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Myth and reality
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women's liberation, self-defense, and the creation of mechanisms of popular power that return to society the management of life itself.

Strikes and Art

Between 1960 and 1970, anarchists had lost their influence in the working class, although they continued to participate in various unions, primarily in Guayaquil. In Quito, the libertarians' activity was minimal, if not imperceptible. There are no clear records other than a certain sympathy for the publication of texts; also, according to Alexei Páez, some anarchists joined the Ecuadorian MIR, participating in insurrectionary acts. A few anarchists joined, without much involvement (probably as individuals), the United Workers' Front (FUT) organizations during the 1980s, an organization that would lead the famous "national strikes" during the same years and up to the present day. Jaime Guevara and Carlos Michelena, Quito artists linked to the popular world, established themselves as anarchist leaders on the fringes of the Ecuadorian left, which was predominantly Marxist.

Transform or disappear

The contemporary generation of Ecuadorian anarchists from the late 1990s and early 2000s, primarily linked to the punk counterculture, the alternative world, and even those who opted for mass political and social work, faced the following dilemma: transform or disappear. Rafael Correa's rise to power in 2007 marked a before and after in the forms of popular struggle. The anti-neoliberal slogans of the social movements that overthrew three presidents coalesced into a government with an anti-neoliberal and progressive discourse that represented an interesting process (with all the possible contradictions and criticisms), now in crisis. Ideological abstentionism, the worship of the social base, and anti-statist immediacy have weakened anarchism in its quest to establish itself as a real alternative for a society like Ecuador's. This fact reveals the need to rethink political theory and action, the role of the State,

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were responsible for murdering between 300 and 1,000 people, women, children, and unarmed men. This was the baptism of blood for the Ecuadorian working class. Following the massacre, several unions that participated in the mobilization, including the FTRE, were banned. Many anarchists were imprisoned, and one disappeared (the FTRE secretary, Peruvian Juan Huapaya). The silence among the working class continued. In the following years, some anarchists who formed the FTRE joined the ranks of the PCE.

The revolution and the exiles

The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the revolutionary process convened by Spanish anarchists were not unfamiliar topics to Ecuadorian libertarians. Newspapers and testimonies bear witness to this. Before the formation of the FTRE, they maintained sporadic contact with Spanish anarchists passing through the port of Guayaquil. After the Republican defeat and the rise of Franco's fascism, several exiles arrived in Ecuador, including José Peirats, the celebrated libertarian historian who, in 1940, along with other exiles, established an anarchist commune in the country's jungle; and Armando A. Trabanco Díaz, who worked on the establishment of the Pichincha Master Mechanics Union (1944). These exiles maintained contact with other Spanish exiles in charge of editing the newspaper Tierra y Libertad in Mexico, a publication to which the Ecuadorian anarchists Alejo Capelo and Alejandro Atienza also contributed. The Spanish libertarians present in Ecuador were associated with leftist parties and circles. Their activities remain unknown due to a lack of sources.

sacre of November 15, 1922, erupted in late October among railroad workers in the city of Durán, a few kilometers from Guayaquil. This sector was one of the most militant in the labor movement, and evidence of libertarian propaganda has been found, probably not directly linked to the Guayaquil anarchists but to Jamaican immigrants. After the railway workers' victory, the strike spirit spread to Guayaquil. Workers demanded higher wages and a reduction in the price of basic necessities inflated by the economic crisis, a result of the fall in the value of cocoa on the world market, a commodity of great importance to the national economy at the time.

Bakers, electrical workers, tram workers, printers, peanut farmers, and many others paralyzed Guayaquil beginning on November 7. Security forces were quartered, and the workers took control of the city, marking the first demonstration of popular power in Ecuador. Organized into brigades, the workers were responsible for maintaining order and security in the city. The provincial governor requested permission from the FTRE to travel on the streets of Guayaquil; no incidents of any kind were reported during the workers' control of Guayaquil.

The Great Workers' Assembly (GAT) became the highest body of the striking Guayaquil workers. This body brought together the majority of the FTRE and remnants of the old COG. The GAT's slogans called for wage increases, reduced working hours, and a reduction in the price of basic products. However, the anarchist-led "revolutionary leadership" was quickly overtaken by the agro-export sectors, who placed their own list of demands (a lower dollar exchange rate to address the cocoa crisis) above the workers' interests. The anarchists were defeated and unable to contain the popular upheaval.

On November 15, a large demonstration was called, attended by thousands. José Luis Tamayo, President of the Republic, then declared that enough was enough and that everything must return to calm at any cost. The Marañón and Cazadores de Los Ríos battalions, under the command of General Enrique Barriga,

The history of anarchism in Ecuador remains a great mystery. Many historians of the Ecuadorian labor movement have touched on the subject superficially or overlooked its historical importance. This neglect may well stem from the partisan zeal of some historians, who date the modern origin of the labor movement to the founding of the Ecuadorian Socialist Party (PSE) in 1926, and then the Communist Party of Ecuador (PCE) in 1931, as well as the difficult access to bibliographic sources and testimonies from those who formed the first libertarian organizations in the country.

The works of Elías Muñoz Vicuña, Pedro Saad, Manuel Augustín Aguirre, Patricio Ycaza Cortés, and Oswaldo Albornoz, among others, address the history of the labor movement, describing the role of anarchists in the formation of the first "class struggle" unions at the beginning of the 20th century. Alexei Páez and Alejo Capelo, a surviving libertarian from the original core of Creole anarchism, have so far, not without difficulties and inaccuracies, been the ones who have addressed the subject in greatest depth. Now that all of these anarchists and historians of the Ecuadorian labor movement are dead, the task remains just as complex today, despite the existence of a greater number of organized and available sources for consultation.

Anarchism was an important revolutionary movement that actively intervened in the earliest and most significant labor struggles of the first 40 years of the 20th century. In the following decades, until approximately the 1970s, anarchists continued to participate in the labor movement. From the late 1990s to the present day, anarchism has experienced a weak resurgence, generally in tune with punk counterculture and art. While a small group has migrated to more mature positions regarding political and social work, it nonetheless remains a marginal movement within the country's left.

The libertarian origins of the Ecuadorian labor movement

From 1910 to 1943, there are records of anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist press. This period produced a first generation of anarchists primarily linked to the working-class environment of Guayaquil, the main port and a city of vital importance to the national economy. Not only did merchandise enter and leave the port, but so did ideas and press from different ideological orientations, contributing to the formation of the country's first socialist and anarchist groups. Unlike countries like Brazil, Argentina, or Uruguay, where European migration had brought revolutionary-minded individuals who formed large libertarian trade union centers—the Brazilian Workers' Confederation (COB), the Argentine Regional Workers' Federation (FORA), and the Uruguayan Regional Workers' Federation (FORU)—in Ecuador, the phenomenon is the opposite, comprised mostly of Ecuadorian anarchists and, to a lesser extent, migrants (Peruvians, Argentines, and Chileans, as well as Argentine, Spanish, Italian, Greek, and Jamaican anarchists who passed through the country during these years) who, on their own initiative and in connection with the Latin American libertarian labor movement, created anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist organizations.

Following the outbreak of the Liberal Revolution (1895), Ecuador underwent significant transformations that had repercussions in the political, social, ideological, and economic spheres. The separation of Church and State, the emergence of secular institutions, and the capitalist revitalization of the economy, which ran counter to the colonial-style hacienda regime, among other factors, enabled the emergence of a precarious working class and an agro-exporting and banking bourgeoisie. The artisan guilds, which until the arrival of liberalism had been in the hands

of the Church, gradually transformed into mutual societies and later into unions.

In 1905, under the leadership of liberalism, the Confederación Obrera del Guayas (COG) emerged, one of the most important labor organizations of the time. Anarchism began its journey in this context, championing a class-struggle unionism that was free from ecclesiastical and liberal control. Between 1920 and 1922, Guayaquil's anarchists focused their activity on unions of typographers, peanut workers, railroad workers, and shipyard workers, forming the embryo of the Regional Federation of Workers of Ecuador (FTRE). Like the COB, FORA, FORU, and other anarcho-syndicalist federations, the FTRE used the word "regional," warning that it was an organization that recognized neither homelands nor borders.

Between 1910 and 1921, Guayaquil's anarchists focused their activity on propaganda and agitation for their ideas. They moved to the city's working-class neighborhoods (such as Astillero, where the powerful Asociación Gremial del Barrio del Astillero was born). They founded study organizations and women's organizations (the Rosa Luxemburg Center was the first socialist women's center in Ecuador linked to libertarian ideas), not without sparking controversy and controversial interpretations of the anarchist ideal. This was a pro-anarchist period where libertarians were in "formation."

The massacre of November 15, 1922 and the birth of the myth

On November 15, 1922, anarchists called for the first mass strike in Ecuador's history. Days earlier, in October of the same year, they formed the FTRE, also the country's first revolutionary trade union center, which brought together more than 30 workers' organizations (many of which emerged from the COG); between 20,000 and 30,000 workers constituted it. The strike that culminated in the mas-