

“We Want to Revive Anarchism in Cuba”

The Cuban movement erased by Castro is coming back & they need our solidarity

Mario Castillo
Dmitri Prieto
Isbel Díaz

2016

FE note: Comrades working to revive anarchism in Cuba need our immediate financial support. For U.S. dollar donations, visit the Cuban Anarchist Solidarity Fund. For Euro-zone contributions, click [here](#).



Isbel, Mario & Jimmy (photo: Gabriel Uchida)

Changes in the Cuban state’s regulation of private enterprise and in the relationship between Cuba and the U.S. over the last decade are opening up new possibilities and dangers for Cuban society.

However, the new conditions have also inspired the rebirth of the long-repressed anarchist movement on the island. The Alfredo Lopez Libertarian Workshop (Taller Libertario Alfredo Lopez, TLAL), named for an early 20th century Cuban anarcho-syndicalist, is one of the main groups accomplishing this task.

In the 1980s, there was a loosening of the state’s control over cultural matters. Cubans became very active in the punk movement, and street graffiti began to appear using the circle-A, understood as a symbol of freedom.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the so-called socialist camp at the beginning of the 1990s inspired

many to think about a thorough critique of actually existing authoritarian socialism—in Cuba, as elsewhere.

One clandestine student group active in the 1990s and early 2000s devoted themselves to studying anarchist ideas and incorporating them into their protests and challenges to the official culture. Anarchism was attractive because of its criticism of authoritarian and bureaucratic rule and its simultaneous concern for human freedom, political confrontation, self-organization, and social justice.

The group organized events including debates on topics relevant to anti-authoritarians and formed alliances with autonomous cultural groups to promote change from below. The group was involved in the creation of the Cuban Critical Observatory (Observatorio Critico Cubano), which promoted discussions on Cuban society engendered by the transfer of government leadership in 2006.

In the beginning, the Observatory was conceived as a network of various alternative left groups. Some protested the bureaucracy, some worked on rescuing the spirit of May 1 and the independent workers movement, others emphasized the importance of African heritage, others paid tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, still others did street actions in solidarity with the 15-M movement in Spain, others used blogs to criticize the government and denounced the official Labor Code as capitalist because it encourages the development of small and medium privately owned enterprises, while impeding the emergence of autonomous cooperatives. They also protested the new Labour Code for weakening the position of workers by authorizing private employers to dismiss them without appeal.



Cuban comrades at fundraiser. They need our help too!

The Observatory facilitated meetings where people from various left tendencies could express themselves. In addition, it organized meetings where local anarchists and socialist critics of Cuba and those from other countries could discuss their ideas freely.

Five years ago the anarchists within the anti-capitalist project of the Critical Observatory became aware of the need to organize themselves as a separate collective and formed the Alfredo Lopez Libertarian Workshop, while also continuing to participate in the larger anti-capitalist struggle. As they learned about the history of the anarchist movement in Cuba, they began to realize that it was an immense mine of experiences, achievements, knowledge, and inspiring energy.

They came to understand that the really existing socialism in Cuba had not been conducive to the development of collective self-organized solidarity but instead had generated an atrocious individualism, which lacked the spirit of collective actions and sharing of skills by equals. Too many people had become accustomed to intermediaries organizing activities from above.

The group realized that, as anarchists, they needed to learn how to lay the basis for nurturing mutual aid and support, as well as for the ability to think critically and to develop effective rebellious self-organization.

To introduce anarcho-syndicalist and other anarchist ideas to Cubans with no access to the internet, TLAL began issuing a printed newspaper, *New World! (Tierra Nueva!)*.

Thanks to the collaboration of comrades and friends in Spain, France, and the US, the group has also become familiar with radical critiques of industrialism and advanced technology, sexism and gender discrimination.

It now has expanded its critique of modern capitalist life to include the advocacy of decreasing dependence on modern technologies and the defense of animal rights, as well as the right to sexual diversity and to live together without sexism. It also is cooperating with the independent, anti-capitalist, Project Rainbow activists for lesbian people, gay, bisexual, trans, queer; as well as feminist activists.

In March 2015, along with other comrades in the region, the Cuban anarchists founded the Central American and Caribbean Anarchist Federation network, which they hope will help to strengthen movements in the region as a whole.

The comrades of the Alfredo Lopez Libertarian Workshop are now in the process of raising funds to purchase a building for a social center and anarchist library where they can build autonomous community and create activities and organizations to foster mutual aid.

The building is envisioned as the permanent headquarters of the TLAL, where they can hold working meetings and other activities, and as the home of a Libertarian Library with materials donated over the years by individuals and anarchist groups.

It will also host conferences, meetings of local groups, visitors from the area, other provinces and abroad, shared meals, parties, video debates, concerts, readings, exhibitions, and other activities.

Purchasing such a building requires money, and none of the group's various activities generates any surplus funds.

The TLAL does not receive funding from the state, private institutions, or NGOs since they are dedicated to ensuring their complete independence and non-subordination to an external agenda.

They only accept donations from groups and individuals in agreement with their principles, with no strings attached.

See the site observatoriocriticocuba.org for more information about the Alfredo Lopez Libertarian Workshop and the situation in Cuba.

Mario Castillo, Dmitri Prieto and Isabel Díaz are Cuban anarchist activists.

Related

The Diary of Che Guevara

Book review

by Hank Malone

Fifth Estate #62, Sept. 19-Oct. 2, 1968

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/62-sept-19-oct-2-1968/the-diary-of-che-guevara/>

Cuba: Dawning of American Imperialism

The Spanish-American War

by Bob Nirkind

Fifth Estate #269, February, 1976

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/269-february-1976/cuba-dawning-american-imperialism/>

An Anarchist in Cuba

Socialism or Cell Phones

by Walker Lane

Fifth Estate #378, Summer 2008

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/378-summer-2008/anarchist-cuba/>

Cuba: From State to Private Capitalism

Adios Socialismo

by Walker Lane

Fifth Estate #383, Summer, 2010

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/383-summer-2010/cuba-state-private-capitalism/>

State Violence & Cuba's Ladies in White

by Walker Lane

Fifth Estate #383, Summer, 2010

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/383-summer-2010/state-violence-cubas-ladies-white/>

Anarchists Confront the Marxist State in Cuba

Whee! Airbnb announces 2,000 available Cuban listings; The New York Times has full page ads for travel to the island. Isn't it all grand? Well, no.

by Quincy B. Thorn

Fifth Estate #394, Summer 2015

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/394-summer-2015/anarchists-confront-the-marxist-state-in-cuba/>

The Train to Matanzas

Cuba: A tsunami of tourism & foreign investment hits the island

by Peter Werbe

Fifth Estate #396, Summer, 2016

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/396-summer-2016/the-train-to-matanzas/>

The Myth of Che Guevara

Live Like him?

by MLB
Fifth Estate #397, Winter, 2017
<http://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/397-winter-2017/the-myth-of-che-guevara/>

Related

Find more articles on the Fifth Estate's Cuba Resource Page.

fi fifth Estate

Mario Castillo

Dmitri Prieto

Isbel Díaz

“We Want to Revive Anarchism in Cuba”

The Cuban movement erased by Castro is coming back & they need our solidarity

2016

https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/395-winter-2016-50th-anniversary/we-want-to-revive-a

Fifth Estate #395, Winter 2016 — 50th Anniversary

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net