

ANARCHISM IN CUBA: HISTORIC TRAJECTORY AND THE CLASH WITH CASTROISM

This essay delves into the deep, complicated trajectory followed by anarchism in Cuba, from its 19th century origins through to its tragic repression under Castroist rule. Cuban anarchism, in its various strains, emerged as a social and labour force of some influence; it often was the dominant element and stood out for its deep-seated anti-Statism, its anti-racist commitment and its advocacy of direct action. Contrary to what occurred in other Latin American settings, the Cuban labour movement was initially shaped more by libertarian ideas than by Marxism.

Our research details how this ideological current, crucial in the configuration of the island's social and trade union struggles, was inevitably doomed to collide with the 1959 Cuban Revolution's statist project. Whereas initially there had been cautious hopefulness on the part of some anarchists, the irreconcilable ideological differences of opinion regarding the role of the State, the organization of the economy and individual liberty swiftly had them at loggerheads. The consolidation of Castroism, with its Marxist-Leninist leanings and centralization of power, saw anarchism as an existential threat. The new regime's response took the form of a systematic campaign of repression that included purging of the trade unions, mass arrests, jailings, torture and executions, plus a sophisticated press censorship, culminating in the liquidation of the organized movement. This confrontation not only wiped out an alternative option for Cuba, but also resulted in anarchism's being rendered invisible in official narratives, a process that proceeded over decades before it started to be overturned by later generations.

INTRODUCTION

19th century Cuban history was a crucible for social and political changes, marked by far-reaching stratification of society and the lingering footprint left by Spanish colonialism. The society was split into a Spanish *criollo* elite controlling huge tobacco, sugar and coffee plantations, a middle class made up of black and Spanish plantation workers, and a sizeable lower class made up of black slaves. Against this backdrop of inequality and colonial oppression, various movements emerged lobbying for independence, annexation by the United States or integration with Spain. It was against this backdrop that anarchist ideas found fertile soil in which to embed and flourish.

Anarchism's roots began to appear in the mid-19th century in Cuba with the foundation of a Proudhonist mutual society in 1857. That early organization, influenced by the thinking of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, laid the groundwork for the growth of a movement that, over the decades, would favour Mikhail Bakunin's anarcho-collectivism and, later on, anarcho-syndicalism. It is vital that we point out here that, unlike what happened in many another area in Latin America, the Cuban workers' movement was more influenced by anarchism than by Marxism. This peculiarity made anarchism not some marginal phenomenon, but rather a central pioneering actor in social and labour struggles on the island.

The aim of this study is to analyse the historical trajectory of anarchism in Cuba, from its early origins in the 19th century, through to its high point in the earliest decades of the 20th century, including its complex interactions with the republican governments and the part it played in the resistance to the Batista dictatorship. Crucially, the study will focus on the clash with Fidel Castro's regime following the 1959 Revolution, delving into

the profound ideological disagreements and the systematic methods of oppression to which the new State resorted. Our investigation is out to clarify how anarchism, such a fundamental force in the earliest struggles for social justice in Cuba, was later snuffed out by a revolutionary government that also proclaimed social justice. This dynamic suggests that there was more to the clash with Castroism than just the elimination of a political competitor, but rather, the eradication of a telling, albeit ideological different, part of Cuba's revolutionary inheritance. The process exposes the tensions inherent in anti-authoritarian revolutionary impulses and the centralizing tendencies involved in the construction of a new State.

I. Origins and Consolidation of Anarchism in Cuba (19th – Early 20th Centuries)

Anarchist origins in Cuba date back to the mid-19th century, when the very first mutual society influenced by the thinking of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon there was launched in 1857. That pioneering venture signalled the beginning of the spread of libertarian principles on the island. One key figure in that initial phase was Saturnino Martinez, an immigrant from Asturias (Spain) who, upon being introduced to Proudhon's thinking by José de Jesús Márquez, launched the newspaper *La Aurora* in 1865. Its main target audience was the tobacco-workers.

La Aurora became the essential vehicle for the promotion of cooperative societies and the spread of the earliest anarchist ideas among Cuban labour.

Over time, Cuban anarchism's ideological leanings evolved. Whilst they may have started out on the basis of Proudhonist ideas, the movement tilted more and more towards the anarcho-collectivism of Mikhail Bakunin, and, later still, towards anarcho-syndicalism. That evolution mirrored an adaptation to the realities of the labour movement and a preference for direct action and trade union organizing as tools for changing society. The influence of Spanish anarchists, relations with whom the Cubans tightened their bonds of solidarity during the 1880s, proved crucial in the infiltration and consolidation of libertarian ideas where the labour movement was concerned.

1.2 Anarchism in the Labour Movement: The Tobacco Sector and the Earliest Organizations.

It was not long before anarchism achieved a significant profile within the Cuban labour movement, particularly within the mighty tobacco industry. In 1865, the very year in which Proudhon died, the first strike was registered in the Cuban tobacco industry, an early indication of the pugnacious organizational capability inspired by libertarian thinking. By the end of the 1870s Cuba boasted a well-structured labour movement of a pronounced anarchist hue, one that was heavily influenced by Spain.

Cuban anarchists stood out for their rejection of collaboration with political parties, the State, capitalism and the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, they pioneered the class struggle, trade union organizing, anti-racism and the championing of women's rights. In a deeply fascist setting, they actively fought against slavery and racial discrimination, campaigning for equality between whites and blacks. This commitment to universal equality heedless of race or nationality was one of its major platforms.

The establishment in 1888 of the 'La Alianza' workers' society was a significant milestone as it mounted noteworthy actions in Cuba as well as among Cuban workers in industrial enclaves in south Florida such as Tampa and Key West. Cuba's very first labour congress, held in 1887, mirrored the forward-looking ideas of the anarchists, who were behind significant labour and social gains.

1.3 Anarchist Publications and Pioneering Figures

The spread of anarchist ideas was driven by a vibrant libertarian press. The later 19th century saw the emergence of publications such as *El Obrero* (1883) and *El Productor* (1887) which served as crucial mouthpieces in the organizing and raising workers' consciousness.

In the 20th century, the anarchist weekly *¡Tierra!*, published in Havana from 1902 to 1915, played a crucial role in the spread of the libertarian ideology throughout Cuba. Not only did the paper help connect workers on the

island with one another, but it also conjured up cross-border networking, linking the Cuban labour movement with the anarchist and labour community straddling the Atlantic. The circulation of *¡Tierra!* and its constant interactions with other anarchist newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic, including reports from France and England, testified to Cuban anarchism's commitment to international solidarity.

1.4 The Complex Relationship with the Cuban Independence Movement

The stance of Cuban anarchists vis a vis the War of Independence in 1895 was complex rather than unanimous and could be boiled down to two basic schools of thought. There was a significant faction that actively backed the fight against Spanish colonialism. Those anarchists understood that they could not stand aloof from the separatist forces since Spanish integrism was out to sow division among the opponents of colonialism. The charismatic figure of José Martí was decisive in attracting lots of anarchists over to the pro-independence cause. Martí's socially liberal approach and the decentralized structure of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, founded in 1902, which included clubs named after anarchists such as the 'Enrique Roig San Martín' and 'Fermín Salvochea' clubs chimed with libertarians' organizational practices. Prominent anarchist figures such as Enrique Crecci and Carlos Baliño threw their weight behind national liberation. A lot of anarchists played their part in the armed struggle, some of them – such as Armando André – achieving high rank: André was a pro-independence commander murdered for his expose of Gerardo Machado.

However, another fraction of the anarchist movement espoused a neutral position or even opposed the war. Such anarchists saw the conflict as a civil war, given that Cuba was part of Spain, and they were critical of the liberal nationalist ideology of figures like José Martí, their view being that (in libertarian terms) no clear solution to the labour question was on offer. They were afraid that the republic promised by the supporters of independence would be no different than others around the continent, where anarchists were being persecuted. There was a strong anti-war sentiment, especially in Havana, which cautioned that a "barbarous" war would destroy the economy, cause a huge number of deaths and, more importantly, would result in the island's being handed over to the United States. To some extent, history confirmed such worries when the Platt Amendment placing restrictions upon Cuban independence was imposed following US intervention.

The rift among Cuban anarchists over the War of Independence exposed a recurrent paradox for anti-authoritarian movements: the tension between tactical alliance with nationalist personnel in order to topple a common oppressor and preserving ideological purity in the face of the inevitable consolidation of a brand-new State. The fact that some anarchists were attracted to Martí's movement on account of its decentralized structures suggests a sort of pragmatic compromise. Nevertheless, detailed predictions about US intervention and the emergence of a potentially repressive new republic underpinned a profounder, principled opposition to the State per se, regardless of its origins. This historical precedent is crucial to an understanding of the subsequent and more severe frictions with Castroism. It speaks to a fundamental and enduring tension between the anarchist quest for a Stateless, decentralized freedom and the Statist imperative of revolutionary nationalism. This inherent incompatibility ensured that the clash with Castroism (which was another State-building project) was all but inevitable, showing that the shared revolutionary fervour directed against the ancient regime is no guarantee of ideological compatibility when it comes to building a new society.

II. ANARCHISM UNDER THE CUBAN REPUBLIC (Early 20th century – 1959)

II.1 The Rise of Anarcho-syndicalism: The CNOC [Cuban National Labour Confederation] and the Leadership of Alfredo López

The early decades of the 20th century marked the heyday of anarcho-syndicalism in Cuba as it consolidated its position as the dominant force within the labour movement. Those were the days when the anarchists wielded their greatest organizational influence. The culmination of the process was the creation in 1926 of the CNOC [Confederación Nacional Obrero Cubana/ Cuban National Labour Confederation], a significant achievement that put flesh on the bones of "López's dream". The CNOC managed to bring together trade unions, gremios [workers' guilds] and proletarian associations from all over the island, all operating under stout

anarcho-syndicalist influence. Its founding principles included a rejection of electoral activity, a demand for the eight-hour working day, the right to strike and a deep-seated desire to prevent bureaucratization of the organization. For the first time in Cuban history, a woman – Juana María Acosta – was appointed president of a labour organization of this magnitude.

Alfredo López emerged during this time as a central, iconic figure. Born in Sagua La Grande in 1894 as the son of an Asturian anarchist, López was the driver behind and leader of the Typographers' Association from a very early age. He was fundamental in the establishment of the Havana Workers' Federation in 1921 and, later, in the founding of the CNOC. His trade union activism and tireless battle to unite the working class marked the early part of the 1920s. López stood firm and incorruptible and that made him an obstacle in the way of Gerardo Machado's government. Outside of the trade union organization, Alfredo López was also an ardent promoter of workers' education. In 1922 he founded the Rationalist School at the Havana Workers' Centre which offered education to the children of workers by day and night classes for adults, the aim being to combat ignorance and empower the working class. His commitment to social justice and education made him a close collaborator of Julio Antonio Mella in founding the José Martí People's University in 1923.

II.2 Challenges and Repression under Republican Governments and the Rise of Communism

For all its remarkable influence, the Cuban anarchist movement was faced with severe and unremitting repression coming from successive republican governments. Libertarian activists were liable to being jailed, deported or summary execution. The repression was at its most brutal during the dictatorship of General Gerardo Machado y Morales, who assumed the presidency in 1925 as a very popular figure, only to finish up overthrown as dictator in 1933. Machado was directly responsible for the murder of Alfredo López on 20 July 1926, which was a devastating blow to Cuban anarcho-syndicalists.

At the same time as the State repression, bolshevism was beginning to gain ground in Cuba, challenging the anarchists' hegemony within the labour movement. Initially, Leninism gained acceptance in small intellectual and student circles attracted to the novelty and seeming success of the Russian Revolution. It is important to point out that, in spite of bolshevism's unmistakably Marxist derivation, some Cuban libertarians were all for the Bolshevik Revolution, seeing it, in its early stages, as just and egalitarian. However, the execution of anarchists in Russia in 1925 served as a warning as to the authoritarian nature of the "dictatorship of the proletariat".

By 1927, the Cuban Communist Party (PCC), led by Rubén Martínez Villena, had managed to infiltrate and to all effects convert the CNOC into a tool of political intrigue. That process culminated in 1933 when the communists secured hegemony over much of the labour movement's leadership, often with direct assistance from the USSR. This co-optation marked a watershed, significantly supplanting the anarchist sway over the Cuban working class.

II.3 The Anarchist "Third Generation" and Its Activity Prior to 1959

In spite of brutal repression and the growing communist influence, a "third generation" of Cuban anarchists achieved considerable organizational growth between the 1930s and the 1950s. This bounce-back was particularly telling, given that anarchism around the globe was grappling with a steep decline and had been swept away by its rivals in many other places around the world.

One key factor in this resurgence was the launching in the mid-1930s of the Libertarian Young Students and Female Workers' Federation. It aimed at recovery from the "Stalinist hijacking" of the CNOC, which had been effected with the support of the police. At a congress held in 1950, the Cuban anarchists decided to combat political bureaucrats' and religious sects' control over the labour movement, lobbying instead for a trade union that was revolutionary, federalist and a-political and opposed to power-seekers.

In the lead-up to the 1959 revolution, the anarchists played an active part in the fight against Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship. Some of them joined the guerrilla campaigns in the eastern areas or in Escambray, whilst others engaged in conspiratorial work and the urban struggle. Their main aims were to remove the military dictatorship and political corruption and to try to pave the way for access to freedoms that might make the

continuation of their social and labour activities feasible. It is important that it be pointed out that at that point they were not expecting a radical alteration to the country's socio-economic structures, which set them apart from other revolutionary factions.

The endurance of anarchism in Cuba, even after having to deal with Machado's brutal repression and the Communist Party's strategic take-over of the CNOC, bears witness to its embedded ideological attraction and its resilience. This "noteworthy growth" by a "third generation" just when anarchism around the world was in decline shows that its underlying principles – anti-Statism, direct action, workers' autonomy and anti-racism – resonated deeply and continually with a significant segment of the Cuban population, especially where the working class was concerned. Indicating that the movement's strength was not easily undermined by outside pressures, nor by the rise of rival ideologies (like Marxism) with a focus on the State. The anarchists' ability to bounce back in spite of previous setbacks, underlines the inherent threat that they posed to any centralized, Statist project, quite apart from their revolutionary demands or anti-imperialist rhetoric. This dynamic made the subsequent clash with Castroism a more deep-seated ideological conflict that went further than just a straightforward mopping-up operation.

III. ANARCHISM VIS À VIS THE CUBAN REVOLUTION AND THE RISE OF CASTROISM (1959-1961)

III.1 Anarchist Participation in the Fight against the Batista Dictatorship

Cuban anarchists played an active part in the underground resistance and armed resistance to Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship. They were to be found both in the guerrilla campaigns, especially in the eastern part of the island and in the Escambray, as well as in conspiratorial efforts and the struggle in the cities. Their essential aims were to wipe out the military dictatorship and political corruption, in hopes of establishing a broader freedom that would allow their ideological, social and trade union activities to proceed. It is vital that we highlight here that anarchists were neither looking forward to nor looking for a radical change in the country's socio-economic structures and this was a telling difference from the aspirations of other revolutionary groups.

III.2 Initial Caution and Skepticism vis à vis Fidel Castro and the New Government

Anarchist mistrust of Fidel Castro predated the success of the Revolution. As early as 1956, a pamphlet entitled *Proyecciones libertarias* (Libertarian Projections) pointed out that Castro "is undeserving of any confidence" and that his main motivation was a quest for "power". That initial view of Castro as a leader with designs on power laid the groundwork for their scepticism.

In spite of that underlying mistrust, in the wake of the January 1959 uprising some libertarian publications such as *Solidaridad Gastronómica* and *El Libertario* espoused an initially "favourable, though cautious and hopeful" position vis à vis the incoming revolutionary government. That cautious optimism may have derived from the shared endeavour to overthrow Batista and the initial promises made of greater freedom. However, the Libertarian Association of Cuba (ALC)'s National Council issued a statement setting out its lack of enthusiasm for "institutional changes" and arguing that these "neither enthuse nor deceive us", although they did concede the possibility of a period of "public freedoms" that might allow their ideas to spread.

3.3. First Frictions: Trade Union Purges and Statist Centralism

It was not long before frictions surfaced between anarchism and the new revolutionary government. From early January 1959 onwards. On the pretext of purging personnel who had collaborated with the preceding government, the revolutionary government set about arbitrarily ousting lots of anarcho-syndicalist officials from the CTC (Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba/ Cuban Workers' Confederation) in key sectors such as catering, transport, constriction and power plants. This measure hit the already weakened libertarian current hard.

By March 1959, *Solidaridad Gastronómica* was sourly complaining about the "dictatorial methods" of the CTCR (Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba Revolucionaria /Workers' Confederation of Revolutionary Cuba),

criticizing the “top down” imposition of such measures and the appointment or dismissal of officials. There was also reference made to the intimidating attendance at trade union meetings of “armed militians”, which amounted to “blatant bullying”.

The ALC statement not only articulated a widespread scepticism but also amounted to a frontal attack upon “Statist centralism”, cautioning that it would inevitably lead to an “authoritarian order”. The anarchists also sounded the alarm about the growing influence of the Catholic Church and, more worryingly for them, of the Communist Party. By July 1959, the Cuban State was firmly under the control of Castro and his collaborators, with the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) having a noticeable presence in high government offices, a development that profoundly alarmed the anarchists, who correctly anticipated a “mortal blow” to their movement.

III.3 The Libertarian Syndicalist Agrupación’s “Statement of Principles” and the Official Response

In June 1960, persuaded that Castro was on an increasingly totalitarian course, the bulk of the membership of the ALC, using the cover name of the “Libertarian Syndicalist Agrupación” released a crucial “Statement of Principles”. This document amounted to a direct ideological challenge to the new regime. The eight-point Statement attacked “the State in all its forms”, arguing that the land ought to belong to those that worked it, lobbying for free, collective education, and condemning “bureaucratic centralism”, nationalism, militarism and imperialism. It called for freedom of the individual as the path to collective freedom and condemned the “authoritarian tendencies” in the Cuban Revolution.

This explicit ideological onslaught triggered a swift and violent retort in August 1960 from *Hoy*, the official mouthpiece of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) and endorsed by its general secretary, Blas Roca. Roca’s response resorted to a number of falsehoods and, dangerously, accused the anarchist authors of the Statement of being “agents of the Yankee State Department”. This official condemnation proved a critical watershed, effectively forcing the anarchists underground and leading to a cessation of publications like *El Libertario* that same summer.

The quick shift from initial, cautious support on the part of some anarchists to open condemnation by the revolutionary government was illustrative of an underlying and irreconcilable ideological clash. The immediate purging of anarcho-syndicalists from the trade unions and the swift rise of Communist Party influence indicate that the issue essentially revolved around the nature of the outcome from the revolution: a centralized, authoritarian State versus a Stateless, decentralized society. By definition, the anarchists were opposed to the State, whereas Castroism was quickly consolidating a brand-new, power machinery of State, the embodiment of the “dictatorship of the proletariat”. This dynamic made it plain that the confrontation was not some misunderstanding or betrayal of shared revolutionary ideals, but a direct consequence flowing from two intrinsically opposed political philosophies. The initial “cautious hope” expressed by some anarchists might be interpreted as an error of judgment as to Castro’s true intentions or as an under-estimation of the inherently Statist drive behind the 26 July Movement, one that ultimately prized State power over libertarian principles. This case study is vital for any understanding of how revolutionary coalitions can break down when underlying ideological differences regarding the role of the State come to the surface again.

IV. CASTROISM’S SYSTEMATIC CRACKDOWN ON ANARCHISM

IV.1 Irreconcilable Ideological Differences between Anarchism and Castroism

The Castro regime swiftly set about establishing and beefing up Revolutionary Courts that heard summary trials. These courts often ordered shootings or handed down lengthy prison sentences for persons charged with “political offences” or “subversive actions”, which added up to the restoration and escalating of death sentences handed down for political reasons.

Many anarchists were subjected to severe physical repression. A lot of them were arrested, jailed and subjected to torture; some died tragically behind bars or took their own lives due to the inhuman conditions and bad treatment. Among the documented cases, there was Augusto Sánchez, a young combatant murdered

after capture; Rolando Tamargo and Ventura Suárez, shot; Sebastián Aguilar Jr., shot to death; Eusebio Otero, found dead; and Raúl Negrín, who took his own life by setting fire to himself, due to persecution. Francisco Aguirre died behind bars and Victoriano Hernández committed suicide due to illness and loss of his sight due to torture while in prison.

Prominent anarchist figures like Isidro Moscú and Plácido Méndez were given 20-year prison sentences. Luis Linsuaín was sentenced to death for attempting to execute Raúl Castro, although an international anarchist campaign managed to have his life spared.

IV.2 Censorship of the Libertarian Press and the Campaign of Defamation (The “Gaona Manifesto”)

Press freedom, a pillar of anarchism’s defences, was quickly eradicated. Publications like *El Libertario* ceased publication in the summer of 1960. One notable example of direct censorship was the case of the German Libertarian Agustín Souchy. Following a visit to Havana in the summer of 1960, he produced a critical pamphlet, *Testimonios sobre la Revolución Cubana*, which analysed the Cuban agricultural model and its proximity to the soviet system; at the instigation of the PCC leadership, the pamphlet was seized and destroyed in its entirety by the Castro government just three days after Souchy’s departure.

The regime also orchestrated sophisticated propaganda campaigns designed to discredit the anarchists. The notorious “Gaona Manifesto” (officially “A Clarification and Declaration from the Cuban Libertarians”), drafted by the veteran libertarian activist Manuel Gaona Sousa in November 1961, with explicit government backing, amounted to an “enormous libel” designed to bring anarchists opposed to Castroism into disrepute. This document falsely asserted that there were no libertarian comrades behind bars or suffering harassment in Cuba and that they had all willingly joined the “Agencies of the Cuban Revolution”, the contention being that the revolution had met their aspirations. Gaona used his position as the ALC’s Liaison Secretary to peddle this disinformation and he bullied elderly and ailing anarchists such as Serra and Bretau into co-signing his declaration, threatening to denounce them as “agents of imperialism” to the recently created CDRs (Committees for Defence of the Revolution). His act of treachery triggered profound splits within world anarchism as to how the Castro government was to be evaluated.

IV.3 Forced Exile and the Fates of Prominent Anarchist Figures

In the face of the escalating repression, a lot of anarchists were obliged to seek asylum and go into exile, in a significant exodus that began in mid-1960 and sped up during the summer of 1961. Notably and in spite of its historical restrictions on anarchists, the United States afforded them entry and allowed them residence as “parolees”, most likely considering them “our enemies’ enemies”.

From exile, the Cuban anarchists carried on with their fight. In the summer of 1961, the Movimiento Libertario Cubano en el Exilio (MLCE/Cuban Libertarian Movement in Exile) was formally launched in New York. That organization then embarked upon a sustained propaganda campaign against the Marxist-Leninist regime, published a *Boletín de Información Libertaria* (BIL) in 1962 in order to circulate its criticisms and as a briefing for the international anarchist movement. There was also an underground bulletin, the *Movimiento de Acción Sindical* (Trade Union Action Movement) circulating inside Cuba and abroad between August and December 1960, fiercely attacking Castro and the PCC and acting as an essential channel for domestic dissent.

Prominent figures like Marcelo Salinas, Manuel González and Casto Moscú found themselves obliged to leave their homeland in order to escape persecution. Even though they had been arrested, González and Moscú were released on the orders of a captain serving with the State Security agency who had some regard for their record of labour activism, and were therefore able to seek asylum in the Mexican Embassy.

The swift introduction of Revolutionary Courts and the arbitrary purges inside the trade unions were evidence that the Castro regime was quick to depart from usual legal practices and drifting towards a “revolutionary

justice” arrangement driven by political convenience and the consolidation of power. The “Gaona Manifesto” was an especially unsettling example of the regime’s sophisticated use of propaganda, internal manipulation (bullying of elderly anarchists) and psychological warfare designed to discredit and isolate opponents, at both the national and the international levels. The fact that there was an effort to nullify international solidarity was a glimpse into a strategic awareness of global perceptions. Which shows that the suppression of anarchism was not just a use of brute force, but also a deliberate, multi-faceted strategy. It involved, not just physical repression (through arrests and executions), but also control of information (through censorship and propaganda), with historical narratives being manipulated and personal vulnerabilities exploited. Which shows how a revolutionary government, once embedded, can turn its tools for liberation (such as revolutionary courts and mass mobilization) into tools for repression, effectively silencing dissenting voices and rewriting its own history in order to justify its authoritarian course of action.

TABLE 1 - CUBAN ANARCHISTS PERSECUTED UNFDER CASTROISM (1959-1965)

NAME	ROLE/ACTIVITY	FATE	CONTEXT/NOTES
Augusto Sánchez	Guerrilla fighter	Captured, then murdered	17 year old peasant, executed in Pinar del Río
Rolando Tamargo	Combatant	Executed	Shot by the regime
Ventura Sánchez	Combatant	Executed	Shot by the regime
Sebastián Aguilar Jr	Not known	Murdered	Gunned down
Eusebio Otero	Not known	Found dead	Found dead in his home
Raúl Negrín	Not known	Suicide	Set fire to himself due to persecution and died
Modesto Piñeiro	Activist	Jailed	Arrested and sent to prison
Floreal Barrera	Activist	Jailed	Arrested and sent to prison
Suria Linsuaín	Activist	Jailed	Served a short sentence
Manuel González	Underground activist	Exiled	Arrested, then freed by a captain from the Security Service, sought asylum at the Mexican Embassy and moved to Miami

José Aceña	Activist	Jailed	Arrested and sent to jail
Isidro Moscu	Underground activist	Jailed, (20 years)/Exiled	Given a 20-year prison term then exiled in Miami
Norberto Torres	Activist	Jailed	Arrested and sent to jail
Sicinio Torres	Activist	Jailed	Arrested and sent to jail
José Mandado Marcos	Activist	Jailed	Arrested and jailed
Plácido Méndez	Activist	Jailed (20 years)	20-year jail term
Luis Linsuaín	Combatant	Sentenced to death (commuted)	Condemned to death for having planned to kill Raúl Castro: the MLCE mobilized international opinion to have his life spared
Francisco Aguirre	Activist	Died behind bars	Died in jail
Victoriano Álvarez Micheltorena	Activist	Died after his release	Died within weeks of leaving jail
Marcelo Salinas	Prominent intellectual	Exiled	Refused to sign the “Gaona Manifesto” and was forced out of the country
Manuel Gaona Sousa	Libertarian militant	Collaborated with the regime.	Author of the “Gaona Manifesto”, he defamed and bullied ex-comrades into supporting Castroism
Vicente Alea	Elderly militant	Bullied	Bullied by Gaona into signing his Manifesto
Rafael Serra	Elderly militant	Bullied	Bullied by Gaona into signing his Manifesto
Francisco Bretau	Elderly militant	Bullied	Bullied by Gaona into signing his Manifesto
Andrés Pardo	Elderly militant	Bullied	Bullied by Gaona into signing his Manifesto
Francisco Calle (Mata)	Elderly militant	Bullied	Bullied by Gaona into signing his Manifesto

Table 1 above offers a concrete and quantifiable view of the human toll taken by the repression. Representing a description of the persecution as a tangible list of individuals and their fates, renders the impact of the reader that much more immediate. The range of fates – execution, lengthy prison sentences, forced exile and deaths in custody – underlines the systematic and widespread nature of the campaign of repression. Each entry in the table represents a life and a personal tragedy behind a wider ideological clash, bringing a human touch to the historical narrative and allowing for a deeper connection with the anarchists’ sacrifices and suffering. What is more, the table provides a useful reference point for future academic research, providing a structured starting-point for exploration of the micro-histories within the overall account.

TABLE 2 - IDEOLOGICAL POINTS OF DIFFERENCE: ANARCHISM V. CASTROISM

KEY CONCEPT	THE ANARCHIST STANCE	THE CASTROIST/MARXIST-LENINIST STANCE	IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CLASH
THE ROLE OF THE STATE	ALL FORMS OF STATE AUTHORITY TO BE ABOLISHED: A STATELESS SOCIETY	DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT/CENTRALIZED STATE AS A TRANSITIONAL STAGE	ANARCHIST ANTI-STATISM POSED A DIRECT CHALLENGE TO THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE NEW STATE AUTHORITY, MAKING REPRESSION INEVITABLE
ECONOMIC SYSTEM	DE-CENTRALIZED SELF-MANAGEMENT/AUTONOMOUS COOPERATIVES/COLLECTIVE OWNERSHIP WITHOUT STATE OVERSIGHT	STATE-CONTROLLED ECONOMY/ PROPERTY NATIONALIZED AS STATE MONOPOLY	STATE CONTROL OF THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION WIPE OUT THE ANARCHIST INFLUENCE AND ITS VISION OF A WORKER-MANAGED ECONOMY
INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM	COMPLETE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND THE PRESS/FREEDOM AS THE BASIS FOR ALL MORALITY	INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY SUBORDINATED TO THE AIMS OF SOCIALIST SOCIETY AND STATE/CONTROLLED CULTURE	ANARCHISTS’ QUEST FOR BASIC FREEDOMS WITHOUT STATE RESTRICTIONS CLASHED WITH REGIME’S NEED FOR COMPLETE CONTROL
POLITICAL ORGANIZATION	DIRECT DEMOCRACY/FEDERALISM/AUTONOMY FOR POPULAR ORGANIZATIONS	AUTHORITIES EXERCISING CENTRALIZED CONTROL VIA A VANGUARD PARTY (THE PCC)/DISSENT SNUFFED OUT	OPPOSITION TO POLITICAL PARTIES AND BUREAUCRATIC CENTRALISM TRIGGERED PERSECUTION OF ANARCHIST ORGANIZATIONS

Table 2 above offers a blunt and clear breakdown of the fundamental ideological differences that not only made the clash between anarchism and Castroism not merely possible, but largely inevitable. By setting the two ideologies alongside each other, the table offers an explicit illustration of why the Castro regime felt impelled to come down hard on anarchism. Anarchist principles – things like anti-Statism, anti-centralization,

individual autonomy and repudiation of political parties – were inherently antithetical towards the Statist, centralized, authoritarian character of Castroism, which was out to build one single, dominant political and economic system. For academic audiences, this table provides a concise, high-level conceptual framework for understanding the theoretical underpinnings of that clash. Complicated ideological positions are distilled into a readily digestible format, making possible detailed discussion of the subsequent repression more comprehensible as the logical outcome of those opposing world views. The Table represents a powerful visual aid bolstering the main contention of this report: the irreconcilable differences between anarchism and Castroism were the main drivers of the brutal crackdown on the former.

V. ORGANIZED ANARCHISM’S LEGACY AND ITS DISAPPEARANCE FROM POST-1961 CUBA

V.1 Consolidation of the Castro Regime and the Liquidation of Internal Dissent

The failed Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961 proved a decisive watershed, leading directly on to the “utter liquidation of the internal opposition” that included whatever libertarians remained and the irreversible consolidation of the power of the Castro regime. On 1 May 1961, Fidel Castro publicly proclaimed the socialist nature of his government, a step that in practical terms amounted to a model in line with Stalinism. That proclamation faced Cuban anarchists with an acute “ethical quandary”: embrace the new State’s ideology whole-heartedly, or face serious consequences in the short term.

The regime’s economic policy led swiftly to a sovietization of Cuba, in the shape of widespread nationalization of all properties of size, companies, farms, sugar refineries and tobacco plantations, which fell under the direct control of the State and the Communist Party (PCC). Whilst anarchists were not necessarily against nationalization, they vehemently condemned the State’s monopolization of wealth and the elimination of independent workers’ control, deeming it all as oppression in a new format. The imposition of this centralized, authoritarian outlook left no room for coexistence with an ideology that, by its very nature, lobbied for decentralization and autonomy.

V.2 Continuing the Struggle from Exile and Historical Invisibilization

In the wake of ferocious repression, exiled anarchists quickly organized to carry on the fight against the new dictatorship. In the summer of 1961, the MLCE [Movimiento Libertario Cubano en el Exilio/ Cuban Libertarian Movement in Exile] was formally launched in New York and Miami. This organization embarked upon a sustained propaganda campaign targeting the Marxist-Leninist regime, publishing a *Boletín de Información Libertaria* (BIL) in 1962, circulating their criticisms and briefing the anarchist community worldwide on the situation inside Cuba.

At the same time, an underground bulletin, *Movimiento de Acción Sindical* (MAS) was circulating inside Cuba as well as abroad between August and December 1960. MAS mounted scathing attacks on Castro, the PCC and their collaborators and providing a crucial channel for internal dissenters and calling for popular opposition. Such publications and organizations in exile were crucial in keeping the flame of Cuban anarchism lit, albeit outside of the country’s borders.

V.3 Critical Analysis of Official Cuban Historiography on Anarchism

One telling aspect of the period after 1961 is the systematic elimination and downplaying of anarchism’s historical role in Cuba on the part of the official historiographers. In spite of their documented significance and prevalent influence within the labour movement over several decades, the official narrative often chooses to ignore the contributions made by libertarian ideas and movements. And that omission is not a simple

oversight, but an active process of erasing them from the historical record, a “memory hole” conjured up by the State in order to legitimize its own revolutionary trajectory as the only one possible.

Besides this suppression from without, there is a remarkable “memory loss” even within the libertarian movement itself with regard to its own history and influence within Cuban social struggles. This lack of internal historical continuity, whether due to repression, dispersion or lack of systemization, inadvertently contributed to its removal from the broader historical record and public consciousness. The fact that a “fourth generation” of anarchists, decades on, have had to embark upon “an exacting process, requiring a lot of persistence and a great need for remembrance” in order to reconnect with its suppressed historical lineage just underlines the efficacy of this strategy of controlling the narrative.

V.4 Thoughts on the Long-term Impact of Repression

The systematic repression of anarchism eliminated an alternative vision crucial for Cuba’s development, a vision rooted in decentralized social and economic organization outside of State oversight. This was especially damaging in terms of the potential of a sturdy cooperativist movement which had historically been championed by the anarchists. In the absence of a libertarian outlook, cooperativism’s history in Cuba has largely been whittled down to “ministerial efforts” instead of initiatives emanating from popular, autonomous movements.

The repression left a lingering legacy of fear and silence, effectively precluding the organic emergence of a “fourth generation” of anarchist for decades at a time. The eventual resurgence of such groups called for a considerable effort to reconstruct the movement’s historical memory. Which goes to show the profound, long-term impact of the revamping of the historical record by the State and ideological purges. In erasing the anarchist legacy, the regime was out to legitimize its own course as the sole possible revolutionary trajectory and to pre-empt the resurgence of future anti-authoritarian movements by severing the connections with their historical roots and their intellectual inheritance. Control of the past has thus been turned into a powerful mechanism for controlling the present and shaping the future along authoritarian lines.

6. OTHER INTERNATIONAL BACKING

Support from international anarchist organizations has been the key to the revitalization of anarchism in Cuba, particularly after decades of absence and repression. Such backing has taken the forms of solidarity, material and intellectual support, as well as help with communications and coordination with libertarian networks worldwide.

In recent years, Cuban anarchist collectives have received support from groups and organizations such as GALSIC (Grupo de Apoyo a los Libertarios y Sindicalistas Independientes/ Support Group for Libertarians and Independent Trade Unionists in Cuba), the CNT (National Confederation of Labour) in Paris and Spain, the CGT (General Confederation of Labour) in Spain, the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) in San Francisco, the FAF (French Fédération Anarchiste), the IFA (International of Anarchist Federations), as well as groups in the Dominican Republic, Argentina, Colombia and Uruguay, in addition to publishing ventures and social centres in Europe and Latin America.

Thanks to such international networking, Cuban anarchists have recovered a profile, gained support for cultural activities and rallied behind the creation in Havana in 2018 of ABRA, the first anarchist social centre in upwards of a century, as well as helping to form the FACC (Anarchist Federation of Central America and the Caribbean). Historically, international solidarity was afforded right from the first few years after the success of the Castro revolution. Fund raised in the United States, Argentina, Germany, France, Chile and elsewhere helped out the libertarian exiles and political prisoners, in spite of a number of cross purposes and muddles as to how the

Cuban regime should be responded to. This support was essential in upholding the exposure of the repression inside and outside Cuba.

6.1 Solidarity from Sweden: the Role of the SAC

The SAC (Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation/ Swedish Workers' Central Organization), a Swedish anarcho-communist trade union has been an outstanding example of that international support effort. On the advice of the editors of the independent review *Cuba Nuestra*, published in Stockholm, since the late 1990s the SAC has been backing left-wing dissent and later, the resurgence of the Cuban anarchists.

That commitment has been expressed in three main ways:

1. *Solidarity and International Distribution*: working with the TLAL (Taller Libertario Alfredo López/Alfredo López Libertarian Workshop), trading publications and circulating critical texts through media such as *Brand*, as well as backing libertarian resolutions in international forums.
2. *Education and Visibility*: promoting the works of exiles such as Canek Sánchez Guevara, the grandson of Che, a critic of Castroism and incorporating Cuban libertarian history into trade union educational resources.
3. *Material Support and Public Campaigning*: dispatching books and materials to Cuba (though these are often intercepted by customs) and organizing meetings outside Cuban embassies in order to expose the repression.

It should be pointed out that such support also entailed internal boycotts of South American militants aligned with Castroism, who prioritized defence of the regime over libertarian ideals.

6.2 Libertarian Networking in Latin America and the Caribbean

Contemporary Cuban anarchism has been supported by such regional networks as: *El Libertario* (Venezuela), active since 1995, which circulates critiques of Latin American authoritarianism, publishing texts by Cuban exiles and promoting solidarity campaigns.

The FACC (Central American and Caribbean Anarchist Federation), with a presence in the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Haiti, counts the TLAL as one of its affiliates. In 2018 it backed the opening of the ABRA Social Centre and Libertarian Library and denounced the repression enforced following 11 June 2021.

7. THE TLAL (ALBERTO LOPEZ LIBERTARIAN WORKSHOP): STEADFAST IN TIMES OF CRISIS

In the midst of a food, energy and migration crisis affecting Cuba, the TLAL has been a reference point since its foundation in 2013. Its aim has been to recover anarcho-syndicalist memory and promote libertarian practices.

In 2018, the TLAL inaugurated the ABRA Centre, an autonomous forum for critical thinking and counter-culture. However, since 2019 the group went into a decline due to factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the collapse of transport services, inflation, a youth exodus and the crackdown in the wake of 11J. [ie the wave of street disturbances that erupted across Cuba on 11 July 2021, protesting against food and medicine shortages and showing general discontent with the regime. KSL]

Nevertheless, the TLAL has held on to its symbolic presence, maintains links with regional networks and remains a voice critical of the Cuban State. The ABRA project, albeit paused, remains a reference point for independent activists, researchers and neighbours from the Lawton *barrio*, as it waits for more favourable conditions before it springs back to life.

8. CONCLUSIONS

From its 19th century origins, anarchism in Cuba played a crucial, and often hegemonic role in the moulding of the labour movement and the battles for social justice. Its principles – anti-Statism, direct action, anti-racism and the championing of worker autonomy – distinguished it as a pioneering force on the island. Despite the repression enforced under republican governments and the growing communist influence, anarchism displayed remarkable resilience, consolidating organizations and sustaining an active presence right up until the eve of the 1959 Revolution.

Fidel Castro's accession to power signalled the start of an inevitable clash rooted in an underlying ideological incompatibility. Whereas anarchism was out for a Stateless, decentralized society rooted in personal freedom and self-management, Castroism quickly shifted towards a Marxist-Leninist model that prioritized consolidation of a centralized, authoritarian State. This core divergence turned anarchists' initial wariness into open opposition. The Castro regime's response was systematic and multi-faceted repression. Purges in the trade unions, mass arrests, jailings, torture and execution of anarchist figures became common practice. Censorship of the libertarian press and the orchestration of slander campaigns such as the "Gaona Manifesto" sought not merely to silence dissent, but also to discredit and isolate the movement, at home as well as abroad. Forced exile became the only option open to many and they carried on the fight from abroad.

Suppression of organized anarchism in Cuba was no mere historical accident, but a direct consequence of the imposition of a Statist, totalitarian approach. Its elimination not only denied Cuba a significant current of thought and social action, but also led to its legacy being rendered invisible, a "memory hole" that it has taken later generations a considerable effort to recover from. The fate of Cuban anarchism under Castroism bears eloquent witness to the tensions inherent between anti-authoritarian revolutionary ideals and the dynamics of Statist power consolidation.

REQUIRED FUTURE RESEARCH

On the basis of what has been unearthed in this study, the following lines of inquiry are suggested for future research and academic analyses:

1. **Detailed studies of the lives of lesser-known Cuban anarchist figures.** A deeper dive into the lives and contributions of anarchist activists who did not attain the same prominence as figures such as Alfredo Lopez, but who suffered repression and kept the struggle alive. This might add to our understanding of the movement's social footprint and diversity.
2. **A comparative analysis of the international solidarity networks.** A detailed scrutiny of how anarchist networks worldwide responded to the repression in Cuba and the effectiveness of their campaigns of denunciation and support, plus the internal divisions that cropped up, especially regarding the "Gaona Manifesto".
3. **An exhaustive examination of the mechanisms of historical invisibilization.** A critical examination of the approaches and specific narratives used by Cuban official historiography to erase or systematically misrepresent the anarchist legacy and how this has impacted upon collective memory on the island.
4. **Comparative studies with other Latin American anarchist organizations.** Delving into similar instances in Latin America where anarchist movements faced challenges from statist revolutions (in, say, Mexico or Argentina) in order to identify common themes behind the suppression, resistance and adaptation.
5. **Investigation of the "fourth generation" of anarchists in Cuba.** Exploring the emergence and characteristics of contemporary anarchist movements inside Cuba, their current challenges, their

organizational and activist strategies and how they seek to recover and reconstruct the historical memory of Cuban anarchism.

6. **The impact of repression in the development of alternative models of cooperation.** Looking into how the suppression of anarchism impacted upon the development of autonomous popular cooperative ventures in Cuba and how anarchism's absence impacted upon the centralization of the economy and State-controlled agriculture.

Sources:

1. [Academic Bibliography and Historical Essays](#)

Dialnet: *¡Tierra!* y la internacionalización del anarquismo cubano (1902-1915): publishers and editions

CEPC: *¡Tierra!* y la internacionalización del anarquismo cubano (1902-1915): publishers and editions

Acta Academica: Polémicas culturales de los años sesenta en Cuba: historia, contextos y actualidad

UNESP: Las interacciones de la Revolución Cubana con 'los nuevos liderazgos latinoamericanos'

UTEC LIBRARY SYSTEM: Reseñas biográficas de figuras significativas en la historia de Cuba

OpenEdition Journals: Las primeras sanciones económicas de los Estados Unidos contra Cuba

Foro Internacional: La formación de la línea castrista desde la Conferencia Tricontinental.

2. LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES SPECIALIZING IN ANARCHISM

Anarchist Libraries: Los anarquistas cubanos a fines del siglo XIX: los libertarios y la ...
Cuba, el Socialismo y la Libertad

Kate Sharpley Library: Alfredo López. Anarchist Founder of the Cuban Trade Union Movement

Portaloaca: Anarquismo en Cuba (1959-1980: castrismo, confrontación, exilio y ...

Inventati: El Movimiento Anarquista en Cuba

3. MEDIA AND REVIEW ARTICLES

Kaos en la Red: Hechos y circunstancias de una cuarta generación de anarquistas en Cuba. Notas desde dentro

Monde Nouveau: 1961: Sobre Cuba y el "Documento de Gaona"

Interferencia: El origen del anarquismo mundial

Nodo 50: Los anarquistas cubanos a fines del siglo XIX: los libertarios y la guerra del 95

La Tizza: Un anarquista alemán en la revolución cubana: Agustí Souchy y las (des)memorias sobre el ...

Acracia: El movimiento anarquista en Cuba

Archivos de Historia: Lecturas ácratas en torno a la Revolución cubana

Solidaridad Obrera: Los anarquistas en la revolución cubana

Canarias de Colonial: Libros: El anarquismo en Cuba

4. ENCYCLOPEDIAS, EDUCATIONAL AND INFORMATIONAL PLATFORMS

StudySmarter: Anarquismo: Entérate de todo sobre esta ideología política

Wikipedia: Anarquismo en Cuba

La Revolución cubana

Reddit: ¿Cuál es la diferencia entre el anarquismo y el comunismo? (<https://www.reddit.com>)

Juan de Mariana: Anarcocapitalismo y anarco-comunismo, las diferencias fundamentales

5. TESTIMONIES and AUDIO-VISUAL REPORTAGE

YouTube: Anarquismo en Cuba. 1 parte (1857-1953) (<https://www.youtube.com>)

Desgarradores testimonios de presas políticas de los abusos de la dictadura castrista (<https://www.youtube.com>)

Radio Cadena Agramonte: Alfredo López, leader of the workers

6. **HUMAN RIGHTS, POLITICS AND CONTEMPORARY ANALYSIS**

Amnesty International: Cuba. ¿"Medidas esenciales"? Los derechos humanos en peligro en nombre de la seguridad

El legado de derechos humanos de Fidel Castro

Diario de Cuba: Exiliados Cubanos contra culto a Fidel Castro y Guevara en México

Centro de Estudios Convivencia: Nacionalismo en Cuba con a revolución iniciada en 1959 y hasta la actualidad

Fernando Díaz Villanueva: El castrismo, crónica de una tiranía infame

La Razón: El gran represor Fidel Castro

La Nación: La furia del dictador. Testimonio de la represión del gobierno cubano

Dated: 30 July 2025

From CubaNuestra

(<https://cubanuestra7eu.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/7>)

<https://cubabuestra7eu.wordpress.com/2025/07/30/el-anarquismo-en-cuba-trayectoria-historica-y-confrontacion-con-el-castrismo/>

Translated by Paul Sharkey for the Kate Sharpley Library <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/>