Batista, who,

with the aid of the Communist Party caused the failure of the general strike in March 1935. This was one of the major blows the anarchists took during this time of social recovery.

At the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and Revolution in July 1936, the Cuban anarchists rallied to the defence of the Spanish people and founded in Havana for this purpose the International Anti-Fascist Solidarity, *Solidaridad Internacional Anti-Fascista* (SIA), which worked with dedication in the middle of a world depression to collect funds, medicines and arms to send to the Spanish comrades of the CNT-FAI (*Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo-Federacion Anarquista Iberica*). Many Cubans died in Spain during the Civil War defending their ideals in the ranks of the anarchist columns. After the Spanish conflict, many returned to Cuba, together with a large number of Spanish comrades who fled Europe with Cuban passports. Again, on this occasion, money was collected for distressed militants.

In 1939, following orders from Moscow, the Cuban Communist Party made a pact with Batista, now a General, who totally lacked popular support, and in exchange for their services and solidarity Batista gave them the directorship of a new Labour Confederation, the Confederation of Cuban Workers, *Confederacion de Trabajadores de Cuba*, (CTC) the largest labour organisation in Cuba, which included all social factions, including an anarchist minority. In these years, the Cuban workers' movement, by order of Batista, was organised and legalised under Communist control. The anarchists for their part founded an organisation called the Libertarian Association of Cuba, *Asociacion Libertaria de Cuba*, (ALC) with the purpose of regrouping together all the anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists who survived the decade of the 1930s.

### **3. The Second Republic**

The Cuban constitution of 1940, marked the beginning of a new republican era. It was the first attempt in Cuban history to contend with social issues by governmental action, and represented an effort to correct errors and omissions under earlier regimes. A modern and progressive document, this Cuban Magna-Carta represented an effort of two generations, from all social classes and spheres of national life. A number of problems, present in this difficult period of our history were dealt with in great detail: political, social, agrarian, civic and labour related. The 1940 Constitution was without doubt a well-conceived document: all that was left to do was to set it to practice.

During the first years of the 1940's, the libertarians had organised through the ALC. The basis for their popular support were the remnants of the unions that so strongly functioned before the mid-1920's. The anarchists retained a good reputation among the working class, because of their spirit of combat and sacrifice based on their selfless, revolutionary and uncorrupted past. They developed fresh cadres of militants through the newly founded Libertarian Youths (*Juventudes Libertarias*), with the intention of recovering terrain lost to the Communists in the unions and among students. Further, although the constitution of 1940 recognised the eight-hour day and the worker's right to strike, it also severely regulated these activities. This situation forced the anarcho-syndicalists within the CTC to create militant action groups in order to defend or negotiate their demands.

Batista was elected President and maintained his alliance with the Communist Party, who, receiving ministerial posts, money and media for propaganda among the Cuban people. They addressed Batista with considerable flattery, as "the messenger of prosperity", and collaborated

with him at the party and union levels (through the official Communist electoral organisation as well as through the CTC union federation controlled from the top by them) thus betraying, once more the true goals of libertarian and revolutionary unionism.

Cuba's next President, Ramon Grau San Martin, won the elections and assumed power in 1944. The people expected radical changes since his government was expected to be social-democratic. However, Grau kept the Communists in their posts and only one significant change took place in the Cuban union movement. On May Day 1947 Grau, forced by the Cold War, expelled the marxists from their hierarchical posts within the CTC. But notwithstanding U.S. pressure, Grau left the Communist Party intact. The anarchists used this opportunity to call for free elections in almost all the unions; hence a number of their most respected comrades were elected in the CTC in different posts. Because of their prestige and dedication, the anarcho-syndicalists effectively led a number of trade unions: transport, food workers and construction. They were also able to sustain militant action groups in almost all the CTC unions. In those years, the anarchists also set up peasants associations, based on the poorest, landless, moneyless peasants. These organising efforts were more effective in the north coast province of Camaguey, an old anarchist bastion, and the coffee plantations in the southern province of Oriente, where for many years anarchists had founded and supported free agricultural collectives.

Carlos Prio Socarras assumed the presidency in 1948 and followed similar policies of tolerance in social and labour relations similar to those of Grau. In 1949 the anarchists within the CTC manoeuvred with kindred elements to create a new, separate trade union federation, the General Confederation of Workers (Confederacion General de Trabajadores or CGT). The idea, following an old anarchist tradition, was to create a workers' organisation independent from the governmentally supervised CTC; however, this attempt failed due to pressure exercised by the presidency through the Ministry of Labour, which categorically opposed it, because of the growing influence of anarcho-syndicalist ideas. In 1950, Prio outlawed the Communist Party, then known as the Popular Socialist Party, (Partido Socialista Popular, PSP). Hence, once again the Communists sought an alliance with Batista.

In March 1952 Batista, violating the constitutional system of Cuba, led a coup d'etat. The Communists took this opportunity to try to penetrate the official bureaucracy. However, they could not recover their lost influence. The Cold War was at its apogee and Batista had to be prudent with his Marxist allies. In order to fill the power vacuum among the oppositional forces, now in full retreat, Fidel Castro, an obscure electoralist politician of bourgeois origins and Jesuistic education, with a group of young revolutionaries, attacked the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba. This action was a bloody failure; their "revolutionary" program was merely a middle class one, with reformist characteristics and social-democratic content. Castro and his comrades were put in prison, and after having been pardoned, in a few months left for Mexico. The opposition to Batista became violent and, as expected, Batista retaliated in a brutal fashion.

By the end of 1956 there was definite polarisation between Batista and the opposition. The anarchist ALC decided to form an alliance with the democratic opposition forces, against the dictator. In that year, Castro landed in the Oriente province and in the following year, he launched a small guerrilla war from the mountains of that province. In the more important cities of the island, Castro's July 26th Movement, his political front, won followers who carried out provocative acts, followed by the usual government repression. By the end of 1958 Batista had lost the political war and could no longer contain the rebels by force. Castro became politically stronger and won over the rest of the opposition. His social and political program was still as it was be-

fore: social justice and reform, based on the return of the Constitution of 1940, which Batista effectively nullified. The Communists, who previously had openly backed and collaborated with Batista and even attacked Castro, changed their position and made an alliance with Castro in August 1958. Finally, on December 31, 1958, Batista fled Cuba and a new historical cycle began for the Cuban people.

#### **4. Castroism and Exile**

The anarchists participated in the struggle against Batista. Some in the guerrilla forces in Oriente province and in the Sierra del Escambray in Las Villas province, others in the urban struggle. Their objective, along with that of the rest of the Cuban people, was to liquidate the Batista dictatorship. However, they never fully trusted Castro. By 1956, they already saw in Castro a potential dictator, head of a top-down organisation with totalitarian traits, whose image was closer to that of Hitler than of Durruti. Castro, according to the ill-conceived evaluation of the democratic opposition, was a temporary yet necessary evil; a product of the confusion, fragmentation and even cowardice that existed within the opposition to Batista. The anarchists perceived Castro and his revolution differently from the political elite of the time, who hoped to manipulate the victor. At the beginning of 1959, with the excuse of purging from the CTC union federation those elements that collaborated with Batista, the new "revolutionary" government arbitrarily removed from office anarcho-syndicalists and social democrats who were oriented toward the working class movement. Many of them, in fact had been previously persecuted and jailed by Batista.

The libertarians, even though dislodged from the CTC (now called "revolutionary"), maintained their prestige with the working class. In a congress organised by the government at the end of 1959 the union elements within the 26th of July Movement, through their Secretary General, David Salvador, allied this time with the Communist Party and its members within the union central, delivered the organisation once again to the government, this time represented by the "maximum leader of the revolution", Fidel Castro and all this according to the best "democratic tradition".

Castro, anxious to retain power at all costs, allied his regime with the Soviet Union, making Cuba one big sugar plantation for the profit of the Russians. The benefits, rights and demands that through more than a century of struggles, the Cuban workers had won at the price of their blood, ended as Marx once said, in "the rubbish heap of history". The omnipresent and despotic State became the only employer and social leader. In 1961, the old political, economic and social order collapsed completely and the island became a factory and a Leninist dominion.

Early in 1960, the anarchists rejected Castro, and adopted a combative attitude toward the government. Ultimately, their publications, *El Libertario* and *Solidaridad Gastrdriomica*, were suppressed. The only recourse was to go underground, and then into exile.

The underground resistance process had two stages. The first commenced with the clandestine publication of *Nuestra Palabra Semanal* (Our Weekly Message), organ of the Movement for Trade Union Action, (Movimiento de Accion Sindical. MAS), with the purpose of general information for the workers and the people. The struggle was tougher than it had been against Batista and the repression was much harsher. Unfortunately, the leadership of this new civil struggle was in the hands of the U.S. and the Cuban bourgeoisie, which had few things in common with libertarians. The U.S. was not genuinely interested in overthrowing the Castro regime and proved

forever reluctant while the bourgeoisie lacked the preparation and vocation for a revolutionary enterprise of such a magnitude and caliber, but both groups were powerful and had plenty of resources. The Cuban people did not accept communism and a large number became involved in the struggle against the regime. The anarchists failed on all fronts despite their work among the proletarians and peasants, carried out with much personal sacrifice.

The second stage was that of exile, either through a sympathetic embassy or illegally. In 1961 the Cuban Libertarian Movement (Movimiento Libertario Cubano; MLC) was founded in the United States, where those shipwrecked by Castro's hurricane were regrouped, and maintained contact with the remains of the ALC in Cuba. They were few, but their labour was important for the cause of Cuban freedom. This was a period of intense work and sacrifice: propaganda, collection of money to rescue people from the island, and direct action against the Stalinist dictatorship. The 1960s were dedicated to the struggle, based entirely on personal efforts. *El Gastronomico* (The Food Worker) began publication in Miami and there was concerted effort made to convince the rest of the anarchist world that Castro was not really a revolutionary, as so many saw him, but a corrupt despot. The Cuban anarchists had to work hard and be patient. Manifestos, articles, essays, pamphlets, letters were necessary; they launched appeals to old friendships, to the fraternal comrades of the past, with whom difficult moments had been shared. They issued statements in Spain, France, Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela, Panama, Chile, England, the United States, in half the world, but all in vain, for those who answered and showed solidarity were few, some because of conviction, others because of ideological affinity. Anarchists around the world either did not understand the situation or did not want to understand it; the efforts of the Cuban anarchists became a dialogue with the deaf.

In the mid-1970's changes began to take place in the anarchist world, one began to ascertain changes in the world's anti-authoritarian milieu, less in favour of the Cuban libertarians but rather toward disenchantment with Castro's revolution. Suddenly Castro was seen as a Communist dictator who oppressed his people. But it was too little too late; much precious and important time had been lost. Many anarchists were exiled, valuable comrades had been sacrificed, some had become frustrated, others remained alone on the island, and still others rotted in jails. The lack of international solidarity with the Cuban anarchists was notorious as "anarchism's bad conscience", as was later said.

This phenomenon, comparable only with what happened to the Russian anarchists in relation to the Bolsheviks in 1917 and with East European comrades in post WWII Europe, was based on a neglect of these historical precedents, and did a lot of damage and cost dearly. Lack of solidarity and ideological understanding, however, did not stop the Cuban anarchists in their struggle for freedom. In its history of more than half a century of persecutions, assassinations, deportations and imprisonments, it had never suffered a defeat with the power and magnitude of that brought by Castro. Communism has apparently won; however, Cuban anarchists today do not accept it. In the past twenty-eight years we have kept our banner high and our ideals unchanged, without ever renouncing the desire to set our people free from the despot that oppresses them.

Cuba and the anarchists have a long history of the pursuit of freedom. The early labour struggles, the important contributions to Cuban independence from Spain, their protest against U.S. interventions, their critical attitudes toward social problems during the two republics, their spirit of combat and sacrifice against the dictatorships and disorders of Machado, Batista and Castro. Finally, the unbreakable faith that unites us in the present sinister moment of our destiny, serve as a powerful spur to continue the struggle until the end.

Miami, February 1987.

WE SHALL FIGHT TO THE END TO ESTABLISH THE THIRD REPUBLIC!

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



Frank Fernández  
Cuba: The anarchists and liberty  
February 1987

<https://libcom.org/library/cuba-anarchists-liberty-labour-movement-fernandez>

First published in Spanish by Guangara Libertaria, Miami 1987

First English edition Monty Miller Press, Sydney 1987

This edition 1989 ASP, London

**[theanarchistlibrary.org](https://theanarchistlibrary.org)**