The Federacion Anarquista Uruguaya (FAU): Crisis, Armed Struggle and Dictatorship, 1967-1985

Texts by Juan Carlos Mechoso, Jaime Prieto, Hugo Cores and others
translated and edited by Paul Sharkey

The FAU (Federación Anarquista Uruguaya), founded in 1956, was one on the strongest anarchist movements in Latin America. In the 1960s, it faced a rising tide of repression which would culminate in the military dictatorship of 1973-85. As legal avenues of struggle were closed down, through the Worker-Student Resistance (ROE) and OPR-33 (People's Revolutionary Organisation) it expanded its tactics to include armed struggle in defence of the workers movement. Banks were raided for funds, and factory bosses were kidnapped in support of workers' demands.

After Argentina became a military dictatorship in 1976, many FAU militants there were 'disappeared' in joint repression by the Uruguayan and Argentine armed forces. Elements of the FAU were fundamental in the creation of the People's Victory Party (PVP). The FAU is still active today.

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Mechoso, Juan C., 1935-
The Federación Anarquista Uruguaya (FAU) : crisis, armed struggle and dictatorship, 1967-1985. - (Anarchist sources series ; 11)
1. Federación Anarquista Uruguaya 2. Anarchism - Uruguay - History - 20th century 3. Uruguay - Politics and government - 1973-1985 4. Uruguay - Politics and government - 1904-1973
I. Title II. Prieto, Jaime III. Cores, Hugo IV. Sharkey, Paul
320.5'7'09895'09045

ISBN-13: 9781873605691

What is Anarchism?
Anarchism is a political theory which opposes the State and capitalism. It says that people with economic power (capitalists) and those with political power (politicians of all stripes left, right or centre) use that power for their own benefit, and not (like they claim) for the benefit of society. Anarchism says that neither exploitation nor government is natural or necessary, and that a society based on freedom, mutual aid and equal shares of the good things in life would work better than this one.

Anarchism is also a political movement. Anarchists take part in day-to-day struggles (against poverty, oppression of any kind, war etc) and also promote the idea of comprehensive social change. Based on bitter experience, they warn that new 'revolutionary' bosses are no improvement: 'ends' and 'means' (what you want and how you get it) are closely connected.

Uruguay – Background

The republic of Uruguay – originally referred to as the *Banda Oriental* (Eastern Strip) on the eastern bank of the River Plate, with Argentina on the western bank – had its first ever labour congress in 1896. But 1900 there were 28 unions active in Montevideo and another 11 in the provinces. Immigration from Europe after 1880 brought a range of ideas about social change and the anarchist FORU (Uruguayan Regional Workers' Federation) was launched in 1905. Under President Batlle y Ordoñez, a system of social security and labour legislation was introduced. In 1915 Uruguay legislated the 8-hour day into existence. In the 1940 there was a huge upsurge in unionisation, chiefly among the textile workers, railwaymen, dockers, construction workers and meat-packers. The period 1940-1955 was referred to in Uruguayan history as the "fatted calf" years: between 1948 and 1954, the cost of living rose by 58% but the wages of workers across 31 trade unions grew by 110%. Uruguay has a relatively liberal ruling class and the country was often referred to as the 'Switzerland of Latin America'.

By the 1950s the economic situation had taken a turn for the worse. The agricultural sector began to stagnate, adding to pressure on the welfare state funded by the earnings of Uruguay's wool and meat exports. Between 1955 and 1959 the cost of living doubled and wages could not keep pace. This led to a flurry of strikes and 1964 saw the formation of the CNT (National Workers' Convention). By 1965 inflation was running at 100% by 1967 at 140%. President Pacheco Areco proposed in 1967 to impose a wage freeze and devalued the currency. Workers' living standards began to fall sharply. Troops broke strikes by meat-packers, electricians and bank employees. Emergency laws were introduced, officially to counter the activities of the Tupamaro guerrillas (MLN) but actually used to stifle shop floor unrest. The 1971 elections produced a fraudulent victory for Bordaberry who maintained Pacheco's policies. The fight against the Tupamaros brought the military a growing role in politics. In June 1973 Bordaberry and the military agreed to outlaw political parties, shut down congress, ban public meetings and suspend constitutional rights. The CNT called a general strike, only to be banned itself. Employers capitalised upon the muscular repression by the army to break the power of the unions. Between 1971 and 1976 there was a 35% fall in real wages and by 1979 inflation was running at 80% with wages limping behind at 45%.

In the fight against the collapse of the Uruguayan economy, the austerity regime, the 'security state' legislation and the deployment of the military to use the breaking of the Tupamaros as a pretext for breaking the working class, the FAU and its offshoots, the ROE and the OPR-33 played a disproportionately significant role.

The FAU

The FAU was set up in 1956 by workers, students and trade unionists. It is a platformist organisation (it really is, even though it does not seem to make much of a song and dance about it) whose operational rules, activities, core concerns and methods of struggle and the demands that must then be collectively pursued are laid down at congresses.
It enjoys a measure of social purchase in certain working class districts in the capital and in certain trade unions. It claims a good hundred members and can mobilise several hundred people at its public rally in the lead-up to May Day.

It is a class-based organisation which struck me as being marked by a degree of economicism. Ideological and counter-cultural issues seem to be little dealt with, in public at any rate.

However, it is notable that its practice at neighbourhood level (sometimes relying on the existence of libertarian ateneos [social and educational clubs]) does not rule out concerns relating to culture and popular education, neighbourhood solidarity and the maintenance of social connections. Its core theoretical yardsticks are Bakunin and especially Malatesta. The Spanish FAI (up to and including its action groups) are an important historical reference. That said, the FAU struck me as being characterised primarily by a certain pragmatism and a degree of empiricism that leads it to be constantly on the look-out for the best ways of gaining a foothold among the masses of the population in the special national context of Uruguay. They are right in thinking that the 'solutions' to their problems cannot just be imported from abroad and then 'grafted' on to Uruguayan conditions.

Again politically speaking, it is noticeable that the FAU displays a rabid anti-imperialism (especially obvious with regard to US foreign policy) and a strong sense of solidarity with the whole spectrum (here I would stress this point) of revolutionary movements in Latin America (by the way, note that they do a lot of work in concert with Brazilian anarchists from the Gaucha Anarchist Federation (FAG) and seem to have regular dealings with the AUCA in Argentina). What I mean is that movements like the communist FARC in Colombia or the Peruvian guevarists of the MRTA, say, seem to inspire a degree of sympathy from the FAU.

The anti-imperialism and the internationalism and the fact that these are armed movements (and the FAU has given rise to a couple of its own in the past and still acknowledges the necessarily violent character of any revolutionary process), respect for risky forms of commitment and for sacrifices made 'for the cause' (ideas very deeply rooted in Latin American revolutionary culture) seem to underpin this relative sympathy which is very probably bound up with lack of critical information about such authoritarian movements.

Take another example: Cuba. The FAU was one of the first Uruguayan organisations to set up committees in solidarity with the Cuban revolution. At a time (late 1950s and

early 1960s) when the majority of Latin American leftist organisations were calling for power to be taken by means of elections, the Cuban revolution thrown up by an armed popular uprising opened up fresh political prospects and possibilities for revolutionary groups. It put direct, self-organised and violent mass action back on the agenda. The FAU, like a number of other organisations, fell headlong into the political cracks opened up by the Cuban revolution and backed it for years, even after it had become plain that that revolution was turning into a bureaucratic dictatorship and even after Cuban anarchists had been rounded up and executed. Moreover, it eventually triggered a split in its ranks. The FAU eventually distanced itself from that betrayed revolution and withdrew its support from it, though does not appear to mean that it is prepared to risk blunt criticism of the current Cuban regime. The guevarist and Cuban myth is a really strong factor in Latin America and once again the FAU does not seem to want to run the risk of finding itself 'cut off from the masses' by being too open in its criticisms of Cuba. If I have dwelt upon these 'peculiarities' of the FAU, it is in part because they are also to be found to a greater or lesser extent in other Uruguayan anarchists.

The FAU does not operate an open-door policy. Like a number of other platformist organisations, one must first graduate through 'stages' of political education (readings and discussions about organisation, its operating style, its aims, activities and methodology) before acceptance. There is then a one year delay before one can become a full member with all the associated entitlements.

Besides the references to a highly organised anarchism, a plainly militant understanding of organisation and the need for a degree of political homogeneity within it, the experience of repression (and of direct action by its clandestine organisation, the OPR-33) in the 1960s and 1970s have certainly had something to do with the emphasis on all these graduated entry conditions.

Once inside the organisation, the member has to opt for his preferred theatre of 'activity' (neighbourhood, firm, union, university).

The FAU is active within the PIT-CNT. This Uruguayan labour federation (90% of union members in the country belong to it) is a reformist federation wherein the main influence is the Communist Party, but in certain unions there are also more radical elements (egged on by FAU activists, often in concert with politically non-aligned leftist militants taking a self-managerial, rank-and-file approach.)

This opposition presence (which seems to be quite pugnacious) within the big national reformist federation surprised me but it looks as if the majority of workers are very attached to there being a unifying federation that appears to be almost unique. The FAU, preoccupied as ever by its 'foothold' in the populace, thus has it seems, to choose whether to risk getting cut off from the trade union organisation where 'the masses' are. It looks as if the Printing Trades union is under their influence and FAU activists are on its leadership.

In the popular and working class areas (some, like El Cerro were real anarchist strongholds for several decades and this has left its mark), the FAU participates in or has plain and simply set up several community radio projects, sort of non-commercial free radio stations, focusing on local social issues; these may not be legal but they are pretty much tolerated by the authorities (which did try, in vain, to shut them down). The FAU relies on these radio stations, among other things, to gain a foothold in these neighbourhoods where it can make contact with the huge numbers unemployed or under-employed. Its activists take part in swap-shop and mutual aid networks, sponsor ateneos or social clubs with canteen facilities, clothing banks for the poor and which host educational or cultural support activities. Involved in the everyday lives of the locals, the members of the FAU are not out to make recruits hand over fist but aim rather to gain a slow, discrete foothold.

Their headquarters (which houses the little printing co-operative they have set up and where they print up reviews, handbills, stickers and posters) is not very big but seems to suit their requirements. Two small rooms are being rehabilitated for use as a small library and for some archival material (the apparently huge library collection and massive archives the FAU once owned were destroyed by the dictatorship) – donations of books and pamphlets in Spanish are welcomed.

From time to time the FAU publishes a review entitled *Lucha Libertaria*, well presented in A4 format. Occasionally there is a more theoretical review produced called *Rojo y Negro*. Recently they published (in Spanish of course) a weighty history book (with a wealth of detail about FAU struggles from the mid-1960s to the start of the dictatorship in 1973; its title is *Anarchist Direct Action: a History of the FAU (*about 500 pages in length, Ediciones Recortes, 2002). It was written by Juan Carlos Mechoso, one of the FAU's veteran militants who was also a member of its armed wing.

From a profile of anarchism in Uruguay by the Syndicat Intercorporatif anarcho-syndicaliste de Caen, France (SIA Caen, BP 257, 14013, Caen Cedex).

"Anarchists had more of a stomach for the fight": Interview With Juan Carlos Mechoso [2001]

Juan Carlos Mechoso does not need much coaxing to turn to his subject – the El Cerro district [Montevideo] – a subject that loosens his tongue and stirs him more than any other. Before the start of the interview, when the photographs were being taken, he mentioned that El Cerro had a population of some 80,000 and greater El Cerro 150,000. That, at best, youngsters could only find casual jobs. That those who managed to find work for five, six or eight months were few in number and scarcely anybody has a steady job, he says and then he smiles because he is asked about the glory days in the past when there was no unemployment and when each family had somebody working in the refrigeration plants – Swift, Nacional or Artigas…

"Somebody bringing home a wage and two kilos of beef a day" – he says, enjoying our surprise. "there were families with three or four workers working in refrigeration and bringing home so much beef that it was even given away for free. Barbecues were held in the district and in the clubs. In those days it was also the case that the workers built their own little houses and this required masses of equipment, carpentry and glazing materials and there was a store on every block and the pawn shop was part of the local culture. A dim view was taken of anybody who did not cough up. Come the lay-offs, the shops were filled with blue uniforms and clothing."

Supplied by the firm?

"Yes, two uniforms a year and a pair of boots. That was one of many gains made."

And do the youngsters in El Cerro these days know about this?

"Sure. You often hear them talking about such gains which were made in the 1930s as if they happened yesterday. They are engraved in the collective memory in El Cerro and people still refer to incidents and things and ways of life that are now gone."

You arrived in El Cerro with your family, then?

"We came from Flores in the interior of the country [he was born in 1935] and we came to Montevideo, like many another family in the 1940s and settled into a modest home in La Teja. And any of us that could work went out to work. I myself went to school and worked. Then they offered me double pay to put in more hours."

So you had to quit school?

"Yes, in my fourth year. In those days in those barrios most lads used to work and, get this, it was a rare shop that didn't display a card saying 'Boy needed here'" (Mechoso erupts into uncontainable laughter).

If only! It must have been paradise.

"Yes, it was. Nearly all of us lads from the barrio worked. As did the grown-ups and youngsters, virtually all of them. It was hard to carry on with one's studies."

You worked in a warehouse which, I think, was facing the glass factory where your father worked.

"Yes. There were frequent disputes at that factory because it had a very pugnacious trade union with an anarchist trade union leadership. 'Bigote' was the nickname given to one of the leaders. The vast majority of my contemporaries from La Cachimba del Piojo near where we lived became anarchist sympathisers."

You say the union members were very militant. How did that show itself?

"I can remember the factory cordoned off by the police because the workers had taken it over and were holding the bosses inside as hostages. I was very aware of this because my father and brother were inside."

And what age were you at the time?

"Eleven or twelve."

And when did you begin to flirt with anarchism?

"All my brothers became anarchists before me. I followed soon after, aged 14."

And what did anarchism mean to you at that point, what was its attraction for you?

"I saw it as the workers defending themselves. I heard the matter being talked about all day at home. In addition, though, there was effective, well-organised propaganda. Lots of anarchist workers were employed in the refrigeration forms and a group was up and running in the barrio. My 16 year old brother was active in it and I became active in it at the age of 14."

You mean your brother who was murdered? [Alberto Mechoso]

"No, the one they killed was younger than me. There were four of us, one of whom was a runaway from a home and he lived with us."

Not a full brother, then?

"No, a brother from the streets. When he ran away he ended up in our house and stayed and became another brother. He became an anarchist too, just as we did. In fact he may well have led the way for he was a couple of years older than the eldest of us."

What did that propaganda you mentioned consist of?

"Conversation. Lots of conversations explaining ideas and what socialism was. There were two or three places we used to go for a chat."

And what was the situation between socialists and communists in El Cerro back then?

"There were hardly any socialists. There were anarchists and, later, communists. The CP was slowly growing and had worker groups in El Cerro as well as in La Teja."

What do you remember of the trade union arguments between anarchists and communists back then? What were the most ticklish issues?

"I reckon the anarchists had more of a stomach for a fight over demands and claims and confrontation with the class enemy."

Really? More so than the communists?

"Yes. At that point, yes. The communists were more moderate."

Maybe the war was a factor.

"Of course. Even though the communists never gave up on their class approach, there was a live-and-let-live arrangement in place at that point in time. Then again there was sharp controversy from the anarchists in that they had severed any connections with the Russian revolution. "

But they had backed the revolution in trade union terms.

"To start with. But by that point any hope that the revolution might, as was claimed, bring about a new civilisation, had long since evaporated."

More than 25 years had gone by.

"Yes. There was increasing friction within the unions as the first communist groups spread across the country, when they affiliated to the Third International and when the CGT was set up. What was left of the anarchists were very critical."

What were the main points of difference? Did they perhaps have something to do with rejection or acceptance of the Soviet Union?

"In a sense, yes, because the main controversy surrounded the issue 'socialism plus freedom or authoritarian socialism'. And that argument had been raging from the very beginning, when the union was being organised. These days, union membership is taken for granted. But in those days it was a badge of the libertarian school of thought. A way of organising along federal lines."

And what did the communists want?

"A centralist form of organising, with more permanent leaders, little involvement by the people."

They reckoned that was the only efficient way of prosecuting the social struggle. Goes to show how much distrust there can be of everybody getting involved. Bordering on what is often referred to these days as 'anarchy'. Anarchy meaning 'disorder', 'chaos' and 'confusion'. Or as we say down here on the River Plate 'looseness'.

"Anarchism stated, and historically has argued, that we have to rely upon the populace getting involved and try to make that involvement greater and more intense as time goes on. People grow through participation. That's what we believe. The greater the participation, the greater the growth and the learning process."

Which is one of the major arguments that feminism puts for participation.

"Precisely. In the National Library I was reading a newspaper, *El Obrero*, dating from 1884 which contains a spectacular feminist outlook as up to date as if it were yesterday. The earliest feminist arguments in this country emanated from anarchist quarters."

They wouldn't agree that women should wait for the revolution in order to be liberated and take up the position they are born to occupy. I remember it being said that the feminist struggle per se is meaningless. What did that newspaper from the 19th century have to say?

"It said that besides the class struggle and moving beyond capitalism, women had a two-pronged war to fight since they had to break free of the patriarchy they had to endure

at home. And that the latter was a struggle to be carried forward since performance in those professing left-wing ideas very often falls short of their ideas. And another issue raised was nature conservation."

Odd that these topics should have been raised over a hundred years ago.

"Yes. Within the group there was a greater concern with the human being. I'd say that the revolution encompassed a much broader front. You were asking me what the points at issue were. They mostly had to do with forms of relationship and organisation, including modes of relationship between militants. Insofar as there were no leaders, everything was up for discussion by everybody. The views of those most respected carried some clout but this did not of course mean that their views were not well queried."

I imagine that in discussions of concrete problems differences derived from the differing stances within anarchists would have carried some weight.

"That's a fact. Among the anarchists there were nuances corresponding to differing strategic approaches. I mean the politically organised ones."

Yourself, for instance, were you a believer in political organisation as a priority?

"Yes, I was a in favour of a specifically anarchist organisation, a given scheme of political work different from that of the anarcho-syndicalists who held that trade union work was enough to bring about emancipation of the workers and subsequently reorganise social life. Inside these currents we ran into Spaniards who had come over after the civil war and stated here, whereas others moved on to Argentina. From the word go these people used to visit El Cerro and La Teja to give us talks."

You left school after four years of primary schooling, but you have an education that many an academic might envy. A while ago you were talking about Foucault, who is no easy read. I was changing tapes and you were saying something. What was it you were saying about forms of repression?

Juan Carlos Mechoso laughs.

"I don't know. Some nonsense."

No, no. It was no nonsense.

"I said that there are forms of repression in matters economic, political and social going right back to the ideological roots and as they permeate the body of society at every level they allow the system to avoid resorting to direct repression. It being the citizens themselves who uphold and reproduce the ideology that serves the system."

Interesting. The question is how did you get where you are now?

"Like a lot of anarchists, I got here through reading and conversations. Near here we had the Ateneo Cerro where lectures and talks and debates would take place."

What sort of reading?

"All sorts. For instance, the comrades used to urge us to read history from Greece through to the First International, and Bakunin's polemics with Marx, the birth of the workers' movement, and good quality literature. Kropotkin of course, a theoretician of

anarchy who wrote, say, a book on prisons adopting viewpoints akin to Foucault's *Surveillance and Punishment* "

But Kropotkin lived a century ago.

"True, he was a Russian prince. When the anarchists parted company from the First International in 1872, he carried on being active within what came afterwards."

I got off the bus recently and walked as far as your house looking at the run-down little houses and the bay yonder. I'd like you to draw us a picture of what El Cerro was like once upon a time. Prosperous, lively, militant. Tell us a little of what El Cerro was like when you were 15.

"We lived in El Cerro and sought our entertainment in El Cerro. People didn't go into the city proper very often. There was a joke in those days. Whenever anybody bought a new suit, they would be asked: 'Off to the centre then?' On Sundays and holidays we would stroll down Grecia Street as if in the countryside. There were some cinemas, dance halls, a theatre (the Selecto) near the bend in Grecia Street. And lots of cafe life, where one could sit all night over two or three cups of coffee. Left-wing cafes where left-wingers would stop off."

The enemy wasn't the Blancos nor the Colorados. Because the right as such was non-existent. [Blancos and Colorados (whites and Reds) the two party system in Uruguay]

"There were no right-wing parties, although there were right-wing individuals inside the parties … Echegoyen, for instance, was a right-winger." [Echegoyen: Martin Recaredo Echegoyen, Blanco party leader]

Nardone was a right-winger too. And Pacheco later. [Nardone: Benito Nardone, radio broadcaster elected president in 1958: he proved a sore disappointment to his conservative voters. Pacheco: Jorge Pacheco Areco, president and Colorado Party leader.]

"Sure. To get back to your question: we used to meet up in those cafes where we talked about everything, politics included. One of the cafes was the Mirambell and the other one, down yonder, was the Viacaba."

Tell me about demonstrations when there was a dispute on.

"The demonstrations by the Meatworkers' Federation were massive, really massive turn-outs. With gauchos [cowboys] leading them."

Even the gauchos were involved?

"Yes, the guys who worked on the refrigeration ships would turn out. On horseback they would follow behind the Meat Federation's loudspeaker truck as it played the Marseillaise at full volume."

No singing?

"No, just the music. When folk heard the strains of the Marseillaise they knew right away that federation propaganda or a street demonstration was on the way. Heading up the procession there also a machine firing rockets skywards. The cowboys – many wearing

their ponchos, white neckerchiefs and grey sombreros – were followed by cyclists and then by people on foot. Entire families, young and old. Drinking yerba mate as they went."

All bound for the Palace... [the parliament building in Montevideo]

"The final destination was the Palace where sometimes they camped out. Tents were erected along the esplanade. And then the police would show up and wind things up. That was in the early 1950s."

Just as Uruguay was taking an economic down-turn.

"Yes, the refrigerated meat industry was in crisis and the foreign firms were starting to pull out. The Meatworkers' Federation was sorely injured and almost fatally wounded and had stopped playing its part. The Ateneo Cerro picked up the banner of agitation. There were experts in various fields who used to come and give talks. About humour, cinema and history. Some of these courses lasted six months. At the same time positions were being adopted vis a vis labour mobilisations and liberation movements around Latin America … in Guatemala, Santo Domingo and the fighting in Cuba leading up to the revolution. A number of libertarian performers such as Carlos 'El Gaucho' Molina and Zitarrosa [Alfredo Zitarrosa (1936-1989), very popular singer, composer and writer whose songs were banned in Uruguay after 1971 and who was forced out of the county.] used to turn up to play and sing. And at the weekends there were conversations with the Spanish exiles. The rector of the university even turned out: he was introduced by Gomensoro [Possibly Jose Gomensoro, lecturer in medicine at the University of Montevideo.] and Gatti and gave a talk on fascism at a street rally. The Ateneo was always alert and active on issues, not just nationally but throughout Latin America."

What is the Ateneo focusing on these days?

"One of the things I feel is important right now is the need to counter the fragmentation being caused by our new historical circumstances."

The undermining of the strength of the working class.

"Precisely. Right now the Ateneo means to make as much of an effort as it can to rally scattered forces so as to rebuild the fabric of social solidarity. We've always been in favour of not making man a prisoner of the collective."

'The collective should not wall him in but shore him up', is one of your principles.

"Correct. We are all for personalisation although naturally that has nothing to do with bourgeois individualism."

Which is running very strong right now.

"And which has spawned a number of practices boosting the power of a tiny faction that can do whatever it pleases, whereas the broad masses, being atomised, have lost much of their power. What we are looking for through the Ateneo is some way of coming together and coordinating with every other social institution in El Cerro and then aiming to create a strong social movement with answers to contemporary issues, bearing in mind especially that traditional political mechanisms have these days run out of steam."

How do you see the performance of the establishment in this context?

"The establishment has become a lot more conciliatory. We have a particularly ruthless capitalism spearheaded by finance capital and we have states creating openings for them right around the globe making laws for their protection. What have Menem, Cavallo [Menem: Carlos Saul Menem, Peronist president of Argentina in the 1990s. Cavallo: Domenico Cavallo, Argentinean economy minister in the 1990s.] and others in Argentina done but set in place the legal conditions enabling capital to do as it pleases? And another important point: no longer is this being described as imperialism. "

It has been re-branded as globalisation.

"And there in that change of terminology lies the snare that disguises what is really going on, the real machinery at work. Let's not use the words 'class', nor 'struggle' nor 'confrontation' nor 'imperialism' any more. At the same time they have conjured up a consensus around this lie. As Chomsky puts it: "Never have so many intellectuals of the first calibre been as compliant and comfortable within the system as they are now. Nor as productive of its values."

As you see it, what is the purpose behind these changes in terminology?

"To stop us from thinking about these things. To offer us a representation that does not match the facts. Preventing a correct analysis of them. Gaston Bachelard has done some interesting research into this."

So this belongs in the same category as 'the end of ideology', the 'end of history' and 'the impossibility of socialism?

"And as 'there are no classes any more' and 'those days are gone'. As Chomsky says: 'If there's one thing that is self-evident, it's the existence of classes.'."

There's an economist, an American like Chomsky, Kenneth Galbraith who states in his History of Economics *that 'economics is a science greatly cultivated by those who say what the rich are eager to hear.' And 'Monetary measures are not politically and socially neutral.*

"True, that's another thing they would have us swallow. One of the theorists of Thatcherite conservatism said that it was a good thing for social democracy to win from time to time 'to introduce some ideological oxygen'. Obviously, this raised certain expectations among the people that made it feasible to put immediate demands on the long finger."

Let's look a bit further back into the past. Back to the days of the dictatorship. You people were hit quite hard in terms of dead and disappeared, You yourself had a brother who perished in Orletti [concentration camp].

"Yes, my brother [Alberto Mechoso] is one of those who disappeared in Orletti along with Gerardo Gatti and León Duarte. Along with another comrade, Perro Pérez [Washington 'Perro' Perez, FAU and PVP activist], for instance, they were founders of the FAU. We were active alongside them on a range of tasks … the ROE and the OPR (an armed organisation that carried out a number of operations)."

Such as the kidnapping of the industrialist Molaguero, or the abduction of Costa-Gavras's wife, Michele Ray, or the theft of the '33 Orientales' flag and the kidnapping of Cambón, the representative of a number of paper-making forms. What was behind the Molaguero kidnapping?

"Molaguero was an industrialist involved in shoe-manufacture, a real feudal lord who was firing people, harassing the union and even beating people. At the time, Alfaro had an article printed about the vicious treatment he was doling out to the workers. The guy was a member of the JUP [Juventud Uruguaya de Pie: Alert Uruguayan Youth] and he was kidnapped in relation to a dispute."

It was claimed at the time that you had tortured him.

"Which is a complete lie. Our thinking on such matters was very clear. Torture of a defenceless person was not on. Not just because of what it did to the victim, but also because of the way it impacted on the militant. He was the only kidnap victim who claimed to have been tortured and he was lying. As to the abduction of the reporter Michele Ray, the object there was to get some publicity for the reasons we had not voted in the elections. We whiled the night away chatting to her. She was very well informed as to the situation in Latin America and our chat was very enjoyable."

Tell us about those of your comrades who were 'disappeared' in Orletti.

"Those comrades featured in an episode of what was known as Operation Condor."

Tell us about the incident when they took Perro Pérez to Orletti to get something the Uruguayans involved in Operation Condor in Buenos Aires were after.

"Here goes. Our people kidnapped an industrialist inside Argentina and got a ten million dollar ransom for him. I was in jail at the time. The military – Gavozzo and Cordero and the rest – got wind of the money and wanted a cut. At the time they were holding Gerardo Gatti and Duarte in Orletti. Perro Pérez, a well known and very active anarchist and FUNSA [Uruguayan National Tyre Plant and its trade union] employee, one of the people most active in the 1972 strike, was in Buenos Aires."

In hiding.

"No, living openly because there was no warrant for his arrest. He had a street-corner newsagent's shop that supported himself and his family. One day one of the Uruguayan military turned up and offered to free his comrades from Orletti in return for two million and suggested that they take him to Orletti to iron out the details. They took him out to Orletti – blindfolded of course. Perro asked to see Gerardo Gatti but was told that he was not there. He then asked for Duarte and they fetched him. He could scarcely recognise him. He looked ghastly. Clothing in shreds and his feet bare. Perro looked at his feet and said: 'How come you've no shoes on?' At which the soldier, who was listening, piped up to say: 'There are shoes in that room', with a smirk. When Leon later went to the room there were more than fifty pairs of men's and women's shoes there. Perro Pérez had a word with Duarte. He put the proposition made by the Uruguayan military and agreed to

come back to hear the response. They fetched him a few days later. What the response was I do not know, but I know that before they parted they hugged each other and Duarte whispered into his ear: 'Get out of here. They're going to kill you.' That very same day Perro and his family applied to the Swedish embassy for asylum And survived. Duarte and Gatti were 'disappeared'. Duarte knew that, money or no money, they were going to be killed.

And Perro is dead now.

"Yes, he returned from Sweden in 1986 or 1987 for a tribute we paid to Duarte. He said his piece and then sat down. And dropped dead ten minutes later. His heart gave out."

Interview conducted by Maria Esther Gillo from *Brecha*, Uruguay, July 2001

Juan Carlos Mechoso

The material below was intended for publication in *O Diluvio*, a review circulating in Porto Alegre and district in Brazil. In it, a comrade offers us a profile of the veteran Uruguayan anarchist fighter Juan Carlos Mechoso, a lifelong supporter of the libertarian project and co-founder of the FAU in 1956. In the interview, Juan Carlos talks about politics outside the parameters of reproduction of the system and analyses the fresh developments turning Latin America into a theatre of struggle for social change and the building of people's power.

Juan Carlos Mechoso was born in Uruguay, in the town of Trinidade (Flores) on 24 March 1935. His activism started at age 14. Born into a family of workers, he became a labourer and linotype operator. Along with the now legendary León Duarte, Gerardo Gatti, 'Perro' Pérez and others, he co-founded the Uruguayan CNT (National Workers' Convention) in 1964. Self-educated, he was one of the founders of the FAU (Uruguayan Anarchist Federation) in October 1956. Years later he was behind the creation of its politico-military wing, the OPR-33 [People's Revolutionary Organisation], an anarchist guerrilla warfare experiment.

On 26 April 1969, he went to ground for 4 years after a shed used for making home-made bombs was accidentally blown up while an OPR-33 activist was making an ammonia-based device. There was an explosion and his children suffered burns, prompting Juan Carlos to change safe-houses every week until he was captured in 1973.

His brother Alberto Mechoso, known as 'El Pocho', was 'disappeared'. Alberto too had been a socialist fighter and guerrilla with great experience in bank robberies and kidnappings. He was a key figure in the underground Uruguayan resistance.

Alberto served several terms in prison. One very rainy night in 1972, he managed to escape following horrific torture. His mouth toothless, his body torn, and his feet aching from long torture sessions, he escaped through a bathroom window. He slipped through

easily thanks to the serious weight loss from weeks of torture, electric shock treatment and interrogation. And made it on to the roof of the army barracks. He waited there for the changing of the guard and then, with whatever strength he could muster, leapt on to a tree, clung on to branch and fell to earth with a thud. Getting to his feet, he made a run for it. The troops spotted him and opened fire. Firing dozens of shots. Alberto just kept on running. He came to a ditch where there was an open sewer. He ran on, the stinking water up to his knees. He came to a humble dwelling, knocked on the door and asked for help. The family living in poverty there were afraid but showed solidarity with the fugitive.

Once he had recovered enough, Alberto ventured into the street and made contact with the FAU-OPR 33 again. The organisation pulled out all the stops to rescue the militant who refused the accolade of hero and whose modesty was legendary. Later he made a physical recovery. The enemy was never able to break his spirit. He moved away to Buenos Aires where he played a key part in setting up a bridgehead and an infra-structure offering a haven to those on the run. Dozens of militants had been forced underground by the brutal repression. Alberto featured in and oversaw a number of spectacular operations … kidnappings, attacks and bank robberies to raise funds for the mammoth task of resisting the military dictatorship.

In 1976, Operation Condor [the cooperative efforts of military dictatorships in the southern Cone] tracked him down to a bar where he waiting to meet a contact. The military raided his humble abode. His wife and children were taken back to Montevideo under false identities. Alberto held his ground and refused to 'sing'. He has never been seen since.

Juan Carlos stresses his brother's story more than his own. Refusing to speak in the first person is an old anarchist tradition. The cult of the self is regarded as lacking in the modesty which libertarians prize as a central value. In March 1973, Juan Carlos was picked up with some comrades from the OPR-33 (the military wing of the FAU). He was tortured horrifically over weeks. In 1976, when there was a coup mounted in Argentina, the torture resumed with the usual savagery. An international campaign was mounted to save the lives of the prisoners. The torture was halted. Juan Carlos stayed in jail for a further 9 years.

Juan Carlos was released from prison in 1985 under an amnesty. And was welcomed back to the El Cerro barrio [Montevideo] like the prodigal son. On his first night back, there was a barbecue with his beloved labourers. By the third day of freedom after 12 years as a political prisoner, he was attending meetings again, especially FAU meetings. Not one to dwell on the past, he set about grappling with the future. Now in his seventies, he remains faithful to the libertarian principles that have accompanied him through his life. He is active every day, just as was as an adolescent.

Q. Where does the FAU, which you have headed for so many years, stand on capitalism's present condition and on the lifestyle that relies upon huge profits going to the big transnational companies thanks to political coercion by the ruling class? Can we expect anything from politics? Where is the human race headed for?

A. For a start, we need to be clear what we mean by politics. Politics is often spoken about and linked only to parliament, the cabinet, elections, the political class and the party leaderships who appear in the media. Such linkage stunts and belittles the idea of politics.

We ought to think of politics as being much more than these. There is a huge number of struggles that deserve classification as political. In Latin America and in Europe there is the political battle against globalisation and war. There are populations that refuse to be disciplined and which manifest great discontent. The masses have their dreams and ambitions which are still alive and well.

People are fighting back. The United States thought the invasion of Iraq would be a walkover and today we know it to be a nightmare. They have no idea of how to extricate themselves from the mess they've got themselves into. In Latin America at any rate, it is plain to see that the capitalist model has failed.

In the so-called developed world there are great problems also. The huge numbers of immigrants who suffer from casual employment, are exploited and their living conditions are awful and the poverty rate is growing by the day. The hopes of these people are rising because they have an idea that they are not going to get justice or better their living conditions or change social relationships or begin a process guaranteeing every human being's basic needs by following the capitalist road.

The aims of the big multinationals are bigger and bigger profits. Geopolitics rules the developed world and the costs are ignored.

They invade countries and kill indiscriminately. And millions are starving to death.

A great French thinker (Michel Foucault) said that "where there is oppression, inevitably there is resistance" and history bears that out. Oppression may be growing but so is resistance. Resistance movements grow and blunder around and look for new methods of resistance and that search is not going to be completed overnight; it's a long haul.

These days we are breaking free of one part of domination, tomorrow we break free of another. Today we take one step forward, tomorrow we may have to retreat. These are not linear movements: they zigzag.

But we have every reason to think that the resistance fight is making headway.

Q. Should we be hopeful?

A. Yes. The system isn't about to commit hara-kiri. People are starting to think that unless we change everything nothing is going to change and if we don't change social relationships there isn't going to be any meaningful change and the people are waking up to this.

This is a form of consciousness, an empirical knowledge that history has been imparting to us and which largely finds expression in demonstrations around the world.

[Adapted from www.vermelhoenegro.org, website of the FAG (Gaucha Anarchist Federation ie. Anarchist Federation of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil). No name given for interviewer, but article is said to have been added to the site in January 2008, thanks to comrade LD.]

Santa (El Santa Romero)

El Santa Romero was like something out of a poem by León Felipe. He could not brook this mean reality and its injustices. With its courts that he could see were not worth a dog's piss. His was a rebellious temperament that was uncomfortable when surrounded by resignation or taking things in one's stride and being complicit in them. He suffered and fumed in the face of arbitrary actions. And loved the people to whom he genuinely belonged. He sensed that he had to do something and could not resign himself to things as they were and he found all this inequality unbearable. An order where the few had it all and the many did not know what the next day held in store for them or whether they could keep a roof over their heads and food on the table.

This social sensitivity of his was "killing" him and his life as an exploited worker pointed him in one direction.

Having worked from childhood, his had been an impoverished childhood that even a fool would not have asked for.

He started working at the age of 7 in a shop in Trinidad (in the Flores department of Uruguay) where he was born. A village with lots of landowners and little history of social struggles. Even in short trousers he was wrestling with life and earning the respect of his contemporaries when the need arose.

After his move to Montevideo he was shunted from job to job. In the end he found regular work at RAUSA. The job: Stacking up 50 kilo sacks of sugar all day long. A tiny band of his comrades got together to press some minor demands. He joined forces with them and they set about doing union business. The leaders of the union, affiliated to the CSU, were too moderate. Which merely doubled his workload.

He never complained about his work but he was outraged about arbitrary treatment, abuses and a number of excesses. No, he never complained, being the sort of man "who speaks not of pain or love".

What was required was struggle, not whining. And he was being drawn down paths chosen for him by his sensibilities and rebelliousness. The problem affected everybody and needed a universal response. His friends, workmates, neighbours and the population at large lived like that, with scarcely enough to eat in most cases; bringing up children and educating them and looking after their health was a real worry.

For the poor, education was almost a luxury. They could scarcely afford primary schooling paid in instalments. It was too much for him. The education he had received

from his day to day life had nurtured certain beliefs: he was facing an enemy, a system that worked in favour of a handful of privileged money-grubbers who were swindling the people. This was "order" stood on its head. He felt that the whole thing needed taking apart but those at the bottom of the heap had no means of doing so. Of course nothing was done for the benefit of the working person who might have to approach the bank for a loan to pay off his rent arrears, only to be asked for so much in return that he concluded that in order to get anywhere "you have to be well off and then your interest rates turn your head". Of course the bank was an oppressive institution, a good symbol of the system. Even so he would later apply for a number of loans on behalf of the group.

Strikes were on a large scale and lengthy. General gains started to be whittled away at the top and they were refusing to keep wages in line with the costs of living. Then there was the police crackdown, with workers from the Meat Industry killed. The students were battling for university reforms. Society was convulsed.

Libertarian activists had banded together and set up the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (FAU). The Ateneo in El Cerro was engaged in intense socio-political work and in the thick of the struggles locally and across Latin America. Backing the fighters in the Sierra Maestre whom others were attacking by writing them off as adventurers.

The 'beardies' from the Sierra Maestra overran Cuba. Sending the blood pumping through the veins of much of the Americas.

In 1959 El Santa arrived at the El Cerro Ateneo. Where one of its many ventures was on at the time. There he met up with other 'misfits' angry with injustice who reckoned that the only solution was to fight back. A fighter was listening to them. From then on El Santa lost interest in certain, sometimes wearisome tasks such as sticking up posters through to 2.00 or 3.00 am., leaving little time for those who had to be at work by 7.00 am. But he hardly ever missed out on street activity.

Almost immediately he joined the El Cerro Anarchist Group which was part of the FAU. And he cut his teeth on local activities, trade union agitations, organisational propaganda and anarchist activities out of the Ateneo.

And got involved in confrontations on the streets with the repression. Up to his neck in the FUNSA comrades thrust for the government building and the savage clash with the police. He was a mainstay of the lads from El Cerro who, together with the FUNSA union and the folks from La Teja formed a powerful team that roved the arterial routes of Montevideo, chanting, complaining and showing their support almost on a weekly basis.

And he fully embraced the libertarian socialist outlook. Dismissing the authoritarian approach to socialism. His socialism had nothing in common with the USSR and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Much less their strategy for the Americas. He found social democracy to be too close to the system and that it had nothing to do with the cause of real emancipation. He thought and felt that in the absence of real involvement by the people, without solidarity and freedom, socialism would never be possible. He was a firm believer

in organisation, in an operational and flexible federalism through which his organisation could operate and manage change without overruling the people; the main aim being a new order, with improvements to the quality of life for the individual.

Those were stormy days and full of promise. Many were starting to feel that change was possible. Obviously there was a lot of fighting yet to be done but it was possible for all that. A number of direct action operations were mounted. Along came the Hunger Commandos episode. Funds were needed and there was no money available and lots to be done and there were lots of openings for growth. And then there was Santa running out of a bank with a bag stuffed with cash. In 1967 the FAU was overhauled, structurally, with an eye to the new circumstances and focusing on future prospects. *Pocho* [Alberto Mechoso] had a word with Santa in accordance with one FAU resolution apropos of systematically tackling armed activity. Building a specific apparatus within the parameters of FAU political work. Santa's response was " Let me think it over."

This armed struggle was different from the "*foco*" approach that was trying to build a struggle on a range of planes over a long-term process and it had a well-defined objective – libertarian socialism.

After joining the armed wing, he took part in bank robberies, jobs related to "kidnappings" and procurement, etc. He happened to walk into one bank with a recently fitted alarm system directly linked to the police station and this was his undoing. When the alarm went off he tried to shoot his way out with his comrades. As the leader of the raid he had issued his instructions when he happened to glance through the window. A huddle of soldiers with rifles and short arms were aiming at the exit. "I thought we were dealing with a couple of beat cops who had happened along and that we had a chance of getting away after a couple of shots fired", he would later tell us. At no time did it occur to him to take a hostage: such things were unthinkable to him. He took his chance and made a run for it. Later, after he was captured, he never confessed to membership of any organisation. Thereby protecting his "family", the FAU.

With *Pocho*, especially in relation to OPR operations: they were like two brothers. They had a lot in common, one of them not least this feature of his of acting like a local kid from the working class *barrio*, something he never lost. The wisecracks, the "sledging", the jokes. Vivacious, sound and disrespectful of pretensions.

They also shared this readiness to take a gamble and to take things on seriously and responsibly, abide by the decisions of the Organisation and not kick over the traces.

The director of the newspaper *El Día*, kidnapped by the Organisation said "This subversive swiped away the flies lest they might bother me", as if pointing up some great contradiction by this. No, Santa was a sound, tough guy but at the same time he was very soft-hearted, brotherly and set high standards for himself. He could not mistreat a defenceless man; he just felt that that was not right. This was the struggle, nothing more.

Yes, Santa was blessed with this "people skill" as we used to say of those who are straight-dealers, with no back doors, no two faces. That's just the way he was. He was a battler, no matter what the context. Remember the 15 years he spent behind bars when he stood firm and stood by the others, his vernacular language keeping up spirits. He dressed according to his affections, in a red and black shirt sometimes or in the Club Cerro colours every time he turned out for a game of soccer. After he began to frequent the Ateneo and read Malatesta, reading became a regular pursuit of his, especially during his time inside. He always took an active part in the political life of the FAU teams. We stress this because in his everyday life was not much of a talker. Santa's life was exemplary for a person and for a militant. A man of integrity. We have lost, in him, a chunk of the best of our history. Lost one of those militants from the people who gave their all for a better tomorrow, for a world of justice and freedom. We were with him when his life was hanging by a thread and he realised that the game was up but he kept on battling to the end. Chatting about everyday matters as if nothing was wrong. We told Julia, his partner, who stood by him with wonderful devotion "It's as if there wasn't a thing wrong with him."

It was with great grief that a huge number of people bade him farewell: his relations, libertarian comrades and comrades from the Ateneo, militants from other political organisations he had a great regard for, his beloved friends from the La Grúa gang and from Club Cerro, neighbours and acquaintances from the district. Those were times of pain and loss, happy memories and wisecracks. As Santa's remains were being laid to rest. Grief overcome those present and drained the colours from the landscape. Darkness in the daylight.

But there are parts of Santa that shall never die. Cherished memories. His commitment, his pugnacious approach, his solidarity, his love of liberty, his yearning for a better world.

The FAU feels proud to have numbered a militant of his stature among its members. Your exemplary life, beloved comrade, will live forever in our memories.

From the FAU's *Lucha Libertaria*, May 2001

Jaime Prieto, Rebel

Born in Vergara in Treinta y Tres province, Uruguay in 1932, he married Susana Varaldi with whom he had three children. As a student, trade union, political and social activist, within the law or outside it, he followed a political path that encompassed the anarchists from the Libertarian Youth (JL), the anarcho-syndicalists and the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (FAU), before moving on to Worker-Student Resistance (ROE), the People's Revolutionary Organisation (OPR-33) and then, less of an anarchist, to the People's Victory Party (PVP). [What follows is a series of extracts from an interview covering his personal experience and evolution]

There was a lot of talk about politics in our house. My father was an independent nationalist, a liberal who believed in plain-dealing. I had an uncle who studied from home, a very decent doctor with ideas different from my father. And then there was my uncle Ademar Gómez, a big noise in Treinta y Tres. When they tried to appoint him chief of police he publicly declined the appointment and joined the Communist Party. So I inherited his anarchist book collection which I devoured. With my father an anti-communist and an uncle who was in the CP, you can imagine the sort of arguments I was exposed to.

The young Prieto was politicised early on and the left had a variety of options to offer. However, he and his frends chose the libertarians.

I was active in the University Reform Group (ARU), the ARU mark one, in a sizeable group that used to meet at the plumbers' union in Durazno Street. There were Perico Scaron, Gerardo Gatti, Raul Carboni, Rama … I'm talking about the 1950s. Later I joined the Libertarian Youth operating out of the bakers' union on Arequita Street. Which is where I met another great guy, the doctor Juan Piñeyro Mariscurrena. Together we set up the worker-student coalition, the first attempt to orchestrate people outside the UGT whose hold on the workers' movement was loosening. The first time the university struck over autonomy, we began to come into contact with the anarchist movement, especially the anarcho-syndicalists. This marked a resurgence of direct action trade unionism.

We were concerned about building a synthesis that would lend anarchist ideas more impact and make them more palatable to society and act as a corrective to bolshevik authoritarianism. Not that we were against organisation or socialism. Within the libertarian movement they used to call us 'the other anarchists'. In 1954 when the FAU was launched, we managed to rally lots of people and yet they called us the 'bolshies'.

When you say 'they used to call us', who are you talking about? And how did you get to be a 'we'?

We came together out of a fondness for discussions, because we thought of ourselves as anarchists and as a libertarian collective. We were friends as well as comrades. Gerardo [Gatti] and I were especially friends and had been since adolescence; then there was my partner Susana and Marta (Casal), Gerardo's partner. But there was a fair number of us. We were about 16 or 17 years old and we used to meet in an attic.[…] There was Scarssi, for instance, who could multiply a four-digit number by another four-digit number, in his head. And Lisito Aldao, a tall and highly intelligent guy who tended to say things backwards and whom there was no correcting. Our treasurer was David Rosemberg who had a DKW practically made up of cardboard held together with nails. This jalopy had a hole in the floor but no starter, so David would peddle furiously and off he went … They were crazies but a breath of fresh air! On the student scene we were involved in 1951 in the *gremios solidarios* strike and in the very first ANCAP dispute. I began to come into contact with people from La Teja and El Cerro at a farmhouse where we used to go to

make molotov cocktails… We were in the Uruguayan Student Federation, but we were active as anarchists.

How much a part of your life was activism, alongside studies, love-life, friends?

They were all one. We used to go to meetings … and to Don Pablo…

Oh yes, Don Pablo's on the corner of Agraciado and Marcelino Sosa... beer and snacks

Beer and snacks and a placard that read 'Nazis not welcome on these premises'. During the war that placard had been in German. We used to hang out there and chat. Gerardo, for instance, had a real loud horse-laugh and I never heard him use sarcasm … But the others. Raul (Carboni) could demolish you with sarcasm and leave you feeling like an idiot. Hugo (Cores) could make himself enemies with his sarcasm. But Scaron was very sarcastic too. Pichon was a one-off and we became great friends; he was a very open, very capable who taught himself German in a few months while he was living with the *barbudos* (beardies). You know who I mean by beardies?

The reader might well think that the reference to 'beardies' refers to the Cuban guerrillas but in fact Machado was referring to a [Hutterite] Christian community.

We were open to a range of influences in those days. The 'beardies' were a Christian community who followed the teachings of Pastor Hutter, a German. They were English and French and German war-resisters, pacifists. They had no particular rites but supported themselves by farming and they had toy factories … no war toys. When their kids grew up and saw the outside world, the notion of sharing everything began to pall with them and they blended into society at large. So the community was opening up.

Communitarism and cooperativism would have been some of the other influences you mentioned.

Yes, partly as a result of the influence from the 'beardies' and partly through Luce Fabbri … We set up a farming commune on Route 7, almost just after the Comunidad del Sur was founded. There's a Luce Fabbri pamphlet called *El camino*, published by the JL. It states that society has to be transformed on the basis of cultural improvement, ideas of solidarity and sampling of different methodologies … that was the way (el camino). It was practically our Bible. We began setting up co-ops in El Cerro and people's ateneos… and when the FAU was launched it took the form of a federation. I liked the craziness of it all but then along came the Cuban revolution and we took the bait: a snappier seizure of power. Despite our reading of criticisms of that approach, the idea overpowered us. Another influence on some of us was a brand of literature that might be described as social-pacifist: John Dos Passos, Sartre, Jules Romain, Albert Camus … My own nom de guerre was Camuso because I was a big Camus fan, and especially a fan of *The Rebel.*

And of The Just, *I dare say.*

Every time we set out to do anything *The Just* would come to mind. As did *The Outsider* and Camus's whole philosophical output. Not everyone knows that.

There's a big difference between the Libertarian Youth and the PVP with a lot of stops between where a lot of people got on board or stepped off. Organisational changes, changes of name, changes of definition. How do you see the whole trip?
When the FAU broke up, with the people from the faculties of Fine Arts and Medicine and the Errandoneas forming one faction, D'Ottone dropped in on me at the bank to bring me the news. I told him: 'Look, you are still the anarchists; those guys have nothing to do with anarchism. And I'm with the others now…'
But a decision had to be made as to which faction would carry on with the name FAU.
Yes, we held on to the name FAU. And that was a mistake by Gerardo and a costly one. Gerardo was never ready to sever ties with the anarchist tradition because they were marvellous people and because many on the left would not understand a new choice of name. But it was a mistake, because we lost the traditionalists and, on the other hand, we created confusion when we ought to have adopted a new name. In Paris, when we were discussing the PVP – the discussions may have started off in Buenos Aires, but the continued in France – I said at one meeting: 'Count me in, but that's in spite of the Marxism-Leninism. This is not just Marxist, it's Leninist as well. Hugo sneered at this, but it was a fact." And that was another mistake.
What exactly was your point?
I am not anti-communist. I am a follower of Camus. I'm all for organisation, but let it be a libertarian organisation, not a party. Parties throw up bureaucracy and chicanery and social climbers. I was no apparatchik: I had little to do with the FAU apparatus. I joined a farm commune and dropped out for several years but there was always this proviso: that if the comrades needed me, I'd be there. Later I finished up as a bank official but even then I couldn't stand the apparatus. I did whatever needed doing in Buenos Aires. I survived the disaster in 1976 by the skin of my teeth, but it left its mark on me, on us all. Even later when I became active again on my return from exile, I made non-attendance at party meetings a condition. I was available though and everybody knew it.

Interview by Ivonne Trías in *Brecha*, 14 October 2005 [adapted]

Ruben 'Pepe' Prieto

Ruben 'Pepe' Prieto was active in the FAU and in the Worker-Student Resistance (ROE) in the 1960s. He was a co-founder of the People's Victory Party (PVP).

On the FAU, the ROE and the PVP

Where were you active in the 60s?
I was active in the FAU and worked within the ROE from late 1967 onwards. The FAU was set up in 1956 with people such as Gerardo Gatti, Juan Carlos Mechoso, Mauricio Gatti, Hugo Cores, the Errandoneas from the Faculty of Fine Arts and so on.
By the time you joined the FAU there was another process underway.
Yes, with Gatti as the driving force, the FAU had taken a path that might be described as Malatestan in the sense that there was an awareness of a need to establish a specific and centralised organisation. That and the decision to offer critical support to the Cuban revolution and the adoption of certain Marxist-Leninist methods of analysis triggered a split in the FAU. A number of groups pulled out and one group – on the basis of the trade union activity of Gatti himself, León Duarte, Hugo Cores and other comrades from the trade union movement of the day, plus others within the student scene, like Gustavo Inzurralde, Elena Quinteros, Lilián Celiberti and ourselves – sponsored the formation of the ROE by way of opposition to the readjustments entailed in the growing hegemony of international finance capital.
What happened come the 1973 coup d'état ?
Come the coup, most organisation were gravely weakened. By 1972 extra-parliamentary groups trying to mount direct action or armed struggle activity were already being hit hard. In 1973 many of the FAU's activists had fallen back across the border to Buenos Aires in view of the infra-structural difficulties in shielding underground activists, although there was still a notable presence within Uruguay which enabled many ROE activists (it having a higher profile than the FAU) to play leading roles in the banking, FUNSA, beverage-workers' or healthworkers' unions.
And how did the formation of the PVP come out of that withdrawal to Buenos Aires?
From Buenos Aires Gerardo Gatti resumed his preparations for a congress that had been thwarted by the repression. There was also open activity such as support committees and liaison with Argentinean political groups. Together with a team of comrades, Gatti worked on drafting the basis for the launch of the PVP.
The PVP also drew in armed groups such as the People's Revolutionary Organisation (OPR-33).
OPR-33 never actually had an independent life of its own. It was always an outgrowth of the FAU. It was not an apparatus with a life of its own, nor did it have any decision-making powers of its own. Everything OPR-33 did was determined by the leadership of the FAU which acted as a political party. It had, as Gatti put it, 'two feet'. One handling

mass activity in terms of trade unions, student life and neighbourhood issues, etc., and the other designed to intervene in popular struggles by means of direct action.

OPR-33 mounted important operations within Uruguay, such as the theft of the 33 Orientales flag in 1969 and a number of kidnappings such as that of the entrepreneur Mologuero.

Yes, the Molaguera kidnapping had more to do with his being linked to a trade union dispute then on in the rubber industry. The FAU had mounted that sort of operation before in connection with the FUNSA or CICCSA disputes.

The militants based in Argentina decided to 'raise funds'. There was the abortive attempt to abduct a Pepsi Cola executive and then they plumped for a Dutch entrepreneur, Hart.

Yes. Two or three comrades were arrested in the attempted kidnapping of the Pepsi Cola executive. But the Hart kidnapping was a success. I wasn't in on it as I wasn't in Buenos Aires at the time, but there are accounts of what happened. The operation netted ten million dollars.

That was some figure for those days, just about the largest ransom paid up to then in Argentina.

Actually, the biggest was from the Bunge Born kidnapping carried out by the Montoneros which netted 60 million dollars. Then came an ERP kidnapping that raised a 14 million ransom paid for Esso executive Samuelson, but the Hart operation brought in 10 million. A huge sum of money.

What became of the money?

For one thing it enabled planning for the congress to proceed. Comrades set up the requisite infrastructure to fund an underground congress in secure circumstances.

That congress in October 1975 saw the launch of the People's Victory Party (PVP) as a public and legal set-up.

It was launched as a political party, but as a clandestine one. At the time it was unthinkable that any leftist party could take on the dictatorship whilst operating within the law. The congress's conclusions provided for a plan of action and a programme of anti-dictatorship activity suggesting resistance and the imposition of a provisional government of national salvation made up of all who had opposed the dictatorship, and a call for a constituent assembly to determine the new institutions for the country. This proposal won support from dozens of left-wing activists, many of them drawn from the Workers' Revolutionary Front (FRT) a Tupamaro faction that made a massive contribution to the fleshing out of the proposal. […]

And where did the remainder of the money go?

Here I should refer back to a conversation I had with Mauricio Gatti prior to his trip to France. The PVP had a core leadership made up of Gerardo Gatti, León Duarte, Alberto Mechoso and Mauricio Gatti. In 1976 the Uruguayan army swooped on the comrades in

Argentina. It started on 28 March with a raid on a caravan in Colonia ferrying propaganda into Uruguay. In April Telba Juarez was murdered and Ary Cabrera and Eduardo Chizzola were 'disappeared'. Then on 9 June they abducted Gerardo Gatti.

The Gatti case marked the start of the repression mounted in the secret Automotores Orletti camp [inside Argentina].

But how much of the Hart ransom money had been spent on buying houses and premises up that point?

All in all, counting premises, accommodation, vehicles and the upkeep of some people, no more that 500,000 dollars. And to give you some idea of values at the time, an apartment within commuting distance of Buenos Aires in those days cost around 6,000 dollars. The price of a car these days. Property was very cheap in Argentina.

There are two clear phases to the repression from Orletti. One starts with the Gatti abduction and ends with the first flight out of Orletti on 24 July when 23 prisoners were flown back to Uruguay. A second phase in September 1976 ended with the second flight out of Orletti on 5 October when they flew in further 22 who are now 'among the missing'. The forces of repression seized money at both stages. but how much did you manage to smuggle abroad?

Roughly 1,400,000 dollars were smuggled out and used to fund a worldwide campaign exposing the Uruguayan dictatorship.

That sum, plus the expenditure on premises and the money spent on publicity within Uruguay can be rounded up to 2 million dollars. What became of the other 8 million?

The military stole it.

In July, following the Gatti kidnapping in Argentina, the forces of repression based in Orletti tried blackmail.

The people who kidnapped Gatti on 9 June used one of his comrades, Washington 'Perro' Pérez, in an attempt to demand a 2 million dollar ransom. A few months ago I mentioned in La Republica that a sequence of photos was sent out by the military showing a naked Gatti photographed face-on, in profile and from behind and plainly in good health. One snap showed him holding the ace of spades and the ace of clubs in one hand, symbolising the 2 million they were demanding. Somebody took those snaps before they started to torture him. They also sent a tape of him reading, the date being established by the fact that he was reading from the sports pages of *El País*. Shortly after that another snap was sent, the one that has survived, showing Gatti lying on a bunk in a very sorry state, alongside Perro Pérez who is holding a copy of *Crónica* newspaper.

The negotiations involved Perro Perez making five trips between the guys in Orletti and the PVP. What did you make of tit?

On the day the photos came we were in an apartment on Luis Viale Street in Buenos Aires where I was living with my partner, my daughter and Tota Quinteros. It was construed as an intelligence operation mounted to buy time so that they could track down and round up

all the other militants of the organisation and, above all, get their hands on the money. It is very telling that on 13 July, following the abduction of León Duarte, one of the bosses from Orletti told Washington 'Perro' Pérez: "Right, Don Perro, the Gatti business is over.' Suggesting that they now had the 2 million or were about to get it. According to our information, the money finished up in two locations. So Duarte told Perro Pérez: "Get away. These guys are killers."

That figure tallies with the figure given by the Argentinean 'informant' who supplied the details leading to the discovery of Simón Riquelo and the exposure of the second flight out of Orletti. He says that they got two million dollars during the July phase. The other six million were captured in September then?

They got the lot. In conversation with Mauricio we reckoned that they netted 6 million from Alberto Mechoso's capture. Some of the money might have been captured with Adalberto Soba and there might have been some money in other people's homes. But the top leadership was rounded up and all the money with them. [...]

Roger Rodriguez [adapted]

What Would I Value About My Experience With The FAU?

[Although not a FAU member for long, (PVP and Frente Amplio leader) Hugo Cores's account of his own movement and the shift of FAU personnel towards the un-anarchist PVP is the most detailed explanation I have seen.]

Personally speaking, a lot. I found it a short-lived but enriching experience. It brought me into contact with people of extraordinarily high calibre, such as Raúl Carboni, Gerardo Gatti (who would long be my mentors), León Duarte, Washingtom Pérez, Juan Carlos Mechoso, Rubén Barcos, Julio Mancebo, Alfredo Errandonea Jr. and Rubén Prieto from the Comunidad del Sur. All of them activists of the highest calibre.

My own life took such a turn that although I and many of these comrades adopted different political and theoretical stances, our connections survived and there was mutual respect between us all. Even when our differences led to significant polarisation, in the early 1960s. I remember that in April 1959 we were publishing a fortnightly called *Lucha Libertaria*. It had been coming out virtually ever since the FAU had been launched. One evening we left an editorial meeting with Gerardo Gatti, Elbia Leite and Pedro Scaron and made for ... where there was a rally on. The speaker was Fidel [Castro] from the victorious Cuban 26 July Movement. He was explaining the logic of the incipient revolution. Which at that point was irrepressibly popular, democratic and anti-imperialist.

That day I embraced the (for an anarchist totally heretical) notion that liberation might be achievable from government. At the time I was a rank and file, all but politically illiterate activist, but I still cling to that idea.

The ideological gulf widened later when the revolution in Cuba began to describe itself as socialist and embraced the precepts of Marxism-Leninism. Whenever I began carefully to read into the issues of rebellion and revolution, I was largely guided by what we knew about Cuba: the magazine *Pensamiento Critico*, Fidel's speeches, the writings of Che and the effervescent, critical Marxism that grew out of that experience.

The 26 July Movement (Fidel's movement) and the FAU shared the same red and black colours , but their political thinking was completely different.

In those days a number of comrades, headed by Gerardo Gatti, reckoned that that the FAU, or most of it at least, could support the revolution in Cuba. This ushered in a fairly lengthy period of fierce argument. I subscribed to the line pushed by Gerardo, Duarte and other comrades but I began from the acknowledgement that it was not compatible with the label 'anarchist'. Besides, that was the experience, not just of the Cuban anarchists who were at loggerheads with the 26 July Movement, but also with the anarchists around the world. I did not take part in the arguments that led to the split [in the FAU].

For one thing, the FAU at its foundation [in 1956] had been a mixed bag, theoretically – taking in the Fine Arts faculty, the Comunidad del Sur, the anarcho-syndicalists, the libertarians from the Faculty of Medicine, and Luce Fabbri. Divergent ideas spinning off in differing directions. Those who put the case for them in the debates were sound comrades with great political nous and real commitment to activism. But there was no unity in their thinking, let alone their action.

For a time, anarchists were very open and appreciative and had a positive view of a wide variety of shared experiences in community life, hard-fought strikes, advertising campaigns, the experience of communal life and work, gaining a foothold in the *barrio* and denouncing price hikes.

When the Cuban debate erupted, relations between the various ideological outlooks became much less cordial.

Anarchist thought as it then existed, inspired by Bakunin and Malatesta, was not much use as a guide to activity in a Uruguay on the verge of a cycle of events dictated by the IMF, with the beginnings of a conservative shift and a slow, steady perversion of democracy that would evolve into dictatorship.

Anarchist thinking was not taking this on board. It was largely generic thinking, invoking broad principles such as "back the fight for freedom". The 1956 programme placed great stress on the fight against statism, against taxes, against clericalism and militarism.

The move from the broad principles of freedom, justice, equality to activism on the basis of a prescribed policy line was something that anarchism failed to promote. It did not believe in change effected through a political instrument such as a party, Instead, it insisted that such things were perverse 'exercises in power' and ' dictatorship in embryo'.

There was little in such thinking that was of any interest to me, whose concern was political activism within Uruguay geared to helping change reality in Uruguay. Doing my bit alongside other folk from other social and political organisations. Joining forces with other comrades who might not see entirely eye to eye with me.

At that time at any rate classical anarchist thinking had not taken on board the changes that had taken place within the state. The Uruguayan state was undergoing a period of involution. No longer was it the judge-and-gendarme state it had been in the 19th century. It was a state that had grown up along paternalist lines. Later it drfited away from its talk of democracy to authoritarianism and tightened its grip as a strait-jacket squeezing the whole of social life. That was the state we were bumping into everywhere we went.

But since the late 1950s the syndicalists in the FAU had been pushing a line very different from classical anarcho-syndicalism. It was no longer good enough just to say "no truck with the representatives of the bourgeois state". Dating right back to the rule of Batlle y Ordoñez, the whole labour question tended to be regulated by laws. And the unions had been built up from below, fighting on those terms.

In 1960s Uruguay, like today, participation in the real struggles of the popular movement meant grappling with the issue of government. It was not enough just to invoke general principles such as freedom and justice and some generic anti-statism; what was needed was resistance to and defeat of conservative government. And that required some alternative proposition.

Taking a stand on this ground, the unions – including the ones driven by FAU comrades and sympathisers – engaged in a practice and programme of struggle that tackled all the big issues raised at national level: the programme of the 1965 People's Congress. That programme could only be carried forward by grappling with issues of government.

And shortly after that the issue inevitably arose of turning the fight for that trade union and popular programme into a political fight to drive government policy. In Uruguay that move came in 1965 with the People's Congress and with the formation of the Frente Amplio [Broad Front] in the late 1970s.

We also discovered that well-tuned political thinking is vital lest we finish up doomed to some "never-ending replay", a cycle played out over and over again.

The sort of thinking that was up to the task of investing things with meaning and of moving us beyond the situation in which we were living and in which we were ourselves active, whatever lessons and reasons there were for moving ahead and carrying on the fight for victory. [...]

At the same time, the creation of the PVP rang down the curtain on our anarchist part. We were looking to set up a party (rather than a federation) and we invited comrades from political backgrounds different from the FAU's to join in. [...]

In December 1963 the FAU split. The incipient Cuban revolution as well as differing emphases on political work, arguments about the centrality or otherwise of the working

class in the process of change to be attempted and organisational matters were a few of the reasons behind a split which, depending on who tells the story, was more or less violent. The FAU name and its symbols were retained – albeit not without harsh criticism from the other faction – by the faction then headed by the 'old hands' Roberto Franano and Alberto Marino, the brothers Gerardo and Mauricio Gatti, León Duarte, Washington Pérez, Raúl Carboni, and Juan Carlos Mechoso. Lining up against them was the more 'communitarian' faction clinging to the traditional anarchist view, revolving around the Comunidad del Sur and the libertarian groups in the faculty of Fine Arts (especially Rubén Prieto and Alfredo Errandonea) and Luce Fabbri. The ones who held on to the FAU name sought increasingly to gain ground on the political scene by co-ordinating with other groups 'bent on revolution' (just such an arrangement led to the refloating of the newspaper *Época*) or working towards trade union unity (FAU leaders were to play a central role in the establishment of the CNT). The deepening of the ideological processes flowing from the 1963 split and the political approach per se meant that gradually several key figures in the FAU began to downplay the anarchist label or at any rate to import 'elements' from the more 'maverick' brands of Marxism. At which point people began to talk about a "FAU without the full stops" and dropping the initials.

Following the entry into the FAU in the late 1960s of Pablo Anzalone, a student leader in those days [...] "The organisation was no longer describing itself as 'anarchist' and was focused on the need to achieve a 'synthesis' between Marxism and anarchism. The thoughts of exponents of the structuralist school of Marxism, people like Poulantzas and Althusser, began to be tossed around, and Gramsci later on. The organisation had a theoretical outlook that consisted of incorporating elements from revolutionary Marxism whilst holding on to libertarian ideological values deriving from anarchism, but distancing itself clearly from anarcho-syndicalism. *Cartas de FAU* (one of the organisation's publications back then) used to talk about the importance of the party and discuss what it should be like. It was an organisation that prioritised politics."

That organisation, the 'FAU without the full stops', Anzalone says, saw itself as a mini-engine driving work on a number of fronts into which activists with different origins could be drawn. This was the case with the ROE which had been devised initially as an umbrella for the factions making up the Fighting Tendency (TC) – people drawn from the MLN (National Liberation Movement – Tupamaros), the GAU or the MRO (Uruguayan Revolutionary Movement). A short time before the 1973 coup, many of the activists from the Student Revolutionary Front (FER), openly influenced by 'revolutionary Marxism', decided to join the ROE and in the medium term this was to accelerate the process whereby the FAU evolved into 'something other than' its original anarchism. The other 'wing' of the movement was the armed wing, as embodied by the OPR-33, into which members of the Workers' Revolutionary Front (FRT), close to the FER also flooded. "We were moving towards a party organisation and increasingly drifting away from anarchist

definitions, but this re-think, which began in 1968, took place against the backdrop of very intense activity within trade union disputes. The process was of course interrupted due to the repression and the imprisonment of lots of comrades, including more than half of the leadership." Anzalone was to be among those involved in the setting up of the People's Victory Party (PVP) in 1975 and remains a member of it.

Hugo Cores (7 November 1937-7 December 2007). From *Brecha*, 17 November 2006.

Roberto Franano

Active in the printing trade since the 1930s. A mind open to new developments and social change. His undogmatic outlook was an inspiration to younger FAU members. His steadfast militancy placed him on a blacklist with printing bosses and he was forced to do odd jobs to get by. A number of comrades – including Gerardo Gatti – learnt their trade on the linotype machines in his workshop.

With others he tried to set up a FAU in the 1930s. And he was among the most consistent promoters of the establishment of the FAU founded in 1956.

From the outset he was in favour of the liberation struggles mounted during the 1960s. And a critical supporter of the Cuban revolution from the word go. His trade union experience, and his foothold in the populace as well as his view of a politically organised anarchism was a highly positive factor in the internal life of the FAU.

Alberto Marino

Anarchist activist since the 1930s. Self-educated worker and acclaimed sculptor. Practical supporter of organised anarchism. A man to 'muck in' with concrete efforts. He had a deep-seated sympathy for 'men of action' on the anarchist scene along the River Plate and acted on those sympathies. He was the organisation's quartermaster for many years. And managed the first significant 'sums of money' that helped with the initial launch. Steadfast, emphatic but not sectarian. Not fond of the long-winded but welcoming of any contributions made. Also not fond of failures to live up to promises and could be scathing in his harsh but fraternal criticisms. One of the comrades who shaped the FAU, he grappled with a range of activities with wonderful responsibility and modesty.

Both from *Lucha Libertaria*, Montevideo

OPR-33 (Organizacion Popular Revolucionaria-33)

OPR-33 emerged as the military wing of the FAU; it was one of a rash of paramilitary, armed struggle groups to appear in Uruguay. It was essentially an emanation of the FAU which determined its 'line'. It was not an autonomous organisation. It was supposed to deploy armed force in support of class struggles engaged in under the auspices of the ROE, the front organisation of the FAU. As Sara Méndez of the FAU explains: "The embryo of what was to become the OPR emerged from inside the FAU and part of the OPR was a section dealing with mass activity, in the student unions, the trade unions, working at neighbourhood level and with social organisations; they would make up the embryo of a small group (…) then there emerged an embryonic military apparatus, the OPR-33, which would at all times be under political direction. The criticisms being voiced at the time against the MLN said that its military machine could overrule the political element, whereupon the mounting of guerrilla operations would become the be-all and end-all… So there was this real concern with ensuring that the direction came from the ideological, political side and that the two areas, mass activity and the military apparatus, should take their lead from there."

The FAU itself was outlawed in late 1967. It had some foothold in the trade unions and at neighbourhood level, among trainee teachers and secondary students and in the faculties of Humanities and Medicine at university level. By the early 1970s over half of the FAU's federal council were behind bars. The OPR-33 had only around 30 clandestine operatives inside the country. The ROE was an attempt to build a broad-based, class-based revolutionary movement outside of party politics. It backed and largely carried the 15 day general strike in 1973 after the Uruguayan Communist Party withdrew its support and sought to open a dialogue with the country's military rulers.

16 July 1969: OPR-33 bombs and completely demolishes the Banco Comercial in Montevideo [This according to Colonel 'Nino' Gavazzo, admitted torturer].
16 July 1969: An OPR-33 team, led by Hugo Cores, raids a museum and steals the historic 'Orientales 33' flag (symbol of Uruguayan independence): it has never been recovered. Cores was insistent that the flag was recovered by 'Nino' Gavazzo from OPR-33 homes raided in 1976.
31 July 1970: OPR-33 tries unsuccessfully to rob businessman Ignacio Parpar, manager of the National Brewery Plant.
29 December 1970: OPR-33 raids a number of private homes, forcing the owners (Cándido Eizmendi, Pedro R. Core and Asdrubal Corbo) to sign over cheques which are then immediately cashed.
1 January 1971: The FAU releases a theoretical study of the feasibility and conditions for successful armed resistance. This document, code-named COPEI and running to 50+ A4

pages, attempts to draw the lessons from the defeat inflicted on the Tupamaro campaign. It is highly critical of guevarist theory and of the theory of the guerrilla *foco*.

19 April 1971: OPR-33 carries out a wave of gun thefts from Dr Armando Mutter, Javier Pietriopinto and Ricardo Rimini, among others to boost its arsenal.

23 June 1971: OPR-33 kidnaps the businessman Cambón, manager of the FUNSA (Uruguayan National Tyre Plant) holding him for ransom. [During a sit-in strike at the FUNSA, company guards are disarmed by OPR-33 personnel].

18 August 1971: OPR-33 kidnaps Luis Fernández Lladó, the manager of the Frigorífico Modelo plant.

11 October 1971: An OPR raid on the 'El Mago S.A' firm nets $4,053.

22 October 1971: Upset by tendentious misreporting, OPR-33 kidnaps José Pereira Gómez. Director of the newspaper *El Día* and secures a retraction.

29 November 1971: OPR-33 kidnaps French reporter Michelle Ray, the wife of movie director Costa-Gavras. One theory suggests that this kidnapping was a 'set-up' designed to generate media interest and provide an opportunity for the OPR-33 to express its aims.

16 March 1972: OPR-33 mounts a raid on the 'Paris Televisión' firm and finds itself involved in a shoot out when security forces happen on to the scene. In the gun-battle Wilmar Martinez Dura is killed and María Rosa Méndez Díaz arrested.

11 May 1972: OPR-33 kidnaps entrepreneur and shoe manufacturer Molaguero in relation to a strike. He is held for 70 days. After his release Molaguero claims to have been starved and tortured, a charge denied by people from the FAU-OPR-33 sector. Among his kidnappers, allegedly, was Jorge Vázquez, later a member of the Frente Amplio administration in Uruguay.

28 July 1972: OPR-33 kidnaps United Press International director Héctor Menoni.

In 1973, OPR-33, which had had up to 4 columns operating across the country, is down to about 30 underground activists. In the face of escalating repression, which has dismantled the much larger MLN-Tupamaros threat, the decision is made to make a strategic withdrawal of compromised OPR-33 personnel from Uruguay to Argentina. Argentina was not then under military rule and was a more attractive option. One column remains in Uruguay, under Idílio De León Bermúdez.

April 1974: OPR-33 kills the businessma Manuel Tosio and a soldier, Nelson Vique, who happens on to the scene. OPR-33 activist Julio Larranaga is also killed.

October 1974: Idílio De León Bermúdez is killed in a shoot-out by the Joint Forces (army and police) after shooting dead soft drinks distributor Raul Cantioni.

The US National Security Agency has declassified a document drawn up as part of 'Operation Condor', the name given to the cross-border co-operation between the

dictatorships of Argentina, Uruguay, Chile and Paraguay. The document is a detailed list of 64 named OPR-33 'wanted' men and women. 22 of those named are women. The list includes details of their whereabouts, home addresses, ID numbers, aliases and, in some cases, past operations and their roles within the organisation.

Alberto Mechoso (brother of Juan Carlos Mechoso) was cited as "one of currently three leaders and still involved in military activity". Pablo León Farías Ledussea was named as 'implicated in the Molaguero kidnapping', as were the brothers Francisco Jorge Leoni Marenco and Walter Omar León Marenco, as well as Carlos Alfredo Rodríguez Mercader who 'received ransom money'. Susana Wilda Alvez Sosa de Martinez was supposed to have 'kept a watch on the Molaguero place'. It was noted that Juan Pablo Ricagno Ibarburu had his roots in the MLN (Tupamaros), whilst Robero Luis Silva Gadiño came from the Revolutionary Communist Party (PCR). Adela Margarita Vigil de Silva had passed through the MIR and the PCR before finishing up in the OPR-33. Adalberto Soba Fernández was said to have 'been in charge of the military leadership since 1975'.

After the OPR-33 began to mount fund-raising operations on Argentinean soil, the Uruguayan security forces were able to secure the co-operation of Argentinean colleagues and established a clandestine detention centre on the Automotores Orletti site. An attempt to kidnap Pepsi Cola executive Nelson Laurino for ransom failed and Pablo León Farías Ledussea and Anibal Griot were arrested but managed to pass for ordinary criminals. Another OPR-33 activist, Omar Zina was arrested after another unsuccessful operation but equally passed as an ordinary criminal. Following the successful OPR-33 kidnapping of Federico Hart, a Dutch-Argentinean businessman (for whom a 10 million dollar ransom was paid to OPR-33), and the imposition of military rule in Argentina as well, Uruguayan forces were able to raid the homes and haunts in Argentina of many OPR-33 suspects, effectively dismantling the OPR-33 apparatus.

13 July 1976: Led by José 'Nino' Gavazzo, a joint team of Uruguayan and Argentinean soldiers kidnapped Sara Méndez (the partner of Gerardo Gatti's brother Mauricio Gatti) and her friend Acilú Marceiro. Sara woke up in the Automotores Orletti holding/torture camp and was not able to track down her missing infant son until 2002. That son, born under an assumed name, Simón Riquelo, was taken from her and adoption arranged for him.

Beginning on 24 September 1976, a four day joint operation by Uruguayan and Argentinean intelligence and security forces rounded up some 110 suspected OPR-33 members and associates.

Many of the better known OPR-33 and putative PVP leaders, such as Gatti and Duarte, were briefly held in the Orletti centre only to be 'disappeared' and never heard from again.

Of the 110 suspects abducted, 89 have never been seen again. In at least two cases, infant children of the suspects were removed from their parents.

Some mystery surrounds the fate of ransom paid for Federico Hart's release. Many argue that the money was recovered (but not returned) by the military in the wake of the raids that smashed the OPR-33 organisation… Colonel 'Nino' Gavazzo who has admitted his role in the Automotores Orletti detention/torture centre insists that the whereabouts of the ransom money and of the stolen 'Orientales 33' flag remain unknown, but former OPR-33 personnel insist that the money was recovered during the anti-OPR-33 raids and, most likely, the flag suffered the same fate.

Idilio de León

Idilio de León, known as 'the little gaucho' was a militant dedicated with utter devotion, commitment and selflessness to our libertarian cause.

He came from an economically very modest family and was toughened in the struggle for his daily bread. As a boy he was subjected to a lot of exploitation and denied basic necessities and grew used to facing ordeals. From personal experience he learnt the meaning of the words rebellion, justice, arbitrariness, freedom and a society with no oppressed. When he joined the FAU in 1964 he brought with him a degree of experience in labour and popular activities. He could be found by the factory gate selling newspapers or handing out some manifesto or leaflet. And he was tremendously active in the La Teja ateneo. In 1964 he went on the sugarcane workers' march as the representative of the organisation. And took part in the ROE's street demonstrations.

He lived and was involved in turbulent times for Uruguayan society. Times when popular struggles and combat organisations were making great headway. A warrant was issued for his arrest in 1971 in connection with social and revolutionary activities and he went underground. Only to be arrested the same year. Jailed in Punta Carretas, he broke out in the 6 September 1971 escape. And promptly resumed his activities with the armed front, the OPR-33. He was gunned down in a shoot-out related to such armed activity on 29 October 1979.

Roberto Larrasq El Vasco (The Basque)

[in the security services' OPR-33 suspects list he is named as Roberto Valentin Larrasco Outeda aka Gordo Arturo (Fat Arthur) and Grandote (Big Guy)]

He was involved in libertarian activity prior to the foundation of the FAU. And while still very young set up a propaganda team that engaged in very intense and systematic work. He was involved in the work leading up to the launch of the FAU and later did his bit as an activist from the barrio Sur and from the old Bakers' Union premises on the Calle Arequita, from where various education and propaganda activities were mounted.

El Vasco (The Basque) was a tireless worker during the early years of the FAU. And this was a feature of his that lasted through time. He was unfazed by any 'storm' but was always consistent and quietly determined.

El Vasco was a selfless sort, his ethical conduct a model to us all. His brotherliness, good humour and optimism made a big impact on wherever he carried out his activism. All of these features, plus his unparalleled modesty, helped him introduce a style into the organisation. We ought to stress this and it falls to us to do so because he was a comrade who favoured modesty.

He would turn his hand to any sort of activity. And was tremendously versatile. It would take too long to list the day-to-day tasks that he carried out. He was present at the meetings where the formation of the ROE and OPR-33 was considered and decided. He was involved in the organisational side of the launch of the OPR. He took part in bank robberies and in the big 'kidnapping' in Argentina. After the dictatorship he played an active part in the re-launch of the FAU. He never turned up his nose at any activity and carried out every task with the same unassuming modesty.

With El Vasco we lost a chunk of the best of the entire history of the FAU.

24 July 1971: The Killing Of Heber Nieto aka *El Monje*

"Savage murder by dictatorship", the headlines of the ROE's newspaper *Compañero* read as it reported the death of Heber Nieto aka *El Monje*: Heber was a 17 year old, a lad who had felt the brunt of the system for himself and refused to back down. A student at the Shipping Industry School, a worker, he was active in the ROE and in the FAU, always in the fray, supporting disputes such as the ones at TEM and BP COLOR. He was murdered by the slavish lackeys of those eager to keep the people cowed.

Whilst several very young comrades (aged 12 to 14) were picketing near the IEC in support of the workers in dispute at the CICCSA paper-mill, two 'marksmen' in the area targeted them for ferocious repression, opening fire on them.

With some others who were working on the IEC site, Heber started stoning the shooters. The latter moved on to the lawn in front of the BPS and tried shooting at them from there. After a wile the IEC was cordoned off by troops, large numbers of whom arrived, opening up on the Institute (IEC) with rifles and handguns, including some weapons fitted

with telescopic sights. Comrades at work on the roof of the building tried to seek refuge inside the IEC. And had to pass through a doorway leading from the rooftop. As Heber was slipping through the doorway he was shot through the chest. The gunfire came from the roof of the BPS building which was under construction at the time. And as if his death was not enough, some 50 youngsters no older than 14 were rounded up, and a number of people sustained gunshot wounds. But to make matters even worse, the wake held for *El Monje* was desecrated with tear-gas used and those attended being clubbed.

However, steadfastness and courage was the people's response to the outrages of the Pacheco dictatorship. The CNT called a general strike for Monday 26 July beginning at 1.00 pm., announcing that "(the CNT) had sounded the alarm against the stance adopted by the government and its police who, under cover of the emergency laws, were creating a climate of terror throughout the land and our warnings have been proved true." For its part, the FUNSA trade union stated: "Yet again the oligarchy demonstrates that the only peace it seeks is the peace imposed by fear. They resort to gunfire against those supportive of the workers' struggles, just as they did with the CICCSA workers. […] Our union and its entire membership clenches its teeth with anger, resentment and hatred for the repression and the ruling classes who have robbed us of our comrade Heber. Yet again we declare our solidarity with the struggle and pledge that we will not rest until the oligarchy has paid for its crimes, every one of them."

[…] 1971 was an election year, a year when the political class and bourgeoisie sought to 'pacify' the country and yet this sort of thing was going on. Little over a month later (on 1 September) the forces of repression were to take the life of Julio Espósito at the Chemistry Faculty. Such was the bourgeoisie's brand of 'pacification' and its 'democracy'.

The ROE issued the following statement, rejecting the brutal murder of '*El Monje*'. "From the Worker-Student Resistance (ROE) to the people. A comrade has perished. So much for the pacification they preach. They talk of imminent elections and of their desire to bring peace to the country. The want to break the people's morale and to put paid to workers' struggles and seek to finish off the people's initiative by getting them to drop a piece of paper into a ballot box. So that attention focuses on the famous 'political judgement' that everybody knew was not about to come off. Other heroes must take up Heber's place so that the struggle can carry on. There will be no peace in this country as long as the people goes hungry and as long as the rifles of the military carry on targeting the grassroots; they have claimed the life of a comrade. A militant of the people and of the RESISTANCE, one who backed the CICCSA workers. But the fight goes on. Until we witness the destruction of the last remaining vestiges of this stinking regime which only the organised force of the people can topple. WE CALL UPON EVERYONE: Hold firm. Carry on with the fight. Carry on with the struggle. Let us unite and stand shoulder to shoulder in the struggle against the oppressors. And, taking up the watchword that he made his so much

that he gave his life for the people, let us tell our comrade: UNTIL THE FINAL VICTORY, UP WITH THOSE WHO STRUGGLE." […]

The red and black flag and the flag of the '*33 orientales*' [the symbol of the fathers of Uruguayan independence] accompanied him to his resting place and to that final farewell at the cemetery. An entire people walked with him with the sense of loss that the murder of one of our finest brings. Our Organisation [the FAU] lost one of its best militants, his youth and his promise and all his revolutionary belief and great appetite for struggle. After his death, the ROE's student youth groups bore his name.

FAU statement marking the 30th anniversary of Heber Nieto's murder in 2001

Uruguayan Anarchist Gerardo Gatti (1931-1976?)

The anarchist movement in Uruguay has been a special case. Especially during the stormy decades in Latin America – the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. In 1956, after a lengthy process of debate and plenums, the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (FAU) was set up, fed by two main sources – the Libertarian Youth and the El Cerro-La Tejada district Ateneo. Outstanding among the younger generation that was to make up the libertarian segment of the left in Uruguay was Gerardo Gatti, officially recorded as one of the 'disappeared' during the genocide carried out in the Southern Cone, as is his daughter Adriana. […]

In the wake of the Cuban revolution and the process that it unleashed across the continent, Uruguayan anarchists adopted a stance in favour of popular and anti-imperialist causes. From 1961 to 1965 this led to intense arguments about what was going on in Cuba and its implications for Latin America. The split that came in the ranks of Uruguayan anarchism – the 'fracture', as the historian of the FAU [Juan Carlos Mechoso] describes it – actually centred upon the Cuban issue which provided the badge and the pretext but more far-reaching issues were at stake: whether anarchism should take a class-based approach or was instead a wholly humanistic and thus multi-class stance.

In fact this dilemma affected not just Uruguayan anarchists but anarchism in general whenever promotion of its ideas brings it into contact with the masses of the people: Spain 1936-1939, during the events in the Ukraine in revolutionary Russia, during the antifascist struggle in Italy, etc.

The faction that broke away from the FAU then formed the ALU (Uruguayan Libertarian Alliance), a body that petered out within months, even though it was heavily influenced by the Rocker-ite tendency that tuned into radical liberalism in a Cold War context.

The fact is that, from the Spanish revolution on, there have been two reading of anarchism – the class-based reading and the liberal interpretation. The first friction between the two came at the IWA congress in 1953 where a majority rejected the theses of Helmut Rudiger, the delegate from the Swedish SAC. Of the Spanish civil war anarchist

leaders, there is no question but that Juan García Oliver (d. 1980) pushed the anarcho-communist line.

In the early 1950s, the Rocker-ite current hoped to get libertarians to embrace the anarchist reformism of the SAC in Europe: they withheld funds from the anarcho-communists (Diego Abad de Santillán, Fidel Miró, José Peirats and the like) who influenced the Spanish CNT-in-exile (1965 saw the initiation of conversations between the so-called 'Iñigo group; and Franco's vertical syndicates, an episode later referred to as '*Cincopuntismo*').

In fact, after moving to the United States after 1933 (he died in New York in 1958), Rocker's thinking changed greatly from the radicalism of his years in Germany, the rise of Nazism and reports from Russia having prompted him to hold his tongue before the war. For instance, after referring to the 'working class' in his draft of the IWA Principles (1922), by 1945 he drifted away from a class-based anarchist stance and published *The Influence of Absolutist Thinking in Socialism*, where he mistakenly equates the notion of 'nation' and 'race' with the idea of 'class', leaving an opening for anarchism to finish up as a strand of US liberalism. Many years later, in an interview with *Anarcho-syndicalist Review* in Chicago – Chomsky conceded that Rocker had eventually accepted capitalism. The same thing happened with other anarchist thinkers from the Rocker school, like Santillán, Souchy, etc. Santillán was perhaps the most pathetic case as he ended his days in the arms of holy mother church.

The author was a lot younger back then, but he can remember perfectly well that in the anarchist veteran circles he used to frequent, especially those who had in their younger day been direct action-ists in Barcelona, Buenos Aires and Montevideo, 'Souchy-ism' had become a real bête noire.

Souchy it was that international anarchism dispatched to Cuba at the time of the Cuban revolution of 1961. He published two pamphlets on Cuba that were translated into Spanish by the Argentine chapter of the Santillán faction; his conclusions were very ambiguous but predicted the inevitability of USSR support for Cuba. It also helped ensure that the French and Italian anarchist federations passed motions condemning the Cuban revolution. The Spanish CNT-in-exile, run by revolutionary anarchists at the time, issued no public statement of any sort of which I am aware.

Anyway, Gatti was one of the front runners in this class struggle within Uruguayan anarchism. The 'second' FAU emerged from the fracture and was bound up with the workers' movement, with a policy of alliances, an updated line of revolutionary violence and a rejection of the very clear cut and more humanistic, multi-class approaches that we today would call liberal.

In 1968 the FAU was outlawed and forced underground and forced also to equip itself with the self-defence mechanisms needed to survive the attack from the bosses. Out of this there emerged a range of initiatives, and Gerardo Gatti turned up in the best thought-out

one alongside lots of other comrades. In 1973, the underground apparatus was relocated to Buenos Aires but there he was picked up by Uruguayan military intelligence and taken back to Montevideo where he was incarcerated in Orletti, the dictatorship's secret concentration and torture camp. By 1976 he was among the disappeared. In his later years he had encouraged the establishment of another libertarian socialist organisation, the PVP (People's Victory Party) to grapple with the realities of the fascist dictatorship and the prospects for the post-dictatorship period.

Floreal Castilla (Venezuela)

Labels

The bourgeoisie's power is fleshed out through and amalgamated with the State. There is no way of transforming society without the destruction of the bourgeois state and because we are fighting for a classless society we want to see the elimination of the whole bureaucratic state machine, all division into rulers and ruled. Down through the ages, the privileged, of whatever brand, horrified by the prospect of losing their privileges, have always claimed that this is impossible. Just the way it used to be said that the world was flat or square.

It is our belief that when it comes to the political administration of society private property should be done away with, and that we should put paid to a situation where some command and others obey. Councils and federations of workers' committees and residents' committees, communes or rural peasants' councils… these are some of the different formats through which the workers have organised themselves in order to defend revolutionary processes against the counter-revolution within or aggression from without and in order to administer, orchestrate and run the life of society as a whole. Our view is that society's bodies should be built upon these foundations. Effective workers' power, the greatest amount of direct management, the least amount of indirect representation with no sort of wage differentials, no prebends or any sort and no privileges. That is what we mean by people's power. None of this is new. For those ideals, workers around the world have made revolutions, celebrated victories and suffered defeats. And for upwards of a century now, men drawn from the working class and others who, whilst not deriving from it, have genuinely placed themselves in its service, have been organising plots, drafting manifestoes and collecting funds for the workers' cause and showing solidarity. Experiences were coming together and we workers have been coming up with explanations for our misfortunes.

Knowing nothing of that history, without having read the same books and indeed without knowing any such explanations, around the world every day millions upon millions of human beings who suffer bullying yearn for equality; those who hunger yearn to eat, those who go cold and have no roof over their heads and nowhere to shelter, who

endure humiliation, crave brotherhood and those who know that they are ignorant crave schooling, for their children at any rate.

In a very often vague fashion, sometimes giving it different names, the majority of those who know suffering, dictatorship, misfortune, despotism and poverty aspire to well-being, solidarity and understanding between human beings.

No lofty raison d'état, or government, party, organisational, factional or movement consideration lies at the root of or provides a rationale for our struggle. At the root lies pain and the aspirations of the great human race to which our people belongs.

Because we know that man is a social animal, we want to see his ability grow and placed in the service of humanity, because we want all decisions affecting society to be made and resolved socially, because we want wealth to be vested not in the individual or in the few but in society, in all of us – this is why we call ourselves socialists.

Because we have more confidence in agreement than in imposition, in understanding rather than in coercion, in freedom rather than in authority. Which is why we are libertarians.

But we have been learning that sometimes labels can be misleading. Which is why we do not care to hang a label on the struggle of the oppressed. There may be folk who go by some description but do not quite know what they want, and there may be others flying different colours (or not even knowing which colours to fly) who are after the same thing.

'Comrade' is a label we hang on all who struggle for these ideals without self-seeking, according to their own lights and means.

Uruguayan anarchist and 'disappeared' opponent of the dictatorship, Gerardo Gatti, Buenos Aires, June-July 1975

The FAU version of story of the Seral dispute and Molaguero kidnapping [as published in *Lucha Libertaria*]

"*Seems to me that Molaguero, the son of the owner, himself an active share-holder in the company, who has been insulting workers and groping the female staff and actively encouraging a crackdown on the factory's workforce is due for a kidnapping. It may well be that we have to look beyond trade union action for a resolution to this dispute*". It was in roughly these terms that León 'El Loco' Duarte put to the FAU the sort of support that he reckoned should be available as an option.

And so the gathering of intelligence began. It was no easy undertaking, given the distances involved and the initial vagueness of the information. Things dragged on, little by little. In the end, after almost 20 days, they settled on a couple of locations where Sergio Molaguero could be "lifted". The details were investigated as thoroughly as they were able. It was eventually decided that the operation should be carried out on a local road along which Molaguero made his homeward journey on certain days and at certain times.

The comrades from the FUNSA [National Tyre Plant union] arrived to offer their support and make their experience in union-building available to the Seral Union. Once the Seral Workers' Union had been set up with the 308-strong factory workforce, León Duarte was seconded to it because of his experience in the handling of a bitter dispute…

Molaguero stuck by the agreement for nine days. Then, he threatened to close down the factory if he was going to be required to honour the agreement. To show that he meant business, he sacked thirty junior employees and the two mechanics whose faces he did not like. For the first time he was facing organised workers and for the first time those workers were in a position to respond. On the thirty-first day of the strike, every single item of the agreement was upheld by the national authorities which expressed surprise at the powers it left to the shoe factory owner and the latter's contempt for the labour laws protecting his workers. But contempt was all the rage at the time: laws imposing obligations on the Seral company were ignored and the workers got a taste of what it was like to suffer persecution for unionising. Literally: the authorities endorsed their rights, but back in Santa Lucía [where the Seral plant was located] they were treated like prisoners. With a firmness unusual in a union only three months in existence, the Seral Workers' Union unanimously decided: "We all go back in, or nobody does". The army and police (who had not yet taken to referring themselves as the Joint Forces), embarked upon a task that did them no credit. After a number of painful episodes, workers were roughed up and camps razed to the ground. The workers' response was to set out on the March of Dignity.

"Is everything is in place for the Molaguero kidnapping?" Gerardo Gatti asked at a meeting of 'The Board' [this was how the top echelon of the FAU was referred to].

"Not just yet: there are a few details to be sorted out in the coming days", was the response from the OPR operative in charge. "There is no question but that the time for this political operation to be carried out is near. The dispute is ready to collapse and we cannot permit such a defeat for it spells defeat for that union and has wider implications. We have to strike as quickly as we can" (he added). "We reckon it could be on in a couple of weeks. The team handling the operation has already been picked."

The term 'commando' was never employed. The preferred term was 'team'; the libertarian approach required that. The expression 'commando' was only ever used jokingly. The vast majority, if not all, of those of worker extraction did whatever they had to do but pomposity embarrassed them.

"Forty comrades from Seral set off on a march from Santa Lucía, but, village after village, their numbers grew. But so did the deployment of the forces of repression. In Las Piedras the marchers were dispersed. But, cutting across country, slipping across farmland and hiding out in the hills, the comrades managed to get as far as La Paz. Eleven of them were arrested there and brutally beaten. The military were out in force and had very clear orders: this march must not get beyond La Paz. But it did. Under cover of dark, cutting across country and through farms and laying low in the hills, the workers – by now

200-strong – arrived in Peñarol. There they received a warm welcome from the rail union which was generous with its solidarity, support and material assistance and that same day the march moved on, bound for El Cerro. As it arrived, the factories shut down; the comrades at the Portland Cement plant downed tools and joined the column. By the time it reached the town of Carlos María Ramírez, the marchers numbered almost a thousand. There they set up camp. And a pathetic sight it was. There were no trees and no shelter. . But the forces of order were determined to sort out the problem; their response was to raze the makeshift shelters, destroying everything and burning the very footwear that was much the worse for wear from the trek.

"The job could be pulled off there; that was the spot and as we waited we hid in this ditch waiting for our comrade on the 'walkie-talkie' to alert us to his approach." Comrades from the team were watching the 'pick-up' location, missing no detail. The police uniforms that would be worn by those who would stand out on the road to halt the traffic were ready. Since "roadblocks" were commonplace just then, the reckoning was that this was the best way of stopping his car.

Every door in the neighbourhood was open to the marchers at the time and again the solidarity from their fellow workers was obvious. Using whatever they could find, with tarpaulins rescued from rubbish tips and the sheets loaned to them, a fresh encampment was set up in the grounds of the church of San Rafael. But there too they were attacked. They were beaten up and dragged away; the number of those on the March of Dignity who saw the inside of cells and the worst treatment that can be inflicted upon somebody. Three of those still at large began a hunger strike.

"Yes, no later than tomorrow night. Everything's in place", *El Abuelo* told the gathering of OPR operatives ('*Chola*' was the code name used when speaking in public or over the phone about these matters). The timing coincided with a meeting of leaders of the above ground part of the FAU (or *Alejandra* as it was referred to for security reasons)."

"We'll keep in touch. I'm going to be at the *Alejandra* meeting and *El Loco* will be there too, waiting. It is essential that it go ahead then. The union and the ROE worked fine and fought well but, in this instance, if the *Chola* operation does not come off, things will backfire badly. Let's do as follows: we'll stick with *El Loco* and Mauricio and wait in a cafe after the meeting and we'll give you a call", Gerardo said.

Early morning 11 May 1972. "Did they ring?" Gerardo asked over the phone. "No, not yet, but there's still time. Call back in an hour and we shall see." The wait was a tense one. Had they? Would they? The phone rang again and a voice said wearily: "Martin here. We're out on the spree with *Orlando*; he's mad about the ladies." Sergio Molaguero was in our power. This ushered in a new stage in the labour dispute; armed action can advance so many other things.

Later we found out that everything had gone off smoothly with no problems of note. Molaguero's car had pulled up, with our comrades dressed as police and deployed

appropriately. Molaguero had not been 'bothered' initially. It seems that once the car had pulled up and our comrades were on top of him he smelt something fishy. He was quickly overpowered and a weapon seized from the glove compartment. He was known to carry a gun. Then came the transit through pre-selected streets. Moving through the streets was not easy for there was a sizeable police presence out there. But the operation came off without a hitch and the "*tooth*" – as he would later be referred to – ensured that the Seral dispute took a different turn, making a political impact driven by trade union or popular struggles taken to the limit.

The demands put to Molaguero senior

The following day, after a meeting to thrash out the details and what was to be done next, the Organisation contacted the Seral Company's lawyer who was also a friend of Molaguero senior; his address had been kept handy for use.

The first message we sent read essentially as follows:

Montevideo 12 May 1972

Sir –

On the 11th you had a phone call from us. We indicated that since early that morning we had been holding Sergio Hugo Molaguero Brescia and we named the location (the female toilets at the Bar El Jague) where said person's driving licence could be found.

Last night we laid down two conditions to be fulfilled before we get down to brass tacks.

a) 20,000 pesos to be handed over to every employee of the Seral company working in Planillas on 1 August 1971: we are allowing you 48 hours to do this.

b) Children's gear to be set aside for the children of Santa Lucia city. We stated that we would furnish further details about this.

Here they are:

1) and 2) Goods for Schools No 140 and No 156

3) For the children resident in the El Abrojal *barrio*, 150 pairs of children's shoes, assorted sizes; 150 topcoats, same; 150 pairs of jeans, same; 150 waterproof jackets, same; 150 school tunics, same.

4) For the children of the Atrás del Cementerio (Behind the Graveyard) *barrio*, 100 sets of the aforementioned goods (shoes, topcoats, jeans, waterproofs, school tunics, etc.)

We say again that these messages are to remain confidential between yourself, Señor Molaguero and ourselves.

The goods indicated should be purchased from a variety of stores in Santa Lucía city. And should be delivered to the aforesaid Schools and *barrios* by Tuesday 16 May.

This message showed a signature that was to be employed in all dealings related to the matter concerned – *Orlando Pieri.*

Next another message was delivered dealing with other matters. It stated as follows:

CONDITIONS FOR RESOLUTION OF THE UNDERLYING PROBLEM

1) An end to the dispute at the Seral company; the firm to reach agreement with the Seral Staff and Workers' Union.

2) Publication in four newspapers in the city and in four newspapers in Canelones (Santa Lucía included) of the terms of the agreement arrived at. Said insertions are to be paid for by the company, signed by it and then endorsed by the trade union. In the city editions it should appear on page 5 of the newspapers *Ahora* (¼ page in size), *El Día*, *El Popular* and *El Diario* (1/8 of a page).

3) Once we have verified publication of said insertions we shall immediately forward details of the financial damages payable by the company; it shall amount roughly to the cost of meeting the conditions set out earlier in our first message.

4) Once work has been resumed and the terms of the agreement actually implemented and adopted, the company should announce this in the press and over the airwaves.

5) Once items 3 and 4 have been carried out, Sergio Hugo Molaguero Brescia's detention will end within 72 hours.

Orlando Pieri

NB. We say again that these dealings and terms are matter to be kept strictly between yourself, your client and ourselves.

A message on 12 July reported that Molaguero had met the demands put to him and added a few final conditions set by the FAU. This is an extract:

Montevideo 12 July 1972

Sr José Hugo Molaguero

Given that:

1) The two preconditions set – in the message of 12 May 1972 – before addressing the nub of the issue, have been met.

2) That the insertions giving notice of the ending of the Seral dispute have appeared, in accordance with what was agreed, we hereby state:

1) When work resumes and the clauses of the Agreement (with the Union) have been implemented and honoured as normal, the company is going to have to declare this in the press and over the radio.

2) Details of the "financial damages payable by the company" will be forwarded.

3) Let it be said with utter clarity that the mechanics of the delivery of the financial damages must be known only to Sr, José Hugo Moloaguero, or, failing that, his brother, Sr. Luis Molaguero. […]

7) Upon implementation of these conditions "within 72 hours the detention of Sergio Molaguero Brescia shall cease".

All of these demands were met: the back-pay requested was paid over, the union was recognised, all of those sacked were re-hired, the donations to schools and neighbourhood children were made, the FAU received its damages and Sergio Molaguero was freed shortly afterwards.

This was the second last kidnapping carried out in the country. Throughout the time when Molaguero was being held, there was escalating repression and the streets were bristling with soldiers.

We said 'second last' because the FAU carried out one more kidnapping – of the head of a news agency – in order to rebut the accusations made by Molaguero.

This too is part of our Organisation's rich heritage.

From www.espectador.com/nota.php?idNota=47626

[Sergio Molaguero, now a bigwig in the Colorado Party of Uruguay, makes much of his having been an innocent victim of a terrorist kidnapping. He denies having had any connections with right-wing extremism, presents the company and himself as victims of outsiders stirring up unrest and still claims to have been kept in a well in poor conditions, poorly fed and subjected to beatings. He is to launch a book of memoirs. Part of the reason for his media profile is this, plus the fact that he alleges that the brother of the current Uruguayan prime minister was a member of the OPR commando that held him. PS]

A Letter from Prison by Alberto Mechoso Mendez aka Pocho (1936-1976)

[This letter was written while he as being held by the 5th Artillery Regiment in its barracks beside the Northern Cemetery. He later escaped and fled to Argentina from where he was abducted back into Uruguay and 'disappeared'.]

Comrades,

Seems to me that between 6 August and now I've learnt much much more than I learnt from the 6 years I spent in Punta Carretas and it strikes me that I've learnt much more than in the previous 35 years of my life. On the one hand there's my experience inside the Barracks, face to face with the goons and the helping hand from my comrades. Plus what came afterwards, on the outside. The night after I escaped I saw my picture on television.

I was wanted as 'a known associate of …' and there wasn't a word said about what had really happened. Later I was able to read further wanted lists. My compañera's name headed one such list. I discovered that the house I shared with my mother, my compañera and my children was sealed off and guarded by the Joint Forces. I learnt that a servicemen with several stripes had stated that the house would be handed back only if I gave myself up.

And this is the intense experience shared in one way or another by hundreds of thousands of Uruguayans. Lots of children have been cut off from their parents because they are prisoners or because they've had to go elsewhere in search of the work that cannot be found here. Many a mother does not see her children because they are wanted or because they work from sun-up to sun-down helping to halt the wave [of repression]. Many a woman reaches the end of her working life without a roof over her head because they cannot pay out their miserable pensions or because the rotten minds of the hangmen takes revenge against them for the defiance of the children that she managed to rear with such love.

And in the face of all this, what other course have we? In the face of all this, how are we to make life worth living?

There's only one course, only one way to live without shame; fighting. Helping to see to it that the defiance spreads further, helping the victim of persecution and the unemployed to join forces, helping the 'subversive' and the exploited worker to see each other as comrades and to learn through struggle that they face the same enemy. For all of these reasons, comrades, I want you to keep me a place … for all of these reasons I shall return soon. Liberty or Death.

'Pocho'

From the FAU review *Solidaridad* No 16 (no date given).

The FAU: Fifty Years In The Fight For Socialism And Freedom

The first signal of an anarchist ideal in Uruguay was the appearance in the newspaper *El Uruguay* of a translation of Proudhon's *The Federal Principle* in 1863. We have documentary evidence as early as 1872 of the presence in the country of 'Internationalists' – workers banded together on foot of the ideas of the IWMA (International Working-Men's Association) and the very first rally by the IWMA's Uruguayan section was held in 1875, drawing a crowd of 1,500. The IWMA embraced a range of outlooks ranging from federalism to republicanism to anarcho-collectivism and Marxism, and the following year saw the establishment of the Uruguayan Regional Federation (FORU) as a fully-fledged section of the IWMA.

In the 1930s, libertarian activists opposed the landowners' dictatorship and were active in the workers' movement and in strikes, and offered their support to the antifascist, revolutionary struggle of the Spanish CNT, a number of Uruguayan militants fighting on Spanish soil. These comrades set up the Libertarian Youth in Uruguay upon their return in 1938.

[Many of the FAU student members came from the Medical Faculty. By no coincidence a number of anarchists were prominent in the SMU (Uruguayan Medical Union) – people like physicians Jose B. Gomensoro, Roberto Cotelo, haemotologist Virgilio Bottero

and Carlos Maria Fosalba, the latter a friend of Simon Radowitzky. Gomensoro was with *Tierra y Libertad* in Spain for six months in 1936-1937 and associated with the review *Esfuerzo* published in Uruguay after he, Cotelo and Bottero returned to Uruguay. Pedro Tufró and Juan Rúa, Uruguayan libertarians, were in Spain also and killed during the May Days, 1937.

A report in *Lucha Libertaria* (1999) on the foundation meeting of the FAU says that a number of groups and individuals attended, supported and encouraged the launch of the FAU. A 'Commission for a Uruguayan Libertarian Federation' (which included Jorge R. Martinez, whoever he was) had been busy in the run-up to the launch in October 1956. Delegates from *La Protesta* in Buenos Aires were present (Gregorio Nasso and Jorge Perlés) and Fernando Quesada and Enrique Palazzo attended on behalf of the Argentinean Libertarian Federation, FLA. Someone called Jus (no further details) spoke on behalf of the 'CNT nucleus' (presumably the Spanish CNT as the Uruguayan CNT was only established in the 1960s). Also present were Roberto Frasnano (representing the CCRA – American Continental Anarchist Liaison Commission) and Alberto Marino (representing the BAIA – International Anarchist Archive-Library). A big influence seems to have been the Agrupacion Voluntad set up in 1938. Messages of support for the new FAU were received from the CRIA (Anarchist International Relations Commission) and the Mexican Anarchist Federation.]

In the 1940s, libertarians espoused a non-aligned position in the contest between the two great power blocs, the capitalist and the communist, a stance that came to be known as the Third Position, which was staunchly championed in student and labour circles. But by 1945, the FORU had all but petered out, with libertarian labour activists retreating into their unions, whilst on the student scene they carried out activities within the Students' Union (FEEU) and tried to connect it with the workers' movement.

The Foundation of the FAU

By the early 1950s there was significant labour mobilisation in Uruguay, with important strikes in every sector. In 1952, in the El Cerro and La Teja neighbourhoods, the El Cerro-La Teja Free Ateneo was launched by militants who had earned their spurs standing up to the crackdown on strikers. The Ateneo was funded by dues paid by 220 initial members and became a rallying point for the organising trade union and social activities – labour disputes, opposition to fascist gangs, take-overs, trade union gatherings, debates and education, screening movies, holding dances…

In July 1955 the newspaper *Voluntad* carried the very first call for the establishment of an organisation for Uruguayan anarchists and from then on the libertarian groups and organisations set about making plans for a National Anarchist Plenum that lasted for nearly a month.

The foundation congress met on 27 and 28 October 1956 and resolved to establish the Federación Anarquista Uruguaya (FAU: Uruguayan Anarchist Federation) which was,

from the outset up to its neck in the labour and social struggles that were starting to take a dramatic turn around the country. From the outset, the FAU was determined to fortify the unions and work towards labour unity, criticising reformist deviations and the temptation to turn the unions into transmission belts acting out party political directives. In 1957 the organisation's newspaper adopted the title *Lucha Libertaria* and the first public rallies were organised and drew a good crowd. Throughout 1957 and 1958, the impact of the 'crisis' was making itself felt by the most disadvantaged groups in Uruguay and their answer came in the form of factor take-overs and workers' control, robberies carried out to raise funds for organisational activity, and the setting up of consumer co-ops in working class districts. Arrangements were entered into with farming co-ops, there were meetings, demonstrations by workers and by the FEEU students and sit-ins in university buildings and repression followed.

By the start of the 1960s the government had embarked upon a legislative and police offensive against the working class, backing fascist gangs, banning strikes and solidarity strikes, banning factory take-overs and attacking the University and the secondary schools.

In August 1963 some FAU comrades raided the Spanish consulate in Montevideo, hoisting the Libertarian Youth and Spanish CNT flags, in protest at the executions by *garrote vil* of Granado and Delgado.

Underground organisation, direct action and the armed wing

1965 saw a successful trade union unification with the launch of the Uruguayan CNT (National Workers' Convention) with the drive coming from the non-aligned and fighting unions and within the CNT there was the a tendency driven by FAU workers and urging a fighting strategy. In 1967, following a campaign launched by the right wing press against the newspaper *Época* (a joint venture by the FAU and other Leftist organisations such as the MAP, the MIR, The MRO [MAP: People's Action Movement, MIR: Revolutionary Left Movement, MRO: Oriental (i.e. Uruguayan) Revolutionary Movement – Castroist group founded in 1961] and the Socialist Party), the police attacked its premises, seizing its presses and taking over the political groups' premises, arresting dozens of people and shutting down the paper and ordering several organisations – including the FAU – to disband. The FAU went underground.

The FAU revamped its activity in the light of the new situation by developing an armed wing, issuing an underground weekly newspaper, distributing documents, setting up safe-houses for organisational activity and storing propaganda materials and fund-raising … and training its militants in general and personal security. The Worker-Student Resistance (ROE) was launched as an umbrella organisation following the outlawing of the FAU. Funds were replenished by means of bank robberies.

From 1964 onwards the FAU was a lot more cohesive and effective. It launched and invigorated work fronts and built up a presence and clout at national level. It co-ordinated with other forces and took part in the important People's Congress. It issued a call for the

formation of the Fighting Tendency (TC) and served on the Co-ordinating Body, a body favouring the armed struggle in concert with organisations such as the MLN (Tupamaros), MIR and others.

By 1971 the FAU was operating from underground. During this time a number of its safe houses were captured and its militants must have gone fully underground, for their names appeared on public wanted lists. At one point upwards of 50% of its Federal Council were being held in security force barracks.

Alongside the mass activity, the OPR-33 (People's Revolutionary Organisation) was active: the FAU's armed wing, it proved quite a success, carrying out a series of operations – sabotage attacks, expropriations of funds, kidnappings of political bigwigs and bosses especially hated by the people, and offering armed support to strikes, factory take-overs, etc. The FAU saw armed action as part of a political and ideological approach very different from most of the Latin American national liberation movements which were largely influenced by Castro's Cuban revolution and the theorists of the 'revolutionary foco'. The FAU's armed wing enjoyed only tactical autonomy and all its operations were determined by the overall political circumstances. It is reckoned that its growth and the type of violence in which it engaged had to be kept related to the workers'-people's movement across the country. Escalating the violence to levels unsuited to context was avoided, as was isolation of armed activists. At the same time a series of steps was taken to insure against and pre-empt any such 'militaristic' eventuality. The whole culture of obedience had to be resisted.

Against a backdrop of uncertainty and declining levels of resistance, with outright dictatorship looming on the horizon, the Organisation weighed up the situation and saw a need to withdraw some of its forces. The OPR-33 comrades were among the first it evacuated. Their immediate task, once in Argentina, was to raise the funding for what it was anticipated was going to be a long and drawn out struggle against the dictatorship. "To hold out by doing, to hold out by fighting", as the saying was at the time.

In June 1973, with the imposition of military dictatorship, the process of tyrannisation of Uruguay in a continent already marked by military dictatorships in Brazil, Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay and so on, was complete. Uruguayan prisons were already filled with hundreds of political prisoners, most of the revolutionary organisations having been decimated. The FAU put everything it had into a general strike that brought the country to a standstill for a fortnight. It had to redouble its efforts because the majority force, the Communist Party, chose that point to stand down many of its militants and seek dialogue with the military. The general strike survives in the memories of workers in Uruguay as an indication of their stomach for a fight.

And then in September 1976 there was a military take-over in Argentina with the installation of a brutal, genocidal dictatorship. Cornered by joint repression from the special forces of the Uruguayan and Argentinean armies carrying out Operation Condor,

[Operation/Plan Condor: 1976 mutual security agreement between the armed forces of Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, Brazil, Bolivia and Uruguay proyiding for the monitoring of exiled opposition groups. This secret co-operation extended to extra-legal procedures, abductions, torture, imprisonment, disappearances and unexplained deaths, with the security forces often misrepresenting disappearances as escapes and deaths as internecine feuding among the subversives. This international connivance between 'national security states' had the blessing and encouragement (political and financial) of the US administration.] some fifty comrades were 'disappeared' after being subjected to all sorts of unspeakable torture, with others given lengthy prison sentences. Those murdered included comrades such as Gerardo Gatti, Leon Duarte and Alberto Mechoso who had shaped the FAU's history.

Eventually the Uruguayan dictatorship collapsed and the political prisoners were amnestied. March 1986 saw the holding of the 7th FAU congress, at which the organisation promptly set about reorganising in the trade union, neighbourhood and student contexts, without neglecting the demands of internal structural reorganisation, consolidating the infrastructure smashed by the dictatorship. Scarcely had the restructuring begun than the FAU was faced with a further crackdown, with three of its activists jailed and tried. A sustained campaign was immediately launched, attracting solidarity from other libertarian organisations internationally. That campaign was crucial to securing the comrades' release.

The FAU today

The FAU today intervenes at every opportunity: in the unions, schools (through parents' associations) and in all sorts of neighbourhood issues, it has been creating suitable vehicles for such intervention, as well as consolidating community radio stations and libertarian ateneos.

The FAU has a printshop which is common ground and a meeting point for the Uruguayan left. The presses have long been the property of the FAU organisation, so they have enough legal experience to ensure that their patrimony runs no risk whilst at the same time they leave the workers' group enough autonomy to run the day to day operations of the presses for themselves.

At present the FAU has 6 community radio stations up and running, as well as 4 ateneos and 3 libraries. Together with the ateneos and the radio stations they have formed the 'Solidarity and Mutual Aid Space' to co-ordinate with other social organisations on a range of activities and campaigns such as the water campaign which has had such a wide impact. FAU members participate in various areas such as the environmental commission, the community radio co-ordinating committee and a social housing co-op, and is the driving force behind the UCRUS [Union of Solid Urban Waste Sorters, actively resisting privatisation of waste services].

Solidaridad Libertaria, CGT-Burgos, January 2007