

Anarchism Returns to Cuba

Fifth Estate Collective

2018

The Anarchist Social Center and Library (Abra: Centro Social y Biblioteca Libertaria) was inaugurated in Havana on May 5. The first word in the Spanish name, Abra, means a place or action through which possibilities can be opened up, which is what the center hopes to be.

Anarchists have been present in Cuba since the 1870s, suffering periodic repression under several different authoritarian regimes. From 1959 on, the Castro government persecuted, imprisoned, and killed anarchists, forcing large numbers into exile or silence—something neither the Spanish colonialists nor the earlier Cuban dictators could accomplish.

Over the last decade, the Cuban government has loosened its regulation of non-governmental groups, opening up possibilities for social activism resulting in the rebirth of the anarchist movement on the island.

The Alfredo López Anarchist Workshop (Taller Libertario Alfredo López—TLAL—named for an early 20th century Cuban anarcho-syndicalist) along with other groups began collecting funds to purchase a space where they would not have to worry about landlords.

In 2012, the TLAL was joined in this effort by the Cuban Critical Observatory (Observatorio Crítico Cubano), Forest Protectors (Guardabosques) and interested individuals.

Supporters in Europe and North America helped by spreading word of the Cuban project and running effective crowd funding campaigns. Later in May there was a benefit evening of poetry and music in Montreal for the center.

In a recent Web posting on guardabosquescuba.org/ Isabel Díaz Torres, one of the authors of a 2016 FE article, notes,

“After almost three years of international campaigns to obtain the necessary funds—without resorting to grants from foreign governments, political parties, or NGOs, much less to Cuban state institutions—we managed to realize a dream...to have a fixed physical headquarters so that the work could be maintained over time.

“We have seen groups in Europe and America—leftists, trade unionists, anarchists, socialists, alter-globalists—who have their own spaces. Some squat, others rent. There they can express their creativity and direct defiant energies toward transforming a world that is increasingly xenophobic, racist, consumerist, unfair, and exploitative.

“Some of our own struggles can be like theirs, others different; but it is clear that nothing can substitute for direct contact, the transparent gaze of people who want to move something together. Especially in Cuba, where state control of the media is so tight, and the Internet is still so expensive and slow” (FE staff translation).

Abra founders are committed to making the Center open to all who come to the door with dreams and ideas of autonomy and collective work, in order to give life a new meaning.

As part of widening and strengthening their movement connections, in 2015 the Cuban comrades became part of the group that founded the Anarchist Federation of the Caribbean and Central America. The Federation has held annual conferences.

The reactions of Cuban communist authorities to the anarchist revival are not predictable, but the creativity and determination of our comrades in Havana give reason for encouragement and hope for the growth of liberatory projects and ideas.

The need for funds to help keep the Center alive is ongoing. Watch these pages, and Bill Weinberg's counter-vortex.org postings for news and ways you can contribute.

For a discussion of the new anarchist initiatives see "We Want to Revive Anarchism in Cuba" in Fifth Estate #395, Winter 2016, and "The Anarchist Alternative in Cuba" in Fifth Estate, #399, Fall 2017, available in print and online at fiftheestate.org/archive.

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