

Zapata Movement

Agro-Syndicalism (or Agrarian Unionism) in Cuba

Labor & Students' United People Federation

1989, summer

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In 1982, confused reports about symptoms of rebellion in the heart of the working masses, fundamentally peasants, came out of Cuba: a strike attempt at the Abraham Lincoln sugar mill and the detention of 20 activists of an agrarian movement; the Zapata Group. They were accused of having carried out sabotage and, so it was said, of intending to form an independent union organization in the style of Solidarity in Poland.

Five men were sentenced to death, and a woman, Caridad Pavon (La Gallega--The Galician), a feminist leader of the group, did not survive the tortures in Villa Marista (the site authorized by the Department of State Security, G-2, to carry out interrogations); her mysterious death was shamelessly described by the authorities as a "suicide."

A powerful international campaign saved the five activists from execution; nevertheless, they were held tightly incommunicado for a number of years, while even today one of them, Angel Donato Martinez, an anarcho-syndicalist leader of the Zapata agrarian movement, remains in the gloomy "Death Rectangle" in the Combinado del Este prison in Havana province.

Seizing the ideological legacy of Magonismo-Zapatismo (the ideas of the Mexican revolutionaries Ricardo Flores Magon and Emiliano Zapata), this agro-syndicalist movement for self-management was inspired to fight for the needs of the class of agrarian workers by means of seizing the land and machinery and expropriating the State (the sole boss and monopolist proprietor of all the land and all means of production under State capitalism). Consistent with their ideals, these agro-syndicalist activists sought to establish contacts with similar groups in Latin America and other parts of the world with the same aims: the direct democracy of the workers.

The short life of the movement (in the street, since it is still alive behind the walls of the prison) did not permit it to develop into what they call an authentic revolutionary movement of the masses. The contacts did not materialize, the struggle was not internationalized, but instead remained confined in the Cuban historical process, again, the necessity of a true Revolution within the so-called Revolution. This demand, which so frequently comes forth from the youth of the island (who day by day intensify the revolutionary struggle to shake off the bourgeoisie of the new dominant class) terrifies them, since this would mean the end of the privileges of the bourgeois elite which, in the name of the working class, has raised itself on its shoulders by means of a brutal repressive machine which does not shrink from sentencing, jailing or shooting all those who dissent from it.

F.O.E.U.P. poster text

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ARMANDO HERNANDEZ GONZALEZ

Was executed in Cuba, along with his brother-in-law, Ramon Toledo, on Oct. 1st, 1982, on charges of participating in the formation of the first agro-syndicalist movement in San Jose de las Lajas, Havana province.

His wife, Odalis Toledo was also sentenced to prison, as well as other members of his family.

This document, drafted by the resistance group FOEUP (Labor & Students' United People Federation) in Cuba, has been sent abroad through clandestine channels.

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