

Juan Carlos Mechoso

It's Only Been a Few Days and We Already Feel Your Absence

Troy Araiza Kokinis

October 12, 2022

Troy Araiza Kokinis reflects on the life and revolutionary work of Juan Carlos Mechoso, who passed on October 11, 2022. Juan Carlos was a founding member of our sister organization, Federación Anarquista Uruguaya (FAU) and he will be dearly missed. Black Rose/Rosa Negra sends its heartfelt greetings and solidarity to the family, friends, and comrades of Juan Carlos.

Juan Carlos Mechoso was the last surviving militant of those who founded the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (FAU). He died on October 10, 2022. Juan Carlos lived his life alongside his wife Mari in Montevideo's working class El Cerro neighborhood. Their home has served as a pilgrimage for anarchists from all over the world who are interested in the FAU's strand of *especificista* anarchism, in which anarchists integrate into a specific anarchist organization that is used as a support network and infrastructure for triangulating mass social movements in which they are inserted. Numerous militants of Black Rose/Rosa Negra (BRRN) have met and sustained relationships with Juan Carlos and Mari. They spent the past two decades organizing historical FAU documents, some written in code, into a home archive where militant-researchers could access content related to the Uruguayan worker revolt of the 1960s and 70s.

Juan Carlos and others founded FAU in 1956. The organization set out to develop a strategy and practice for anarchist organizing in the Cold War Latin American context. They developed the *especificista* model as an intervention to the then dominant strategy of anarcho-syndicalism, which played a foundational role in Uruguay's first labor unions of the twentieth century. By the late 1960s, a New Left coalition centered around FAU controlled roughly one-third of the country's labor unions. From 1968–1973, Uruguayan workers carried out upwards of two thousand work actions—the majority of them wild cat strikes and occupations led by the coalition surrounding FAU. The coalition supported direct action tactics in the labor movement. This growing (counter)hegemony of such tactics arguably led to an eventual military coup in June 1973. Juan Carlos worked as a graphic artist at this time. He eventually went underground as part of FAU's small armed unit, OPR-33, which robbed banks and kidnapped brutish employers in effort to settle labor disputes. He fell prisoner in 1971 and survived frequent torture sessions under the military and police. At this time in Uruguay, 1 in 30 people experienced detention; and

1 in 62 experienced torture. While imprisoned, Juan Carlos lost his brother and FAU comrade Alberto “Pocho” Mechoso, who was disappeared as part of a pilot operation for a U.S. backed transnational state terror initiative, called Plan Condor. FAU saw 35 militants of its organization disappear during this time. Juan Carlos was released after the fall of Uruguay’s civic-military government in 1985. He returned to his home in El Cerro and participated in rebuilding FAU to confront the post-dictatorship neoliberal era. Part of this effort included gathering historical documents hidden in safe houses throughout Montevideo to organize and preserve them in a publicly accessible archive.

Juan Carlos was an organic intellectual. With no more than a secondary education, he dedicated his life to understanding Left political theory and developing novel models for its modern practical implementation from an anarchist perspective. He was equally influenced by psychoanalysis and post-modern theory. For this reason, FAU’s notion of *poder popular* (popular power) emphasizes the question of mass subjective transformation. Those fortunate enough to visit Juan Carlos’ home archive would also share lunch of ravioli *con tuco* and hours of conversation around the ideas of theorists ranging from Bakunin to Foucault. They also witnessed Juan Carlos’ embodiment of this subjectivity when taking a stroll with him in his El Cerro neighborhood—everyone knew him and, in turn, he could tell you about the history of every crack in the pavement. His rootedness was product of his political commitment, one in which he truly saw himself to be *of* and *with* the people. His life serves as a model for anarchist militant counter-subjectivity the world over.

Juan Carlos Mechoso, it’s been just a few days and we already feel your absence.

Troy Araiza Kokinis is the author of the forthcoming book *Anarchist Popular Power: Dissident Labor and Armed Struggle in Uruguay 1956–76* from AK Press.

For more on the FAU and the life of Juan Carlos, we recommend *An Organisation of Militants* by Tommy Lawson, and *Anarchists Had More of a Stomach for the Fight: Interview with Juan Carlos Mechoso*.

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