

FRANK FERNANDEZ (1932-2026) HISTORIAN OF CUBAN ANARCHISM, LIBERTARIAN ACTIVIST AND EXILED INTELLECTUAL

Francisco Fernández, known in activist and intellectual circles as Frank Fernández, passed away in Miami (Florida) on 18 January 2026 at the age of 92, following complications and infection contracted while in intensive care in hospital. His death marks a major loss for the historiography of Cuban anarchism and of broader social and political Caribbean history.

In May 2004 we hosted Frank at the Maison de l'Amérique Latine in Paris, to mark the release of *L'anarchisme à Cuba*, published by the Editions CNT (Paris Region). I can still recall that intense moment, marked equally by the force of his words and the hostility displayed by a handful of Chilean Communist Party members who could not swallow the criticisms of the Castro revolution voiced in the book.

In April 2015, in Santiago de los Caballeros in the Dominican Republic, I ran into Frank again at the foundation congress of the Caribbean and Central American Anarchist Federation, in which I took part as the representative of the IFA [International of Anarchist Federations]. The meeting, after all those years and on different soil, set the seal upon the continuity of his commitment and friendship as far as I was concerned.

A self-taught historian, libertarian activist and exiled intellectual, Frank Fernández made the critical reconstruction of the history of the anarchist movement in Cuba – especially the period between the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>, - the central axis of his existence. His output explicitly challenged the official historiography, be it liberal, nationalist or marxist-leninist in persuasion. Rejecting any pretence of abstract academic neutrality, he saw the writing of history as a battlefield, an arena for conflicting policies and memories.

What was novel about his contribution was his method and his epistemological stance. Frank Fernández was never content just to compile secondary sources nor to reprint hallowed accounts. His work relied upon painstaking reading of the Cuban anarchist press, published since the colonial era, and on often overlooked trade union archives as well as upon the reconstitution of militant experiences faded due to repression, exile or political marginalization. He paid particular attention to the trajectories of anonymous workers, anarchist women, committed intellectuals, printing workers, readers from the tobacco factories, the people's *ateneos* and the non-hierarchical organizational structures durably established by the Cuban libertarian movement.

This approach was all blended into his main work *Anarchism in Cuba* (2000), which has been translated into several languages (German, French, English and Italian) and to this day it remains an essential reference point for any serious study of the Cuban workers' movement. In it, Fernández shows that anarchism was neither a marginal phenomenon nor some mere ideological fore-runner, but rather was an agent in the social, trade union and cultural struggles on the island. He challenges, head-on, the teleological accounts that depict labour history as secondary to the advent of the nation-state or the victory of authoritarian socialism.

His other major work *La Sangre de Santa Águeda* (1994) is illustrative of his interest in traumatic events and State violence, which are analysed, not as freakish episodes but as telling examples of the balance of social and political power. Added to those books there were the many articles he published in the

magazine *Guángara Libertaria* as well as in a range of libertarian publications in Spanish and English; these amount to an essential body of work for anyone studying Cuban anarchism in exile.

Alongside his historiographical efforts, Frank Fernández was an active member of the Cuban Libertarian Movement in Exile (MLC-E). He was involved in the launch and running of *Guángara Libertaria* between 1979 and 1992 and that magazine played a central role in knitting Cuban anarchist circles outside of the island together. Such activity took place in a particularly hostile environment, marked by the prevalence of conservative and anti-communist political factions in Miami, as well as by pressures and threats coming from the exile community as well as from the Cuban state. Fernández nevertheless stuck to his uncompromising libertarian stance, repudiating both statist authoritarianism and the ideological compromises dictated by political opportunism.

In intellectual terms, Frank Fernández lobbied for a history devoid of heroic figures and epic narratives, but centred upon social practices, subaltern personal experiences and concrete forms of emancipation. He insisted upon the need for a history written “from below” and mindful of the relations of domination within revolutionary movements themselves, notably where gender relations and informal forms of power were concerned.

Not that Frank Fernández’s contribution was confined to a body of writings. There were also his methodological and ethical standards: the approach to history as a living tool destined to sustain current struggles rather than sanctify past ones. In which regard his work remains open, asking to be debated, extended and sometimes criticized, consistently with the libertarian spirit that drove him.

The loss of Frank Fernández has therefore left us with a considerable historiographical legacy and a clear invitation issued to researchers, male and female: to prosecute their critical exploration of Cuban social history without deferring to hegemonic accounts and fully recognizing the place occupied by libertarian traditions in the shaping of liberation movements both on the island of Cuba and among the Cuban diaspora.

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