

Anarchism in Gran Columbia

Andrew Sage & Garrison Davis

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Episode Description

Andrew talks with Gare about the history of anarchist theory and praxis in modern day Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, and Venezuela.

Sources:

Cappelletti, Angel (2018). *Anarchism in Latin America*. AK Press. <https://theanarchistlibrar>

Episode Transcript

Andrew: Hello, and welcome to ACRAP and here. I'm Andrew Sage. I run Andrewism on YouTube and I'm here with the voice of...

Garrison: Garrison Davis, Hello.

Andrew (00:14): Hello, hello, and today we're going to continue our journey through Latin American anarchisms and their histories with a sort of a fourth for one special.

Garrison (00:23): Exciting, exciting.

Andrew (00:27): Very exciting. We talked about Peru, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Cuba sofa as well as the Mapouch struggle in Chile and Argentina. And now is the time to explore what's going on at the top of the South American continent, the territory of the former Grand Colombia, and that is the territories of Ecuador, Colombia, Panama and Venezuela.

(00:52): But if this is the first time you're hearing about Grand Colombia, let me give a quick and a brief historical context. Rundown Grand Columbia was a short lived political entity that emerged in the early nineteenth century during Latin America's struggle for independence from Spanish colonial route. It was formed in eighteen nineteen and it encompassed the territories, like I said, of present day Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador,

(01:15): and Panama, as well as some parts of northern Peru, western Guyana, and northwestern Brazil. The republic was envisioned by Simon Bolivar, who are dreamt of uniting the former Spanish colonies into a powerful federation

Andrew (01:29): where they'd be able to resist foreign intervention and secure their independence. The Congress of Angostura declared the creation of Grand Columbia with Bolivar as its first president. The public was a centralized state with a strong executive branch, so unsurprisingly, tension soon arose among the constituent regions due to their differences

(01:51): in political vision, economic interests, and regional identities. Centralized governance had alienated local elites and over federalism us centralism deepened existing divisions. Plus Bolivar's increasingly autocratic rule I mean he literally tried to push for a lifetime presidency obviously sparked

(02:12): internal opposition, so Grand Columbia was facing external threats from Spanish royalist forces and internal fractures. By eighteen thirty, Bolivard had to resign from the presidency, disillusioned by the failure of his vision, and the same year Grand

Columbia dissolved into three separate nations, Venezuela, Ecuador, and the Republic of

(02:33): New Grenada, which later on split into Columbia and Panama. Unlike the other countries of South America that we've covered, these countries had far less large scale anarchist movements, but will still take a look at what little impact anarchists did make in the past two centuries in these places. This whole series, by the way wouldn't be possible without the

(02:53): scholarship of Anhill Capelletti, whose research I drew upon heavily for this historical review. I suggest reading his book Anarchism in Latin America for further details. Let's first take a look at the history in Ecuador at the turn of the twentieth century. Ecuador was ruined from a liberal revolution that had just taken place in the country. The country

(03:14): was shifting as industrialization crept in. The bourgeoisie were on the rise, and feudal landowners were losing their grip on power.

(03:23): A new secular cultural Wave was also beginning to take shape as the clerical authorities began to lose their power. The workers naturally needed a voice in this process, and they found it first with the rise of the Partiro Liberal Obrero was the Liberal Workers Party in nineteen oh six. Around the same time, on New Year's Eve of nineteen oh five, the Confederacire Delacuador was founded in Guayaquil, a city there would become

(03:47): a hub for worker activity. Both organizations shared a vision rooted in social reform and work empowerment. It was also around this time that the Cuban anarchist Miguel Albuquerque made a name for himself in Ecquador. Originally, he had come seeking assistance with Cuba's independent struggle, but eventually found himself playing a key role in Ecuador's labor movement. He established

(04:09): the side that the e host deale Trabajo or the Society the Sons of Labor, and other anarchist groups would also begin forming, contributing to the struggles taking place at the time. The first recorded strikes with anarchist influence took place in nineteen nineteen, where workers in the graphic arts industry organized the demand back conditions. By nineteen twenty two,

(04:30): Guyaquil was the epicenter of a massive general strike, shaped in part by the anarchist Nicolists, who were obviously right in the thick of it. The strike was driven by dissatisfaction among the workers, particularly among the city's urban laborers and dark workers, who were facing really poor wages, long hours, and deteriorating living conditions talors all this time. The strike

(04:53): culminated in a violent crackdown by government forces, also a tales all this time, with estimates suggesting that one hundred words of workers we killed when the military surpressed the revolts. Most workers returned to their jobs after that, but the trolley workers continued their strike until the twenty first of November, when most of their demands were met.

Garrison (05:12): How much like crossover was there between like revolutionaries or like you know, workers rights people or anarchists in Cuba and places like this, because

I assume there was like a lot more like growing sentiment in Cuba based on how that whole situation turned out in the next like twenty thirty years, and I feel like there would be

(05:33): a decent, like a decent number of cross or at least like some travel between some of these other like nearby places for.

Andrew (05:39): Sure, because Cuba has been gained independence much in theater than the rest of its last America neighbors, places like Mexico and Central America and Grantit, Columbia and the rest of South America. They all gained the independence, and Cuba was still under the Spanish Thumb and their remain under the Spanish ththumb until they ended up having to struggle

(06:00): with the Americans as well and eventually to gain their win independence. I mean, it's all one one big pond. I like to see the Caribbean Sea. So there would have been a lot of transfer and communication between these independent Latin America and republics and Cuba, which was still at the time of colony.

Garrison (06:18): That was really interesting to see.

Andrew (06:19): What when you know, these Cuban characters sort of show up in other parts and then I've stirring up some trouble.

Garrison (06:25): Totally well, and it shows just how like popular the nineteen twenties were kind of like everywhere, Like yeah, whether looking at like labor movement in the United States or like everything that you've been talking about these last few episodes about Latin American anarchism. Like always in like the nineteen twenties, there was always just like crazy shit going down consistently for sure.

Andrew (06:47): Unfortunately, nineteen twenties is also the time of a lot of decline for a lot of the anarchists movements because nineteen twenties follows, you know, the rise of the USSR, and a lot of people ended up abandoned in anarchism and following that sort of popularity at the time.

Garrison (07:04): Well, and similarly, once we start getting into like the early thirties, I remember in the last few episodes that you've done, you see the resurgence of like right wing populism, like really hard.

Garrison (07:14): Yes, we tend to see a lot of resurgences.

Garrison (07:17): And like all this like revolutionary potential that's been growing the past few decades all gets like co opted or channeled into like right wing nationalism and right wing populism, and like that's a whole whole other pivot that happens, not just the more like you know, communism's statust one.

Andrew (07:33): In like the twenties, do see a resurgeons. We do see a resurgions in the writing populism. Yes, we also see a resurgions in the anarchist politics. Remember the thirties was also the time of the Spanish Civil War, sure, and so in that time you had the anarchists picking up steam again and you also had fallen that Civil War, a lot of the anarchists from Spain spread out into

(07:55): a lot of the former colonies in lastin America.

Garrison (07:59): I think part of that rebirn is just because of how tied anarchism and anti fascism is.

Garrison (08:03): That's true.

Garrison (08:04): I think inadvertently, the rise of fascism, they actually give birth to the rise of more anarchists as people get involved in anti fascism because of these things are so like, you know, sister movements in many ways. I think that may be a contributing factor. That's certainly how I kind of got into this sort of stuff was through anti fascism, and and I suspect that that may have also been

(08:27): the case even one hundred years ago.

Garrison (08:29): For sure.

Andrew (08:30): For sure, I think every story needs a good villain, unfortunately, and this is the story of anarchism. I mean, the fascists tend to make really, really impactful antagonists.

Garrison (08:43): I think.

Andrew (08:44): Indeed, at the same time, we also had an ecuador as to how these strikes going on oldiny anarchists doing you know that thing that anarchists like to do, which is a study group.

Garrison (09:06): Many such cases.

Andrew (09:08): Many such cases, many such cases. But I mean it is an important aspect of struggles. That's sort of consciousness raison.

Garrison (09:14): Yes.

Andrew (09:15): So these anarchists, in particular in Guyaquille, they founded these Centro their Studio Socialists, which was a libertarian study.

Garrison (09:21): Group in Guayaquille, and then a.

Andrew (09:24): Decade later, in nineteen twenty the anarchists also established a Centro Gremial Sindicalista or the Synicalist Guild Center, which had a mission to an end liberate all the oppressed of the earth by bringing them into a libertarian syndicate that will replace the present system and opposing all political and religious doctrines as destructive and prejudicial to the rights and

(09:44): aspiration of workers endcode. As in the rest of the region, their publications played a key role in spreading the ideas again early twentieth century, late nineteenth century, the anarchists were making papers.

Garrison (10:01): Yeah, use people's newspapers. Newspapers.

Garrison (10:03): I mean it is a bit of a blueprint for what anarchism continues to be in many ways, even with like the rise of destroyism in the in the past past decade or so, in like popular anarchism, less newspapers, more more zines being held together by possibly one or fewer stables.

Garrison (10:22): And I like to think that I also continue that tradition and you and I as well by creating this kind of totally what do you and visual content.

Garrison (10:30): I am a zine enjoyer, I have I have many zines, but we also have to evolve with the times in some ways. Not everyone's going to be reading newspapers, not everyone's going to be reading booklets. Unfortunately, as much as I encourage people to do so, I do think there is value in attacking the information ecosystem that people more more often use. That includes you know, podcasts, that includes

(10:54): your fantastic videos on YouTube. Thank you, thank you, and yeah, I agree for sure, for sure.

Andrew (11:02): But they didn't have things like like YouTube or the internet at the time. Instead, they had, at least in Ecuador, their newspapers like El Proletario and El Cacajuerro and Bandera Roja, which were carrying these syndicalist anarchist ideas to the workers across Ecuador. They also the first truly anarchist papers that hit the country were Rendicion and Lose the Axion in

(11:27): nineteen twenty two, nineteen twenty nine, respectfully. But as we were anticipating in the nineteen thirties brought some challenges. Marxist Leninist Thought began to dominate leftist circles, and figures like Jose Carlos mariette Gui and his General Amota ended up wielding significant influence in the worker's struggles, and by the

(11:47): end of the decade, anarchist groups found themselves vastly overshadowed as Marcus Lenists consolidated power through unified political parties. But despite these shifts, anarchism and Ecuador was really never entirely extinguished. It actually continues to influence workers organizations like the Ferracio and La guayas well into modern times. But now let's

(12:09): make our way north to Columbia as a similar story and folds of anarchism taken route in nearly twentieth century. And this is actually a fun factor because both Eli's Recluse and Mikhail Bercunan visited Columbia recluses there for research purposes, and Bercunan wasn't an anarchist at the time, so they didn't directly contribute to the anarchist movement as far as

(12:31): we know, in the country. By the nineteen tents, anarchist ideas were definitely spreading finding a home among students, artists, writers and workers. And this wasn't just idle philosophizing. They also got to work building workers societies and organizing mass actions at the May fifteenth demonstration in nineteen sixteen, which

(12:52): of course met with brutal police repression. From there, the movement came momentum. In nineteen twenty, port workers in Katakina went on strike and by the following decade and I guess we're the forefront of workers militancy all across the Caribbean coast, which was more connected to global struggles. In the rest of Columbia, I was thus a hotbed of organizing unrest. If you know the geography of Columbia, you'd

(13:15): know that there's a lot of jungle and mountainous region near the middle of the country. There's the coast where you tend to have more of the activity and connection with the neighboring countries and the Caribbean Sea. For the fact there's actually a lot of people in the English speaking Caribbean aren't aware of the fact that there are people in the Spanish speaking Caribbean who consider, you know, coastal Columbia and coastal Venezuela to be part of the Caribbean,

(13:39): but as like the sort of niche discourse which you get an r slash ass Caribbean. The few anarchists we present in Colombia were part of nearly every major uprising, including the Baranquilla Strike of nineteen ten, the labor wave that swept Baranquilla

and Santimurar year nineteen eighteen, the first strike against the notorious le bloody United Food Company in

(14:01): nineteen eighteen, the hero Dot Railroad strike and the Artisans and Labor strike in Bogota nineteen nineteen. The oil strikes in Baron Kabirmeha during the nineteen twenties, including one against the Tropical Oil Company nineteen twenty seven, which cost twelve hundred workers their jobs and painted the targets on the backs of the organizers because how dare you mess with oil?

(14:24): And then finally there was the famous Santa Maria Banana strike of nineteen twenty eight, where workers demanded fair wages and better treatment, and the government responded at the behest of the United Fruit Company by claiming hundreds of lives after the massacre. The anarchist movement in Columbia was heavily repressed, and because of how small it was, it didn't quite

(14:45): pick back up. As historian Max that Lao noted, publications like Organization in Santa Marta and Via Libre and Baranquilla disappeared at late nineteen twenties. This crackdown on anarchists, coupled with the rise and influence of Bolshevik unions, shifted the landscape, and by the nineteen thirties anarchist organizing was all but

(15:06): silenced in Columbia. But it's a part of Columbia that we're missing. She At one point Panama was considered part of the country, So there must have been stuff happening on that little sliver of land, right. It'd be surprised if we rewind to the mid nineteenth century. Between eighteen fifteen eighteen fifty five, Panama saw the construction of a trans isthmus railroad, and this massive project was followed by

(15:30): two phases of canal constructure, the first by the French between eighteen eighteen and eighteen ninety five and the second by the US from nineteen oh forty nineteen fourteen. These projects brought tens of thousands of workers from Europe, Asia and the Caribbean. Effe actually turned in Panama into her melting part of laborers who brought their skills, their culture, and their ideas. Bijian workers, for example, that is people

(15:52): from Barberos. If I recall correctly, there was a time in Barberos' history where it was some massive number.

Garrison (15:59): I was sure if it was like a full quarter of the.

Andrew (16:01): Country's income was just coming from remittances from people who had had family members sending their money from the canal project back home. And it's not just the Cribbean that was impacted obviously, as workers from Europe and Asia also part of this project. And it's the workers from Europe and particularly Spain that brought many of the ideas of

(16:23): class consciousness and anarchist cynicalism that had been brewin in that region of the world. And such ideas were of course solely needed in the horrific working conditions of death and disease that marked the Panama Canal construction project. Workers organized some successful strikes in both the French phase and the American phase of construction, both before and after Panama gain its independence from Colombia nineteen oh three, but it

(16:45): was just before the transition to American control of a canal construction that Panama officially banned anarchists from entering the country. For the anarchists that were left well when the Americans took over the canal, Governor of the Canal So in general, George W. Davis actively suppressed the anarchist workers that remained. In nineteen oh seven or whatever, despite that repression, two

(17:05): thousand Spanish workers went on strike for better wages. In nineteen twenty four, a prodominantly anarchist syndicalist group founded the Sindicato Heneralist Rabbaha Daughters, which was Panama's first central workers union. It grew to thousands of members and brought together a mix of ideologies anarchists and Marxists alike, even those who would later found the Communist Party and the Socialist Party

(17:27): of Panama in nineteen thirty. But on such a small sliver of land were so many people mixed in there there was bound to be a vibrant mix of ideas. And not all of the anarchists in Panama were of the syndicalist flair. Believe it or not, they were actually workers within Panama who aligned themselves with Max Stunner's philosophy. It had egoists and anarchist egoism. Interesting in Panama, Yeah, exactly.

(17:50): This blew my mind as well. You know, they don't expect to see them in such contexts.

Garrison (17:54): Were they reading Sterner in Panama?

Andrew (17:56): I'm not sure if they were reading Sterner, I'm assuming so, because otherwise how would they have come to identify with his philosophy. But they did launch a paper called Eluniko in nineteen eleven.

Garrison (18:08): That's what I was wondering is if instead of like widely Distributing's actual books, like, was there like some like Sterner influence like newspaper that people were running.

Andrew (18:18): Yeah, yeah, because like that makes sense exactly exactly. So I assuming some of the people either would have read Sterner abroad or they brought still the Inn, and they were obviously inspired by it, and they were skeptical of this sort of mass movement syncho those popular at the time.

Garrison (18:34): Sure many people are.

Andrew (18:36): They were questioning its effectiveness as a strategy for anarchy.

Garrison (18:39): Yeah, and so.

Andrew (18:40): If they were focused primarily on organizing sort of smaller affinity groups, yep. And one of those groups ended up launching that paper e Lunico to spread the ideas and obviously called itself an individualist publication.

Garrison (18:53): That's so funny, that's so emblematic of where we still are with an archism. Oh that's good, that's good.

Andrew (19:02): Yeah. I to think that this kind of diversity of thoughts and strategy is really really beautiful, and I'm glad to see it in the most unconventional and surprise enough contexts. It's why I consider myself an anarchist without adjectives, you.

Garrison (19:15): Know, I really absolutely yeah.

Andrew (19:17): I think we benefit greatly from conversation between these traditions and between these strategies, and so seeing that there were more than one form of anarchism in such a small context, it's really quite inspiring.

Garrison (19:30): Yeah, I am with you there.

Andrew (19:32): By the way, for those listeners who may not be familiar with the anarchist egoist tradition, I know that we're ego and egoism.

Garrison (19:39): Might conjure up some psychoanalytical Freudian Yeah, it might bring some some some sort of feelings about capitalistic individualism or like extreme selfishness and that kind of thing, kind of like screw everybody except me.

Andrew (19:55): But it's actually a much deeper philosophical bent to anarchist egoism than I think everyone or you should give a chance.

I actually recently read what is considered the first manifesto of anarchism, and it was written by this French anarchist named Anselme Bella Garrigue, and he was actually an individualist anarchist, and you're actually, in reading that end up seeing a lot of the influences that would later sort of develop further into anarchist individualism from the very beginning, you know, I highly recommend reading it.

It's called *Anarchy a Journal of Order*, it's available on the Anarchist Library. It's a surprisingly contemporary piece in my opinion. It was translated by Sean Wilentz, another anarchist scholar who I'm really inspired by lately, and it really gets into some of the ideas that I think we've forgotten in terms of what it takes to achieve the complete liberation of all people.

Garrison (20:51): So that's *Anarchy a Journal of Order*.

Andrew (20:54): Yeah, *Anarchy a Journal of Order*. He ended up not publishing more than two issues due to low readership, but that's what happens, I think when you have any such cases, many such cases, many such cases.

Garrison (21:07): Yeah, I will pull that up on the Anarchist Library and give that a read myself.

Andrew (21:12): Yeah, it happens when you're ahead of the times in a sense, and he actually ends up becoming at least partially relevant to the next episode I'm going to do on the Latin American Anarchism series, because he ends up making his way to Latin America at one point in his life. In fact, he dies in Latin America, but we'll get to that in time. Finally returned to Venezuela

(21:44): as late nineteenth century refugees from the field of Paris Commune arrived in Caracas, bringing with them the radical spirit of the International Working Men's Association. From a few of these immigrants, small anarchist cells emerged, but they were stifled by the brutal dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gomez from eighteen ninety nine to nineteen thirty five.

Garrison (22:06): So few in number.

Andrew (22:07): The anarchist immigrant efforts to form mutual societies, organized strikes, and spread propaganda gained them a notoriety that put a massive bullseye on them. For Gomez's persecution, he had a *Misery*. A few sparks of anar-

chism did survive in the cultural fabric. Writers like Migueli Guardo Parlo portrayed anarchists as spiritual revolutionaries, lacking them to saints. Sounds familiar, does

(22:32): sound very familiar, yes, if you know, back in the days of Saint Andrew's There You Go. But his novel Toto and Pueblo described anarchists as apostles of justice, which is a really fire title, I must say, as they carried the flame of liberty into the streets.

Garrison (22:52): But it wasn't all pros.

Andrew (22:54): The early twentieth century also saw a spike in industrial strikes. In nineteen eighteen, for example, of it all strike involving transit workers included at least one known Italian anarchist named Vincenzo Kusati. Although defeated, the strike left to mark in the country's consciousness. Inspired by such as Strive for Freedom, workers united through various mutual aid societies which they were

(23:14): disguised as religious skills, the anarchist influence quietly spread among bakers, bricklayers, and oil workers. Truly, it was the oil boom of the nineteen twenties that reshaped Venezuelan society, and of course continues to affect it today. While anarchistiniclust maintained underground networks in the grown oil sector, state and corporate power proved to be too much by the mid twentieth century. After

(23:38): the fall of Gomez's regime, the rise of political parties like Accion Democratica coopted many of the workers who might have otherwise embraced anarchist syndicalism and anarchist ideals became increasingly marginalized, eclipsed by party politics and steeled repression between nineteen thirty six to nineteen forty five. In fact, anarchist repression also gained a constitutional footing in the form of the Lara Law,

(24:00): which band strikes, associations meeting through a permission from the state, political propaganda, and basically all the.

Garrison (24:06): Usual digatorial stuff.

Andrew (24:08): After the Spanish Civil War and the rise of Franco more Spanish anarchist immigrants came to Venezuela. You see, I said they would be relevant, Yes, yes, but they didn't end up impacting Venezuela so much.

Garrison (24:21): As immigrants.

Andrew (24:22): They ended up creating a mostly self contained scene. Pararly through the founding of the Federacion Obrera Riquinal Venezuelana in nineteen fifty eight, which was affiliated to the International Workers Association, but as I said, didn't make to much of a splash in the port of Venezuelan population. They mostly affected other Spanish immigrants. So ANARCHISTKNOV developed into an explicitly mass

(24:46): movement to Venezuela, but elements of it did persist, and the unield in pursuit of freedom were still felt even in the harshest of conditions. To looking today at the countries that composed the former Grand Columbia, I would argue that this spark of anarchism still hasn't died. You know, ecuador uprisings continue to challenge distractive economies and demand autonomous

(25:08): control over rendigious territories as some anarchist collectives are active in solidarity, providing logistical support during protests and pushing horizontal forms of organizing in the broader social struggle. After the twenty twenty one national strike

in Colombia, some anarchist practices have begun to infuse movements against police brutality, privatization, and austerity measures. Mutual aid networks have all same emerged inspired

(25:30): by anarchist practice to support the community's hit hardest by economic crises. In Panama, anarchism exists on the fringes, but it has the potential to provide inspiration to those who are actively confronting the liberal policies, advocating for workers' rights, and engaging in anti corporate actions. Finally, in Venezuela, economic

(25:51): collapse and authoritarianism of created space for anarchist ideals to spread through grassroots initiatives. Neutral aid and self organized community groups have stepped in. The state has failed across these countries, and gas ideas still have potency. And really, my hope is at these places continue to explore the creativity and solidarity that are necessary for liberation, that they continue to struggle and they go through this still you know Viva I labored that, or power to all the people, peace.

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The Ted K Archive

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