

For Frank Fernández (1932–2026)

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01/26/2026

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.

- Frank Fernández

Of history, the social history of Cuba. “Not the history of wars, not the history of patriots, but the history of slaves, the history of women, the history of Cuban society. We must write history by eliminating epics, leaders and divas enshrined in statues. History is not made by them, but by the people. A tobacco worker did more for the Republic than many soldiers did for independence.”

Frank Fernández – Blázquez, M.G. y, Martín, F. “Entrevista con el historiador cubano Frank Fernández2, CNT, November 2004.

Frank Fernández (1932–2026). Historian of Cuban anarchism, libertarian activist and intellectual in exile.

Francisco Fernández, known in activist and intellectual circles as Frank Fernández, died in Miami, Florida, on January 18, 2026, at the age of 92, from infectious complications following his hospitalisation in intensive care. His death marks a significant loss for the historiography of Cuban anarchism and, more generally, for the social and political history of the Caribbean.

We welcomed Frank in May 2004 to the *Maison de l'Amérique Latine* in Paris for the presentation of *Cuban Anarchism: The History of A Movement* [*El anarquismo en Cuba*], published by the CNT in Paris. I recall an intense moment, marked both by the power of his words and by the hostility of a handful of militants from the Communist Party of Chile, unable to accept the criticisms the book leveled against the Castro revolution.

In April 2015, in Santiago de los Caballeros, Dominican Republic, I met Frank again at the founding congress of the *Anarchist Federation of the Caribbean and Central America*, which I was

attending as a delegate of the *IFA*. This gathering, years later and in another country, sealed for me the continuity of his commitment and our friendship.

A self-taught historian, libertarian activist, and intellectual in exile, Frank Fernández dedicated most of his life to the critical reconstruction of the history of the anarchist movement in Cuba, particularly between the late 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. His work explicitly opposes official historiography, whether liberal, nationalist, or Marxist-Leninist. Rejecting any pretense of abstract academic neutrality, he conceived of historical writing as a battlefield, a space of political confrontation and memorial.

The originality of his contribution lies in his method and his epistemological stance. Frank Fernández never limited himself to compiling secondary sources or reproducing established narratives. His work was based on a meticulous reading of the Cuban anarchist press published since the colonial era, often-forgotten union archives, and the reconstruction of militant experiences erased by repression, exile, or political marginalisation. He paid particular attention to the trajectories of anonymous workers, anarchist women, committed intellectuals, typesetters, readers in tobacco factories, popular cultural centers, and the non-hierarchical forms of organisation that shaped the Cuban libertarian movement.

This perspective is synthesised in his major work, *El anarquismo en Cuba* (2000), translated into several languages, which remains an essential reference for any serious study of the Cuban labor movement. In it, Fernández demonstrates that anarchism was not a marginal phenomenon or a mere ideological precursor, but a central actor in the social, labor, and cultural struggles of the island. It directly challenges teleological narratives that subordinate the history of work to the advent of the nation-state or the victory of authoritarian socialism.

His other important work, *La Sangre de Santa Águeda* (1994), illustrates his interest in traumatic events and state violence, analysed not as isolated episodes, but as revealing moments of the dynamics of social and political power. In addition to these works, he published numerous articles in the magazine *Guámgara Libertaria*, as well as in various libertarian publications in Spanish and English, which constitute an essential corpus for the study of Cuban anarchism in exile.

Alongside his historiographical work, Frank Fernández was an active member of the *Movimiento Libertario Cubano en el Exilio* (MLC-E) [*the Cuban Libertarian Movement in Exile*]. He participated in the founding and management of *Guámgara Libertaria* between 1979 and 1992, a magazine that played a central role in the restructuring of Cuban anarchist networks outside the island. This activity took place in a particularly hostile context, marked by the predominance of conservative and anti-communist political currents in Miami, as well as by pressures and threats from both the exile community and the Cuban state. However, Fernández remained steadfast in his uncompromising libertarian stance, rejecting both state authoritarianism and ideological compromises dictated by political opportunism.

On an intellectual level, Frank Fernández defended a history free of heroic figures and epic narratives, focused on social practices, subaltern subjectivities, and concrete forms of emancipation. He insisted on the need to write history “from below,” attentive to the power dynamics within revolutionary movements themselves, particularly regarding gender relations and informal forms of power.

Frank Fernández’s contribution is not limited to a body of writing. It also resides in a methodological and ethical imperative: to consider history as a living tool, intended to nourish present

struggles rather than sanctify the past. In this sense, his work remains open, inviting debate, exploration, and, at times, critique, in keeping with the libertarian spirit that animated him.

The death of Frank Fernández leaves a considerable historiographical legacy and a clear invitation to researchers: to continue the critical exploration of Cuban social history without succumbing to hegemonic narratives, and to fully recognise the role of libertarian traditions in the formation of emancipation movements on the island of Cuba and in its diaspora.

Interview: Frank Fernandez on Cuban anarchism

Freedom News 07/10/2018

In 1999 Canadian author Larry Gambone talked to Fernandez, writer of the seminal book on Fidel Castro's destruction of Cuba's anarchist movement, about how the regime maintained itself and on libertarian struggles in the country. This article is taken from the May 15th 1999 issue of Freedom Newspaper, and elements are no longer relevant, but it offers a useful look at the situation at the time.

Frank Fernandez is a long-time Cuban anarchist militant and a member of the Movimiento Libertario Cubano — the Cuban anarchist movement in exile. He was a member of the collective of Guangara Libertaria and is the author of *Cuba, the Anarchists and Liberty*, and *La Sangre De Santa Agueda*, a book about the early years of Cuban anarchism. A longer work on the Cuban Revolution is in progress, to be published in Spain and by See Sharp Press in Tlicson, Arizona [2018 note: This was later published as *Cuban Anarchism*]. Comrade Fernandez is interviewed by Larry Gambone.

Larry Gambone: Given the fact that at any one time during the past 25 years there have been at least several thousand people calling themselves anarchists in North America, have we done enough to educate people about Cuban anarchism?

Frank Fernandez: No, of course not, the information about Castro's dictatorship is most of the time one-sided. There are several reasons for this, the efficient Cuban propaganda machine among intellectuals, the apathetic attitude of most anarchist media and general ignorance of the nature of the Castro regime. In some way we have to accept responsibility for failing to communicate with our North American comrades, due to problems with the English language.

What would you like anarchists to do to help your movement?

First, and more important is international solidarity with our cause, the cause of freedom. Second, direct communication with the Cuban people. At this point, I think we should avoid becoming sectarians. There is a unique opportunity to gain some social space inside Cuba. A sympathiser is the first step to becoming a militant. Any act of solidarity with the oppressed, no matter what his political or social persuasion, will benefit our ideals, since this aid represents the anarchist movement outside of Cuba. For us, [MLC] this task is almost impossible, due to the fact that we cannot have direct communication with anyone in Cuba.

Should we boycott Cuba, since in Canada, Cuba is a major vacation spot?

Yes, we have been doing this for the last 35 years and ask that our comrades in the anarchist world to do the same. Tourism represents the main source of income of the Castro regime, superior even to the sugar cane industry. It is important to explain to travellers and tourists, the exploitation and discrimination of Cuban workers in hotels, resorts, restaurants, beaches, etc., and to remind them of what kind of government the Cuban people have suffered under for the last 40 years.

What is your opinion of the US embargo of trade with Cuba?

In the past, nobody asked the Cuban anarchists what was our opinion about this matter, called a “blockade” in Cuba. I realise the embargo gives Castro an excuse to create worse social conditions in Cuba and that the people at the bottom will suffer as he makes them pay the bill of the American policy. However, if the excuse of the embargo is lifted, Castro will find another and the oppression will continue.

I don’t think the embargo will overthrow the government, nor does it represent a ‘criminal enterprise’. Nobody thinks about the blockade Castro imposes upon the Cuban people, nor how the Cuban exiles send \$800 million every year, breaking the embargo. It is hard to take a position pro or con, because nobody can give you an honest answer. Any way you try to answer this question, you are going to sound either like the Potomac’s parrot or a Marxist-Leninist or worse. The question makes you take either the humanitarian side, asking for the abolition of the blockade, thereby helping Castro’s propaganda machine or a more political opinion taking the side of the Miami Cubans and the Washington Reactionaries. In both cases you lose. It is a difficult and somewhat ‘Kafka-like’ matter.

Both your pamphlet and Dolgoff’s book indicate that the Cuban anarchist movement was large and influential. It would be nice to get a rough idea of just how large the movement was.

The anarcho-syndicalist movement in Cuba was not only the largest and most influential organisation in Cuba since 1880, but also the forerunner of social progress among the proletariat until 1927. Government persecution, deportation, incarceration and even murder for two decades, plus the back-stabbing from the Communist Party ended that era. Numerically, you must make a distinction between an anarchist militant and a sympathiser. Any union could be organised and influenced by a minority of anarchist militants. This does not mean all the workers in a particular union are anarchists. However, if the workers respond to the anarchists’s agenda, then you can consider the union or federation anarchist.

The first Cuban Confederation of Labor was founded in 1925, and was composed of all kinds of trade unions, reformist, communist, etc., The anarchists were not in a majority, but the organisation, ideas, projects and manifestos, were from an anarcho-syndicalist point of view. Before the government persecution and communist treason, from 80,000 to 100,000 workers followed the anarcho-syndicalist agenda. In the first and second decades of the ’40s, the Cuban Libertarian Association was reduced in numbers to several hundreds. Before Castro became a dictator, the same Association reported more than 2,000 militants. Most of them worked and had a decisive influence among several important unions like Transportation, Electrical Plants, Gastronomy, Construction, etc.,

Have any younger Cubans in the US taken an interest in anarchism or the Cuban movement?

No, I don’t think this new generation of Cubans (so-called Cuban-Americans) have taken any interest in anarchist ideals. There are several reasons: the indifference for social problems, Americanisation, Cuban cultural and historical characteristics, etc., This is, however, nothing new in the country, which happens to be very nationalistic and with a powerful ‘kultur’ capable of changing to the American Way of Life different immigrants and exiles from stronger cultures than what Cubans have, like Germans, Jews, Italians etc. [2018 note: Since this comment there has been some growth of anarchist activity in Cuba such as the opening of the ABRA social centre in Havana earlier this year]

Are there, in your opinion any anarchists surviving in Cuba? Are there anarchist prisoners in Castro’s gulags?

As far as I can tell, I don't think so. Old comrades die or disperse, so we don't really know if there are any survivors, but I like to think that ideas do not die like humans do, and Cuba is not different in this matter to other parts of the world where anarchist ideals were an important part of working class society. I don't know of any anarchist political prisoners at the moment, however there is always the possibility that some in jail without our knowledge.

I note that some Cuban anarchists were former CNT-FAI. Did they flee Franco only to end up in Castro's prisons or firing squads?

At the beginning of the Revolution, 1959-60, some were detained and let go. Augustin Souchy was in Havana in those days and in a conversation with Abelardo Iglesias, Manuel de la Mata and Salvador Garcia, all members of the CNT-FAI during the Spanish Revolution, told his comrades of the recent visit to Cuba by 'old friends' from the Spanish and Italian Communist Party, Enrique Lister and the infamous Vittorio Vidale, invited by the Castro regime. Souchy warned them of the inevitable persecution from the new secret police in which Lister and Vidale were involved. The CNT comrades were involved in certain 'counterrevolutionary' activities and with the experience of Spain behind them, they knew how to escape on time with the protection of a Latin American embassy.

The Canadian and European media are very soft on Castro and Cuba generally (our former Prime Minister Trudeau even considers Castro 'a friend'). Why is this the case? This friendliness existed long before the Cuba-as-capitalist-investment paradise phase of Castroism. Might this not show that the dispute between corporate capitalism and state capitalist 'socialism' to be somewhat of a game?

The friendship among thieves, authoritarians, 'socialists' and neo-liberals is not a contradiction. Au contraire, this is typical political cynicism. History teaches the anarchist that in the past there was never a difference between Ford, Hitler, Stalin, Rockefeller or Franco. They all have a common desire, that of having the power of exploitation. Criminals, politicians or parasites, they all followed the same path; rule or dominate. The methods were different, but the purpose was constant oppression. Today is the same. Corporations, Castro, Clinton, the Pope or Blair, represent the same hunger for power and control and domination by fear or State terror. Therefore, I think they represent the eternal enemies of anarchism.

The media respond in favour of the interests of government and capital since they pay the bills. The relation between globalisation and Castroism or even 'friendship before' is not a 'game' but is a serious and dangerous partnership of those who exploit and discriminate against a large portion of the Cuban people. In reality, I never saw any difference between dictators or presidents, popes or prime ministers, from 'right' or 'left', for me they all represent the same. There could be different tactics against the state or corporate capitalism, depending upon objective or subjective conditions in regard to the government or economic situations, but in the final analysis, they are all our most distinctly and deadly enemies.

Cuba: The anarchists and liberty

Frank Fernandez (libcom.org)

A pamphlet written in 1987 by Frank Fernandez, with introduction by Sam Dolgoff, about the Cuban anarchist and workers' movements from the mid 1800s up until the mid 1970s.

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.

The aid and support given to Marti by the anarchists was enormous both in a moral sense as well as politically and economically. Marti 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 Marti in a final "Manifesto" 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 Marti 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 Marti 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 combatively: "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 bureaucratised 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 Fulgencio 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, *Joven 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 docu-

ment, 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'état. 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 before: 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.

First published in Spanish by Guangara Libertaria, Miami 1987 First English edition Monty Miller Press, Sydney 1987 This edition 1989 ASP, London

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

Sam Dolgoff

It was a precursor to his more detailed 2001 book, Cuban Anarchism: The history of a movement

This text was taken and edited slightly for spelling and grammar by libcom.org from <http://yelah.rr.nu:8181//index.php/cuba?sida=articles&id=cuba>

Suggested Readings:

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For Frank Fernández (1932–2026)
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<https://autonomies.org/2026/02/for-frank-fernandez-1932-2026/>
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theanarchistlibrary.org