A Cuban Comrade Passes

Frank Fernandez (1934–2026)

Sylvie Kashdan

2026

We are sad to report the passing of Frank Fernandez, a greatly respected Cuban anarchist historian and an active participant in the Movimiento Libertario Cubano en Exilio (the Cuban Anarchist Movement in Exile). He died in Florida in January at the age of 92.

Fernandez was born in Havana in 1934. He immigrated to the United States in the 1960s, where he met Cuban anarchists in exile and learned about anarchist ideas and the history of the movement in Cuba.

When the Castro regime seized power in 1959, many anarchists, some who fought to overthrow the Batista dictatorship, were executed, imprisoned, or fled into exile. From the very beginning, the regime actively suppressed books and articles as well as those who carried the memory that anarchists had fought on all fronts of the anti-Batista struggle, from the urban underground to armed struggle in the countryside and mountains.

But over the last thirty-five years, the anarchist comrades in exile, especially Frank Fernandez, have helped to reestablish the connection with the past, and the understanding that self-organization from the bottom up, mutual aid, and grassroots initiatives were achieved previously and could be again.

Fernandez wrote articles and books relating the story of the Cuban anarchist movement from its mutualist beginnings during the colonial period to its long term integral involvement in the labor movement, through to the current emphasis on mutual aid and social issues, such as racism and gender hierarchies.

He co-founded and wrote many articles for the anarchist magazine *Guángara Libertaria,* which lasted for thirteen years (1979–1992). After the demise of the magazine, he continued to write for other anarchist publications.

In addition to articles, Fernandez was the author of the important books *La Sangre de Santa Águeda* (The Blood of Saint Agatha) and *El Anarquismo en Cuba* (Anarchism in Cuba), (translated into German, French, English, Italian, and Portuguese). In these books he challenged the established narratives of authoritarians in Cuba and elsewhere who claim to represent the will of the people. His focus was on the decisive role played by Cuban anarchist women and men in the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century in the development of the labor movement's struggles on the island.

He made it clear that the history of anarchism in Cuba could not be reduced to a footnote in pro-government books or a collection of romantic anecdotes about the defeat of the movement. It encompasses workers who were willing to fight for freedom and dignity against all odds, intellectuals who expressed support for the struggles, anarchist women who not only confronted the state and organized religion, but also the machismo of their comrades, tobacco factory readers who spread anarchist praxis among cigar rollers, teachers in athenaeums (learning centers) who taught basic skills like reading and critical thinking together.

Well known and anonymous international migrants from Spain, Italy and other places participated in the struggles for emancipation in Cuba.

During the last three decades of his life, Fernandez was very supportive of the young anarchists and artists in Cuba in their endeavors to create self-managed projects, in areas such as anti-authoritarian education, history of ideas related to social liberation, environmental activism, gender diversity, anti-racist activism and Afro-Cuban culture. He also was enthusiastic about the Alfredo Lopez Libertarian Workshop, an anarchist initiative including a publishing project.

However, the last six years since the beginning of the COVID pandemic have been marked by the convergence of several extreme crises which have caused spaces for autonomous social initiatives to close. These included the regulations and fears engendered by the disease, as well as the failure of the public transportation system, which succumbed to long-term government neglect and lack of planning as well as funds for repair.

Out-of-control inflation has led to drastic drops in the value of wages and public retirement benefits for everyone except the government elite. All of this has been exacerbated by the collapse of the public health system, the food supply systems, the national electrical system, the U.S. government economic blockade, and the mass exodus of more than a million people.

Large protests against electricity blackouts and the other shortages broke out on July 11 through 13, 2021. Smaller ones have followed. All have been met with brutal police action.

Many people were arrested and imprisoned. Cuba now has more than 1,000 political prisoners, sentenced to long terms and severe prison conditions, for protesting poor and deteriorating living conditions on the island.

Despite the current harsh and dispiriting political crackdown, Cuban anarchists on the island and in the diaspora say they are heartened by the knowledge of what those who came before them learned to deal with. This is what Frank Fernandez hoped his life's work would achieve.

He considered the knowledge of history to be a tool for inspiring and nourishing the self-organization, mutual aid and grassroots initiatives in all aspects of daily life, in the present, in Cuba and everywhere.

The *Fifth Estate's* editors have been among those who have benefited from the information and understanding that Frank Fernandez shared about resistance to authoritarian rule in Cuba.

More information and analysis can be found on our Cuba Resource Page at www.fifthestate.org/archive/cuba-resource-page/.

Farewell Comrade. You will be sorely missed.

Thanks to Frank Fernandez's comrade Gustavo Rodríguez for help with this obituary.

Sylvie Kashdan is a Longtime supporter of the Cuban anarchist movement. She Lives in the Pacific Northwest.

fifth estate

Sylvie Kashdan
A Cuban Comrade Passes
Frank Fernandez (1934–2026)
2026

https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/418-summer-2026/a-cuban-comrade-passes
Fifth Estate #418, Summer 2026

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net