

Anarchistic Economy of the Indigenous Muisca People of Colombia

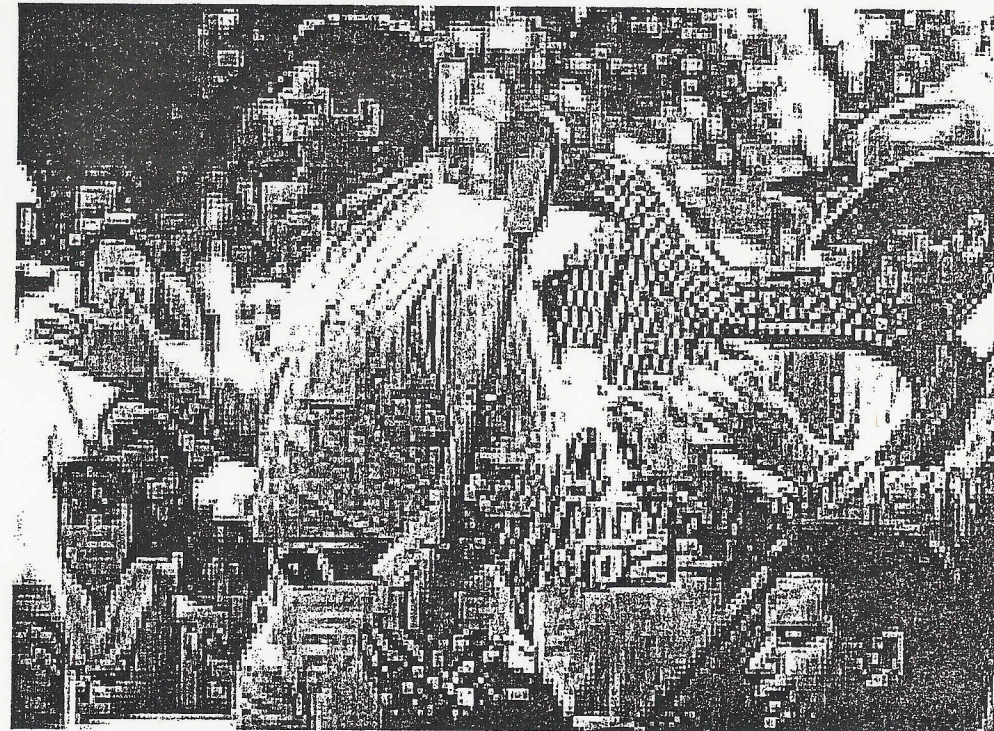
The Community Marketplace of the indigenous Muisca Culture [depicted in this contemporary Colombian painting] had much in common with Anarchist Economics—Community Co-operation, Free Exchange, Mutual Aid, etc.—Present-Day Colombian Anarchists have successfully combined elements of Latin American Anarcho-Syndicalism with the traditionally Anarchistic community economics of the Muisca Culture within the Anarcho-Syndicalist indigenous working-class community organization Alas de Xué-AIT ["Wings of the Sun", in the Muisca Language], the Colombian Section of the International Workers Association (IWA), the Anarcho-Syndicalist Labor Union Federation.



INSURGENCY CULTURE COLLECTIVE
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ANARCHISM IN COLOMBIA

15



BY
NATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF LABOR
INTERNATIONAL WORKERS ASSOCIATION

ancestry)—“light brown”]. Writings by/for the ordinary working people [many of whom are of mixed ancestry]. Originally printed as “*Ravachol*” by **Black Flag**—a computer scanner error.

7. **Source:** Max Nettlau, *A Contribution to an Anarchist Bibliography of Latin America* (1926), p. 30.
8. Originally printed as “*Crepuscolo*” by **Black Flag**—a computer scanner error. Source: *ibid.*, Max Nettlau (1926).
9. Also, published the periodical “*Organización, semanario de sociología y combate*” [“*Organization: Studies from Social Theory to Action*”], No.1, 9 January 1925. Source: *ibid.*, Max Nettlau (1926).
10. “*Asociación Internacional de los Trabajadores*” [“*International Workers Association*” (IWA)]—the Anarcho-Syndicalist international labor federation.
11. Ricardo Flores Magón and Enriqu  Flores Magón, the Mexican Anarchists. Their writings include essays published in the periodicals *Regeneración* and *Revolución* reprinted by *Ediciones Antorcha* in M xico. **WARNING: DO-NOT WRITE** “*Ediciones Antorcha*” on **ANYTHING** you mail to them! Write for catalog (U.S. orders are in Dollars):

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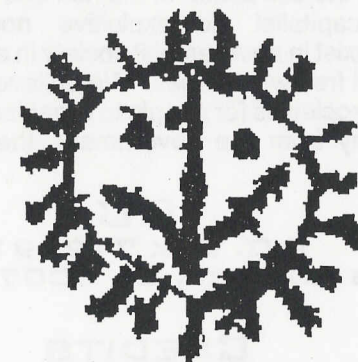
12. Confederation of indigenous people centered around the upper Magdalena River, north of Bogot , Colombia—also called “*Chibcha*”.
13. Figurative translation of “*prisionero*” [“*prisoner*”] by **Black Flag**.
14. Named after “*Mujeres Libres*”, the Anarchist women’s organization in Spain during the 1936 Spanish Civil War. For more info on *Mujeres Libres* in Spain, see, *Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women* by Martha A. Ackelsberg (1991). On the web: http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/women_wsm.html.
15. Named after a South American dragonfly species; “*Libelula*” [“*dragonfly*”] + “*Dorada*” [“*giltthead*”—a Mediterranean fish].
16. Literally, the “cutting-edge of life”.
17. “*Insubmision*” [“*anti-militarist action*”]—Draft Refusal and other Direct Action activities against military activity and propaganda. There is also a movement in Spain. More info at:

Ateno Libertario de Zaragoza:
Apdo. 3141
50080 Zaragoza
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Web: <http://www.csl.tao.ca/ainfos/ainfos2e.html>
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18. From “*Loco*” [“*crazy*”] + “*Colombia*”

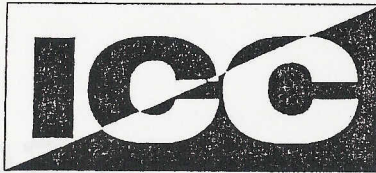
ANARCHISM IN COLOMBIA



BY
NATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF LABOR
INTERNATIONAL WORKERS ASSOCIATION

SPAIN

SEPTEMBER 1998



WHAT WE BELIEVE

We are Class War Anarchists. We believe that a conflict must go on between those who work for a living and our enemies who get rich off our labor but, do nothing until those who live off our labor are laid low and the society with power and privilege based on wealth and class is abolished in favor of a free society based on mutual aid, voluntary cooperation and personal freedom and responsibility. We advocate the methods of Revolutionary Syndicalism to win the class war against the corruption of the rich and powerful. We believe that all forms of non-capitalist non-exploitive non-authoritarian economic organization can co-exist in an Anarchist society in a Federation of free people, free communities and free workplaces. We believe that the first step towards the creation of a free society is for people to organize, educate themselves and assert their autonomy from the government, the capitalist and organized religion.

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LOS ANGELES, CA 90071 USA

CREDITS

First published in CNT, September 1998, the periodical of the *Confederación Nacional de Trabajo-AIT* ["National Confederation of Labor-IWA"] in Spain. An edited translation was published as "**The Course of Libertarian Ideas In Colombia**" in Black Flag, #216, p. 18-19 [4 issues £6 (Europe); Outside EU—£8 (Surface), £12 (Airmail). Back issues £1.50]:

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Front Cover: Musicians play *Vallenato*, music of the indigenous working-class.
Title Page: Pre-European petroglyph from Cundanimarca Region, near Bogotá.
Back Cover: Depiction of *Muisca* community bartering by Gian Calvi.

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ANARCHISM IN COLOMBIA

indigenous Colombian tribes are faced by multiple threats and the contempt shown their traditional forms of organization by government and guerrillas like—both of these being concerned with exploiting the Earth's resources and harnessing them for the benefit of their own causes.

In the "*Locombia*" ["Crazy Colombia"^{1a}] where, as we approach the end of the [20th] Century, five kids are murdered each day, where election candidates in several areas must sue the guerrillas for leave to campaign, where politics and drugs trafficking go hand in glove, we can only hope that Libertarian ideas can make some headway and prosper.

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NOTES:

1. "Libertarian"—"Anarchist"; the BlackFlag translation of The Spanish word "*Libertario*" ["Anarchist"]; In the remainder of the text, this translation has been changed to "Anarchist", to make it consistent with its commonly-used Spanish language meaning; Anarchists are also called "Libertarian Socialists" or "Free Socialists"; "*Liberaire*" ["Libertarian"] was originally used in place of its synonym "*Anarchiste*" ["Anarchist"] in France after Anarchist participation in the 1871 Paris Commune and anti-government Direct Actions [in Solidarity with 25,000 Paris workers murdered and 10,000 imprisoned by Army troops], when use of the word "Anarchist" was made un-lawful by the French government [It should not be confused with the so-called "Libertarian Party" in the U.S., which is a Neo-Liberal liaises faire capitalist political party and not truly "Libertarian"].
2. Originally printed as "EPI" by Black Flag—a computer scanner error.
3. The U.S. government has been supplying money, weapons and Special Forces [and CIA] tactical advisors to the Colombian Army and the so-called "para-militaries", which are really private armies funded by rich people to attack guerilla armies, terrorize the Working-Class, and kill people the Rich don't like—similar military units are operating in Southern Mexico and Central America—they are sometimes called "death squads".
4. Liberal Party (PL).
5. Conservative Party (PC); also, National Salvation Movement (MSN) and New Democratic Force (NDF); according to the American CIA [Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook 1994 (Washington, D.C. : Office of Public and Agency Information, 1994), p. 89].
6. A contraction of "*Raya*" ["writing"] and "*acholado(a)*" [literally, "cholo-"]

politicization, where political meetings and demands are common currency and where some of the students openly support the guerrillas which is why campuses are the targets for paramilitary attacks. The young Anarchist Humberto Peña Taylor and numerous human rights activists were among the victims of paramilitary groups which also threatened to attack the National University while the Libertarian festival was in progress. There are Anarchist sympathizers among the Law Library of the National University (who helped organize the festival) and among many individuals who participate from time to time in violent acts. There are improvised collectives such as the *Anarquistas al Combate* ["Fighting Anarchists"] group. Another of the collectives who shared the organization of the festival in May was the *Mujeres Libres* ["Free Women"¹⁴] group which operates in the Anarcha-Feminist area. There are also Anarchists among the membership of the superb *La Libelula Dorada* ["The Gilthead Dragonfly"¹⁵] theater troupe, some of the members of which helped with the stunning and now resurrected Anarchist publication *Biofilos* ["Living on the Edge"¹⁶]. In Medellin city there is the *Colectivo Libertario de Vargas Vila* ["Vargas Vila Libertarian Collective"] whose activities focus on the music scene, trade unions and discussion, whereas in Cali there are various individuals who mount sporadic campaigns, such as fielding a dog called Walter as a candidate in the elections in order to bring them into disrepute.

Other areas in which Anarchists are to be found are Conscientious Objection¹⁷ (with groups in Bogotá and Medellin) and the music scene related to the Punk and Hardcore genres through which some groups peddle an Anarchist discourse that occasionally lacks definition.

THE INDIAN QUESTION

The demands frequently put by upwards of 50 native peoples through the ONIC [*Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia*] ("National Indigenous people's Organization of Colombia") have received quite a bit of support from local Anarchists in recent years. Instances of native lands being seized by international companies which—as in the case of the Spanish-based Repsol Corporation—enjoy the blessing of the Colombian government, are commonplace. We know all about the plight of the *U'we* people who live in the northwest of the country. Only a few years ago it was announced that there would be a mass suicide by members of this people (around five thousand of them) should Occidental Petroleum [Corporation] set foot on its land to carry out exploratory drilling. To the *U'we* petroleum represents the life blood of Mother Earth and its removal signifies the death of Mother Earth and of her people. This campaign which, with backing from the IWA which mobilized in support of the *U'we*, managed to bring the plan to a standstill, although there has not been a final resolution as yet. The *U'we* are but one case among many where

THE COURSE OF LIBERTARIAN¹ IDEAS IN COLOMBIA

Colombia—the very mention of the name conjures up images of violence and narco-trafficking, but the country is rather more than this, in spite of her turbulent recent history and the absence of any indications of change therein. For instance there are at present five armies active there: On the guerrilla side, there are the FARC [*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*] (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), the ELN [*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*] (National Liberation Army) and the EPL [*Ejército Popular de Liberación*]² (People's Liberation Army) which, altogether may number as many as upwards of 20,000 members according to the official estimates and these draw the bulk of their funding from kidnaping, trafficking in drugs and extortion of the big oil companies with holdings in the area. On the other, the government side, there are the Colombian National Army (seemingly powerless to stamp out "subversion") and the increasingly active paramilitary groups which, having declared their independence from their sponsor (the Colombian government) operate as an independent force, carrying out numerous despicable massacres among the civilian population whom they may suspect s giving any sort of help to the guerrillas.³

For its part, the government suits itself economically; no matter whether it is the Liberals⁴ or (as in the current case following the recent victory of Spanish Prime Minister [José Maria] Aznar's corrupt buddy Andrés Pastrana) the Conservatives,⁵ who are in power, the upshot is always the same; a Neo-Liberal policy strictly obedient to the dictates of the World Bank and the IMF [International Monetary Fund], eagerly pursuing that annual endorsement from the USA in drugs affairs that will guarantee their access to the plentiful American funding that goes with it. The result is that Indian lands are brazenly confiscated and the common people plunged into a crisis of long standing from which there seems to be no imminent escape. Surprisingly, the Colombian people lives on hope, to the sounds of *Vallenato* music and on their great passion for life, weathering the storms as best they can.

At one time there was a solid Anarchist presence in these lush lands. Right now, decades later, an effort is being made to revive and spread it.

ANARCHISM IN COLOMBIA

The earliest properly Anarchist signs were detected in the Mid-19th Century with the arrival on the coast of [Pierre Joseph] Proudhon's writings. This was just about the time that the young Elisée Reclus arrived with the intention of setting up a colony there, a scheme that came to nothing in the end. By the end of the

19th Century important strikes by artisans had a distinguished Anarchist involvement and for a time there was a self-managing commune set up by J. Albarracín. 1910 saw publication of the first edition of Rayacho ["Brown Writing"⁶], a newspaper that was to become comparatively influential among the artisans and workers. Other publications of that time with some sort of Anarchist involvement included Trofeos ["Victory", Bogotá⁷](1908), Crepúsculos⁸ ["Dawn", Manizales](1910–1911), El Obrero ["The Worker"] (1912–1916), and Paz y Amor ["Peace and Love"] (1913). In 1918, the Atlantic coastal area was to be the arena for a number of strikes displaying unmistakably Anarchistic methods: direct action, sabotage, delegates effectively under the control of the rank-and-file [workers], solidarity strikes, etc.. In the 1920's this burgeoning activity was multiplied by the influx of lots of Anarchist immigrants from Europe and three significant labor congresses with a telling Anarchist presence were held and new groups emerged: groups like the Antorcha Libertaria ["Libertarian Torch"] in Bogotá, Via Libre ["Free Path"] in Barranquilla, Grupo Libertario ["Libertarian Group"⁹], in Santa Marta and the important FOLA ["Federación Obrero de Litoral Atlántico"] (Atlantic Coast Labor Federation) which came to embrace 16 trade unions from that area. Among others, the leading publication of this time included La Voz Popular ["The People's Voice"], La Antorcha ["The Torch"], El Sindicalista ["The Syndicalist"], Pensamiento y Voluntad ["Thought and Will-Power"], etc..

In an age of great activism, there were strikes and protests galore. We ought to single out Raúl Eduardo Mahecha here, a committed Anarchist fighter who was to be the driving force behind quite a few such protests and whom we might regard as the leading Colombian labor personality of his day. Other figures of note would be Vargas Vila and the little known and misunderstood Juan de Dios Romero. The "Anarchist and adventurer" (as he described himself) Biófilo Panclasta deserves separate consideration; he saw the insides of many jails in many countries and page after page could be written about his life and the legends surrounding it even today. Suffice to say that the story goes that in Pamplona (Biófilo's native city) mothers would threaten their kids over lunch to "eat up your soup or I'll send for Biófilo".

The great retreat that Libertarian ideas suffered in the 1930's throughout the continent [South America] was also evident in Colombia which slid into several decades of Libertarian "sluggishness" from which she has not recovered until quite recently.

THE PRESENT POSITION

It is no easy undertaking to spread Anarchism in the polarized Colombia of the present-day (where one is either for the guerrillas or for the government).

Non-aligned opposition groups are not welcomed and the situation facing local Anarchists is reminiscent of that of our comrades in Euskadi. The decades of war endured by the country has also left its mark on the Anarchists who sometimes find it hard to stand aloof from it. The most "mature" option to be found among the local Anarchists is represented by the Alas de Xué-AIT¹⁰ grouping, a collective that strives to marry a Libertarian discourse and Libertarian practices with the cultural traditions of the original inhabitants of the country. The work done by several of its members in conjunction with Indian communities afforded them a familiarity with native organizational preferences and prompted them to salvage (like the Flores Magón brothers did in Mexico before them¹¹) quite a number of native traditional forms that come very close to Anarchism (community living, their concept of authority, mutual aid and reciprocity etc.) which they have complemented with (let us say, classical Libertarian ideas imported from Europe. The very name of the collective mirrors this synthesis: Alas (wings) symbolizing freedom in Western [European] Anarchism, and Xué, a Muisca¹² term for the Sun, one of the deities of the Andean peoples of Colombia.

Alas de Xué ["Wings of the Sun"] emerged towards the end of the 1980's out of the protests mounted against the commemoration of the 500th Anniversary. These protests came together into what became known as the "**Self-Discovery Campaign of Our Americas, 500 Years of Native, Black and Popular Resistance**", a movement upon which they managed to stamp a Libertarian seal. Later they were behind the organization of two important nation-wide students' encounters—again from an Anarchist angle—managing to imbue a post-graduate organization with an Anarchist approach. Another of its tasks has been to rescue the history of the Colombian Anarchist Movement from oblivion (especially as it relates to the first two decades of this [the 20th Century], something previously approached only from a Marxist angle, and we all know what that would entail. This historical research resulted in publication of the book Biófilo Panclasta, el eterno prisionero ["Biófilo Pancladsta, the Eternal Captive"¹³]. After putting out feelers internationally, they joined the IWA ["AIT"] later mounting joint campaigns like the campaign in defense of the lands of the U'we people against oil company trespasses. The motley political make-up of the collective (albeit for the most part Anarchists) has led to a situation where, in recent years, several of its members have decided to pursue a different line and this has curtailed the collective's activities somewhat. With an eye to recovery and in order to establish effective co-ordination of the different groups in Colombia, they decided to organize a festival last May under the name of "**May 68–69, the Relevance of Libertarian Thinking**". It drew Anarchists from Bogotá, Cali and Medellín, plus a presence from elsewhere in South America and from Europe.

The festival was mounted on some university campuses with a high degree of