

Colonialism and Separatism (1865-1898)

Fernández Frank. Cuban anarchism : the history of a movement

Nineteenth-century Cuban society possessed a set of characteristics unique in the western hemisphere. From the beginning of the century, exploitation of Cuba's economic wealth had been the work of the white ruling class, who bore titles of Spanish nobility. This creole aristocracy had enough power and resources to influence Spanish policy during the colonial epoch. While the rest of Latin America was violently freeing itself of Spanish colonialism, Cuba's creole plutocracy considered itself more Spanish than Fernando VII, the king of Spain, and very deliberately opposed any type of reformism, no matter how modest.

The cultivation of sugar cane, tobacco, and coffee was the basis of Cuba's agricultural abundance, and in order to compete in international markets Cuba's elite needed cheap labor. So, in open collusion with the Spanish crown and the colonial authorities, Cuba's plutocrats engaged in the massive importation of African slaves, in the process establishing an abusive, slavery-based society. By the middle of the 19th century, Cuba's aristocracy had become powerful sugar barons and Cuba's economy was abnormally dependent-by Latin American standards-on the slave trade and the institution of slavery.

The class structure of Cuban society was pyramidal in these years: on the top, the sugar barons and the Spanish colonial officials; in the middle, artisans, industrial, sugar and tobacco workers, including free blacks and campesinos; and on the bottom, black slaves. The division between the bottom two classes was not always clear cut despite the many racial and social divisions in Cuban society: campesinos and poor Spanish immigrants could suffer almost the same discrimination and exploitation as black slaves. It is well to keep in mind that these divisions in Cuban society were imposed by the dominant class and not by the people at the base of the social pyramid.

In this society, there was no social, racial, political, or economic integration. This was principally because Cuba was a Spanish colony and that the primary interest of the Spanish government was in holding its power through maintaining the polarized situation on the island; the more divided that Cuba was, the easier it was for the Spaniards to exploit its economic resources and to preserve their political power. For more than three centuries the Spanish authorities -in the same manner as the other European colonial powers in other lands-maintained this deplorable situation.

But despite the crushing influence of Spanish colonialism, new ideas found their way to Cuba. By the middle of the 19th century there were political tendencies in the following directions: national independence; reformism (with Cuba remaining a Spanish colony); integration into the United States; and integration into Spain. None of these currents was indigenous; they all came from abroad, because the creole intelligentsia was weak and saw itself and its country's situation as it was seen from abroad, be it in France, Spain, or the U.S.

At this time, the revolutionary independence tendency, even though it had taken root among the creoles, was still in an intellectual phase; it had not yet entered its conspiratorial stage. Cuban reformism was aimed at obtaining small economic and political changes in return for maintaining the status quo. This tendency had gained some influence among the sugar barons

and the large and small creole bourgeois classes, in large part due to the obvious failure of integrationist efforts (in regard to the U.S.). For their part, those Cuban creoles living in the United States were largely in favor of Cuba's joining the U.S. (or at least its southern states) in the period before the U.S. Civil War. But the failure of two exile invasions of Cuba at the beginning of the 1850s (mounted with the help of southern secessionist elements) and the defeat of the South in the Civil War dampened, but did not extinguish, the hopes of Cuba's annexation by the United States.

Ultimately, the most influential tendency in the mid 19th century was that of integration with Spain. This was natural given that the most powerful classes in Cuba depended upon Spanish colonial power-both political and economic-to maintain their privileged positions. Their slogan made their position extremely clear: "Cuba española." At the same time, those Cubans outside of the favored social classes either didn't have-or didn't dare to express-social or political opinions.

Nonetheless, in the 1850s new social concepts began to spread among Cuban and Spanish workers at the bottom of the social pyramid. The massive Spanish emigration to Cuba around 1850, inspired by the fear of the creole ruling class and the Spanish crown of an "Africanized" Cuba, brought with it a series of totally new social concepts, to which the Spanish/Cuban proletariat was receptive. This isn't surprising given the miserable conditions of Cuba's workers at the time. Spanish immigrants were treated as virtual slaves by their own countrymen, and 16- or 18-hour work days, seven days a week, were typical. One important industry in which such conditions were common was tobacco, in which not only was the work unhealthy and the pay low, but the long work hours were filled with monotony in unsafe working conditions. So, the ideas that the newly arrived Spanish workers brought with them interacted with the misery of Cuban workers, slaves, and campesinos to produce a new Cuban social movement.

It was at this time that the social ideas of the French typographer, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, one of the most original socialist thinkers of the 19th century, became influential in Cuba. Proudhon's economic theories and social ideas-often lumped together under the title "mutualism"-had a great impact in Europe, and decisively influenced the origins of Cuban anarchism. The French thinker had disciples among the progressive workers and artisans on the island, and especially among those in the tobacco industry-the first in which some sort of class consciousness developed among Cuban workers.

In 1857, the first Proudhonian mutualist society was founded in Cuba, with the intention of creating a workers' organization free of state and dominator-class influence. This was the first step toward the creation of a civil society within the Cuban proletariat, even though, unfortunately, as the Spanish historian Casanovas Codina notes, the artisans associations founded at this time were "racially segregated and restricted to artisans from the same neighborhood. But they laid the foundation from which Cuban organized labor would grow and evolve in the future."

In 1865, the first strike threat occurred in Cuba. It took place on August 14 at the Hija de Cabañas y Carbajal and El Fígaro tobacco works in Havana. The 400 workers taking part were demanding an increase in their daily wages, and the owners of both factories acceded to their demands.

At about this time the young Asturian, Saturnino Martínez, arrived in Cuba and went to work in the tobacco industry. He quickly became involved in the tobacco workers' associations and by the end of 1865 had founded the first workers' weekly paper in Havana, *La Aurora*, in which he outlined some of Proudhon's ideas, which the mechanical engineer, José de Jesús Márquez, had introduced to him. It was in *La Aurora*, not coincidentally, that Márquez proposed for the first time in Cuba the idea of cooperative societies.

Martínez, although influenced by Proudhon's ideas of federation and mutual aid, was not an anarchist, and his proposals regarding the organization of work in the tobacco industry, which he purported to represent, were not really revolutionary. His paper, *La Aurora*, even though in favor of workers' associations, saw its primary mission as that of education, that of helping the Cuban/Spanish workers develop intellectually. *La Aurora* defended the right of workers to free association, but this was the same position as that of the Partido Reformista, which indeed owned the press on which *La Aurora* was printed. Nonetheless, *La Aurora* was Cuba's first workers' newspaper, and Martínez took the first step toward the protection of workers' associations. He also initiated the practice of reading aloud in tobacco workshops, a practice which would have great utility in propagating anarchist ideas among tobacco workers in years to come.

Let there be no doubt about it: in the period before the Ten Years War for independence from Spain (1868-1878), the foundation of the first free societies and associations of tobacco workers, typographers, carpenters, day laborers and artisans lay in Proudhon's ideas and their influence in Cuba. The country and its workers' movement owe the creation of the first regional centers, secular schools, clinics, and workers' mutual aid associations—at the very least—to the French anarchist. The Ten Years War would halt this impulse toward social emancipation of the most oppressed classes, while at the same time it would ruin the creole sugar barons; and eventually this war would end in the enslavement of Cuba.

Those who participated in the Ten Years War—the first Cuban insurrection for independence—included tobacco workers and survivors of the Paris Commune who had escaped France, bringing with them more of Proudhon's influence. Among the leaders of the Cuban insurgents at this time, one finds Salvador Cisneros Betancourt and Vicente García, who embraced the Proudhonian concepts of federalism and decentralization.

But the first openly anarchist presence in Cuba cannot be discerned until the 1880s, when J.C. Campos, a Cuban typographer who had taken refuge in New York during the Ten Years War, initiated contact between Cuban and Spanish anarchists upon his return to Havana. The profusion of libertarian propaganda in the form of pamphlets and newspapers that arrived regularly and clandestinely from Barcelona, along with the migration of Spanish workers to Cuba, reinforced the transmission of these new ideas. As a result, a new wave of revolutionary, socialist Cuban workers proceeded to involve themselves in the *Alianza Revolucionaria Socialista (ARS)*.

It was in these years, the 1880s, that anarchist thought acquired an unprecedented influence among workers and peasants in France, Italy, Russia, and, above all, Spain. Its principal proponent was the notable figure Mikhail Bakunin, the Russian writer and revolutionary who elaborated on Proudhon's ideas. The divisions between absolutist marxist socialism and revolutionary anarchist socialism had already been demonstrated in the congresses of The Hague and St. Imier, as well as with the founding of the ARS in 1873, and the establishment of the International Social Democratic Alliance in the same year. Ideologically, the well

known Declaration of Principles of the Social Democratic Alliance, edited by Bakunin himself, had established the differences between the authoritarian socialism espoused by Marx, and the libertarian socialism espoused by the anarchists.

The revolutionary concepts of Bakunin were adopted by the Federación Regional Española (FRE) in the Congress of Barcelona in 1881, and they had a definite impact on militant revolutionary workers in Cuba, supplanting the more gradualist ideas of Proudhon in the syndicalist (union) field. It was at this time that the Cuban working class began to achieve class consciousness in regard to ruling class abuses and began to clamor for social renovation and redistribution of wealth and power.

In 1882, Cuban anarchists began to struggle against the reformism preached within workers' associations by Saturnino Martínez, now in another phase of his long life; and this time his was a reformism more favorable to ruling class interests than to those of the working class. He basically advocated collaboration with capitalist interests to obtain mild reforms in exchange for labor peace, an approach which was forcefully rejected by Cuba's anarchists. Their combative approach resonated with Cuba's working class, and it was at this time that Cuban anarchism began to distinguish itself and to gain adherents. One of its leading proponents, Enrique Roig San Martín, advocated that no guild or other working class organization should be tied to the "feet of capital." Under these watchwords, the Junta Central de Artesanos was founded in 1885 with the idea of organizing and uniting Cuba's workers in federations.

Roig San Martín (1843-1889) was born in Havana and was without doubt not only the most persuasive and dedicated anarchist of his time, but probably the most influential and respected anarchist in Cuban history. This charismatic personality was a thinker and author whose writings first appeared in 1883 in *El Obrero* ("The Worker"), the first Cuban paper to espouse a specifically anarchist position to the Cuban working class. He next wrote for *El Boletín del Gremio de Obreros* ("Workers' Guild Bulletin") in 1884-1885, which was directed toward tobacco workers. And in 1887 he founded the influential Havana paper, *El Productor* ("The Producer"), whose first issue appeared on July 12.

El Productor quickly became "must reading" among the working class in Havana, and by 1888 was publishing twice per week. In addition to San Martín, other prominent Cuban anarchists worked on the paper; these included Enrique Messonier, Manuel Fuentes, and Enrique Creci. *El Productor* had influence beyond the tobacco industry, and in fact represented the aspirations of the Cuban working class as a whole; it was the first Cuban paper to outline the idea of class struggle, and it offered Cuba's workers anarchism as a clear alternative to Spanish colonialism and capitalism.

Although based in Havana, the paper had correspondents in Santiago de las Vegas, Guanabacoa, Tampa, and Key West. The material it published included locally written pieces, letters to the editor, and translations of articles from European anarchist papers, such as *Le Revolté*, edited by the anarchist writer/geographer Elisée Reclus in Paris, and *La Acracia* (somewhat loosely, "The Place Without Rule[rs]") in Barcelona. *El Productor* was financed at least in part by the baker Rafael García, whom the Cuban historian Rivero Muñoz calls "a fervent partisan of the anarchist ideal." The paper was circulated within tobacco factories, in other industrial work places by the workers in those industries, and by those who produced it.

The strikes that shook the Cuban tobacco industry at the end of the decade were all organized by anarchists, and were inspired by *El Productor*, "the weekly consecrated to the defense of

working class socioeconomic interests.” The strike actions and the production of *El Productor* were backed by a committee in which many workers influenced by the ideas of the ARS participated. These included Pedro Merino, Francisco Domenech, Gervasio García Purón, Eduardo González Boves, Enrique Messonier and Enrique Creci. All of these were tobacco workers from various labor associations based in Havana.

In order to facilitate and coordinate the efforts of the various workers’ groups and *El Productor*, a revolutionary organization with anarchist roots was created—the Alianza Obrera (Workers’ Alliance). This Alliance, composed largely of the above-mentioned workers, provided the first test of the advocacy of an explicitly anarchist program among the Cuban working class. On October 1, 1887, following the foundation of the Alliance, and with the support of Roig San Martín in *El Productor*, the first Congreso Obrero de Cuba was celebrated in Havana, sponsored by another recently created workers’ organization, La Federación de Trabajadores de Cuba (FTC- Federation of Cuban Workers), which shared the revolutionary socialist orientation of the Alliance. This was the first assembly of workers in Cuba in a form designed to enduringly pursue their social aspirations. A majority of the members of the FTC were tobacco workers (that is workers in Cuba’s second largest industry), although members of many other trades participated—tailors, drivers, bakers, barrel makers, and stevedores among them.

The Congress issued a six-point “dictum”: 1) opposition to “all vestiges of authority” in workers’ organizations; 2) unity among workers’ organizations through a “federative pact” along the lines of the FRE; 3) complete freedom of action among all cooperating groups; 4) mutual cooperation; 5) solidarity among all groups; and 6) the prohibition within the federation of all political and religious doctrines (which in the coming years would be the most-discussed point). The “dictum” ended by expressing “the principles of emancipation . . . [and] confraternity . . . of all producers who people the Earth.”

Now more certain of an organization that would back them, the tobacco guild workers called more strikes in Havana. In October 1887, under the protective umbrella of the Federation, the Alliance, and *El Productor*, they called three strikes as a result of labor grievances. The first strike was called at the La Belinda factory; the second was called at the H. Hupmann factory, as a result of a worker being discharged without good reason and placed on an employers’ blacklist; and the third was called at the La Intimidad (The Intimacy) factory. This last strike lasted through most of November, and according to Roig in a November 24 article in *El Productor* titled “We Will Rectify [Things],” the issues were “apparently” resolved.

In July 1888, the tobacco workers called another strike at the Henry Clay tobacco factory in Havana. The strike had been provoked by the factory’s owner, Francisco González, who was president of the powerful Unión de Fabricantes (Manufacturers’ Union), which was an association of tobacco industry owners. Roig San Martín was personally involved in this strike, and it quickly spread to other Havana tobacco factories. When it became apparent that the tobacco workers were in solidarity with the strikers, the owners resorted to an industry-wide lockout.

In these circumstances, Roig San Martín stated in an editorial on September 13 that rather than abandon the strike, out-of-work strikers should emigrate to Tampa, Key West, or Mérida (on the Yucatan Peninsula). This was a dangerous course, but with it Roig indicated that the Cuban working class could now defy both the Cuban capitalists and the Spanish colonial authorities.

The members of the *Círculo de Trabajadores*-another anarchist-oriented workers' organization, founded in Havana in 1885 and with a large headquarters that contained the offices of many workers' associations as well as a secular school for 500 poor children-met on September 26 and agreed to begin collecting donations to support the workers out in the streets because of the strikes/lockout. According to the American historian Gerald A. Poyo, they also sent three of their comrades, Fernando Royo, Eduardo González Boves, and Isidro Grau to Key West to solicit aid from the tobacco workers there.

Finally, in the October 18 issue of *El Productor*, Roig San Martín announced that "the [Manufacturers' Union] . . . has decided to enter into negotiations with the factory [workers'] commissions . . . [and that in this manner things will be] resolved in more than 100 factories." These negotiations resulted in an agreement that was a victory for the tobacco workers.

The organizing efforts among tobacco workers were not, however, confined to Havana. The *Alianza Obrera* was also well received in the U.S. centers of the tobacco industry, Key West and Tampa. In 1887, workers in Key West organized the *Federación Local de Tabaqueros*, which replaced a previous reformist association known as the *Unión*, and which embraced almost all of the tobacco workers of the city. The organizers were two outstanding anarchists, Enrique Messonier and Enrique Creci, who together with Enrique Roig San Martín constituted the anarchist trio called "the three Enriques." Roig San Martín was widely read among Cuban workers, and his writings had a major impact on the so-called Cuban social question; Messonier was an outstanding orator and organizer; and Creci was a man of action in addition to being a writer of some talent who grappled with the problems of labor and organization.

In Tampa as in Key West, the most important industry was the production of tobacco and cigarettes, and the labor organization remained in the hands of anarchists who had arrived from Cuba, or who traveled back and forth between the two lands. Some of the outstanding militant workers of this period were Carlos Baliño, Segura, Leal, Palomino and Ramón Rivero y Rivero, all of whom held anarchist beliefs.

In 1889, the workers called a general strike in Key West, this time with the support of Havana's workers. The emigration of workers from Havana during the previous year's strike, the voyages between Cuba and the U.S. by anarchist organizers such as Creci, Messonier, and González Boves, the presence of anarchist workers such as Palomino and Guillermo Sorondo in Key West and Tampa, and the reading of *El Productor* in the tobacco workshops had created among the tobacco workers a consciousness favorable to the ideas advanced by Roig San Martín.

During all of 1889 minor strikes had broken out in various tobacco workplaces in the U.S., owing to abuses by the owners and salary demands by the workers. This labor unrest was appreciated in the Havana tobacco factories, and there was a feeling of solidarity on both sides of the Straits of Florida, thanks at least in part to *La Alianza*. By the middle of the year, tension was noticeable in worker-owner relations in Florida, and strikes had broken out in Tampa and Ybor City. These presaged the general strike in Key West.

The workers there had already founded the *Federación Local de Tabaqueros de Cayo Hueso*, and Rivero y Rivero journeyed to Havana to inform *La Alianza* about the possibility of a strike in Key West. So, when the general strike broke out there in October 1889, the tobacco

workers were well prepared. The causes of the strike were working conditions, salary demands, and, in general, the enormous differences in living conditions between those who owned the factories and those who worked in them. Key West was entirely dependent upon the tobacco industry, and the strike called by the Federación Local with the support of La Alianza paralyzed the city.

The Cuban separatists (that is, those favoring national independence) exiled in Key West understood the danger to their cause posed by the anarchists and their strike, and came out on the side of the owners. This did nothing to add to their popularity. They falsely accused the anarchist organizers of the strike of being in the service of Spain, and they unleashed violent strike-breakers against the striking workers. Creci and Messonier were threatened, detained, and finally expelled from Key West by the local authorities, who were at the service of the factory owners.

For their part, a number of out-of-work strikers asked for transport to Havana, thus employing the mirror image of the tactic employed in the previous year's strike. The Spanish colonial authorities very opportunistically decided to "protect the interest of [their] subjects" and facilitated the exodus of workers from Key West to Havana. (This was opportunistic in that the independence movement was financed largely by Cuban business owners in Florida, and by helping the strikers the colonial authorities were dealing an economic blow to the "separatistas.")

Finally, at the beginning of 1890, despite the owners' use of strike-breakers and violence, and the expulsion of strike leaders, the strike ended with a triumph for Florida's tobacco workers. The owners came to an accord with the strike committee and acceded to demands for a pay increase.

In the midst of all this, the premature death of Roig San Martín on August 29, 1889 at age 46 from a diabetic coma a few days after being freed from jail by the Spanish colonial government, was a hard blow to Cuba's anarchists. He was mourned by workers throughout Cuba as well as those in Tampa, Key West, Mérida, and New Orleans, and according to the daily paper *La Lucha* ("The Struggle") more than 10,000 people attended his funeral rites. Thousands of floral wreaths were placed upon his tomb, and *El Productor* dedicated an extraordinary issue to him on September 5th, in which Roig's closest comrades and collaborators paid tribute to him. In his own words, Roig had always considered himself "a precursor" who knew that he would never receive "material recompense for [his] labors," but who was confident that his successors would achieve his goals "through the uninterrupted transmission of our [anarchist] doctrines."

Roig had little peace during his few years of notoriety. His defense of the workers, his social opinions, and his economic concepts caused him to come into conflict with almost everyone. *El Partido Liberal Autonomista* (PLA), which attempted to gain recruits in Cuba's labor movement, suffered the attacks of Roig; and his stinging denunciations of creole autonomism were famous. At the same time, according to Roig, Spanish colonialism was the principal cause of the abuse and ignorance of the Cuban people, and he refused to stifle his attacks on the colonial government, an activity for which he ended up in jail. The specific cause was an incendiary article in *El Productor* titled "O pan o plomo" ("Either Bread or Lead").

As regards national separatism, with which one would logically think that he had an affinity—at least in the political if not the social sphere—Roig was bitterly opposed to it, and had little

regard for the republican ideal. He declared that it would not be desirable if a Cuban workers' society were to follow the example of the Latin American republics and the United States, which he sarcastically termed "the model republic"; he believed that establishment of a Cuban republic would only continue the persecution of the working class begun under Spanish rule.

The clash between Roig's anarchist ideas and his opposition to separatism on the one hand, and the separatist ideas and antagonism toward anarchism of many separatist leaders on the other, divided Cuba into two sociopolitical spheres and weakened both in relation to Spain.

The marxist writers of our day attribute to Roig the crime of lacking sympathy for the separatist cause, and at the same time attempt to locate him in their ideological entourage, declaring in all seriousness that he was "in transition toward marxism." We can understand what this "transition" was when we realize that it consisted only of Roig's having read and cited Marx; like any other anarchist of his time (Bakunin, Reclus, Cafiero, et al.), he would have felt obligated to be informed about everything relating to socialism.

Roig is also accused by marxist sectarians of "national nihilism" and "apoliticism" among other heresies, ignoring the many contributions he made: tirelessly organizing and advocating workers' struggles, general strikes, boycotts, etc., in both Havana and the United States, in defense of the most humble sectors of the working class at the close of the 19th century. This is an outright defamation, and is a good example of the marxist tendency to rewrite history under the cover of nationalism.

The actions of other Cuban anarchists of the time were also consistent with the ideas they held: they advocated and practiced keeping the Cuban labor movement uninvolved in electoral politics and government pacts, because they understood that the labor movement had nothing to gain from representatives of the state, whatever their political stripe.

During this stage of organization and struggle, the relations between the Cuban anarchists and the colonial authorities steadily worsened. The Spanish government tolerated union activities to a certain point, and as the anarchists had decided not to intervene in the island's politics and to stay on the margins of the separatist-colonial-autonomy debate, the authorities established a system of "vigilant tolerance." The anarchists took advantage of this, and also of the changing of military governors and their interpretation of the laws concerning workers' associations and the press. Captains general such as Manuel Salamanca were patient with the anarchists' activities, at least in the interregnums between the seizure of power by military governors. This was the situation on April 20, 1890.

On that night, over a dozen workers assembled in Havana in a hall of the *Círculo de Trabajadores* (Circle of Workers) and decided to hold a demonstration on May Day, in accord with the decision of the Second International in Paris to mark the day honoring the Haymarket martyrs. This proposed workers' commemoration would consist of "a public and peaceful demonstration," the purpose of which was that "the government, the upper classes, and the public in general . . . should know the aspirations of the working people." They then produced a manifesto making public this decision.

On May 1, 1890, more than 3000 workers marched through the streets of Havana to the stanzas of *The Marsellaise*, celebrating May Day for the first time in Cuba. Following the march, the anarchists held a meeting where 23 orators spoke at the "filled to overflowing"

Skating Ring hall, attacking the social, moral and economic conditions in Cuba, and demonstrating that there was now an active anarchist presence within the Cuban proletariat.

Following this public success, the members of the *Círculo de Trabajadores* inspired several strikes, and the social environment began to heat up rapidly. The *Círculo* began to include not only tobacco workers, but also workers from other trades such as firemen, carpenters, typographers, hotel and restaurant workers, etc. This is to say that for the first time almost all of the workers of Havana as well as workers from some interior parts of the island were organized on a federative basis. Of course it would be an exaggeration to claim that all of these workers' associations were composed of anarchists, but it's beyond doubt that their leading members and the agreements they made adhered to anarchist ideals.

Because of its worker orientation, we're also dealing here with the first steps toward what in the years to come would be known as anarchosyndicalism. Havana at this time had a workers' organization of the first rank, clearly the equal of the *Federación Regional Española*. According to the well known Cuban historian, Moreno Friginals, "The workers' movement in Havana was the most developed and the most class conscious in all of Latin America."

At this time, after the mysterious deaths of the Spanish commander, General Salamanca, and of a transitional colonial governor, another officer, Captain-General Camilo García Polavieja-known for his arbitrariness and despotic methods-took command of Cuba's colonial administration. At the same time, a wave of strikes persisted, social well-being continued to deteriorate, and a director of the tobacco section of the reformist *Unión Obrera*, Menéndez Areces, was stabbed to death. He had insulted and made charges against Roig San Martín, resulting in Roig's arrest and imprisonment. Menéndez Areces was also thought to be a police informer.

The colonial authorities evidently thought that the only beneficiaries of Menéndez' death were the *Círculo* anarchists-or at least they used his death as a convenient pretext-and they detained 11 workers who belonged to the *Círculo*, accusing them of Menéndez' murder. At the subsequent trial, the workers proved their innocence and were absolved of the crime. Not satisfied with this verdict, García Polavieja, in December 1890, ordered the shutdown of *El Productor*, bringing an end to the second stage of this Havana anarchist periodical. The repression from the "Christian General" intensified, and shortly after the closing of *El Productor*, he also ordered the shutdown of the *Alianza Obrera*, and prohibited its activities.

These persecutions on the part of the Captain-General, perhaps made because he had little sympathy for anarchists, perhaps because of orders from the Overseas Ministry in Madrid, didn't intimidate Cuba's anarchists, who quickly submerged themselves in clandestine activities. For their part, Cuban and Spanish capitalists-manufacturers, industrialists, and merchants-were enriched more and more every day by the sweat of Cuban workers, who were treated almost as badly as the black slaves of old. These creole and Spanish capitalists feared workers' organizations such as the *Alianza Obrera*, and hated Cuba's anarchists with a passion. They used their influence to create reformist workers' organizations, and to pressure the government in Madrid to repress the activities of revolutionary workers' organizations in Cuba, the same as in Spain.

Under these conditions, and with a good dose of secrecy during the celebration of May Day in 1891, Cuba's anarchists agreed to convene a congress in early 1892, which met in January

after García Polavieja was no longer Captain-General, and the authorities were showing a more tolerant attitude toward the anarchists.

The Congreso Regional Cubano met from January 15 to January 19, 1892, and was met with jubilation. It didn't use the word "national," not only because Cuba was still considered a region of Spain, but also because anarchists had by this time repudiated the concept of nationalism. Seventy-four workers met in this assembly; it included delegates from all of the workers' associations and trades that existed in Cuba. The Congress's accords-after passionate discussion-included the words, "the working class will not emancipate itself until it embraces the ideas of revolutionary socialism," which in these years meant the ideas of anarchism. The Congress also declared that its members felt themselves "tied to all the oppressed of the Earth" and in "sympathy . . . with every step toward liberty."

Finally, in reference to the latent political problem existing among the island's advocates of integration with Spain, autonomy, or independence, the second clause of the Congress's manifesto states: The working masses of Cuba will not and can not come to be an obstacle to the triumph of the people's aspirations for emancipation, because it would be absurd that a person who aspires to individual liberty would oppose the collective liberty of a people, even though the collective liberty desired is that of emancipation from the tutelage of another people.

It's necessary to note that in this paragraph, which is without doubt the key to the future relationship between Cuba's anarchists and separatists, the anarchists established the difference between social liberty and political emancipation. Liberation from foreign rule had been contemplated by the independence movements since the first days of the 19th century, and would still be some decades in coming. Independence advocates had made what was effectively the unilateral decision to put breaking with Spain above all else, putting into the enterprise their will, power, riches, families, and even life itself in order to create a Cuban republic. The Cuban anarchists, for their part, understood that social liberty was more important than the republic proposed by the independence movement, and that a republic would bring little or no benefit to the workers, as Roig had argued. Nevertheless, in the 1892 Congress the anarchists declared that they couldn't oppose the independence aspirations of so many Cubans.

The independence temptation had gained many recruits among Cuban workers on the island, and above all in the emigrant enclaves of Key West and Tampa. The social conflicts and the strikes which had taken place in the previous decade had created a crisis between the tobacco-industry anarchists on the one hand, and the factory owners, bosses, and various capitalists on the other. The most notorious independence advocates had made common cause with the capitalists for simple economic reasons-their ability to contribute economically to the independence movement. In this manner, the ground shifted. Now there was a dangerous split between worker-oriented anarchists and independence advocates taking money from tobacco capitalism. The social question (i.e., workers' rights, welfare, and control of work) had been dramatically displaced by the political question (i.e., the matter of who controls the state apparatus).

The situation, however, began to change rapidly in the first years of the 1890s. The manifesto of the Congress of 1892 is evidence that Cuba's anarchists were inclined to reach an accord with the separatists, and thus cease being used by the Spaniards as a divisive element in combat against the separatists. This shift in position did not, of course, imply the renunciation

of the anarchists' revolutionary cause. Nonetheless, the second clause of the manifesto unleashed a bitter polemic among the anarchists that would endure for years, between those who favored first achieving independence and then pursuing anarchist goals, and those who looked upon the independence movement as a worse-than-useless waste of time for working people

The response of the Spanish authorities to the Congress of 1892 was the prohibition of free assembly, the seizure and temporary closing of *El Productor*, the prohibition of workers' meetings, and the persecution of the *Círculo de Trabajadores* and the *Junta Central de Trabajadores* (formerly the *Junta Central de Artesanos*). Almost all of the organizers of the Congress were jailed and some were exiled, obliging the anarchists to return to clandestine activities. In the words of the orthodox marxist writer, Aleida Plasencia: "At the beginning of 1892, the workers were persecuted, more for their class-conscious activities than for their independence activities." This statement reflects the true nature of things at the time, and also underlines the surprise and violent reaction of the colonial authorities when they realized the contents of the *Manifiesto del Congreso de '92*.

The Cubans preparing for the independence struggle operated primarily from the coast of Florida, mainly from Tampa and Key West—working class focal points, which for years housed the highest numbers of Cubans in exile. These Cubans organized themselves into unions, and these cities were enclaves of patriots, anarchists, separatists, and enemies of Spain in general. It was precisely in these years of the early 1890s that Jose Martí, the most notable Cuban patriot of the time, recruited adherents to the idea of creating unified primary principles first, and armed struggle later, among the different separatist groups exiled in the United States.

At the same time, the Cuban and Spanish workers in the different branches of the tobacco industry contemplated the Cuban question from a social or internationalist point of view. Martí, with his eloquent speech, directed his words toward these workers with the idea of making them see the social advantages that would come with his dreamed-of republic. In contrast to Roig San Martín's fears of a republic full of bloodshed and hate, Martí promised them a republic filled with the sense of liberty and social justice, "with everyone included, and for the good of everyone."

Influenced by the persuasive oratory of Martí, the majority of exiled anarchists began to support the independence cause. This was affirmed years later by the anarchist Pedro Esteve in his *Memoria de la Conferencia Anarquista Internacional*: "Our ideals were accepted" by the anarchists who publicly backed the independence movement, but unfortunately they were not realized in this particular area. "In these anarchists one discovered that the patriotic fire was not extinguished. Below the ashes there were hot coals . . . and blowing on the ashes revived the coals, turning them into a devastating flame." These words of Esteve couldn't have been more correct; and it was precisely the oratory of Martí that blew on the ashes and produced the separatist conflagration.

Martí managed to decisively influence many notable anarchists, such as Creci, Messonier, Rivero y Rivero, and Baliño, all of whom came to accept his revolutionary theses. The majority of them, however, continued to hold to the ideas of political liberty and revolutionary anarchism, with the exceptions of Rivero y Rivero and Baliño, who fully crossed over to the simple independence camp. The support of these anarchist elements within the tobacco industry for the independence movement was immense, as much in the moral as the politico-

economic sphere. Martí jubilantly received the Manifiesto del Congreso de '92, and at almost the same time decided to found a "revolutionary" separatist party, composed primarily of tobacco workers inside and outside of Cuba, who were now able to reconcile their anarchist and separatist sentiments.

At its founding in the first months of 1892, the Partido Revolucionario Cubano (PRC), in which Martí served as a delegate, was composed of autonomous, decentralized, revolutionary clubs, with statutes and structures embodying direct democracy. (The PRC was similar in many ways to the later Partido Liberal Mexicano, founded by the Mexican anarchist and revolutionary, Ricardo Flores Magón.) This is to say that the PRC was not a typical electoral political party, but rather an overall revolutionary movement, a way to independence. The anarchists who grouped together under the separatist banner were mainly in two organizations, the first titled with a certain amount of irony-Club Roig San Martín, and the second titled Fermín Salvochea, in honor of an Andalusian anarchist who was admired by Martí, and who was a great defender, from prison, of the Cuban cause.

In regard to the tactical alliance between anarchists and separatists during the war of 1895, it's necessary to clarify one point: Martí had some idiosyncratic ideas about anarchism. In regard to labor matters, he considered anarchist precepts appropriate and just, but at the same time he abhorred the violence created by the class struggle between workers and the propertied class, and he tended as well to mistakenly differentiate between European and Cuban anarchism. Martí possessed, in contrast to most of his separatist contemporaries, a strong social conscience. He deplored class disparities and was convinced that the future republic would be the impartial solution to social problems, "for the equitable benefit of all classes," without violent impositions from any party.

For their part, the anarchists in Cuba and in exile, allied or not allied to political separatism, had a social agenda different from that of Martí. With Roig San Martín's example before them, they aspired to operate more freely than under the Spanish straitjacket; and a republic would give them that space. In reality, neither separatism, nor the democratic virtues of Martí, nor the ideal of a just republican government, were in those years the focus of the anarchists' revolutionary agenda. What they aspired to and obstinately fought for inside a republican regime was the good of the Cuban proletariat. "More freedom of action and movement" in pursuit of workers' rights was the goal, and what good would a republic be if it didn't serve the interests of the workers? Thus Martí dreamed of a republic as an end in itself; the anarchists regarded it only as a means.

In 1893, according to Pedro Esteve, a "tame tyranny" existed in Cuba, that is to say, another period of calm, colonial government readjustment. The Havana anarchists evidently took advantage of this to regroup and to reopen, in mid May, the Círculo de Trabajadores in another location, changing its name to the Sociedad General de Trabajadores (SGT). That year, according to the Spanish historian, Casanovas Codina, the May Day commemoration took place "in exceptional conditions . . . It was celebrated with meetings in several cities and towns in the western part of the island."

During the depression of 1893, the actions of the industry owners in Key West provoked a very critical situation in which both the authorities and thugs in the pay of the owners carried out violent acts. The tobacco bosses, allied with the local authorities, formed an armed vigilante group, the Key West Rifles, for the purpose of intimidating the tobacco workers and forcing them to "obey the law." In this conflict, the anarchists and strikers had the support of

the separatists, who delivered that support after observing the position of their enemy, the Spanish government.

The Spanish authorities in Cuba took advantage of this tense situation in Key West to weaken the nascent separatist movement in that city. With the idea of excising the anarchists from the separatist movement, the interim Captain-General, José Arderiu, attempted to win the support of the Havana anarchists through bribes. This maneuver failed, and both Cuban and Spanish libertarian-oriented workers in Key West continued, at least for the time being, to be allied with José Martí's already-founded Partido Revolucionario Cubano (PRC), which took the side of the workers.

But the unemployed Cuban workers in Key West were in a lamentable state of misery, and many of them returned to Cuba. The conditions in Havana were no better than those in Key West, and the workers continued to live under horrible conditions despite their move to Cuba. The separatist movement had received monies collected from these workers, and with their return to Cuba and with the economic crash, its financial power waned considerably.

The massive unemployment in the tobacco industry didn't help the anarchists of the SGT (formerly the *Círculo de Trabajadores*), who were unable to devise a solution to the dilemma, and the SGT itself suffered under the terrible situation. However, in the words of Casanovas Codina, "The arrival in Cuba of the workers . . . doubtless contributed . . . to consciousness of the PRC campaign . . . to unchain the war [of independence]."

This economic destabilization had as a consequence the weakening of the social process in which the Cuban anarchists worked. Nevertheless, at the end of 1893 a strike at the *La Rosa Española* tobacco factory broke out in Key West over the contracting of workers brought from Cuba. The owners' response left little hope—they ordered the importation from Havana of 300 Spaniards to replace those workers who had called the strike.

A commission of owners was formed to journey to Havana to speak with Lieutenant-General Callejas, and also with "two young leaders of the SGT, . . . Sabino Muñiz and José González Aguirre," with the idea that they would recruit strikebreakers to work in Key West. Of course Muñiz and González refused this proposal. Eventually, though, strike-breakers were recruited; but the solidarity shown by the anarchists toward the strikers in Key West was manifest. Politically, the plan of the Spanish authorities, in collusion with the tobacco bosses, was to fractionalize the continuing debate between anarchists and separatists by adding the nationalist ingredient, Cubans vs. Spaniards.

The anarchists, who maintained their principles during this time by not accepting a pact with the owners' commission and the Spanish authorities, were the losers in this affair. The separatists, however, who favored drawing a line between Cubans and Spaniards, fared well. In Key West, while all of this was going on, the strike ended with a pay increase for the workers. The strikebreakers received a hostile reception from club-bearing separatists and anarchists—united for the first time in a social struggle for workers' rights.

The disturbances in Key West had repercussions in Washington through the efforts of Horatio Rubens, the PRC attorney following instructions from José Martí, who persuaded the American authorities to prohibit the contracting of foreign workers via Cuba. So while the anarchists in Havana suffered a temporary setback, those in Key West benefitted from this situation.

Given the weakness of the SGT, it was easy for the authorities to prohibit the commemoration of May Day in 1894. Pedro Esteve relates that at about this time he visited Havana for three months, during which time he published a weekly of short duration titled *Archivo Social*, and that he also interviewed Creci, before returning to Paterson, New Jersey to work at *El Despertar* (“The Awakening”). Esteve, who saw war coming to Cuba, felt no sympathy for the independence movement, despite his friendship with Creci; he thought, like Roig San Martín, that a separatist war would benefit no one, and he would oppose the participation of anarchists in the coming independence battle on either side—separatist or colonial. Esteve favored, rather, an attitude of apolitical neutrality.

In February 1895 the Cuban war of independence instigated by Martí broke out, and the anarchists who had rallied to his cause found themselves converted to combatants. Among these, Enrique Creci, who was living at the time in Tampa, stands out. In 1895 he founded the paper *El Esclavo* (“The Slave”), advocating the independence of Cuba from Spain, and debating the matter with Esteve in Paterson and with Cristóbal Fuente in Havana. Creci returned to Cuba in 1896, and died in a field hospital in Matanzas from machete wounds suffered in combat with Spanish troops.

Messonier, for his part, was finally expelled from Cuba in 1893 after making a speech in the Payret Theater in favor of independence. After his expulsion, he played the double role of anarchoseparatist, and debated the matter of independence with the rest of the anarchist world.

To the misfortune of all, the social changes promised by Martí died with him when he met a premature death at the hands of Spanish troops on May 19, 1895, only 44 days after the war began.

Throughout this war period (1895-1898), Cuban anarchists both at home and abroad tended to act more in accord with their principles than with their nationality. While in Tampa and Key West anarchists such as Creci, Messonier, and Miranda were in favor of the insurrection, in Havana one heard opinions now in favor of independence, now in favor of anti-war neutrality. While Cuban anarchists in the United States tended to rally to the separatist flag, or at least to contribute economically to it, in Havana many anarchists were of the opinion that the calamity of a civil war should be opposed on principle, and that such a war would make their task no easier.

At the same time, the differences that existed in the anarchist camp during the war were not totally divisive, especially in Cuba where, despite their opinions about the war, many anarchists actively cooperated with the separatists. For example, the arrival of Valeriano Weyler—the new captain-general of the island, and a man noted for his lack of scruples and abundant cruelty—was met with an unfortunately unsuccessful dynamite attack on his life at his headquarters. The attack was carried out by three anarchists and one separatist who came from Key West.

In Havana, leaflets circulated urging Spanish troops posted to Cuba and Cuban colonial volunteers to desert their posts and cross over to the insurrectionary side. There were also dynamite attacks “in various places in Havana . . . such as bridges and gas lines,” according to Casanovas, who imputed such acts to the anarchists. Retribution was not long in coming. Weyler “sternly repressed the labor movement; he prohibited readings in tobacco workshops, closed the SGT, and deported many anarchists.”

Even though, according to Casanovas, “The contribution of the workers’ movement to the separatists cause was enormous,” it wasn’t universal. Many anarchists opposed the war on principle, and believed that in no way would it ease the way to their goal of social liberty. They thought, as did Roig San Martín, that having a republic in Cuba would not change the social situation, holding up as examples the other republics in the Americas.

From Alaska to Patagonia anarchists were pursued with the same zeal as they were in Spain. So, as was to be expected, anti-separatist-war sentiments aroused bitter discussions among anarchists of the time; and despite accusations, the anti-war anarchists felt themselves in no way to be allies of Spain.

To the violence unleashed by the separatist rebellion, the Spanish government of Cánovas del Castillo responded with its customary violence without quarter, violence so criminal and repressive that it had little parallel in the Americas. Weyler had been sent with the categorical order to end the rebellion using any means necessary. A part of those means, the “Reconcentration Decree,” caused more casualties among Cuban campesinos than did Spanish bullets. Hunger and disease liquidated in less than three years almost an entire generation of Cubans, claiming more than 300,000 victims.

This atrocity was intellectually authored in 1896 by the Catholic curate Juan Bautista Casas, the Governor of the Diocese of Havana. In the summer of that year, and under official ecclesiastical approval, his work, *La guerra separatista en Cuba, sus causas, medios de terminarla y evitar otras* (“The Separatist War in Cuba, Its Causes, Means of Ending It and Avoiding Others”), was published in Madrid. In his essay, Bautista advocated a strategy similar to the American “strategic hamlet” program in Viet Nam—“the concentration of campesinos” in order that they be unable to aid the rebels. Bautista proposed that “our forces destroy and obliterate all of the hovels.”

Following Bautista’s proposal, Captain-General Weyler, under the direct orders of the Spanish premier, Cánovas, ordered that all of Cuba’s campesinos concentrate themselves in the nearest towns and cities, under pain of being shot, and a portion of the Spanish colonial army dedicated itself to dislodging Cuba’s peasants from their homes. As was to be expected, all of Cuba’s towns and cities were inundated by hungry campesinos with no means of earning a living. Neither Weyler nor the Spanish government had made any plans whatsoever to deal with this contingency, and multitudes died—not only among the campesinos, but also among the residents of the inundated urban areas.

Mortality reached figures unknown in Cuba for hundreds of years. The Spaniards had taken the war to Cuba’s civilians. They ended their imperial rule in the same manner they had commenced it 400 years earlier, when they exterminated all of the island’s indigenous people. The magnitude of the “Reconcentration Decree” genocide is aptly described by the British historian Hugh Thomas: “[Proportionally] it compares to Russia’s losses in World War II, Serbia’s in World War I, and [is] probably double the proportions in the Spanish or American civil wars.”

The armed separatist movement responded to the Spanish-created horror with terror. By August 1897, there was a stalemate—the Cuban separatists had made no substantial progress, and Weyler had not pacified Cuba.

While the war lashed the Cuban countryside and the Spanish government was committing unprecedented genocide, the debate among Cuba's anarchists was coming to its end. Adrian del Valle (Palmiro de Lidia), a Catalan anarchist who had known Pedro Esteve well in Barcelona, had moved to Cuba in 1895, from which he was promptly expelled to the United States. Reflecting upon this useless dispute, del Valle proposed a way out of the labyrinth of pro-and anti-insurrection disputes among the anarchists.

This was the first time that the matter had been discussed at an international level, and it wouldn't be the last time that anarchists debated whether or not to support "wars of national liberation." Del Valle reasoned that it was better not to acrimoniously oppose those *compañeros* who believed in the advantages of independence, deducing that the only beneficiaries of this polemic would be the Spanish authorities who had done so much damage to both Spanish and Cuban anarchists. In the end, del Valle successfully recommended a moratorium in the debate.

The cruelty of the war and its enormous consequences created great social tension in Spain, which in turn generated acid criticism of the Cánovas government by the Spanish anarchists. These sentiments were shared by those anarchists favoring Cuban independence such as Salvochea, Pedro Vallina, and the periodical *El Corsario* ("The Corsair"), published in La Coruña, Spain. From Paris, for his part, PRC representative Dr. Ramón Emeterio Betances helped to foment strikes and protests within Spain against the war in Cuba. For its part the Spanish federalism of Pi y Margall and Salmerón also advanced independence as the solution to the conflict.

As an example of the divided feelings of anarchists about the Cuban separatist war, in January 1896 the French Committee for a Free Cuba formed in Paris under the direction of Betances, and with the support of Charles Malato. This committee was composed principally of French anarchists such as Archille Steens, Eliséé Reclús, Eli Reclús, Louise Michelle, Léopold Lacour, Jean Grave, Sébastien Fauré, Paul Adam, and Malato. In contrast, Peter Kropotkin in London and Emma Goldman in the United States maintained attitudes of neutrality.

All of this was soon made academic by events in Spain and by the U.S. entry into the conflict. The principal and first cause of what came to be called "The Disaster" was the assassination of the Spanish chief of state, Antonio Cánovas, in Santa Águeda, Spain in August 1897 in response to the torture and murder of Spanish anarchists in the Montjuich prison, and in response to the colonialist horrors being perpetrated in Cuba and in the Philippines. The disappearance of the principal author of Spanish foreign policy over the previous 20 years was the final blow to the already decadent Spanish empire. The execution of Cánovas, committed by Miguel Angiolillo in cooperation with Betances, changed the destiny of five countries. The elderly, incompetent successor to Cánovas, Práxedes Mateo Sagasta, advanced an equivocal politic toward Cuba, decreeing an autonomy that satisfied no one; it was too little and too late-demonstrating only the weakness of Spanish colonialism.

The U.S. government took advantage of this situation by launching a war against Spain in April 1898 and by almost immediately invading Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico; and almost as quickly the U.S. forced what had been imperial Spain to sign a peace accord in August of the same year. The war formally ended in the humiliation of the Spanish government with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in December 1898, which decreed the loss of all Spanish overseas territories. This was an unparalleled and well-deserved debacle.

The Treaty of Paris, under which Spain delivered its colonies to the mercies of the U.S. government and U.S. capitalism, at the same time guaranteed the protection of the properties, industries, banks, businesses and lands possessed by Spanish citizens in Cuba. Ironically, the Cuban independence movement, allied with the Yankees, had won the war, but had lost the peace. After 30 years of struggle for independence, Cuba shifted from the yoke of Spanish colonialism to that of Yankee imperialism.