

From Fire This Time Newspaper Issue 20/21
December 2004/January 2005



'We Stand Firmly With Cuban People AGAINST the Criminal US Blockade'

A Speech By Tamara Hansen

On October 16th, 2004, Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC) held a film and forum night at Collingwood Neighbourhood House entitled, "Cuba under the US Blockade for 43 years: What's Next?". There were two speakers on the panel, one of which was Tamara Hansen, the coordinator of VCSC. Below is her



talk outlining the US' blockade against Cuba and VCSC's new campaign to "Lift the Blockade Against Cuba".

Short history of US Intervention

First, I want to begin with a history of US intervention in Cuba. Before the revolution from the 1890's to 1959 the United States used Cuba as a military base, a playground for rich and famous Americans, and for plundering resources and labour to create products such as cheap sugar. During this time the Cuban people grew more aware of who was profiting off of their exploitation and how their deepening poverty and exploitation was a result of US intervention in their country.

During this time Cuba was ruled by a series of US supported or US imposed dictators. In 1952 a new US imposed dictator, Batista, took power. Batista was however the last US sponsored puppet leader in Cuba and was over thrown by a popular revolution in 1959.

In 1959, when the Cuban people took back their country, US companies and pleasure seekers were forced off the island, along with much of the Cuban elite. This led to the US trying to reclaim its stakes in Cuba with the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. This invasion was heavily US backed, but despite being out numbered against an expertly trained and funded army, the Cuban militia was able to beat back the imperialist invaders.

After the defeat of the Bay of Pigs invasion the United States moved to more diplomatic means to try and silence Cuba's new revolutionary government. For this they established an economic blockade on Cuba in 1962. At that time the blockade stopped Cuba's sugar exportation to the US, however Cuba was able to trade with the USSR. This was the case until the USSR fell in the 1980's at which point the already desperate situation- caused by the blockade, got worse.

Why the Blockade?

What are the motives behind the blockade? The blockade is an attempt by the US administration to create poor conditions for people in Cuba in hopes that they will lose faith in their government. This will then leave space for the US to implement its dominance over Cuba. The blockade has been modified and reinforced many times since its creation in 1962, and still exists today.

In 1992, it was reinforced with the Torrecelli Act or 'Cuban Democracy Act', under this act any ships from any nations that have docked or have transported Cuban goods cannot dock in US ports for 160 days afterwards. This act limits Cuba's access to food and medicine as well as attempts to prevent other countries from trading with Cuba.

In 1996, the blockade was strengthened again with the Helms-Burton Act which forbade any US company from trading with Cuba and attempted to punish other countries for trading with Cuba as well.

Then again on May 6th 2004, the United States announced that it was putting \$59 million towards new attacks on Cuba. This money will be spent towards radio and TV signals to be broadcast in Cuba against the Cuban government, mercenaries in Cuba and limiting Cuban-Americans travel to Cuba to once every three years and only for a two week period. This is a renewed attempt by the US administration to turn Cuba towards the world bank, privatization and is directly against the gains of the Cuban revolution.

Cuba's Gains and Response to these Renewed Attacks



Since the revolution Cuba has been pushing forward, making major economic and social gains for its people and country. Today, Cuba is the best country in Latin America in terms of life expectancy, literacy, doctors and infant mortality rate. Cuba has been able to accomplish these gains through mass literacy campaigns, sending doctors free of charge to other Latin American nations, free healthcare and education (including post-secondary), agrarian reform and land redistribution. These advances are all major accomplishments, especially considering they are under the blockade and that before the revolution 70% of Cuba's land belonged to US companies. These gains have reinforced the Cuban people's determination to support their government and fight for their rights.

Many of these gains have been made through mobilizations, voluntary work and internationalism. There have been many marches and rallies against the blockade, especially after the May 6th announcement when over a million people marched through the streets of Cuba demanding an end to the blockade. Voluntary work has also helped to achieve much of the new construction in Cuba, from hospitals to schools to housing. The Cuban people's dedication to voluntarily building their country has led to major gains for Cubans' education and healthcare.

Internationalism is another gain not only for giving Cubans a strong world perspective, but also for third world solidarity. Cuba has sent doctors free of charge to other third world countries such as Haiti and Venezuela. Currently, there are 450 Cuban doctors working free of charge throughout Haiti.

Why is the US afraid of Cuba?

To the rest of Latin America Cuba represents an alternative to US intervention and US backed regimes. The US is determined to overthrow Cuba's revolutionary government in order to insure that other countries do not follow Cuba's example towards better social programs and away from the World Bank and privatization. Despite this, the blockade has been a failed attempt at a coup d'état in Cuba for the last 43 years and Cuba's influence has been spreading.

This can be seen right now in Venezuela where the Bolivarian Revolution is continuing to make social gains, similar to those of Cuba, and is becoming a larger threat to US hegemony and US interests in Latin America.

Cuba's internationalism and international work, both with Venezuela and other countries, is perhaps the most threatening and effective element of Cuba's strategy. This is because international work prevents isolation and is what the

US is most afraid of: The creation of more Cubas.

Working in Vancouver: What is our international context?

Although the US blockade on Cuba



has existed since 1962, it has become more relevant in the last couple of years. The reason for this is only in part because of the US' new aggression towards Cuba. To better understand the importance of the US blockade today we must look at the international context in which Cuba and the United States find themselves.

The US' international context is one of economic and moral crisis. This can be seen most clearly in the failing occupation of Iraq and the recent 'democratic' elections in Afghanistan. Both of these situations represent a major moral failure for the United States with thousands dead, and two illegal occupations in sovereign nations. These situations also represent the major economic crisis the US is facing, which is forcing them to compete with other imperialist nations for control over resources and labour in third world countries.

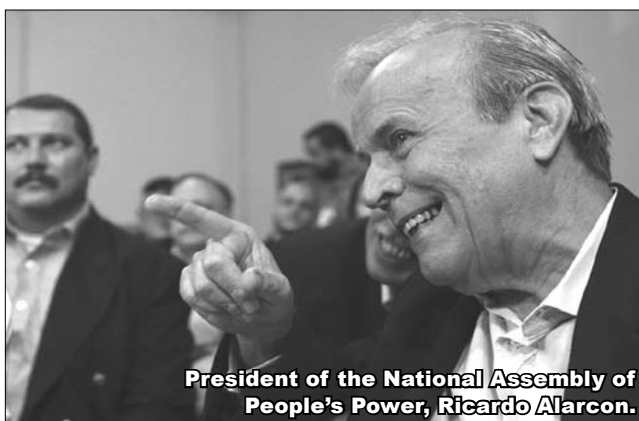
Cuba represents a very important strategical and political block to US hegemony in Latin America. This is becoming more important as the US faces increasing attacks in the Middle East and continues to rely on Latin America for resources and labour power.

Cuba's international context can be seen within its growing ties with Venezuela. Together these two countries are dedicating themselves to making social, economic and political advancements for their people. The international relationship between these two third world countries directly counters attempts by the United States to impose its hegemony and shows that when people are united they can beat back imperialism.

Organizing in Vancouver

Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC) is aiming to increase discussion around Cuba in Vancouver, across BC and around Canada. We are asking people to take a stance in favor of Cuba and its right to self-determination. Our petition to 'Lift the Blockade against Cuba' has already collected over 200 signatures in one week, and I encourage everyone to sign it after the forum.

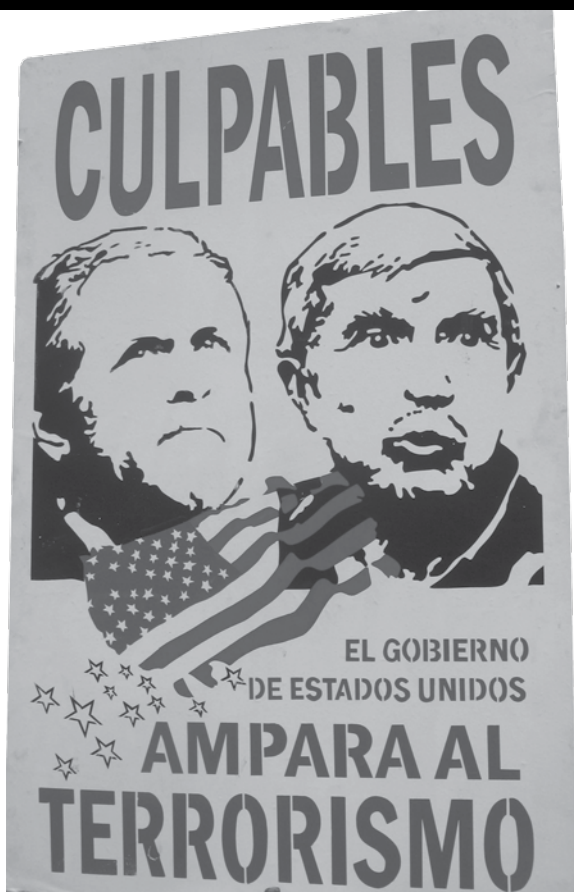
In its fight against imperialism, Cuba needs political solidarity. This does not mean just sending aid, but also standing up with Cuba against the blockade and against US intervention. Using forums, discussion, the petition and other tools to educate and organize North Americans on Cuba, Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba is ready to take this task on. Thank-you.



**President of the National Assembly of
People's Power, Ricardo Alarcon.**

From Fire This Time Newspaper Issue 24
July 2005

Who is Anti-Cuban Terrorist Luis Posada Carriles?



"Guilty. The US government protects terrorism"

Responsible for organizing and carrying out many terrorist plots Luis Posada Carriles is a well-known anti-Cuban terrorist. Posada's terrorist resume includes: spending time jailed in Panama for attempting to assassinate Cuban President Fidel Castro; boasting to a New York Times journalist that he was responsible for organizing a string of bombings at tourist locations throughout Cuba in 1997; and finally the most condemning evidence against Posada- the CIA documents that link Posada to the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner which killed 73 people.

Posada was charged in Venezuela with the 1976 airliner bombing but escaped from prison in 1985 and became an international fugitive. On April 13th 2005 after entering the US on a shrimp boat, Posada filed a request for asylum in the US. Soon after, Venezuela filed an extradition request for Posada in order to charge him with planning the 1976 bombing. The US denied this request citing a lack of evidence against Posada, despite the fact that they have declassified CIA documents, which implicate him in the planning.

On May 17th Posada was detained by the US Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement for entering the United States illegally. Despite being arrested the US continues to refuse to extradite Posada to Venezuela. With their refusal, the US is proving what many already know, which is that the United-States supposed "war on terror" is a farce to be used only when it is in their own interests.



Since Posada submitted his application for asylum in the US there have been rallies, press conferences, and petitions sent out across Canada, the United-States, Venezuela, Cuba and the world, demanding: 'No Asylum for Luis Posada Carriles!' and 'Extradite Posada to Venezuela!'

On May 14th 2005, Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC) launched a petition campaign demanding that the US honour its extradition treaty with Venezuela and refuse Posada asylum. Since starting the campaign less than two months ago, Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC) has collected over 320 signatures.

The positive response to the campaign reflects the understanding of people across the lower mainland of the importance of this campaign in standing up for justice, in defending Cuba against injustice, and in further exposing the lies and deceit of the US administration.

It is together with the people of Venezuela, Cuba and across the globe that we continue to demand the extradition of Posada to Venezuela. We also call on the government of Canada to end its silence on this case and to put pressure on the United-States to uphold international law and extradite Posada.

August 29th 2005 is Posada's next trial date. We are aiming to send a strong message to the US administration for this day by collecting over 700 signatures for our petition campaign. Please join us in our call and get involved in this important emergency campaign. The petition is available at: www.vancubasolidarity.com.

*From Fire This Time Newspaper Issue 26/27
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Building a Campaign Against Anti-Cuban TERRORIST Luis Posada Carriles



On May 14th Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC) launched their petition campaign demanding: 'No Asylum for Anti-Cuban Terrorist Luis Posada Carriles in the United States! Extradite Posada to Venezuela!' This campaign began in the United States in May 2005 in response to Posada requesting asylum from his terrorist activities and crimes against the people of Cuba.

Posada, a former CIA agent, is a self-admitted terrorist with a long history of attacks on the people of Latin America, especially Cuba. His terrorist resumé includes: assassination attempts on Cuban president Fidel Castro, involvement in a string of bombings at tourist locations throughout Cuba in 1997, and the 1976 bombing of a Cubana airliner flight which killed 73 people.

Posada's request for asylum in the United States was immediately opposed by Venezuela and Cuba. Through protests and demonstrations in both countries as well as campaigns building up around the world against Posada pressure was mounted demanding the US government to

take action against the self-admitted terrorist.

On May 17th Posada was arrested. The reason for his arrest? Having entered the US illegally. Since his arrest the US administration has attempted to completely ignore the fact that he is a known and proud terrorist with a history of working with the CIA. However with pressure from the international community: From Venezuela, to Cuba, to the Organization of American States, to the Canadian Labour Congress, to grassroots social justice and Cuba solidarity groups- the media and US administration haven't been able to sweep this case under the rug.

From May through the summer the case against Posada has been built up internationally. On both of Posada's court dates, June 13th and August 29th, international days of action were called. VCSC endorsed both of these calls and organized mobilizations in Vancouver.

On August 27th in building up for the second international day of action against Posada, Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba sent over 1,000 signatures to George Bush demanding Posada's immediate extradition to Venezuela.

August 29th, the Second International Day of Action against Posada

On August 29th, with Cuban flags flying high at the Vancouver Art Gallery in Downtown Vancouver, chants of "Extradite Posada NOW!" rung out loud and clear, for the international day of action against Posada.


Vancouver's demonstration opened with Vancouver City Councilor Tim Louis, who was followed by Marysol Torres of Vancouver's Internationalist Bolivarian Circles.

**INTERNATIONAL DAY OF ACTION
DÍA INTERNACIONAL DE LA ACCIÓN**

No Asylum in the US for Anti-Cuba Terrorist Luis Posada Carriles!
¡No Asilo en los E.U. Para Este Terrorista Anti-Cubano Luis Posada Carriles!

EXTRADITE POSADA TO VENEZUELA!
¡EXTRADITEN A POSADA A VENEZUELA!

US Hands Off Cuba!



Lift the Blockade Against Cuba!
Free the Cuban Five Held in US Jails!

march and rally
MONDAY AUGUST 29TH
@ 4:30pm
Vancouver Art Gallery
Robson St.

¡E.U. MANOS FUERA DE CUBA!
¡Abajo el Bloqueo Contra Cuba!
¡Libertad para los Cinco Cubanos Prisioneros en los E.U.!

Vancouver Communities 778.882.5223 | cubacommunities@yahoo.ca
in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC) www.vancouvercuba.com

Laura Albert of the Capilano Students' Union Social Justice Committee then spoke. Noah Fine, an organizer with the Free the Cuban Five Committee - Vancouver, followed Laura, with a poem by Antonio Guerrero one of the five anti-terrorist Cubans currently being held in US jails. Noah was followed by Tamara Hansen, coordinator of Vancouver Communities in



Cubans demonstrate to demand the extradition of Posada. Havana, Cuba.

Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC), who recently arrived back from traveling in Cuba. She talked about the importance of the fight of the Cuban people for dignity and justice.

The climax of the demonstration came with messages from Gloria La Riva of the National Committee to Free the Cuban Five, and Rosa, a woman whose brother was killed in Posada's 1976 airliner bombing. Both women were in El Paso Texas for Posada's trial that morning, and brought two important messages of solidarity on this international day of action. "Thank-you," said Rosa, "it is very important to me to know that there are people around the world who are against Posada and are demanding justice for my brother and so many other families."

Since August 29th people around the world fighting in solidarity with Cuba have continued to educate and organize around the case of Posada asking: How can the United States be leading a supposed "war AGAINST terrorism", while protecting a well-known terrorist from facing his crimes?

US double standard on 'Terrorism'

"We have a solemn obligation to stop terrorism at its early stages. We must do all we can to disrupt each stage of planning and support of terrorist acts."

- US President George Bush at the UN Security Council session, September 14th 2005

"Those who threaten the whole world in the name of a hypocritical campaign against terrorism, have been protecting convicted, confessed terrorist Luis Posada Carriles in their own territory for six months."

- Speech by President of the National Assembly of the People's Power of Cuba, Richardo Alarcon, delivered September 9th 2005, by Cuba's ambassador to the UN Orlando Requeijo

Cases that can be used to expose the United States' phony "War on Terror" are abundant, so abundant in fact that we could fill hundreds of pages with incidences and events outlining the violent and hypocritical policies of the US administration over many years. Do you remember the

‘weapons of mass destruction’ the US used in Vietnam? Or the atomic bombs they dropped on Japan? Or the torture they are using right now in Abu Gharib prison in Iraq or Guantanamo in Cuba? We must expose the United States support for terrorism - which is when terrorism is helping them win wars.

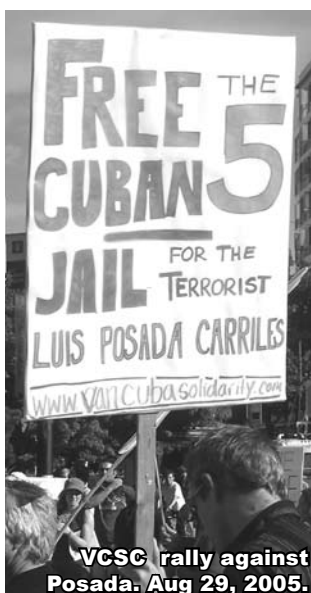
Luis Posada Carriles served in the US military, was a CIA operative, and helped anti-Cuba terrorist groups in the United States carry out terrorist attacks against Cuba. Posada and the United States are on the same side; they are both promoters and defenders of US imperialism. But right now Posada is being held in a US prison while they negotiate with him how to solve their problem.

What is their problem? Their problem is that the United States cannot afford to be seen publicly with such a well-known terrorist. They want to help Posada, because he helped them so many times, but they cannot afford to have Cuba, Venezuela and social justice organizers around the world breathing down their necks and using this case to further expose their false ‘war against terrorism’.

We Must Continue the Campaign Against Posada!

On August 31st, Posada withdrew his request for asylum in the United States. Posada’s lawyers claimed Posada dropped the request because he feared if he was asked certain questions on the stand during his trial he might expose some confidential US or CIA secrets. His lawyers also said that if Posada faced the order of extradition to Venezuela, they would fight to have the extradition deferred to another country. Posada will also be applying for citizenship in the United States and using his time in the US army as credentials to bolster his application.

Posada’s next court date is on the 26th of September. Through buying time with different maneuvers the US government will most likely try to find a legal way to delay a potential extradition order for years to come. This, they hope, will effectively wipe the case of Posada out from the public’s memory. In the mean time they will try both legal and illegal avenues to get Posada’s citizenship papers processed with positive results. These possibilities might comfort Posada for now, but whatever they do it does not change the fact that even if Posada is successful at getting citizenship in the US, he is still an international terrorist and is subject to extradition to Venezuela. What is clear is that the US and Posada are trying to strike a deal that will work for both groups, and a deal that will not be a victory for Cuba or Venezuela. Until there are further developments, and whether he is granted citizenship in the United States or not, Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba will continue its campaign against Posada with the demand, “Extradite Anti-Cuban Terrorist Luis Posada Carriles to Venezuela NOW!”



From Fire This Time Newspaper Vol 3 Issue 1
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**Interview with a Veteran from the
Revolutionary Army,
Pedro Pablo Díaz Rodríguez**

While in Cuba this past summer, I stayed for thirteen wonderful days in Trinidad, a city in the province of Sancti Spiritus. I was on the trip with the Che Guevara Work Brigade and we were staying at a hostel called "La Casa de la Amistad".

On the day we were going to see the "Museum of the Battle Against Bandits" I became sick. However, I was so excited to meet with veterans from the revolutionary army of Cuba that I went anyways. Afterwards I had to go back to the hostel to rest and didn't really have a chance to talk with any of the veterans.

However, despite my disappointment at not getting to talk more with the veterans, a few days later a friend named Hollis and myself discovered that the veterans had a hall where they played dominoes just half a block away from where we were staying. After getting over our nervousness we went inside to chat and say hello. They remembered us from the days before and I took the opportunity to introduce some of the veterans to the Fire This Time Newspaper and explained in very broken Spanish that I wanted to do an interview with them. They thought that was a great idea and so we decided to come back the next day with someone who could translate for us.

Hollis and I returned with our compañero Raul the next day. When we asked who the best person to do an interview would be, everyone pointed to Pedro Pablo Díaz Rodríguez. So that is how this interesting interview on a little known part of the Cuban people's battle after 1959 to establish their revolution came about.

Pedro Pablo Díaz Rodríguez and the rest of the veterans were very warm and welcoming to us throughout the rest of our stay. They honored us by coming over to chat, to celebrate and to wish us farewell before we left Trinidad. A good representation of truly living, loving and caring revolutionaries.

Fire This Time: First off, please tell me your name and how you got involved in the revolutionary army in Cuba.

Pedro: My name is Pedro Pablo Díaz Rodríguez. When we were kids, due to the poverty that existed in Cuba, we used to work in the streets just cleaning shoes or taking bags for housewives up to the bus station. After the triumph of the revolution, we joined the youth police, which was created in 1960. Afterwards, we became members of the organization of young rebels. They organized to us in a series of activities where, at the age of 16, we were on duty, we walked around with the arms and looked after different areas in the city.

On April 13th, 1961, during the Bay of Pigs invasion, we were called to participate, but we didn't go because we had not received enough training. We were preparing to go, but because the battle ended quickly we did not go.



**National Museum of the Battle Against Bandits,
Trinidad, Cuba.**

So we were teenagers and we organized a battalion. They designated to us to take care of bridges and according to the capacity they prepared to us there. In my case I trained to become a gunman, and he became a pilot. We continued in the Armed Forces because we agreed with the cause.

So we continued studying in the army, and then we went to the Escambray Mountains to join the battle against bandits. After the battle against bandits we were sent to military school. Good, so we continued to struggle and help the revolution in different points and struggles according to the political situation in the country... So according to the work and their trajectory as soldiers we were promoted to different positions, for example to lieutenant-colonel.

FTT: How did the problem with Bandits arise after the revolution here in Trinidad and nearby in the Escambray Mountains?

Pedro: Here in Trinidad when... we continued the battle against them... We were not involved in the army when this battle began. We joined this struggle when we were asked to do it, because there was already other groups fighting to defend the revolution in the Escambray.

FTT: Please explain for us a bit more about what the battle against bandits was, for those in Canada who might not know.

Pedro: Okay, so the battle against bandits started when a group of counter-revolutionaries went to the Escambray Mountains. They called themselves 'Freedom Fighters' or something like that. The battle against bandits was made in order to stop these counter-revolutionaries who wished to

keep people in ignorance. But there were many noble people in this area and with the triumph of the Revolution they knew their rights and their duties and that she [the revolution] was what they had to defend. So we had the chance to join the fight, in order help the farmers and also to help defend the revolution.

All of this happened within the literacy campaign here in Cuba. We also had the responsibility to take care of the young teachers working here in the mountains because the counter-revolutionary bandits wanted to cut off the path of the revolution.

FTT: How did the battle against bandits help consolidate or solidify the revolution both here in Trinidad and in all over Cuba?

Pedro: This happened from a few different points of view. For the farmers and workers, everybody realized the importance of defending and maintaining the revolution. Because of the agrarian reforms and some other factors and gains made by the revolution, everyone realized the necessity to defend all of the accomplishments made since the revolution in 1959. That is why it was very important.

Before the revolution there were poor people and poor farmers who had to work the land for a living. They didn't own the land, because the land was the property of enterprises or of very rich people who lived in the city and had some workers out on their farms in order to maintain their way of life.

So even the guards at that time, they exploited the farmers taking away their foods, and animals. A blatant example was the horses, the horses for the soldiers were brought from Canada.

So I just wanted to give you an example of the necessity to make a revolution, and the reason why it was important to defend that revolution.



FTT: What are some of the gains you have seen in Trinidad and in Cuba, I know it has been a long time, since the defeat of the Bandits and the continuation of the revolution.

Pedro: For example, education. Education is totally free in Cuba. But also before the triumph of the revolution those children and young people that didn't have the money, they didn't have the possibility to study. Nowadays, we all have the same possibilities to go to university, according to capacity to study.

Another thing is the health system. Before if you didn't have money you couldn't go to a clinic. In other times they only had four or five doctors and only two private clinics, so if you money to go to those places you would be left to die, and people did die. Today healthcare is totally free, and we have one family doctor for every 500 people. Which means we have a chance to maintain the health of our population.

Also, we now have the possibility to help other countries, to make internationalism like Che Guevara taught us. We can help many people in the world that don't have the same access to a proper health system like we do. So we send doctors over there to help them, and we are able to do that because of the revolution.

Another thing is food and alimentation. Today everyone is able to eat. People can have lunch, breakfast, dinner, like normal and everyone receives food baskets "canastas" the food they need. Before the triumph of the revolution, people didn't have this, and many people, children, older people died because they didn't have enough to eat. They didn't even have one meal a day.

Something else is life. Before 1959 there were many neighborhoods that were not livable. They were built with wood and carton, there was no clean water. The revolution brought houses for all of those people that didn't have anywhere to live, and not only houses, they were given beds, pillows, clothes, everything needed to have a normal life. Not to be rich, but just to have a normal way of life. Another things is the development of culture and sports today they are for everyone.

FTT: Thank you very much. I am very happy to be here in Cuba and be able to hear your important stories.

Pedro: We are also very happy to have you here. All people who are helping us abroad we are like sisters and brothers and we must help each other. Today we are also fighting for the return of our five heroes from the United States.

FTT: Yes, that is a very important fight. We must fight for their return together.



Demonstration in defence of the Cuban 5, Vancouver BC. March 27, 2003.

From Fire This Time Newspaper Vol 3 Issue 2
May 2006

Cuban Revolution: **WORKERS STATE** Defending, Expanding, and Consolidating **WORKERS RIGHTS**

Since 1959



Mayday in Cuba. 2005.

“Humanity is my Homeland” - Jose Marti

“Humanity has a yearning for justice” - Slogan for Cuba’s 2005 Mayday rally

United States - Cuba “relations”

The US has been intervening in Cuba basically since 1898 when Spanish colonialists were kicked out of Cuba. Between that time and 1959 the US intervened in Cuba through exploiting Cuba’s resources and creating a large economy in Cuba based mainly on sugar being exported to the United States. This helped maintain Cuba’s economic reliance on the US.

By 1958, American institutions owned 90% of telephone and electricity services, over 50% of the railways, and over 70% of the land in Cuba. In order to maintain these interests in Cuba, the United States supported a long line of repressive governments in Cuba, which kept the Cuban people in poverty and stole their dignity and pride as human beings. This led to a growing resentment in Cuba towards the United States, which ended in 1959 in a popular revolution.

Only three days after the triumph of the Cuban revolution, in 1959, the Guardian reported, “[Fidel Castro] proposes to nationalize all utilities; to give their working land to tenant farmers, who make up 85 per cent of the farming population; to distribute to the employees of every business in Cuba 30 per cent of the profits; to confiscate all the property of ‘corrupt’ former Government officials; to modernize the island’s industries and begin a huge rural housing and electrification project.”

Almost immediately the new revolutionary government began to follow through with these plans. The agrarian reform laws were quickly implemented with Fidel announcing, “What I can say today is that when the Agrarian Law is entirely applied, two million Cubans will have their income increased and they will become buyers in the domestic market.” Only a year later in 1960 the Cuban government nationalized US corporate assets in Cuba.



US starts Blockade of Cuba **Billboard in Cuba, 1964.**

In retaliation the United States stopped importing sugar from Cuba, which was vital to Cuba's economy. A year later in 1961 the US implemented a full economic blockade against Cuba refusing any trade. During this time the US and counter-revolutionary Cubans who had fled to the US during the revolution, tried to intervene not only through squashing Cuba's economy but also militarily with the Bay of Pigs invasion. However, the invasion failed and within 72 hours the counter-revolutionary Cubans and their US allies were forced to retreat.

Today the US blockade on Cuba continues and is basically an attempt to create poor living conditions for the people of Cuba in hopes that they will lose faith in their revolutionary government or that the people will become weaker through hunger and illness, allowing the US to overthrow the government and possibly invade again.

But the Cuban people remember many of the promises Fidel Castro made to them, one of which he made upon entering the province of Pinar Del Rio after the triumph of the Revolution: “I know there are many people in need. I know there are many who are ill who have no hospital to go to, that there are many children who have no schools to attend, that there are many families who go hungry, but we will not help one or two people, we will help everyone.”

Does Cuba work for workers?

After Bastista fled, the revolution had only just begun. From 1959 to today the revolutionary process continues to unfold in Cuba. A report published in 2002 by a US delegation of “employment lawyers, neutrals and trade unionists” to Cuba (sponsored by the National Lawyers Guild Labor & Employment Committee and the U.S. Health Care Trade Union Committee) outlines some very interesting information

about workers' rights in Cuba and the sharp contrast between workers' rights in the United States and Cuba.

Something the delegation from the US noticed was that the relationship between employees and management is significantly different in Cuba than it is in the United States or Canada. They found that there were two main goals in the workplace for both employees and management, which was to improve production and to improve workers' lives.

The report explains that "without the profit motive which drives management in the United States to try to generate as much income as possible for shareholders, rather than spend money on the workers, Cuban management and labor interests tend to converge."

Another difference was Cuban workers' employment security. Unlike in the United States or Canada, job security is not based on sales or company profit making. Instead, during times of little or no work, employing enterprises are in charge of continuing to pay their workers and provide them with any retraining needed to find a new job.

According to Prensa Latina, a Cuban new agency, "The International Labor Organization (ILO)'s regional director for the Americas Daniel Martinez said Cuba was a model for indicators achieved in employment and initiatives to create jobs... he was impressed with the Island's low unemployment level (1.9 percent), its state policy aimed at eliminating unemployment and social security projects."

In May of last year Cuba's minimum wage was increased by more than 100 percent from about \$5 to about \$11 US per month. More than 1.6 million workers benefited from the raise. But at the time several million higher-level employees did not receive any benefits, until later last year in November when it was announced that higher-level employees would also be getting a pay raise.



The fact that Cubans earn in one month what is considered about an hour's wage by people in the US and Canada is something the media uses quite often to try to discredit the gains made since the Cuban revolution. However we must look at how wages break down for people living in Cuba to better understand what \$11 per month means.

According to an Associated Press article from November 23rd 2005, "Although low by international standards, Cuban salary figures can be misleading in a country where most people do not pay for their housing, utilities or transportation. Health services and education are free, other government services are heavily subsidized and everyone receives about a third of their food each month for less than \$3."

Health services and education are free, other government services are heavily subsidized and everyone receives about a third of their food each month for less than \$3."

Unions in Cuba

According to Guillermo Ferriol Molina the Director of Labor and Social Issues for the CTC (Central Of Cuban Workers), “Approximately 97 to 98 percent of all Cuban workers are members of one of the nineteen national unions, all of which are grouped in the CTC.”

Members’ dues fund unions in Cuba; dues are usually about 1% of a workers wages. Workers voluntarily join the unions and also voluntarily pay their dues, it is not deduced automatically from their pay.

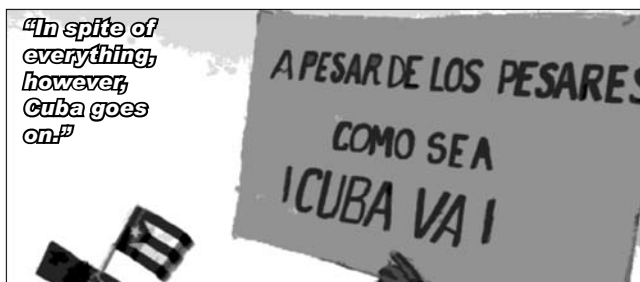
The CTC is a grouping of all of the national unions across Cuba. It is also a way for Cubans to get involved in policy-making in their country. As an example, in 1996, in preparation for a CTC conference, the government put forward some proposals on how to approach some of the problems caused by the collapse of Cuba’s main trading partner at the time, the Soviet Union. More than 2 million workers across Cuba participated in evaluating the proposals. Two of the proposals submitted by the government for discussion were rejected by the CTC vote and were not adopted into Cuban policy.

The revolution is not over, new gains must continue to be made

Recently a new debate has been opened in Cuba around how to make the revolution strong and protect the gains it has made for workers across Cuba. On November 24th 2005 Cuban President Fidel Castro declared, “We are well aware, that today there is new class, in virtue of the phenomena that the Revolution has had to go through, particularly in the years of the Special Period... I can assure you with absolute certainty that this battle against waste, theft, the illegal diverting of resources and other generalized vices has been won in advance... It is the organized masses, ideas, the support of the people that give us the confidence in victory, and, just like we have said that the Revolution today is invincible in military terms and is seeking economic invulnerability, we can also assure its political invulnerability by guaranteeing that the new generations are better than us, more capable than us.”

Of course while battling some internal problem Cuba must also continue to face and defend itself against the outside world. Last week on April 25th 2006 Us President George Bush defended the US’s illegal and criminal economic blockade on Cuba and the American travel ban on Cuba saying, “trade with the country enables a tyrant to stay in power.”

It is obvious the rest of the world disagrees with this statement. First many both inside and outside Cuba support the leadership of Fidel Castro, and if they do not they at least believe that Cuba has the right to self-determination and choosing its own government. Secondly, the blockade has been widely condemned repeatedly at the United Nations.





In November 2005, 182 countries voted to condemn the US blockade on Cuba with only four voting in support of the cruel and genocidal blockade.

Has the revolution lived up to its expectations?

Since the revolutionary Cuban Government, led by Fidel Castro, made their promise saying that, “we will help everyone” the revolution has continued to push forward to fulfill these promises. Specific targets include healthcare, education, workers’ rights, and advancing Cuban society towards becoming more humane, just and dignified. With these targets Cuba has made some amazing accomplishments.

According to Istvan Ojeda Bello’s article in *Periodico 26*, a local newspaper in Las Tunas, Cuba, “Ironically, the country that supposedly limits the freedom of its citizens is the only one in Latin America where there is not malnutrition. Such a claim was not made by Cuban authorities but by a representative of the UN World Food Program (WFP).” Cuba also has the highest life expectancy, literacy rate and number of doctors in Latin America.

Interestingly, Cuba even has more doctors per capita than the United States. In 2000, the US had 279 doctors per ten thousand while Cuba soared above them with 582 doctors per ten thousand. What is the quality of these doctors you might ask? According to a report by the World Health Organization done in that same year, out of 191 countries Cuba’s overall health system ranked 37th while the United States sat below Cuba at 39th. At the same time out of 191 countries the United States spends the most money per capita while Cuba was one of the countries that spent the least at 118th out of 191 countries.

In terms of education, Cuba has made drastic gains since the revolution. Cuba’s Ministry of Foreign affairs website explains that, “In 1953 Cuba had only about 6.5 million inhabitants; more than half a million children had no school and more than 2 million people were completely or functionally illiterate. Only half of the school population went on to secondary school; there were 10,000 unemployed teachers; about 550,000 children aged between 6 and 14, almost half the total number, did not go to school. The population over the age of 15 had an average educational level of less than three years of primary school.”

Today illiteracy has been eradicated in Cuba. The Cuban people, Cuban workers, have universal access to education and students who want to go to school can do so for free! All of the way up to getting their PhD!

These are some of the important gains that Cubans are most proud of. They have fought long and hard, and over come many difficulties to make these gains and continue to surpass difficulties today to make greater gains for future generations.

July 26 1953:

Attack on the Moncada Garrison in Cuba

*“The beginning of a path that
has never been abandoned”*



“Neither weapons, nor experience, nor fortuitous factors accompanied that first effort, which signified the beginning of a path that has never been abandoned. The path opened the conquest of power for the revolutionary people. And that essential characteristic of our Revolution: the confidence of the people in themselves, the faith of the people in their cause, the conviction that no difficulty, however great, would prevent victory. That no road, however difficult would make us incapable of continuing until the end...To remember the moments of adversity is good, to remember the time when the present reality was no more than a dream is good, to remember the sacrifice the victories have cost is good because the memories teach us, tell us, that nothing is easy on the path of the peoples.”
- Cuban Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro Ruz
(July 26th 1967)

July 26th 1953 is not about a victory or a defeat during the battle at the Moncada army garrison. The importance of this day is the vision presented to the Cuban people, showing the necessity and the character of the upcoming Cuban revolution. July 26th 1953 was about a revolutionary vision, from a young revolutionary named Fidel Castro, who along with his compañeros opened Cuba's path towards revolution which was triumphantly pushed into existence 6 years later changing the historical process in all of Latin America, the West, and as we understand today – the World

Cuba in 1953: Repression, poverty and ignorance

In March 1952 the Cuban dictator Batista led a coup just prior to elections seizing power for himself with the support

of the United States. According to Jerry A. Sierra a free-lance journalist from Cuba, *“Batista opened the way for large-scale gambling in Havana, and he reorganized the Cuban state so that he and his political appointees could harvest the nation’s riches...Under Batista, Cuba became profitable for American business and organized crime. Havana became the “Latin Las Vegas,” a playground of choice for wealthy gamblers, and very little was said about democracy, or the rights of the average Cuban. Opposition was swiftly and violently crushed, and many began to fear the new government.”*

In 1953, 90% of people in Cuba were illiterate or semi-literate, without even a 6th grade education level. At the same time only 3.2% of the school-aged population over the age of 10 were enrolled in junior or senior high school. One third of all homes in Cuba were classified as huts, while only 56% of homes had electricity.

An employment census taken for the year 1953 showed that 8.4% of the work force was unemployed. This shameful unemployment rate does not even give the full picture of the poverty facing Cubans as the census was taken during the height of the sugar harvest when unemployment was at its lowest. It is estimated that real unemployment throughout the year was closer to 30%. In 2003, looking back on situation in Cuba 50 years before Fidel Castro said, “Ignorance has been the most powerful and fearsome weapon of the exploiters throughout all of history.” How could a country be changed from a situation of repression, poverty and ignorance to a country with the most doctors per capita in the world, with a literacy rate of 97% and an unemployment rate of only 1.9%?

Was it the will of one man? Was it the will of 150 rebellious young people? Or was it the will of millions of poor and oppressed people across Cuba who were tired of a system and government that did not represent their interests?

What changed on July 26th 1953?

On July 26th 1953 the first major battle against the repressive Batista regime took place when a group of approximately 150 organized rebellious young people lead by Fidel Castro (who at that time was only 26) took up arms to attack the Moncada army garrison in Santiago de Cuba and the Carlos Manuel de Cespedes garrison in Bayamo.

This attack was planned in order to seize arms from the oppressive Batista regime and to trigger a vast popular insurrection against the government. Who were these rebels? Students, workers, artists, teachers and many others who had sold and mortgaged their possessions to raise \$15,000 in order to buy military uniforms and guns.

Despite their preparation, their attempt to take the two garrisons failed and most were imprisoned. In the introduction to the book ‘the Twelve,’ Tana de Gamez wrote, “Half of the rebels died, not in combat, but under torture. Their captors were eager to pin the blame for the aborted insurrection on some high official or foreign instigator. The irate tyranny could not conceive that the near-defeat it suffered had been inflicted by a group of ill-equipped youthful civilians with no ties whatsoever to disgruntled politicians, army chiefs, or an exotic ideology. There simply was nothing to confess to, and the truth was too compromising for the government,

too indicative of oppression and discontent to be admitted.” Those who survived the torture were brought to trial.

At his trial, the young revolutionary Fidel Castro, who was also a lawyer in training, represented himself- giving a groundbreaking speech that condemned his captors for working together with the inhuman and corrupt dictatorship. At the end of his speech he simply and fore-tellingly stated, “Sentence me. It doesn’t matter. History will absolve me.” Despite the moving speech, Fidel Castro along with his other compañeros were found “Guilty” and sentenced to anywhere from 5-15 years. However, two years after they were found guilty, the truth about what happened on July 26th, along with the text of Fidel Castro’s courtroom speech spread throughout Cuba. With that, momentum grew to release Castro and other political prisoners of the Batista regime. Under pressure, the dictator was forced to release them. From there Fidel and others left to Mexico where they would re-group to form ‘the 26th of July Revolutionary Movement’ and plot a new attack against the Batista regime

July 26th 1953 gained significance because it showed people throughout Cuba that the revolutionaries were not doublespeaking politicians. They were motivated and driven to take action against the brutal Batista government. This gave people confidence in their leadership and inspired more Cubans to get involved in the fight for Cuba’s liberation and for justice. In 1956, Fidel Castro and other leaders of the 26th of July Revolutionary Movement returned to Cuba from Mexico and began a



campaign to defeat the government of Batista. Three years later, on January 1st 1959, after many fights and battles ending in both losses and victories the cruel dictator Batista fled Cuba. The revolutionaries had won!

This is where the dreams and aspirations of the 26th of July Revolutionary Movement needed to be implemented and quickly become a reality, to re-affirm with the people of Cuba that the revolution had not been fought in vain, but for specific goals and ideals. Most importantly that the path that the revolutionaries had shown to the Cuban people on July 26th 1953, the path of hope, social justice and prosperity for all poor and oppressed people in Cuba, had not been abandoned- nor would it ever be.

How the Ideals of July 26th are being upheld in Cuba today

Health: Today, the Cuban constitution guarantees access to medical care and citizens receive free healthcare from dental and major surgery to regular check-ups, everything is covered. Cuba has one doctor for every 156 citizens, that is the most doctors per capita of any country in the world. In 1959, life expectancy in Cuba was 45 years. Today, even according to the CIA world fact book, life expectancy in Cuba is 77 years. Cuba's infant mortality rate is also the lowest in Latin America at 6.22%. With "Operation Miracle," Cuban doctors have performed 250,000 free eye operations returning sight to many blind or partially blind people in Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia. The goal of this operation is to cure all of the estimated 5 million blind people in Latin America. The Cuban government has even offered free eye surgery to 100,000 people living in the US, no response yet from the US government.

Education: This year on June 6th, Cuba celebrated 45 years of free education. According to Cuban newswire Prensa Latina, "On June 6, 1961, the revolutionary government



decreed the Teaching Nationalization Law. Two months after defeating the US invasion of Playa Giron (Bay of Pigs), the country ended the education system that served a privileged minority and brought real democracy to teaching."

Since the triumph of the revolution 69 of the army garrisons formerly controlled by the Batista dictatorship were converted into schools and classrooms for over 40,000 students.

Along with that, more than 10,000 classrooms have been created, because of these new classrooms 90% of people aged 9-12 are able to go to school. Most importantly, free education in Cuba does not only mean at the primary and secondary level, but university degrees and PhD's as well!

Jobs: In May 2005 the minimum wage in Cuba went up from 100 to 225 pesos benefiting over 1.6 million workers which accounts for 54% of state employees. In July 2005 wages rose in the healthcare and education sectors, which benefited over 850,000 workers. These actions, as well as raises in social assistance and social security benefited 4.4 million people, which accounted for 30.9% of the population.

At the same time Cuba has worked hard to provide jobs for all Cubans and today, according to the CIA world fact book Cuba's unemployment rate sits at only 1.9%.

Because of these amazing strides being made in Cuba for universal access to social programs and the gains made by the revolution for students, workers, women, people of colour and other oppressed groups, July 26th continues to be a day of great celebration and renewal of hope for gains to be made in the near and far futures. According to journalist Onelio Castillo Corderi, the most important thing about these celebrations was that they “emphasized the will of this portion of land [Cuba] to defend the glory they have reached, that is preserving the beautiful everyday feats that astonish the world.” And defending these feats is becoming more important as the years go on. Because the gains made by the Cuban revolution do not exist in a vacuum.



The Moncada Barracks today.

US Attacks on Cuba

While the Cuban revolution overthrew the dictator Batista it also redistributed land owned by US companies, and nationalized many industries previously monopolized by US companies. This aggravated the US and has led to numerous attempts to overthrow the Cuban revolution: from bombing and military invasion, to media smear campaigns and spreading lies about Cuba. These attacks have all either been led or covertly funded by the US government- among them the most long lasting campaign has been the US economic blockade against Cuba.

Basically since the revolution triumphed the United States has maintained a cruel, illegal, and genocidal blockade against Cuba. Limiting access to food, medicine, teaching equipment and technology the blockade has caused immense hardship for the Cuban people. In fact the blockade has cost Cuba over \$82Billion in the last 45 years.

By George W. Bush's own admission the blockade exists because, “trade with the country enables a tyrant to stay in power.” Even if we were to agree that Fidel is a tyrant, since when is this the US trade policy? Executive Director at Americans for Humanitarian Trade, George Fernandez, pointed out in 1999 that, *“The U.S. embargo on Cuba is the single most restrictive policy of its kind. Even Iraq [under sanctions] is able to buy food and medicine from U.S. sources...As a Cuban American, I speak for the vast majority of us who do not think the U.S. should be in the business of denying basic sustenance to families and children in Cuba.”*

Recently, on July 5th 2006, the US State Department's Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba released a new report which lines up the US' immediate plan of action following the death or incapacitation of Fidel Castro. According to the Miami Herald, "[The report] calls for the creation of a two-year \$80 million "Cuba Fund for a Democratic Future." The money is to "increase support for Cuban civil society, expand international awareness, break the regime's information blockade, and continue developing assistance initiatives to help Cuban civil society realize a democratic transition." After the initial two years, the commission recommends adding at least \$20 million annually to the fund "until the dictatorship ceases to exist.""

What is the US so afraid of?

What frightens the strongest military in the world? What frightens the strongest capitalist ruling class in the world? What makes them so unwilling to trade with Cuba, a little third-world island only 90 miles away?

The power of ideas. This is what makes the United States so weak in the knees.

For over 45 years the US government has done everything in its power to isolate Cuba from the rest of the world. From yelling accusations of 'human rights abuses' to 'dictator' to 'outpost of tyranny' to 'state sponsor of terror' the United States has accused Cuba of horrendous crimes. But in return Cuba has reached out to the rest of the world, offering to send 1,500 doctors to New Orleans after hurricane Katrina, sending 3,500 doctors free of charge to Pakistan, using its exemplary literacy campaign to teach people across Latin America how to read.

For this Cuba has won the respect of many governments around the world, and the admiration of millions oppressed people around the world. This respect can be seen with the United Nations voting to condemn the US blockade on Cuba in November 2005 for the 14th consecutive year, and Cuba's recent election the United Nations Human Rights Council, where Cuba elected by 70% of the UN member nations (135 votes in favour).

However, the United States is not really afraid of Cuba's advances in the United Nations. What frightens the US is the possibility that the ideas represented in that battle on July 26th 1953 will spread to other countries. That seeing the gains Cuba has made since kicking the United States out of their country, will inspire other countries to do the same.

The US blockade on Cuba and all other US attacks on Cuba are meant to prevent the spread of the Cuba's largest strength, its ideas. But like the powerful sound of Cuban music, Cuba's ideas are traveling the world over and no blockade can ever stop them.

The Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA)

"Wise grandfather, Fidel; Father, Hugo; I am the son of you both" - Evo Morales, President of Bolivia

On April 29th 2006 the presidents of Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia came together to affirm their commitment to the Bolivarian Alternative for the peoples of Our America

(ALBA). In their agreement the countries agreed to fund programs to eradicate illiteracy; for each country to attempt to hold at least 51% of all bi-national or tri-national companies in their countries; to organize joint cultural projects; educational exchanges; strengthen communication infrastructure in all three countries; and to share scientific and technical know-how in order to promote economic and social development.

Unfortunately for the US, it has nothing to offer the people of Latin America- promises of freedom of speech, democracy, or improved economy have all been disproved by years of US-backed dictators from: Batista to Pinochet or US-backed coup d'états: from Venezuela to Haiti.

In 2005, in his yearly July 26th address, Cuban president Fidel Castro stated, "The agreement between the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Republic of Cuba, signed in accordance with the principles of ALBA, means a considerable step forward on the way to unity and the true integration of the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean...Because of these noble, constructive and peaceful efforts, the imperialist government is accusing Venezuela and Cuba, Chávez and Castro, of destabilizing and subverting other countries in the region. Faced with such accusations against Venezuela and Cuba, and if President Chávez agreed, a day like today would be most opportune to reply: Condemn us, it doesn't matter, history will absolve us!"



Fifty-three years ago, on July 26th 1953, it was time for the Cuban revolutionaries to show their fellow Cubans an alternative to the repressive dictator Batista. Today, that alternative has been realized and surpassed by the gains made by the Cuban revolution.

Today, in the year 2006, it is time for ALBA to show all of Latin America an alternative to the neo-liberal policies of the US and their puppet governments throughout Latin America. Tomorrow, that alternative will be realized and surpassed if we continue to struggle- Until Victory, Always! We will win!

¡Hasta la Victoria Siempre!
¡Venceremos!

From Fire This Time Newspaper Vol 3 Issue 5
August 2006

PLAN BUSH:

What is the US government planning for Cuba?

“...All who live in tyranny and hopelessness can know: the United States will not ignore your oppression, or excuse your oppressors. When you stand for your liberty...America sees you for who you are: the future leaders of your free country.”
- US President George W. Bush, Plan for Assistance to a Free Cuba

“After having divulged everything that they [The United States] have divulged – tens of millions of dollars more for their mercenaries, new economic restrictions and illegal actions against international trade and the sovereignty of Cuba and other nations, additional punishments for Cubans and for citizens of other countries – and having made public more than two years ago their Plan that describes to the finest detail their intention to re-colonize Cuba; after all that, what is there at this height to conceal with maximum secrecy? ...In the case of Bush and his buddies anything is possible.” - President of the Cuban National Assembly of People’s Power Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada responding to US government’s Plan for Assistance to a Free Cuba

In July 2006, the so-called “Plan for Assistance to a Free Cuba” was released by the US state department’s “Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba”. Promising to free the people of Cuba from so-called “tyranny and hopelessness” this report – signed by US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice and US secretary of trade Carlos Gutiérrez – was seen by many as just another step forward in the aggressive and inhuman policies of the US administration towards Cuba.

What is the report?

As explained directly from a communiqué signed by George W. Bush, “This is an example that we are actively working for a change in Cuba, not simply waiting for a change.” Somewhat like the idea of ‘pre-emptive’ strike in Iraq, this report says that the United States will not wait it will act. But unlike threats of ‘weapons of mass destruction’ the US administration has not been able to label the government of Cuba a ‘terrorist’ or even aggressive with any substantiated evidence. Instead it has tried to discredit the internal policies of the Cuban government accusing Castro of suppressing the population of Cuba or claiming that there are no elections and charging Cuba as a “state sponsor of terrorism” because

of its relationship with Iran.

We will examine these allegations more coming up, and why the US is targeting Cuba specifically. For now, we need to understand a bit about the history of US-Cuba relations in order to figure out where exactly this report comes from.

US/Cuba history

In a special article written by Manuel E. Yepe in the last issue of *Fire This Time* (Vol.3 Is.4), US plots to annex Cuba were well documented. They began in 1783 when US president John Adams stated that the annexation of Cuba was absolutely necessary for the maintenance of the US, and have continued since. Attacks included everything from the US suppression of the Cuban independence army after the Spanish colonizers left, to the ‘permanent treaty’ of 1903 granting the US the unlimited lease of Guantanamo Bay, to US military interventions in Cuba in 1906, 1909 and 1912, to the series of US backed dictators including Batista, who held power in Cuba until the revolution won in 1959. The Cuban revolution, lead by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, fought for justice, independence, nationalization of land, jobs, healthcare and education.

Once Cuba began nationalizing US properties and US owned companies, the US implemented an immediate blockade against Cuba in order to deny or limit Cubans access to medicine, food, sports equipment, school texts, and basically any goods needed for life. This policy was made official in 1961 and continues today. The goal is to impoverish Cuba to a point where people become fed up and revolt against their government.

Looking at the facts, Cuba currently has the lowest infant mortality rate in Latin America, has the highest number of doctors per capita of any country in the world, and has universally accessible education (up to completing post-secondary) and health care.

The US blockade has not been an effective deterrent, and Cuba has stood strong, even inspiring two new countries to follow on a similar path - Venezuela and Bolivia. Today these countries are working together. Cuba and Venezuela are working on Operation Miracle, where they have provided free eye surgery for cataracts to over 350,000 people from different parts of Latin America. Cuba, Bolivia and Venezuela have also recently signed the Bolivarian Alternative for the people of Latin America (ALBA) agreement, which promised Cuban doctors for Venezuelans and Bolivians and cheaper oil and gas for Cubans, among many other things.

What does Plan Bush establish?

The so-called “Plan for Assistance to a Free Cuba” contains seven chapters titled a variety of menacing things from Chapter 1: “Hastening the end of the Castro dictatorship: transition, not succession,” to Chapter 4: “Helping Cubans create market-based economic opportunities,” to Chapter 7, “Preparing now to support the transition”.

The details, according to AIN, a Cuban news agency, “include the return of properties which belonged to the rich



prior to the revolution, the destruction of the island’s social security programs (from which millions of Cubans benefit), the privatization of schools and hospitals, as well as the trying and prosecution of members of political and grass roots organizations on the island”.

Within all this, the US “plan” states that once it does have control it will, “encourage assistance from other countries, associations and private companies; and discourage third parties from intervening to obstruct the will of the Cuban people”. It will achieve this by privatizing all of the companies that were nationalized after the revolution, and then destroying Cuba’s hard-earned highly rated and celebrated education and health systems by privatizing them both as well.

The document allocates \$80 million in US taxpayers’ money over the next two years towards these projects.

The report issued by the US state department also contains a classified chapter. The introduction to the report reads: “THIS is a NON-classified report: for reasons of security and EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION, some of the recommendations are contained in a separate appendix.” But as Ricardo Alarcon the President of the National Assembly of People’s Power in Cuba said, “After having divulged everything that they have divulged...what is there at this height to conceal with maximum secrecy?”

Could it be a plot to overthrow the government of Cuba? Seeing as sections of their report have titles like, “Hastening the end of the Castro dictatorship: transition, not succession,” it seems unlikely that this goal is much of a secret. More likely contained in these secret pages are the strategies and plans of how they are going to hasten the end... thus their “effective implementation” is at risk if they are made public.

What democracy can the US bring anyways?

What kind of democracy does the US have to offer Cuba when it is well documented that Bush stole both of his elections through fraud and manipulation?

What kind of democracy is it when you need millions of dollars to run a campaign that has even a small chance of winning? When the US promises “assistance” to Cuba what does it mean? Will they receive the same assistance to ‘free’ them of their ‘tyrannical regime’ as Iraq did? Because in July 2006 the United Nations reported that there were 100 civilians dying a day in Iraq, and this does not sound like the kind of “assistance” Cuba needs.

When presenting this report, Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez promised, “emergency food, water, fuel and medical equipment.” If the US is so concerned about the availability of water, why doesn’t it provide these things while “assisting” the people of Iraq? Or more recently, even for the US’ own troops?

According to Reuters in January 2006, “A Halliburton Co. subsidiary provided water to US troops at a camp in Iraq that was twice as contaminated as water from the Euphrates River...Kellogg Brown and Root [a subsidiary of Halliburton], also blocked employees’ attempts to inform the US military at Camp Junction City in Ramadi that the water was foul...[Halliburton] was once headed by US Vice President Dick Cheney and has huge contracts to provide services to the U.S. military in Iraq”.

How can we believe the US will bring water to Cuba if it is even willing to give its own troops dirty water?

As for Iraqis, Dr Muhammad Khalid, a pediatrician at the Children’s Teaching Hospital, reported to IRIN news that since last December, at least one child a day in Baghdad had contracted some form of water-borne disease. He said that since June 2005, “We’ve observed a 30 percent increase in cases of waterborne diseases, especially cholera.”

Plan Bush also promises the immediate immunization of all children under five in Cuba. However, Granma International explains that interestingly, “To propose such tasks would seem cynical in [the United States] where the reserve of vaccinations for its own children has been almost completely drained and, as The Washington Post has reported, there are no immediate prospects of replenishing it.” Also, an example of this hypocrisy is exposed in UNESCO’s Human Development Indicators from 2005, which show that 93% of 1-year-olds in the US are fully immunized against the measles, while Cuba sits at 99%.

How exactly is the US planning to “assist” Cuba again?

Fidel’s health

Only a month after Plan Bush started gearing up to hasten “the end of the Castro dictatorship,” Fidel Castro announced that he was ill and underwent surgery leaving his responsibilities to Raul Castro.

In the immediate days following the Miami Herald

reported that, the US assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere Affairs, “likened the Cuban government to a helicopter -- a ‘single fail-point mechanism.’“ The US Secretary said, “When a rotor comes off a helicopter it crashes...When a supreme leader disappears from an authoritarian regime, the authoritarian regime flounders. It doesn’t have the direction that it requires. I think that’s what we’re seeing at this moment.”



What were we “seeing at this moment”? It just so happens that I was in Cuba with the Che Guevara Volunteer Work Brigade at the time Fidel’s illness was announced and we saw exactly what happened in Granma province in the weeks following the announcement. Based on our experience, what we saw at that moment was a group of veterans who fought alongside Fidel and Che during the revolution discussing their continued dedication to defending their country should the United States try to intervene. We met a group of 15-18 year olds studying to become instructors of art who all expressed that they were concerned about the health of Fidel; and we saw a cultural performance at a local theatre where the performers dedicated their show to the health of “el Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro”.

The most moving thing I heard about Fidel’s health while in Cuba came from one of the students named Leidis who, when asked why people in Cuba are so happy with so little material goods, explained that there are three reasons. 1) Because they have a great commander in chief - Fidel Castro, 2) The social programs in Cuba such as healthcare and education, 3) the fact that Cuba is an island with over 11 million people who live together with one heart.

This made it clear to all of us on the brigade that Cuba needs no “assistance”, only support and solidarity to push their revolution further and increase the gains it can make.

Plan Bush: Why now?

After 45 years of blockade against Cuba, the United States is getting frustrated that the revolutionary government of Fidel Castro is still a leading example for people fighting for access to education, jobs, healthcare and other fundamental human rights.

Because the Cuban people and their revolution have not succumbed to the pressure of the blockade, the United States

has developed various slanderous campaigns against Cuba in order to justify its cruel and inhuman policies and this new \$80 million “plan” is no different.

Recently, however, Cuba has been striding forward and making many allies and friends on the world stage. First, Cuba was elected, by a wide majority (135 votes) to the United Nations new Council on Human Rights- despite the fact that the United States (along with Canada) have a long standing campaign trying to discredit Cuba’s exemplary human rights standards.

Recently, Cuba was host to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Havana, an organization of which Fidel is currently the chairman. US media, like CNN, tried to paint this summit as a meeting of America’s enemies only 90 miles off their shores. Conversely, according to Mark Weisbrot, co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington D.C., the US ignoring or slandering the NAM shows that they are “refusing to acknowledge the changes that are taking place in Latin America... That’s why they are losing influence so rapidly.”

From here Cuba is continuing its 47-year-old struggle against the US’ attempt at hegemony and annexation. Because of its firm position against US intervention in any country, as well as Cuba’s willingness to make friends and send professionals and doctors for free around the world, Cuba is making friends quickly with other world leaders. Because of Cuba’s firm stance in the fight for social justice, as well as its universal health and education systems Cuba is making friends with regular working and oppressed people from around the world from Venezuela and Bolivia to China and Pakistan, from South African to Harlem in US, from Iran and Palestine to Brazil and Angola. Cuba has proved that internationalism based on international solidarity is the way of liberating countries from the yoke of imperialism.

As a show of support for Cuba after the announcement of Plan Bush, Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez made the bold recommendation that Washington not develop a transition for others but for its own political system.

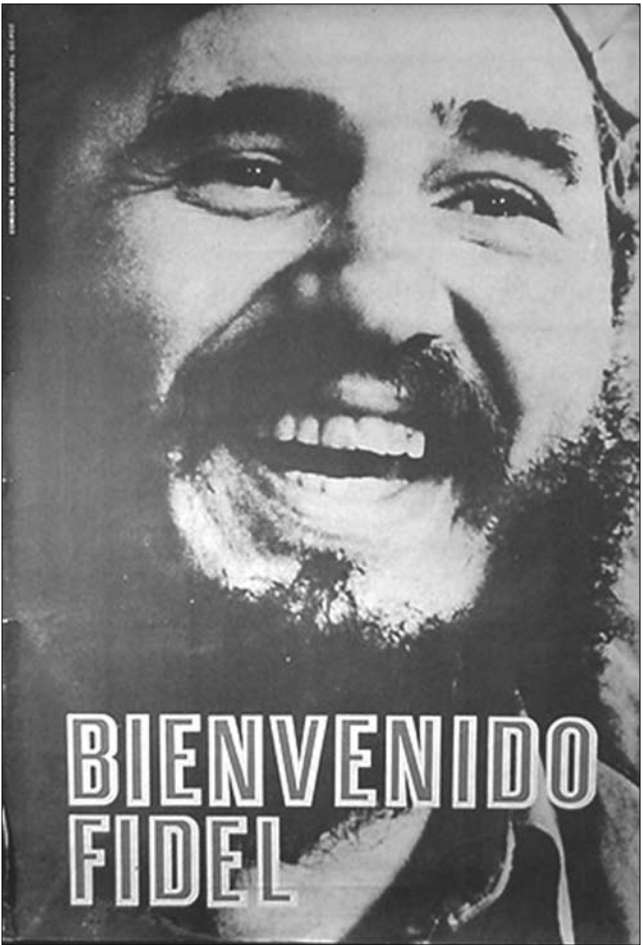
STOP PLAN BUSH! LIFT THE BLOCKADE AGAINST CUBA! STOP U.S. AGRESSION AGAINST CUBA!



From Fire This Time Newspaper Vol 3 Issue 7
December 2006

A Tribute to Fidel: A True Revolutionary Who Inspires Us to Fight for a Better World

*Why do we celebrate his 80th birthday?
Why do we like him as a leader?
What can we learn from him?*



“Sentence me. It doesn’t matter. History will absolve me.”

It was with these words that Fidel Castro, a fiery 26-year-old lawyer, closed his own defense statement in a courtroom in Cuba in 1953.

On July 26th 1953, Fidel and about 150 other young fighters had attacked the Moncada military barracks in an effort to begin an uprising against the dictator Batista. But many factors in this first attempt by Fidel at an insurrection were miscalculated, and many of the 150 fighters were murdered or tortured to death in Batista’s prisons afterwards. After giving his now famous courtroom speech against the brutal

rule of Batista, Fidel and with his other compañeros were found “guilty” and were each sentenced to between 5 and 15 years. However, because of growing protests and discontent in Cuba, the dictator Batista was pressured to release them only two years later, in 1955.

That same year, Fidel Castro and other revolutionaries came together to form the July 26th Movement. They went to Mexico to re-group and plot their victory against Batista. Fifty years ago this month, Fidel, Che and 80 other revolutionaries boarded the Granma in Mexico and headed back to Cuba to begin their historic battle against Batista’s army in the Sierra Maestra Mountains.

There were 82 men and a heavy supply of weapons on the small yacht, which was really only meant to hold about 25 people. One engine failed during their journey and they were met with other delays because of the ship’s weight and miscalculations in their navigation. However, important lessons were learned on this trip, especially the story told by Norberto Collado, helmsman on the Granma, who recounted what happen when one of the men on the ship fell overboard only hours before their landing in Cuba. He said, “the search began. Many believed that because of the state of the waves and the weight of his clothes, he had drowned. The delay compromised the mission, but Fidel said, ‘I won’t abandon any of my comrades,’ and after a great effort, we found him in the dark. Fidel’s humanist position really impressed me. It’s the same one he’s maintained throughout the Revolution.”

Only a few days after their arrival, Batista’s army ambushed the fighters. At the end of this fight, only 12 remained to re-group in the Sierra Maestra Mountains. But this did not dampen their spirits. It was then that Fidel said, with the outlook of a truly exceptional leader, “We will win this war... we’re just beginning to fight!” And fight they did. They gained support from people throughout Cuba and fought against Batista’s forces for three years and one month. On Dec 31st 1959, Batista fled to Miami, and after three years and one month of intense and impassioned fighting, Fidel and the July 26th Movement had won!

THE UPHILL BATTLE OF THE REVOLUTION

But from there it was to continue



to be an uphill battle. The dreams and visions of Fidel and those other revolutionaries ran very deep. They wanted to flip Cuba upside down. When they came to power, 90% of the land was controlled by US institutions, with the wealth of their country being swept into the pockets of a small minority. They planned for the wealth to be distributed among the poor, with land given to the landless, and fundamental human rights for ALL, such as education, housing, jobs and healthcare.

In his first speech upon his arrival in Havana on January 9th 1959, Fidel was very honest about these future battles to maintain the revolution. He explained, “The tyranny has been overthrown, but there is still much to be done. Let us not fool ourselves into believing that the future will be easy; perhaps everything will be more difficult in the future.”

The battles Cuba has fought since those days have not been easy. Some were physical battles, such as the battle against bandits in the Escambray Mountains or the Bay of Pigs invasion. However, most were not battles of physical might, but battles of ideas. But with every twist and turn, every up and down Fidel has been one of the first leaders to say, ‘this way forward’ or ‘we made a wrong turn, we must change course’.

Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961 was the largest attempt by the US at a physical invasion of Cuba. The US backed and trained 1,500 men, to invade Cuba and overthrow Fidel. The idea was that Cubans on the island would join the US in its fight to defeat Fidel and the revolution. However, after less than 72 hours, the frontline invaders were forced to surrender to the revolutionary army of Cuba. José Manuel Gutiérrez, one of the members of the US-backed invasion army said, “a jeep passed shooting and saying: ‘Surrender, surrender’; a little later, a group of us came out and turned ourselves over. It was Fidel in that jeep, and I said to someone: ‘That’s why

we lost, because Fidel is with them, fighting on the frontline.” Fidel, the strategist and frontline fighter in this battle had shown to people in Cuba that he was a visionary leader who not only talked the talk but also walked the walk.

Basically a year later, Cuba had continued concerns about potential US attacks against the island. This factor, along with the US officially imposing an economic



Fidel addresses Cubans, May 2, 1961.

blockade against Cuba, caused Cuba to look to the Soviet Union for help. The Soviet Union snuck nuclear weapons into Cuba without the US knowing. This went against what Cuba had negotiated with them, and when a US spy plane discovered the weapons, the US came very close to retaliating against Cuba. The Soviet Union then went in, to negotiate with the US, leaving Cuba out of the discussions. Forty years later in an interview with Barbara Walters, Fidel remarked, "Believe me. We were not interested in becoming part of the whole contention between the two countries. We would not have accepted the missiles if they had said that it was related to the balance of power." This trick by the Soviet Union would put Fidel in a better position to understand how to work with the Soviet Union in the future.

Cuba sent 30,000 soldiers into Angola in 1975 to help with their fight for independence. After a small victory against the South African apartheid army, Cuba wanted to push forward, and in the words of Fidel "exact a heavy price from South Africa for its adventure, the application of UN Resolution 435 and the independence of Namibia." However, Fidel also explained that, "on the other hand, the Soviets, worried about possible US reaction, were putting strong pressure on us to make a rapid withdrawal. After raising strong objections, we were obliged to accede, at least partially, to the Soviet demands."

FIDEL'S HISTORICAL ROLE IN AFRICA

But in 1987, the South African apartheid army hit back again at Angola. This time Fidel took matters into his own hands. He explained how the South African army "advanced strongly towards Cuito Cuanavale, an old NATO airbase. Here it prepared to deliver a mortal blow against Angola. Desperate calls were received from the Angolan government appealing to the Cuban troops for support in fending off presumed disaster; it was unquestionably the biggest threat from a military operation in which we, as on other occasions, had no responsibility whatever." Despite the fact that the responsibility to defend Angola's sovereignty was not Cuba's, Fidel sent 55,000 soldiers to Angola. Remaining in Cuba, Fidel spent days and nights strategizing the fight in Angola. These strategies were victorious, and the victory against the apartheid army in Cuito Cuanavale weakened them severely. Fidel again set an example of courage and leadership that not only awed military strategists, but changed the course of history for South Africans.

What were the people of Africa's reaction to Cuba's involvement under Fidel's leadership? Angolans did not only feel the victory in Cuito Cuanavale. The famous anti-colonial leader Amilcar Cabral from Guinea-Bissau also said, "Cuban fighters are ready to lay down their lives for the liberation of our countries, and in exchange for this aid to our freedom and the progress of our people, all they take from us are their comrades who fell fighting for freedom."

Along with Amilcar is Nelson Mandela, who has said many times, "the defeat of the racist army at Cuito Cuanavale has made it possible for me to be here today." On Fidel,

Nelson Mandela said in 1995, “I went to Cuba in July 1991, and I drove through the streets with Fidel Castro. There were a great deal of cheers. And I also waved back believing that these cheers were for me...But when I reached the square where I had to make some remarks to the crowd, then I realized that these cheers were not meant for me, they were meant for Fidel Castro...Then I realized that here was a man of the masses...Those are the impressions I have about Fidel Castro in Cuba.”



FIDEL: AN INSTRUMENT OF REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

A new and difficult challenge fell upon Fidel Castro in 1989. This was the case of his former comrade and friend Ochoa, or “Case No. 1 of 1989”. This was when four high-ranking officers in the Cuban military were caught involved in smuggling drugs through Cuba. One of these four was Arnaldo Ochoa, a highly decorated officer who had fought alongside Fidel in the Sierra Maestra. Cubans were outraged and felt a deep sense of betrayal, as these men’s actions left the Cuban government very vulnerable to be attacked by US.



Karen Lee Wald, an American journalist, wrote “Most Cubans believed that all of the accused committed high treason... They tended not to ask whether Castro was guilty, too... but rather, ‘how could they do that to Fidel?!’” Wald continues, saying that Cubans generally flip-flopped during the trial as to whether or not they should be given the death penalty. However, after all of the members of the Council of State (including Fidel) explained their reasons for supporting the death penalty “most people in the country were convinced of the necessity of this action.”

This case was especially offensive to Fidel because Ochoa had been in charge of troops in Angola and they had pulled him out before the battle at Cuito Cuanavale, but had they not, who knows what might have happened. Years later, looking back at this case in 1999, Fidel stated, “they had taken part in the organization of drug trafficking through our country, an extremely serious offense that jeopardized the prestige and security of the nation. [...] We had found their justification incredible, since they said that they had concocted the plan to help the country... even if drug smugglers had delivered a billion or five billion dollars, if they had paid Cuba’s foreign debt, the Revolution would never accept the passage of even a kilogram of drugs, because our country is worth much more. What it has achieved in health, education and many

other fields as a matter of sheer justice with the sacrifice of many lives is worth much more than that amount; the life of just one person is worth much more, and we had had to sacrifice many lives.”

THE DIFFERENCE OF TWO METHODS: SOVIET UNION DOWN, CUBA UP

But the challenges the Cuban revolution faced did not come anywhere near an end there. In the mid-1980s, the political and economic situation in Cuba began to show challenges ahead for the maintenance of the revolution. The country was showing signs of stagnation and increased bureaucratic tendencies. This was when Fidel called for Rectification.

When being asked why Cuba was not following the Soviet Bloc on its economic policy of perestroika, Fidel responded to the news agency Paris AFP in 1988, “problems must also be resolved with honor, morals, and principles.” Soon after the process of rectification, the Soviet bloc collapsed.

The fall of the Soviet Bloc meant not only that Cuba was losing its main trading partner, but gave the US government an opportunity to tighten its grip around Cuba’s neck. Basically since 1959, but officially from 1962, the US government imposed an economic blockade against Cuba. This limited Cuba’s access to medicine, food, construction materials, etc. The US also stopped importing Cuban sugar, which meant that Cuba had been forced to rely instead very heavily on the Soviet Bloc for trade. The US government knew this, and after the collapse of Soviet Union, they passed the Torricelli Act in 1992 and the Helms-Burton Bill in 1996 in order to further strangle Cuba’s economy. These two things launched Cuba into the special period.



After the revolution, political and social education in Cuba was widespread, and most people in Cuba understood the importance of defending the gains of the Cuban revolution at this time of severe crisis. Most Cubans stood beside the revolution during the special period, despite delays and overcrowding of public transportation, power blackouts, food shortages, and long line-ups at stores.

Fidel, always the optimist, reminded people in 1996, “After five years of blockade combined with the special period, the people’s spirit is stronger, because mankind is brave and gains strength under adversity, under struggles, under difficulties. Man is no meringue topping that fades under a whiff. Humans are children of their own history, and very few countries have a history as beautiful as ours.” It is because of this belief that the revolution can overcome all obstacles and is fully supported by the people of Cuba, who continue to defend the revolution and their Comandante en Jefe Fidel.

In order to pull Cuba out of the immense poverty and hardship of the special period, Cuba opened its doors to tourism. This was basically what some call a “necessary evil”, meaning that although it went against the overall goals of creating equality among all Cubans it was the only solution for the revolutionary government of Cuba if it wanted the gains made by the revolution to survive. This was a difficult choice for Fidel, but he was willing to make it.

A fight against the corruption of the ‘new rich’ that resulted from tourism was presented by Fidel in a speech on November 17th, 2005. “We have a people who have learned to handle weapons. We have an entire nation which, in spite of our errors, holds such a high degree of culture, education, and conscience that it will never allow this country to become their colony again. This country can self-destruct, this Revolution can destroy itself, but they can never destroy us. We can destroy ourselves, and it would be our fault.” These statements by Fidel opened the idea that another rectification of Cuba’s direction could be necessary in the near future as the Cuban economy recovers from the special period.

GAINS

The challenges for Cuba and Fidel’s revolutionary leadership to maintain its road forward have been and continue to be numerous. Despite these ongoing challenges, Cuba has not stopped making large strides forward for its people. Javier Rodriguez, a writer for Granma International recently wrote, “Irrespective of the fierce US economic and commercial blockade, Cuba was able to develop education, health and other fields...Cuban experts and technicians joined with nations of the region to jointly work on projects targeting the quality of life of the most underprivileged of Latin America. Strategies to eliminate illiteracy through Cuba’s “Yo Sí Puedo (I Can Do It) system were successful in Venezuela and are being implemented in Bolivia and other countries. Medical assistance to the poorest populations in Latin America is complemented with the training of thousands of doctors.”

Cuban economist Carlos Tablada explained that even in the difficult times between 1985 and 1989, under the leadership of Fidel the Cuban revolution continued to fight for a better life for people in Cuba. He cited these statistics: “The number of inhabitants per doctor fell from 1832 to 303 over the same period, reaching 274 in 1990 ... Infant mortality

stood at 10.2 per thousand births in 1990, against 15 for the developed world, 52 for Latin America and 76 in the underdeveloped world.”

What we can see from this is that through many of the unforeseeable ups and downs of the revolution, Fidel Castro’s consistent revolutionary method in approaching Cuba’s challenges and his consistent visionary leadership role, has providing guidance in all difficult stages, has led Cuba to succeed. These battles have been fought and overcome through the pressure and devotion of the Cuban people to their revolution and its gains, but also through the clear foresight of Cuba’s revolutionary government led by Fidel Castro.

FIDEL TODAY

In a short interview with Armando Hart about his lifelong friendship with Fidel, he explained the basic concept that while imperialists attempt to “divide and win” in Latin America, Fidel and Cuba want to “unite and win”. Someone who I think would agree with this is Wayne Smith, former head of the US Interest Section in Havana under US President Jimmy Carter. Smith said, “Castro is celebrated as a hero throughout Latin America. It isn’t because they all want to be socialist now. No, it’s because he’s the only one who stood up to us and succeeded.” Indeed! Fidel has now watched and outlasted 10 different US presidents. Along with this, the US government and the CIA have attempted to take Fidel’s life over 600 times since 1959.



But with all of these great accomplishments to celebrate (from surviving assassination attempts, to helping defeat the racist south African army, to the countless other feats we have discussed in this article) in August, only a few days before his 80th birthday, Fidel announced that he had had emergency surgery and that Minister of Defence Raul Castro would take over his responsibilities in government. This meant that his birthday celebrations were postponed until Dec 2nd, which also marks the 50th anniversary of the landing of the Granma. Despite his illness, Fidel declared, “In terms of my spirits I am perfectly well. What is important

is that everything in the country is running and will continue to run perfectly well... We must fight and work.”

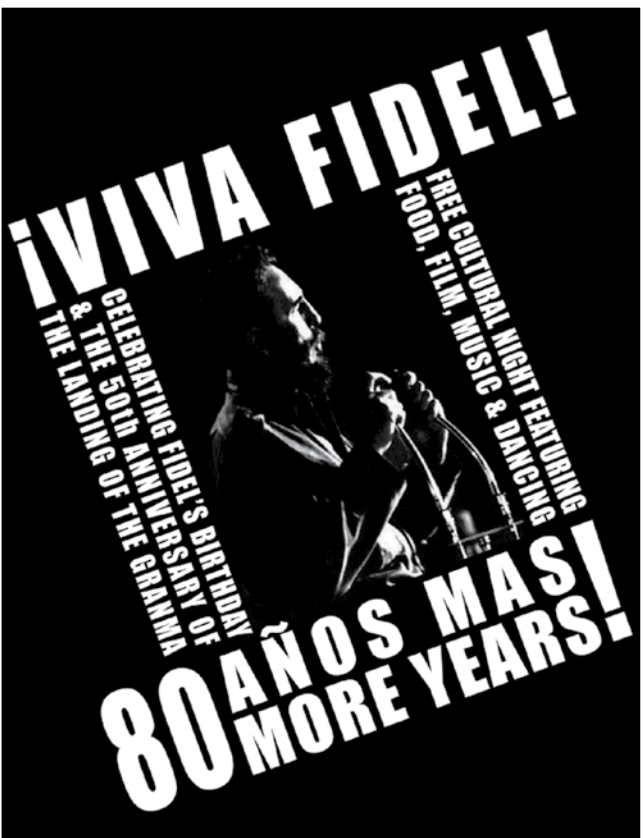
For the celebration of Fidel’s 80th birthday, 5,000 foreign visitors and Cubans came to the open night on November 28th, with 300,000 expected at his birthday rally on Saturday Dec 2nd. Others around the world who could not make it to Cuba are holding special celebrations in their countries. At the same time, earlier in November the world stood with Cuba at the United Nations, voting for a resolution to condemn the US blockade. 183 countries voted in favor of condemning the blockade, and only 4 voted against the resolution.

“Our enemies are counting the minutes, hoping and waiting for the demise of Fidel, but they fail to understand that Fidel is all the people; he is every man and every woman on the planet willing to fight for a better world,” said Cuba’s Foreign Minister, Perez Roque, on November 30th 2006. He continued, “All that Fidel wants to bequeath are his ideas, nothing else. Recovering and returning to the struggle, he will once again be defeating his enemies, those who are so full of hatred and mediocrity.”

We wish Fidel a speedy recovery from his illness, and call along with people across Cuba and around the world:

“¡VIVA FIDEL! ¡80 AÑOS MÁS!”

“Long Live Fidel! 80 more years!”

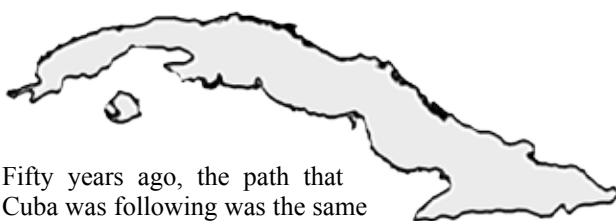


Detail from VCSC poster for the event to celebrate Fidel's 80th birthday. Dec 2006.

NO AL BLOQUEO:

The World Condemns the United States' Criminal Blockade Against Cuba

Crime Against Humanity: History of US Blockade on Cuba



Fifty years ago, the path that Cuba was following was the same as most countries in Latin America. Cubans' rate of illiteracy was very high, the level of prostitution was high and many of the Cuban people lived in poverty and hunger. Ninety percent of Cuba's telephone and electricity services, over 50% of Cuba's railways, and over 70% of its land were owned by American institutions. The United States had supported a series of brutal dictators in Cuba which ensured that resources and money were siphoned off the island at the expense of poor and working people throughout Cuba. In December 1956, when Fidel Castro and 82 other revolutionary fighters arrived in Cuba from Mexico on their small ship, the Granma, their aim was to end this abuse by the United States.

In 1959, when Fidel Castro and the revolutionary fighters had spread their vision to millions of people throughout Cuba, they defeated the US imposed dictator Batista and were brought to power in the country. One of the first things their new government implemented was land reform. First, in May 1959, they expropriated all farm lands that were larger than 1,000 acres and then redistributed it to over 200,000 Cuban peasants. Second, in July 1960, they nationalized all US companies and properties, which meant that profits would no longer be funnelled off the island, but could instead go to funding literacy programs, a healthcare system and education.

It quickly became clear that the US would not be able to use Fidel Castro as a pawn in their game. In March 1960, US President Eisenhower called for a US ban on Cuban sugar, oil and gun imports. During this time, the US also tried to intervene in Cuba militarily, with the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. This US backed and funded invasion was a dramatic and desperate attempt to overthrow Cuba's new revolutionary government. The plan called for Cuban exiles (mainly rich Cubans and beneficiary of the previous colonial Cuba, who fled after the revolution) to attack Cuba and attempt to overthrow Castro's revolutionary government.

Within only 72 hours, with the direct leadership and guidance of Fidel Castro, this attempt failed and the US and its reactionary allies embarrassingly and shamefully were sent home with their tails between their legs.

The failed Bay of Pigs invasion led the US to cease both economic and diplomatic relations with Cuba, leading to the official declaration of a full economic blockade against Cuba in 1962. With cutting imports from Cuba, the US government hoped to cripple Cuba's economy and force the new government to bend under US pressure. Despite the United States aggression and attacks against the newborn Cuban revolution, the Cuban people rose up to this challenge and changed the course of their own history.

Since the beginning of the inhuman US blockade against Cuba, the US has prevented Cuba from importing and exporting everything from food, to medicine and even sports equipment. The blockade has been tightened and loosened tactically at different times but has always remained firm and vicious. There were two important increases in the blockade during the 1990s: the Torrecelli Act of 1992 (ironically, the US government officially named it the "Cuban Democracy Act") declared that ships of any nationality that dock in Cuba or are transporting Cuban merchandise cannot dock in the US for 160 days afterwards. The US again updated its hostile policy towards Cuba in 1996 with the Helms-Burton Act. This act not only forbids American companies from trading with Cuba, but also seeks to criminalize foreign companies who trade with Cuba. These acts both stopped many tonnes of food, medicine and supplies from reaching the Cuban people - because really, look at the size of the two countries: if you were a company looking to make profit, where would you go?

US Intensification of Blockade Against Cuba: 2004 - Today

"For nearly 50 years, the regime of Fidel Castro has condemned the people of Cuba to a tragic fate of repression and poverty... to accelerate the demise of Castro's tyranny, President Bush created the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba."
- US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, July 2005.

What is this commission? The US Department of State website clearly identifies the objectives the commission by stating,

"United States policy towards Cuba is clear:

- *Bring an end to the ruthless and brutal dictatorship;*
- *Assist the Cuban people in a transition to representative democracy; and*
- *Assist the Cuban people in establishing a free market economy.*

To achieve these objectives, the President created the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba with a mandate to identify:

- *Additional measures to help the Cuban people bring to an end the dictatorship;*
- *Elements of a plan for agile, effective, and decisive assistance to a post-dictatorship Cuba."*

Created in May of 2004, this commission initially promised \$59 Million over two years towards securing these objectives. When that money ran out this year the commission published

its second report in July, now requiring \$80 Million over the next two years. This new report from the commission contained the same objectives as quoted above, but also contains a secret section, sealed off from the public. We must ask, if you are already stating publicly that one of your objectives is to, “bring to an end the dictatorship” then what could you possibly need to hide?

Part of the commission’s money is for sending “aid” money to right-wing anti-Cuba groups in Miami. At least a few million dollars of the commission’s money will go to USAID. In mid-November 2006, a report from the US Congressional auditors concluded that at least 30% of the exile groups who received USAID grants showed questionable expenditures, including “aid” like chocolate and cashmere clothing.

Why does the US have a Blockade on Cuba?

Two simple reasons: First, their imperialist economic interests in Cuba. Second, because Cuba is the threat of a good example, socialism against capitalism, humanism against imperialism. It is the example of the battle of ideas of which Cuba and Fidel are consistently the winners.

First, we must look at Chapter 5 of the 2006 report from the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, where we can almost hear the drool dropping from the US government’s mouth. They are hungry for Cuba’s markets and resources. The report states that they will assist a “free” Cuba by: “opening avenues of cooperation between public/private US transport entities and their Cuban counterparts.” Or by “seeking donor assistance from the international community and organizations such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank to help...undertake the privatization of utilities, encourage competition in services, and develop regulatory mechanisms for natural monopolies.”

Great, so Cuba can borrow money from the World Bank, and use it to pay US companies to ‘reconstruct’ their country... you know, like all of the reconstruction they have been doing in Iraq? What an alternative for Cuba!

Secondly, we cannot forget the US administration’s accusation that Cuba forces its population to live in “repression and poverty.” Interestingly, by the CIA’s own statistics we can

Countries that supported our resolution (183)

The world has increasingly come out in opposition to the genocidal blockade imposed by the United States against Cuba				
Year	IN FAVOR	AGAINST	ABSENT	ABSTENTION
1992	59	3	46	71
1993	88	4	35	57
1994	101	2	33	48
1995	117	3	27	38
1996	137	3	20	25
1997	143	3	22	17
1998	157	2	14	12
1999	155	2	23	8
2000	167	3	15	4
2001	167	3	16	3
2002	173	3	11	4
2003	179	3	7	2
2004	179	4	7	7
2005	182	4	4	1
2006	183	4	4	1

Taken from: <http://www.granma.cubaweb.cu/english/news/art77.html>

see the great advances Cuba has made despite 47 years of economic blockade by the U.S. Some examples of this are Cuba's unemployment rate, 1.9%, which is lower than the U.S. at 5.1%. Cuba's infant mortality rate is also lower than that of the US, and the lowest in all of Latin America. At the same time, Health Affairs (a US policy journal) says, "Currently, 46 million people or nearly one in five non-elderly adults and children lack health insurance in the United States." Add to this that for most students, getting a post-secondary education in the US means drowning in a huge and unacceptable debt. Then turn your head to Cuba, a third world country, where healthcare is free and universally accessible whether you live in the heart of Havana or up in the mountain ranges. Education is completely free, all the way up to getting a university PhD. This includes not only tuition, but also uniforms, books and in many cases three meals a day. What can the US offer to attract any Cuban?

A Changing Latin America: Making an Example of Revolutionary Cuba, Living with Humanity and Dignity

The US blockade on Cuba is basically an attempt to create poor living conditions for the people of Cuba in hopes that they will lose faith in their government and their revolution



due to hunger, illness and other problems, and the US will be able to intervene. The reason? One of the assistant Secretaries of State in the US, Roger Noriega said it best: "The emerging axis of subversion forming between Cuba and Venezuela must be confronted before it can undermine democracy in Colombia, Nicaragua, Bolivia, or another vulnerable neighbour."

While the United States is using its accusations against Venezuela and Cuba as part of the reason for upholding the blockade on Cuba, the US is better known in Latin America as a supporter of the death squads in El Salvador, of dictators from Pinochet in Chile to Batista in Cuba, and of coup d'états in Haiti and Venezuela.

Basically, all countries in Latin America have had the US intervene in their government, land, and resources for many decades. They see what US 'democracy' means for third-world countries: exploitation, sweatshops, plundering and the raping of their rich lands for other peoples' profits, namely those of US corporations and the US capitalist

ruling class in general. Cuba is a country that since 1959 has stood firmly against this US-sponsored exploitation and colonial policies. The US cannot afford to have its companies and influence kicked out of any more resource-rich Latin American countries. In other words, the gains made by the Cuban revolution for poor and working people are the threat of a good example for all of Latin America, or more accurately, FOR THE WHOLE WORLD.

With all the criminal and illegal activities against Cuba by US imperialists, their attempts to kill the spirit of the Cuban revolution and its influence are failing. The winds of Latin America are blowing in a very new direction right now. A string of leftist or progressive leaders have been elected to power, with Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia, the re-election of Lula Da Silva in Brazil, the recent elections of Rafael Correa in Ecuador and Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, and the protest rallies of millions in Mexico against the election fraud that prevented the progressive candidate there, Manuel Lopez Obrador, from winning. All of these progressive and leftist leaders have a lot to live up to, because whether they like it or not, the working and oppressed people in those countries are demanding their legitimate share of wealth that they produce. They see what has happened in Cuba over the last 48 years and how Venezuela is following the same path, and yes, above all they know that a better world is possible and necessary, because as Fidel said, there is no other option.

47 Years of Solidarity Against the US Blockade of Cuba!

In November 2006, the United Nations general assembly voted for the 15th consecutive year to condemn the US blockade against Cuba. The vote was overwhelmingly in Cuba's favour, with 183 countries voting to condemn the blockade while only four voted against the motion, with one country abstaining. This is a huge blow every year to the United States, and if Cuba can convince so many countries internationally to stand with them against the United States, then it is our human obligation, our job to get people in our cities and communities to get on board as well.

US government attacks against Cuba must be taken seriously. Not only because these hostile policies infringe on Cuba's right to self-determination, but even more, because of what we stand to learn from Cuba - a country that is fighting for real human rights, such as jobs, education, health and housing, and above all, human dignity.

**LIFT THE US BLOCKADE ON CUBA!
US HANDS OFF CUBA!**



From Fire This Time Newspaper Vol 4 Issue 1
January 2007

What Does Sustainability Mean in *Cuba*?

Socialist Cuba Champions Environmentally Sustainable Development



“Recently, the prestigious World Wildlife Fund, based in Switzerland and considered internationally to be the most important NGO overseeing the global environment, stated that all of the measures taken by Cuba to protect the environment made it the only country on earth that meets the minimum requirements for sustainable development. This is an encouraging honor for our country.” – Message from Cuban President Fidel Castro November 28, 2006.

In its Living Planet Report 2006 the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) announced that, “No region, nor the world as a whole, met both criteria for sustainable development. Cuba alone did.” This short and maybe a bit confusing sentence says a lot about Cuba.

What does it mean exactly? The WWF’s Living Planet Report 2006 marks the progress of countries around the world towards sustainable human and ecological development. They do this using the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) and calculating a country’s ecological footprint.

The HDI number of each country is based on its life expectancy, literacy rate, education system, and per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Ecological footprint is a measure of the country’s demand on the environment/biosphere. The UN Development Programme considers an HDI higher than 0.8 to be “high human development”.

Meanwhile, a country with potential for sustainability must have a footprint lower than 1.8. Cuba is the only country to meet both of these criterias with an HDI of 0.82 and a footprint of 1.5! Canada, on the other hand, may have an HDI of 0.95, but its footprint is 7.6! The United States is even worse with an HDI of 0.94 and a footprint of 9.6!

This report has a huge message about Cuba; first, that Cuba is a champion for environmental sustainability in the world, and second, it's the only country in the world reaching the report's criteria and goals. Despite this there is only one line



in the whole WWF report about Cuba. Also important is that there is no place on the WWF website that talks about how Cuba is the only country to pass this report with flying colors! Why has the WWF been so silent about this? Isn't Cuba an example they want the rest of the world to follow?

Another imperative question: Why is it that when major news media 'discovers' something disreputable about Cuba, such as "prostitution" or "poverty", it is splashed everywhere in the news? However, while the media keeps talking about the environment, global warming and the Kyoto accord, they ignore that Cuba has been announced as the single country in the world making real progress towards sustainability, which means better living conditions and natural conditions for human beings.

Maybe they are trying to keep this important example secret because of how Cuba came to be a champion of human and environmental improvement. Which brings us to the best question of all, how did Cuba become the only country in the world to meet this report's requirements for sustainable development?

How does Cuba put human needs first?

In 1959, the people of Cuba brought forth a revolution that would change Cuba's course in history. From 1952, the country had been ruled by a brutal dictator who was backed and funded by the United States. After many attempts at taking power, the revolutionaries led by Fidel Castro, succeeded on New Year's Day 1959. The revolution began a new era of giving land to landless farmers and nationalizing industries formerly owned by the United States.

One of the goals of the Cuban revolution was to change Cuba's economy from one that relied on the US for exports and imports. This relationship was really one of exploitation, as the US used Cuba's sugar, sold goods to Cuba at high costs, and set up a playground for the wealthy

American mafia who used Havana for drinking, gambling and prostitutes. The majority of people in Cuba were poor, jobless most of the year and illiterate. The Cuban revolution set out with the ambitious goals of changing all of this.

In the eyes of the United States, there was a potential that the Cuban revolution would become an example for the rest of Latin America and that they would lose their business and economic interests in other countries as well. So they set out to prevent Cuba from becoming a successful example. This is why the US completely dropped its relations with Cuba shortly after the triumph of the revolution and forced Cuba to find other trade partners. This turned Cuba towards the Soviet Union. Unfortunately during this partnership, Cuba slowed progress on some of its earlier ideas of developing its agriculture beyond sugar. This meant that when the Soviet Union fell, Cuba could not feed itself, as its economy was still heavily reliant on exporting sugar and importing other resources and goods.

According to a documentary on Cuba by prominent Canadian environmentalist and scientist David Suzuki, *“At one time Cuba’s agrarian culture was as conventional as the rest of the world. It experienced its first “Green Revolution” when Russia was supplying Cuba with chemical and mechanical “inputs.” However, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 ended all of that, and almost overnight threw Cuba’s whole economic system into crisis. Factories closed, food supplies plummeted. Within a year the country had lost over 80% of its foreign trade. With the loss of their export markets and the foreign exchange to pay for imports, Cuba was unable to feed its population and the country was thrown into a crisis. The average daily caloric intake of Cubans dropped by a third.”*

During this time of crisis, Cuba entered a time known as the special period. The fall of the Soviet Union meant a crisis for Cuba’s economy and hardship for the people of Cuba who lost an average of 20 pounds during this time. The US took no mercy on Cuba and tightened their economic blockade with the Torricelli Act of 1992 and the Helms-Burton law of 1996. These laws further limited Cuba’s access to food, medicine and supplies.

At the same time as Cubans were being asked to make many sacrifices, the main gains of the Cuban revolution – free and universal healthcare and education – were maintained. This gave people confidence that their government was doing what it could for them under strained circumstances and people in Cuba knew that with time their situation would improve.

Interestingly, according to Kurt Cobb, writer of the weblog ‘Resource Insights’, “Some visionary members of the country’s Ministry of Agriculture suggested that the low-input, organic methods they had been experimenting with for years be introduced on a broad scale and that agricultural output be directed toward local consumption.”

Hope was not lost or abandoned; instead positive outcomes were created from the special period: urban gardens were founded all over cities throughout the country, in back yards, in playgrounds, and on patios. The result? “Cuba created the largest program in sustainable agriculture ever undertaken”, according to the David Suzuki documentary.

Today – Agriculture, Oil and Environment in Cuba

Cuba responded to its oil and fuel scarcity after the fall of the Soviet Union in very creative and innovative ways. They readjusted their crops to be organic and useful to the country's population. An example of this today is Cuba's sugar production. According to a May 2006 article in the UK's Guardian magazine, "*Cuba, which once produced eight million tons of sugar a year, has now all but left the sugar business. Barely one million tons are now produced, enough for home consumption.*"

Another way Cuba has upped local agriculture and limited the amount of transportation needed to import, export and move food across the country is by pushing for urban agriculture. Urban agriculture, a very innovative route for Cuba, focuses on taking pieces of land in cities and towns where there is no tradition of agriculture, and developing gardens to grow vegetables, spices and other valuable foodstuffs. By the end of 2005 there were 3,010 urban agricultural gardens set up in urban areas across the island. According to Periodico 26, a Cuban newspaper, "*In 2005, the nationwide program of Urban Agriculture was not only outstanding for being a secure source of employment for some 354,000 men and women, but it also produced 4.11 million tons of fresh vegetables and spices in urban intensive farms.*"

Urban agriculture is an exciting endeavor not only because it is practical, it also means that cities become greener areas, people living in urban areas learn about food production, and the urban spaces become more sustainable in the long term. Today in Cuba most students must learn how to grow food organically, and according to the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, the city of Havana grows 90% of the fruit and vegetables it consumes!

In terms of oil and gas consumption, this year Cuba reached its target of producing 3.9 million tons of oil and gas. Granma International reports that this volume represents approximately 50% of Cuba's domestic consumption of oil and gas and is seven times the oil and gas production Cuba made in 1990. This self-sufficiency means a total annual savings of \$260 Million US, which can be used on other important projects.

Similar statistics come from CUPET (the Cubapetroleo Corporation), which says that Cuba's daily consumption of oil is 180,000 barrels. Cuba produces 80,000 of these barrels and the other 100,000 barrels come at below market value from Venezuela. In order to get these preferential prices Cuba sends its highly renowned professionals to Venezuela, including doctors, teachers, nurses and sports coaches. Another interesting fact about the environment in Cuba is that in 1959, only 14% of Cuba's territory was considered "forest-covered areas". Today Cuba is one of the only countries in the world where the forest-covered areas are expanding and interestingly, Cuba has now reached 24.5% forested area. Cuba's plan is to continue this trend towards a balanced figure of 25% by 2008.

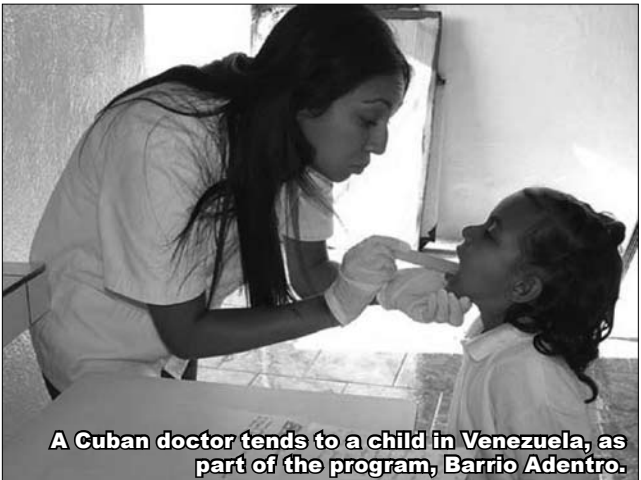
Sustainability is not only about the environment!

Some people in the environmentalist community would argue that Cuba being named the only sustainable country in the world is Cuba's biggest success story. This argument has led many people to say that, for example, we should support the US blockade on Cuba because this is the only reason

that Cuba has developed its agriculture and environment in such an interesting, creative and sustainable way. This is a dangerous argument and path to take, especially because people in Cuba have been demanding an end to the US blockade since its cruel and inhuman inception not long after the victory of the revolution. We must support the people of Cuba in this demand no matter how we on the outside project it will impact Cuba's path to a more environmentally sustainable society.

The environment is not Cuba's first priority; their first priority is improving human lives and protecting the gains of the revolution. Cuba does this today through giving people confidence that Cuba is continuing to evolve sustainably, not only in terms of the environment but sustainably in terms of the needs and desires of its people. Succinctly put, Cuba must move towards greater humanity and with that the environment will follow.

Some small examples of this immense humanity can be seen in the fields of health, jobs, and education. Fascinatingly, *"Education and health services will receive 22.6 per cent of Cuba's Gross Domestic Product (GDP)"* this year, explains the Prensa Latina news agency. It continues, *"that is four times more than the average destined by any country in Latin America, according to 2007 budget figures."*



A Cuban doctor tends to a child in Venezuela, as part of the program, Barrio Adentro.

Also, this year the percentage of Cubans who made blood bank donations was higher than the percentage in any other country in the world. In December 2006, Deputy Public Health Minister Joaquin Garcia said, *"The number of donors is ever more increasing, and that is not luck, but the work of the Revolution itself, as it has created a dignified, kind people."*

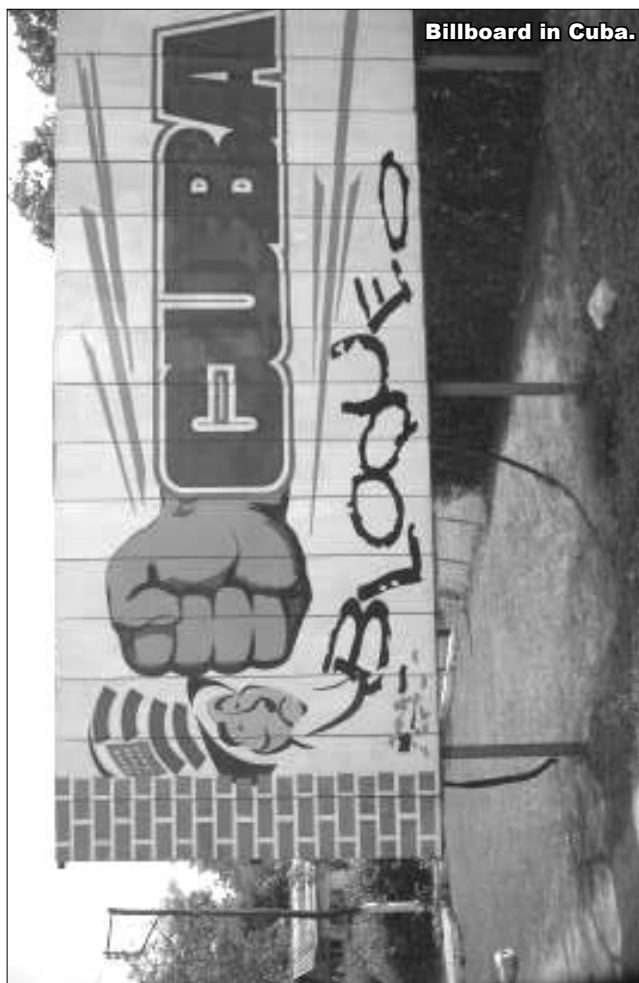
Some of the advances made in education include Cuba having just 2% of Latin America's population, but 11% of its scientists. Elementary, secondary and university education in Cuba are free for students. This also includes their books and uniforms. Today Cuba's universities are even training students from the United States to become doctors - and they are doing it for free! The only promise these students have to make is that they will return to the US and work in poor areas of the country for two years.

Today Cuba has the highest number of doctors per capita out

of any country in the world. Before the Cuban Revolution in 1959, there was one doctor per 2000 people. Today, through Cuba's education system and training, there is one doctor per 167 people! Cuba uses these doctors not only in Cuba or Venezuela, but throughout Latin America, the Caribbean and around the world. For example there have been more than 400,000 eye operations made under Operation Miracle. This is a shared program between Cuba and Venezuela, who are working together to provide free eye surgeries to hundreds of thousands of people in Latin America who are blind or going blind from lack of access to proper medical care.

A better world is possible...and necessary

As the world moves towards what is known as "peak oil", when the world will reach the maximum oil/gas production and everything will begin to decline in those industries, there are two main ways for world leaders to prepare. Option #1, taken on mainly by the US, Canada and other imperialist countries see this time as important to get their hands on as many valuable resources as possible, especially oil and gas resources. Option #2, taken on mainly by Cuba, is looking for other more sustainable energy sources. Option #1 has been part of the reason for invasions into oppressed countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan and at this time, potentially Sudan. Option #2 has been a part of the reason for communities, scientists, environmentalists and people of all stripes to unite and think resourcefully about new options. If we agree that a better world is possible and necessary, whose option do we follow?



From Fire This Time Newspaper Vol 4 Issue 2
February 2007

The Cuban Revolution & Women's Liberation



“I’ve been interested in... the history of those little grandmothers, small domestic marvels who embroider the table cloths where their oppressors would eat.”
“For forty years I have tried to give life to a chorus of voices historically silenced who are reborn in the language of my work far beyond their origins, their race or their gender.”
- Two quotes from Nancy Morejón (a Cuban poet) receiving the Golden Wreath Award in Struga, Macedonia

International Women’s Day – March 8th

Every year March 8th comes as a day to celebrate the accomplishments of women; to commemorate women who have been lost – as victims of oppression or heroines for our liberation; and to reaffirm the goals and aims of our continued fight for equality.

Women are a diverse group of people. We are of different backgrounds, cultures, countries, races, ages, and classes. However, we are all similarly oppressed in a world that privileges men. In our history and present, we have let this diversity both divide us and other times we have overcome these obstacles to protect and advance our rights. Fighting for women’s equality and liberation is not only for women, but for all of humanity. It is a well known fact that one of the most important steps to improving the lives of children - is the empowerment of women.

Advancing women’s rights is a constant struggle. Today in this era characterized by war, both at home in imperialist countries, and abroad in oppressed or ‘third world’ countries – women’s rights are coming under attack and many gains are being violently or silently taken away. There is one country that has truly made great strides in offering women hope,

Cuba. Some people might ask, “How is this true?” Well let us look a bit at the situation for women in Canada and Iraq, and then let’s talk a bit more about women in Cuba.

Canada: an Imperialist Country

“Women in Canada still only earn 72.5 cents for every dollar earned by a man.” - BC Federation of Labour Press Release, October 5th 2007

Living in Canada we look at many of the gains made by the women’s rights movement and many feel we have come far enough, but unfortunately as women our rights are never guaranteed and can always come under renewed attack. Most recently the Conservative government announced its 38.5% budget cut to the Status of Women agency and the removal “women’s equality” from the goals of the agency.

Some people might ask, “But aren’t women equal in Canada? Do they really NEED a special agency to promote their equality?” A good response to that comes from the government’s own statistics to be found on the Stats Can website. In its 2005 report on women, 20% of all families with children were single-parent female-headed families and these families have, by far, the lowest incomes of all family types in Canada. In 2003, single-parent families headed by women had an average income of only 38% of the figure for double-parent families and less than 60% that of single-parent families headed by men.

Most importantly the report charged that in 2003, the average annual pre-tax income of women was just 62% the figure for men – how’s that for equal?

Not only this, abuse against women is also very prevalent in Canada as a 2006 report by the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) showed that over half of women in Canada were victims of at least one act of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16.

Important to note as well that on top of these cuts to programs for women, the government of Canada has instead increased tax cuts and the military spending budget.

Iraq: an Occupied Country

“Kawkab Sami wakes up at 5 o’clock every morning to clean her house and feed her four children breakfast before getting them off to school. As a resident of Baghdad, the 35-year-old widow says she lives in constant fear of a bomb killing her children and herself at any moment. Her husband was killed by US troops in the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Her children are between the ages of 4 and 10. With only a few hours of power a day at home, no clean water, and broken sewer pipes in the road outside, Sami cries every night, worried about how long she will be able to take care of her family and keep them healthy. “I cannot afford a generator and special filter for the water because my salary is hardly enough for the main needs of my children...People tell me that I have to boil the [tap] water before I drink it, but I will need to use gas to do that and it is so expensive. The only thing I can do is pray my children do not get sick from it,” she added.”

– October 6th 2006, from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

While Sami's story is an important illustration of the burden put on women in Iraq and especially women in now single-parent families; war takes its toll on every aspect of life. Especially access to important resources needed to survive with dignity: food, water, shelter, jobs, healthcare and education. Usually women are the first to go without as they will give everything to their husbands and children, because of this, women suffer the most under war and occupation.



Iraqi women protest the occupation of their country by US/UK forces.

In Iraq the healthcare system is in shambles. For example, Iraq's Ministry of Health says that the US government has spent nearly US \$1Billion on Iraq's healthcare system, but they also say more than \$8Billion is required over the next four years to fund the current healthcare structure. The shortages seen by this lack of funding are already evident as the Iraqi Medical Association (IMA) reported that 90% of the nearly 180 Iraqi hospitals are lacking resources.

Because of the violence and destruction in Iraq many families are being forced to move, this is not only devastating for the family which is forced from their home, but is also having an impact on provinces that people are moving to. Ghalib al-Daami, a member of Karbala Provincial Council admitted to IRIN news, "The province is suffering under the pressure of the increasing number of displaced families. Service directorates like health, education and municipality are no longer capable of meeting the needs of more families."

US/UK war and occupation is also taking its toll on children's access to education. In 2004, only two years after the bombing started, Roger Wright of UNICEF said: "Iraq used to have one of the finest school systems in the Middle East...Today, millions of children in Iraq are attending schools that lack even basic water or sanitation facilities, have crumbling walls, broken windows and leaking roofs. The system is overwhelmed."

"Aid agencies estimate that thousands of Iraqi parents do not send their daughters to school for cultural reasons and because of the general insecurity in the country," reported IRIN news only two months ago in December 2006. Instability is also causing the literacy rates to decline. UNESCO estimates that the literacy rate in Iraq as of Dec 11 2006 was below 60 percent, this is horrifying, considering between 2000-2003 literacy was much higher at 74 percent. According to UNICEF in 2004, only 37 percent of rural women are literate, and only 30 percent of high school aged women are enrolled in school which compares to about 42 percent of boys.

Cuba: A Permanent Revolutionary Development

“The main thrust behind our development has been a Revolution that since its beginning on January 1st 1959, put women in an important place, and the FMC [Cuban Federation of Women] has been part of that battle since the beginning... The women’s situation in Cuba is important. Before the revolutionary triumph, we were second in the Cuban society, and our presence today has expanded to all levels of the country’s social and economic life.”

- Yolanda Ferrer, General Secretary of the FMC, March 7th 2006

Cuban women did not always have the advantage of living in a society where the people and government are fighting on the side of women. *“Prejudices are thousands of years old and have survived through various social systems. If we consider capitalism, women – that is, lower-class women – were doubly exploited or doubly humiliated. A poor woman, part of the working class or of a working class family, was exploited simply because she was poor; because she was a member of the working class. But in addition, although she was a woman of the working class, even her own class looked down and underrated her;”* said Cuban President Fidel Castro in 1966. He continued,

“Naturally, a considerable amount of prejudice still persists. If women were to believe that they have totally fulfilled their role as revolutionaries in society, they would be making a mistake. It seems to us that women must still fight and exert great efforts to attain the place that they should really hold in society. If women in our country were doubly humiliated in the past, then this simply means that women in a social revolution should be doubly revolutionary.”

Today 86% of women in Cuba have voluntarily joined the Cuban Women’s Federation (FMC). In a report on the United Nations meeting of the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women, a Cuban representative explained how the Federation of Cuban Women was developed in the early years of the revolution as a political organization. Today this federation represents a broad range of women in the country, of all ages, religions, professions and races. For more than 48 years, the organization has built influence and recognition in society, because it reflects the needs and views of women. One of the focuses of the local FMC’s in each municipality is teaching women about their rights in their workplace, at home and in society.

An interview in 2000 with a woman named Theresa Vigil from Habitat-Cuba cited some important statistics to understand the situation of women in Cuba. She said, *“With rent, and childcare geared to income, free education and all medical services for children free, the economic burden on single mothers is greatly eased. Women are entitled to three months’ maternity leave at full salary, from 1 ½ month*



before to 1 ½ month after delivery. After that a mother has the right to six months of leave at half her salary while she retains the right to return to her job for up to one year.”

An important document for women in Cuba is The Family Code, which was passed into law in 1974. Interestingly



the United States State Department’s “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices “ outlines quite well what the Code is about. “*The Family Code states that women and men have equal rights and responsibilities regarding marriage, divorce, raising children, maintaining the home, and pursuing a career.*” This report released on Feb 28th 2005 goes on to say, “the most recent (2000) public figures of the Cuban Women’s Federation (FMC), a mass organization affiliated with the CP [Communist Party], women held 33% of managerial positions. The FMC also asserted that 11,200 women received land parcels to cultivate, more than 561,000 women had begun working as agricultural workers, and that women devoted 34 hours a week to domestic work, approximately the same number of hours they spent working outside the home.” Women’s power in divorce is also higher, for example under the Family Code a man can not evict a woman with underage children from a house because the children would be left unprotected.

Today women have made big steps forward, representing 45.2% of the active labour force in the state civil sector, and 66.4% in technical and professional force, according to the Peoples’ Power Assembly. A recent census in Cuba also showed that women head 40% of households. Since the 2005 elections, women now hold 28.19% of the political posts in local government, this percentage is larger in the national parliament, but we will discuss that later.

Organizations such as the FMC push women in Cuba to get involved in politics. Not necessarily by running for a position in government (although the FMC does have representation in top levels of the Cuban government) but more in terms of recognizing and evaluating the situation facing women and looking for ways to improve the situation of women in Cuba and around the world. As a part of this, the FMC runs or supports different political and educational campaigns.

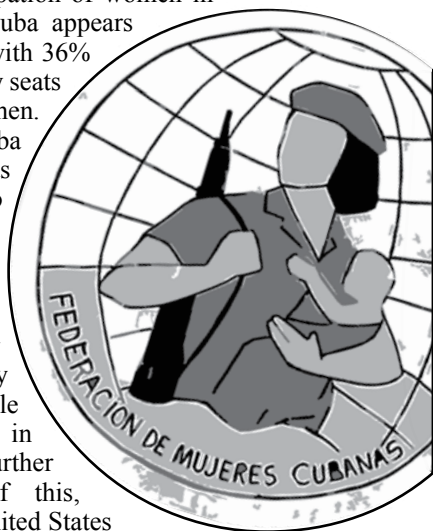
For example as a lead up to International Women's Day last year, over 300,000 Cuban women signed petitions against war and terrorism as part of the international campaign "Women Say No to War".

Cuba and Canada, which Government is Working for Women?

In UNICEF's list of the 15 countries in the world with the highest participation of women in political power, Cuba appears as number eight, with 36% of its parliamentary seats occupied by women.

Interestingly, Cuba is counted as one of only two countries on this list of 15 that do not have either constitutional, electoral law or political party quotas for female involvement in parliament. Further added to all of this, Canada and the United States appear nowhere on this list,

in fact Canada ranks 47th in the world as only 20.7% of parliamentarians in Canada are women. Although these statistics are important, we must note that having more women in Canada's parliament does not insure that she will represent the interests of women. For instance, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women - Bev Oda, a member of Conservative Party - encouraged the government's cuts to the Status of Women Agency.



In Cuba most women are organized within the FMC and because of that, voters in Cuba are assured that women who run for official positions have women's issues on their agenda. Cuba does not have quotas for women's involvement in parliament, because as Fidel said they must fight twice as hard to achieve their rights. Cuban women are elected based on their qualities as equal human beings, not to fill a certain prescription.

Another interesting way to compare Canada and Cuba is government spending. From UNICEF statistics we learn that, an average of 23% of the Cuban government's expenditures from 1994-2004 were allocated to health, while during the same period 10% was allocated to education. This is in what is considered to be a developing or 'third world' country with an annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of approximately \$40Billion. In Canada, a much richer country with an annual GDP of \$1Trillion, the government spent 9% of it annual expenditures on health and 2% on education from 1994-2004.

Women's Liberation – Change is possible!

Cuba is by no means perfect, however, something they fought for and gained is access to their true human rights: jobs, education, housing and health. These human rights are provided for all in Cuba. This is especially advantageous

to women because, as mentioned before, in situations of poverty or scarcity women are usually the ones who will give up what little they have for their families.

In Cuba families are not so desperate to have to make these kinds of choices and the government is standing beside them, opening space, especially for women, to get involved in the revolutionary process taking place in their country. In the same speech I cited earlier from 1966, Fidel Castro said, *“Discrimination will never be wiped out within the framework of capitalist society. Discrimination with respect to race and sex can only be wiped out through socialist revolution, which eradicates the exploitation of man by man. Now, does the disappearance of the exploitation of man by man mean that all the conditions are immediately created whereby woman may elevate her position in society? No. The conditions for the liberation of women, for the full development of women in society, for an authentic equality of rights for women and men in society, require a material base; they require the material foundations of economic and social development.”*

We can trust Fidel’s assessment of steps needed to advance towards the liberation of women. History and the present illustrate well that women’s rights have never been handed to women; we have always had to fight for them. But today in Cuba women are not fighting alone, they have the support and encouragement of the Cuban government and society, and the unprecedented step being taken towards the equality of women.



Cuban revolutionary leader, Celia Sanchez.

*From Fire This Time Newspaper Vol 4 Issue 2
February 2007*

Fidel Gaining Strength & Health!

Imperialists Watching with Fear While He's Coming Back Again

“Cuba is at a critical point in its history... The country is poised for change. The policy of the Bush administration has been to help the Cuban people achieve their freedom through democratic change.”

- Carlos Gutierrez, US Secretary of Commerce, speaking to the Council of the Americas

In July 2006, after undergoing an emergency operation- Fidel Castro - Commander-in-Chief of Cuba, provisionally handed over his responsibilities to the first Vice President of Cuba, Raul Castro.

I happened to be in Cuba when the news was announced that Fidel had had emergency surgery. Do you know what happened the next day in the capital city of the Holguin province where we were staying? Nothing, everything was the same as it had been the day before. Except at the Communist Party of Cuba offices, where different officials were wearing their military uniforms, symbolizing that with or without Fidel they were prepared to defend their country and their revolution.

US Wishful Thinking

This is a tense time for Cuba as less than a month before Fidel fell ill the United States released its second report from the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba. Some of the objectives of the commission are to, “Bring an end to the ruthless and brutal dictatorship [in Cuba]” and, “Assist the Cuban people in a transition to representative democracy.” This report set aside \$80Million to work towards its goals and also contains a secret section, sealed off from the public. But we must ask, if you are already stating publicly that one of your objectives is to, “bring to an end the ruthless and brutal dictatorship” then what could you possibly need to hide? Obviously Cubans have fairly legitimate reasons to feel apprehensive about the US government and its commission’s promises for “representative democracy” for Cuba as they have all seen quite clearly what is happening with US “democracy” in Iraq.

Don't Worry, Fidel is OK

The US government for some time was also trying to convince the world that Fidel had terminal cancer; but

they haven't used that argument much since December 2006 when Dr. Jose Luis Garcia Sabrido, the head of surgery at the Gregorio Maranon hospital in Spain, who is seen as more 'objective' or reliable than a Cuban doctor by international bourgeois media said, "He is in good condition. Within the confines of doctor-patient privilege, I can say President Castro is not suffering from a malignant condition." He continued, "He does not have cancer... He has a problem with his digestive system."



The US government and media continue to try and paint Fidel as being on the verge of death, including an article by Reuters on January 17th 2007, which said, "a report in Spain's El Pais newspaper yesterday [said] that Castro was in serious condition after operations to his large intestine for diverticulitis, or an inflamed bulge in the intestine, complicated by infection. Castro's prognosis is "very serious" and he is being fed intravenously, the paper said, citing two medical sources at Madrid's Gregorio Maranon hospital, where Garcia Sabrido is head of surgery."

This report and these "sources" were slammed a few days later when Fidel appeared on Cuban TV again with Hugo Chavez. Not even the Associated Press could deny that Fidel looked noticeably stronger and healthier. They said, "The communist government Jan. 30 released a new video of the leader that showed him looking as if he had gained strength and weight... Fidel had looked far more gaunt and pale during a video released by the government in late October."

Sign of Stability: Smooth Transition in Leadership

The important question on everybody's mind is always, what will happen in Cuba after Fidel? In many ways Fidel's sudden surgery seems to be a good solid indicator showing how smoothly the government of Cuba can function in the absence of Fidel. It also shows that there is no real "pro-democracy" movement (looking to overthrow the revolution and embrace US capitalism) as the US has been claiming. When Fidel first had surgery many people were wondering if a civil war would break out in Cuba, with people rising up against the government as mainstream capitalist media propagated. Many of the same mainstream news stations were attempting to paint Cuba as a politically unstable country. But to their disappointment, as we have seen, Cuba has continued down its strong path towards a brighter future for humanity without Fidel directly in charge.

"The regime of Fidel Castro is not viable without Fidel Castro...A transition to democracy in Cuba is inevitable, but Fidel Castro needs to die for the future of Cuba to begin."

- Rep. Lincoln Diaz-Balart, a Cuban-born Florida Republican

Today the media is asking, but what about when Fidel ACTUALLY dies? Will Fidel's death really mean big changes and unrest? The US apparently thinks so, as they are preparing to use their Guantánamo Naval base in Cuba to house the fleeing Cubans they presume will run when Fidel dies. In fact the Department of Defense has reportedly planned to spend \$18Million, US tax payer dollars, to expand the Guantánamo Bay facility to house these Cubans as they are estimating up to 500,000 may seek asylum. From the Guardian UK in February 2007, "As U.S. officials see it, the seismic political event for Cuba has yet to come. "We don't feel that we've lost an important moment, because quite frankly, we don't see any significant possibility of change of any kind until Fidel is gone," Tom Shannon, the top State Department aide for Latin America, says."

An interesting analysis a friend of mine gave on this was – imagine – hundreds of thousands of Cubans have clandestinely hid boats and rubber dingy's in their backyards and are turning on their radio every morning asking, 'is he dead yet?' Waiting for their chance to go to Guantánamo Naval base. Somehow this seems unrealistic and ridiculous.

From the Associated Press on February 17th 2007, "Brian Latell, a former top Cuba analyst at the CIA, agrees and says Raul Castro has been acting more boldly than expected, encouraging debate among Cubans and calling on university students to "fearlessly" discuss the country's problems... There is little evidence of pro-democracy ferment in Cuba. The answer to whether that reflects fear or contentment on the island depends on whom one asks.

One visible indication of unrest is the single word that appears on occasional street signs: “Cambio””

But what does “Change” written on a street sign in Cuba really symbolize? Isn't the whole point of the Cuban revolution to make change? To stop systemic racism, sexism and homophobia; to provide jobs, healthcare and education to everyone in Cuba; and to stand up in the face of the US' “war on terror” and say, no thank-you we do not need your “democracy” (we already lived through that in the 1950's with the dictator you supported in our country, Batista).

These sentiments were echoed by his niece Mariela Castro Espin, who heads the national centre for Sex Education CENESEX, who said, “Fidel is stupendous... I imagine him returning and not returning, because one way or the other he is going to be present and very active.”

We are happy to hear of this slow but visible recovery by Fidel, we wish him a speedy recovery but know that with or without Fidel the Cuban revolution will continue because it is the will of people in Cuba. Here in Vancouver, BC and across Canada we will fight along side the Cuban people and continue to defend them against US-sponsored attacks and to defend the gains of their revolution.



The Case Against Luis Posada Carriles: Demand Posada's Extradition to Venezuela **NOW!**

Posada's History In Latin America

A very little known name in North America, Luis Posada Carriles, is well known to the people of Latin America. Trained by the United States' CIA in explosives in the early 1960's, he was a participant in the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba along with many other US-backed right-wing groups of former Cubans in 1962. This invasion was a complete and utter failure for these right-wing groups who were harbouring themselves in the US, as well as for the US government itself which had hoped to rid themselves of Fidel Castro and the sweeping changes being made by the Cuban revolution. Posada soon moved on, working for the Venezuelan secret police in the 1970's.

His list of terrorism-related crimes in Latin America is long. Even Reuters, a news agency that is generally quite critical of Cuban leader Fidel Castro and the Cuban revolution, had to admit the charges of terrorism hanging against this man.

In an article on April 10th 2007, Reuters recognized, "[Posada Carriles] is wanted in Venezuela on charges he planned the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner that killed 73 people. He was detained in Caracas in 1976, but fled prison in 1985 disguised as a priest. Posada Carriles is also accused of tourist bombings in Havana in 1997. He was jailed in Panama for a plot to assassinate Castro during an Ibero-American summit in 2000, but was pardoned by outgoing President Mireya Moscoso."

Resurfacing In The U.S.

In March 2005, Posada resurfaced requesting political asylum in the United States. For two months Posada walked freely on the streets on Miami. However, someone in the US government must have informed him that as leaders of the "war on terror" it would be impossible for the US government to publicly support him without getting themselves into a whirlwind of trouble. On May 17th 2005, Posada skipped out on an immigration hearing and instead

held a press conference publicly announcing that he would be leaving the US shortly.

But with all of this hullabaloo and pressure growing from Cuba, Venezuela, and social justice groups around the world, the US government was forced to act. On the same day as his press conference Posada Carriles was taken into US custody, but not for his terrorist crimes. No, instead he was charged for entering the US illegally. Posada has now been in a US prison in El Paso, Texas since May 2005, while the US government looks for the best option to protect its “image” as a leader in the global “war on terror” and at the same time help out one of their former agents.

The Case For Extradition

“Venezuela accuses Mr Posada Carriles of planning the bombing of the Cubana Airlines plane on a flight from Caracas to Havana in 1976, an attack which left 73 people dead... He escaped from a Venezuelan prison in 1985 while awaiting a trial on appeal.” – BBC, September 1st 2005



“A federal immigration judge ruled in 2005 that Posada must be deported, but said he could not be sent to Cuba, where he was born, or Venezuela, where he is a naturalized citizen, because of fears that he could be tortured.” – Associated Press, April 12th 2007

“We’ve sent a message that is understood throughout the world: if you harbour a terrorist, if you support a terrorist, if you feed a terrorist, you’re just as guilty as the terrorists.” – George W. Bush, President of the United States, August 26th 2003

Then Bush and the US government is itself a terrorist. The only way for justice to prevail is if Posada is charged with his true crimes against humanity, not for breaking immigrations laws or entering the US illegally. Legally the United States has an extradition treaty with Venezuela so they must send Posada there to be charged. However, the US is using lame-duck excuses such as Venezuela not having enough evidence against Posada or that Posada may be tortured as reasons to harbour this terrorist within their own borders. After witnessing the United States’ war in Iraq, their occupation of Afghanistan, their recent bombing campaign against Somalia and conditions their prisoners face in their

Guantanamo Bay detention camp, we don't really need more evidence that they indeed support terrorism whenever it is in their favour. Despite this, the case of Luis Posada Carriles stands as strong proof that that US is not concerned about terrorism, and that they are willing to harbour terrorists, especially if they are ex-agents of the US government.

How The U.S. Is Protecting Posada

Now Posada has been fighting for access to bail and being released before his trial on immigration fraud charges coming up on May 11th 2007. The US government's attorneys have been petitioning to keep him in prison until the trial, but on April 17th 2007 it was ruled that the former CIA operative will be released on a quarter of a million dollar bond.

The US government's own attorneys released a long document as a motion for an emergency stay after the District Court ordered Posada's pretrial release. The attorneys stated a long list of reasons why Posada should not be released: his previous escape from Venezuelan prison in the 1980's; his press conference in 2005, when he was "too ill" to attend his immigration hearing, and his use of many fake IDs and passports in the past, all as evidence that Posada poses a slight risk.

But is the US government really against releasing Posada? Obviously the decision of the judge to release this terrorist, especially after the evidence presented proved the risk involved, had to come from somewhere. While their attorneys make it seem as if the US government is fighting the good fight, it is certain that the White House pressured the courts to release Posada before his trial.



First, the White House has been trying to find a country to take Posada off of their hands since his arrival in the US, but nowhere "suitable" has been willing to take such a high profile criminal. Secondly, if the White House does not aid Posada how are they going to convince any of their current CIA agents that they will be protected in the future from the crimes they have committed in the CIA's name? Thirdly, the White House has stayed away from accusing or charging Posada with ANY of his terrorist crimes and will only charge

him with immigration issues - a decision obviously meant to protect Posada.

“Jail Posada! Free The Cuban 5!”

The US government’s hypocrisy is not only seen in their treatment of Posada. They are not only protecting this terrorist. They have also jailed 5 Cubans who came into the United States to investigate the crimes of the anti-Cuban terrorist organizations that Posada works with in Miami.

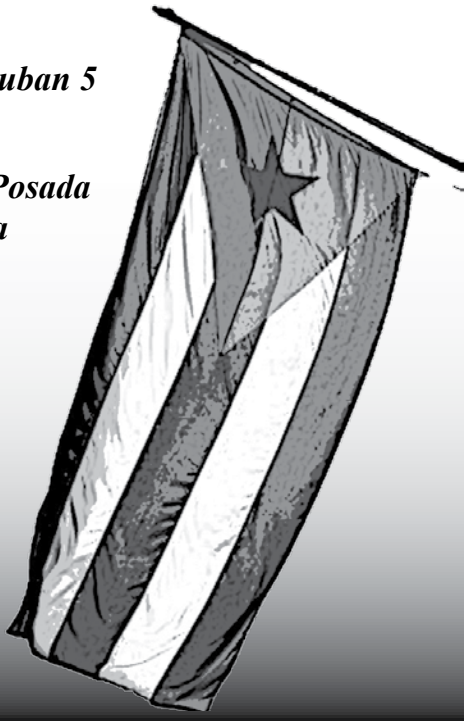
Gerardo Hernández, Antonio Guerrero, Ramón Labañino, Fernando González and René González were falsely accused by the US government of “conspiracy to commit espionage”, “conspiracy to commit murder” and other bogus charges. These men did not come to spy on the US government, but to collect evidence about the acts of terrorism planned by the right-wing anti-Cuba groups in Miami. The five Cubans never harmed anyone, which even the US government knows, and that is why they could only be charged with “conspiracy to commit” these crimes and not even that they “attempted to commit” these crimes. Despite the lack of evidence against them, these five heroes, who were defending the people of Cuba against terrorists (like Luis Posada Carriles), are serving four life sentences and 75 years collectively, after being unjustly imprisoned by the US government.

But Cuba, Venezuela and people around the world who are concerned about social justice are exposing the United States’ blatant hypocrisy and have been speaking out, demanding justice in both the case of the anti-Cuban terrorist Luis Posada Carriles and in the case of these five anti-terrorist Cuban heroes. These people have been uniting and appealing to others to join them in the demands:

“Jail Posada! Free the Five!”

“Free the Cuban 5 NOW!”

“Extradite Posada to Venezuela NOW!”



26th of July Movement



& Dynamism of the Cuban Revolution

In the early morning hours of July 26th 1953, the darkness of night was just lifting on the town of Santiago de Cuba. Around 150 young rebels drove in a suspicious row of cars through part of town, however they went unnoticed because no one was yet awake.

They were driving with determination in their hearts and minds. Their goal? The Moncada army garrison. Their dream? To overtake the garrison and its cache of weapons and tools of repression used by the US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista, and put that arsenal in the hands of the people to begin an uprising for their liberation.

This morning was the beginning of the end for US control and hegemony in Cuba, the beginning of the end of the reign of terror they puppeteered with their marionette Batista.

The attack was well planned, but a few unexpected incidents alerted the army of their invasion too quickly. After losing some fighters and the onslaught of government soldiers, the rebels retreated. This initial attack failed, but we call it the beginning of the end because the vision shown by the rebels under the leadership of a young revolutionary named Fidel Castro (only 26 at the time) opened Cuba's path towards revolution. Only six years after that fateful morning, this revolution and its ideas triumphed over the brutal dictatorship of Batista.

Cuba under Batista's control

The need for the change represented by the July 26th attack was quite evident by the misery and poverty that plagued Cuba prior to the Cuban Revolution.

According to the CBC website, “He [Batista] opened the doors to large-scale gambling in Havana, to the point where the capital became known as the Latin Las Vegas. Cuba became a playground for the rich, most of whom were American. There was little tolerance for opposition to the government.”

The Yahoo! Education Encyclopedia continues, “In 1952 he [Batista] seized power through a coup. His second term as president was marked by brutal repression, which led to several uprisings, notably that of Fidel Castro. Pressed by the rebels and after a mock election (1958) had failed to calm the populace, Batista fled Cuba.”

In 1953, 90% of people in Cuba were illiterate or semi-literate, without even a 6th grade education level. One third of all homes in Cuba were classified as huts, while only 56% of homes had electricity. A 1953 employment census noted that 8.4% of the work force was unemployed. This rate does not even give the full picture of the poverty facing Cubans as the census was taken during the height of the sugar harvest when unemployment was at its lowest. It is estimated that real unemployment throughout the year was closer to 30%.

How could a country be changed from a situation of repression, poverty and ignorance to today when, Cuba has the most doctors per capita of any country in the world, with, according to the CIA World Factbook, a literacy rate of 99.8% and an unemployment rate of only 1.9%?

Formation of the 26th of July Movement

After their retreat, many of the revolutionaries were captured. Using torture, intimidation, duress and other inhumane tactics Batista's army hunted and rounded up most of the young rebels. Fidel Castro, a young lawyer in training at the time, was also soon captured.

Fidel was lucky to make it to his trial date. Many of his fellow combatants were tortured to death in Batista's prisons. At his trial, Fidel represented himself. His trial was marked by a poignant speech where he condemned his guards,



Demonstration against Batista.



the judge and all others working for the court for their involvement in the brutal and corrupt government.

“Sentence me. It doesn’t matter.” He said with conviction, “History will absolve me.”

Fidel Castro was shortly thereafter found “Guilty” and sentenced to 15 years in jail.

This would not last long; as members of the urban underground quickly began distributing clandestine copies of Fidel’s speech. This talk shook the disgruntled and oppressed people of Cuba. Popular pressure grew across the country demanding the release of all political prisoners, including Fidel Castro. Batista was required to release the heroic rebels after only two years.

Many of the committed rebels fled quickly to Mexico where they created ‘the 26th of July Movement’ and planned a new attack against the Batista regime. In 1956, Fidel and other leaders of the 26th of July Movement returned to Cuba from Mexico and began a campaign to defeat the government of Batista. Two years later, in December 1958, Ernesto Ché Guevara, a leader along with Fidel in the 26th of July Movement, led an attack in Santa Clara against an armoured train Batista planned to send across the country to reinforce his lowering troop morale and crippled army. However, their convoy was interrupted when Ché and his fellow revolutionaries derailed the train and triumphantly persuaded the troops and their leader to surrender. Batista fled Cuba shortly thereafter.

Where has the 26th of July Movement taken Cuba?

And here we are today, 54 years after the initial attack on July 26th 1953! What does Cuba have to show for it?

Health: In 1959, life expectancy in Cuba was 45 years. Today, according to the CIA World Factbook, life expectancy in Cuba is 77 years. Cuba’s infant mortality rate is also the lowest in Latin America at 6.04%. Cuba has the most doctors per capita of any country in the world.

Education: In 2006 Cuba marked 45 years of free education. Cuban news agency Prensa Latina reported last year, “On June 6, 1961, the revolutionary government decreed the Teaching Nationalization Law. Two months after defeating the US invasion of Playa Girón (Bay of Pigs), the country ended the education system that served a privileged minority and brought real democracy to teaching.” Illiteracy was wiped out just two years after the revolution began, and today the literacy rate sits at 99.8%, which according to the United Nations is full literacy.

Jobs: In May 2005 the minimum wage in Cuba went up from 100 to 225 pesos benefiting over 1.6 million workers, which accounts for 54% of state employees. In July 2005 wages rose in the healthcare and education sectors, which benefited over 850,000 workers. These actions, as well as raises in social assistance and social security benefited 4.4 million people, which accounted for 30.9% of the population.

Internationalism: Cuba, since triumph of revolution in 1959, has constantly championed a revolutionary internationalist program in its foreign policy. Cuba has helped dozens of countries in this planet through material, health, education, technology, and even military assistance. Thousands of Cuban doctors, nurses, technicians, and educators are serving to improve lives of millions of people. Cuban military assistance in Africa helped many African countries in their struggle for self-determination. With the help of the Cuban revolutionary armed forces, the Angolan army defeated for good the South African army, which not only gained complete sovereignty for Angola but caused the collapse of Apartheid in South Africa and brought the freedom of Nelson Mandela.



All of these achievements happened while revolutionary Cuba has been for more than 45 years under severe US blockade and constant US and other imperialist attacks and sabotage. Because of these important gains made by the revolution for students, workers, women, people of colour and other oppressed groups, July 26th continues to be a day of great celebration and renewal of hope for gains to be made in the near and far futures.

The Battle of Ideas: a better world is possible!

Since the triumph of the revolution Cuba has been under pressure from the Government of the United States, because of lost stakes and profit when Cuba nationalized its industries and kicked many US companies out of Cuba. The US government has been seeking ways to defeat the Cuban revolution and return it to the hands of profit-makers and private companies. They have done this through

the immoral and illegal blockade imposed on Cuba, the attempted Bay of Pigs invasion, and the more recent creation of the 'Commission for the Assistance to a Free Cuba,' a commission under the US Department of State.

In order to combat these dark forces from interrupting the immense gains Cuba has

made for poor and working people Cuba has created a campaign called, "The Battle of Ideas". This began when Elián González was kidnapped by his mother from his father in order to take him with her to the United States. When Elián's mother died on a raft between Cuba and Miami he was taken in by family members living in the US. Elián's father and the Cuban government fought a long and difficult battle to get Elián back. Using education, organization and mass mobilizations Cuba pressured the Government of the United States to do what was just, both legally and morally, which was to return Elián to his father.



This was a major victory for Cuba against the United States, a country that is constantly slandering Cuba and making false accusations towards Cuba as a pretext to uphold its internationally exposed and condemned blockade against the island.

Some of the projects initiated by the Battle of Ideas were recently outlined in an article by the The Cox Newspapers Washington Bureau. They explained a presentation given by Otto Rivero, a member of the Cuban Council of Ministers who is coordinating the campaign, "Success in the Battle of Ideas, the reporters were told, can be tallied by thousands of projects that have been accomplished in institutions across Cuban society. Among these are the restoration of 84 hospitals, the expansion of 498 small medical clinics and the installation of 155 high-tech medical machines. Dozens of run-down schools have been rebuilt, while 34,877 new social



workers have been trained to aid the population. All levels of education have been reorganized with a focus on information technology, and university classrooms have been moved into Havana's suburbs and cities around the island. Every child now gets computer instruction from the age of 6, along with English language classes beginning in the third grade. The Battle of Ideas even extends to the effort to train the next generation of Cuban Olympic champions,

along with the opening of youth video clubs, in which more than 20,000 young people have created short movies and video presentations.”

This project encompasses a huge variety of projects to advance and polarize Cuba and the world. It is deepening the differences between where the interests of the US government lie, which is in re-privatizing Cuba and widening the divide between rich and poor, and the Cuban people’s interests, which is having access to health, housing, jobs and education. In short, it is a battle between the ideas of Capitalism vs. Socialism.



Fidel: Revolutionary Leadership Example!

More importantly than all of the statistics is that the path of the revolutionaries of July 26th 1953, the path of hope, social justice and prosperity for all poor and oppressed people in Cuba, has not been abandoned- nor will it ever be.

On July 31st 2006, Fidel Castro announced that he was going for surgery and would be stepping down temporarily from his posts as President of the Council of State and President of the Council of Ministers. Since that time he has not made any public appearances, however he has begun publishing, “Reflections by the Commander-in-Chief,” articles with his perspective on what is happening in Cuba and around the world.

With titles such as, “NOBODY WANTSTOTAKETHEBULL BY THE HORNS”, “THE TRAGEDY THREATENING OUR SPECIES”, “BUSH EXPECTS EVERYTHING TO BE SOLVED WITH A BANG”, “NEEDING AFFECTION”, “CUBA’S SELF-CRITICISM”, and “THE BRAIN DRAIN” we can see that 54 years after leading the attack on the Moncada army garrison, and one year after going in for serious surgery, Fidel is still ready to fight.



Fifty-four years ago it was time for the Cuban revolutionaries to show their fellow Cubans and Latin Americans an alternative to repressive US-style imperialism. Today, that alternative has been realised and surpassed in Cuba. Today more than ever, the gains of the Cuban revolution are being felt around Latin America. With the revolutionary leadership in Venezuela, and progressive governments being elected in many different Latin American countries, they are joining Cuba towards a better future. There are many battles that still need to be fought, but it is clear that Latin Americans are marching forward to a better future!

Viva Fidel! Viva Cuba!

*From Fire This Time Newspaper Vol 4 Issue 7
July 2007*

We Remember Compañera Vilma Espín Guillois



(April 7th 1930- June 18th 2007)

We receive with heavy hearts the news of the passing of Compañera Vilma Espín Guillois. An honoured revolutionary, Vilma became active in the struggle in Cuba against the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. She first participated with Frank País in the urban underground, and after the assassination of País in 1957 she took the role of leading the movement in Oriente province. Then, in mid-1958, the clandestine movement in the cities became too dangerous for Vilma and she moved to the Sierra Maestra to join the guerrilla fighters.

The Cuban revolution triumphed soon after, and just over a year later the Cuban Women's Federation (FMC) was created. At the founding of the FMC Vilma became its president-elect. Her presidency was re-confirmed at every FMC Assembly, from the first in 1962 to the seventh in 2000. In the first years of its foundation the FMC began to activate women in the changes being executed by the revolution, it began a new era for women in Cuba. According to Granma International, "During the first 15 months of work, the nascent organization, still embryonic, had mobilized women en masse for the construction of schools and hospitals; to collect up and take care of unsupported children wandering the streets at the triumph of the Revolution; to improve living standards in the so-called "destitute" barrios; and other social tasks."

Even the Washington Post, a publication that is quite biased against the Cuban revolution, had to admit the great work of Vilma, “She was credited with improving the status of women in a society known for its history of machismo by articulating the need for a more equal environment between the sexes. She gave prominent voice to improvements in maternal and child health-care policies as well as the need for women to educate themselves... “From the feminist perspective, she empowered women in a home to say to a husband, ‘It’s my national, patriotic duty to work, to volunteer in the community,’” said Ileana Fuentes, executive director of the Cuban Feminist Network, a Miami-based social-needs organization... “Whether you are for or against Castro, that’s an empowering tool for women.”

Vilma was well known throughout Cuba and the world as a lifelong fighter for the rights of women, this is very important because when women have rights it opens new doors for their children, their husbands, their parents, their communities and their societies. Women’s rights are inextricably linked to the rights of all human beings and the need to build a better, more humane world.

On June 18th 2007, Vilma passed away. But she is not forgotten, nor are her contributions to the gains made by the Cuban Revolution. Remembered today and forever, for her amazing and exemplary contributions to the victorious battle for the revolution and the ongoing battle for the rights of women in Cuba and worldwide, Vilma is a revolutionary we hold close to our hearts and make her revolutionary life an example for all women in struggle and all men and women fighting for revolutionary change.

As President of Cuba Fidel Castro wrote in his reflections lately on her life and legacy, “Vilma’s example today is more necessary than ever.”



*From Fire This Time Newspaper Vol 4 Issue 9-10
September/October 2007*

Elections Called in Cuba..

*This is What Popular
Democracy Looks Like!*

**11-million-strong popular democracy
against US 2-party system**

On Sunday October 21st 2007, Cubans headed to the polls. Yes, I do in fact mean elections polls - What, you didn't know there are elections in Cuba?

Back and forth between Fidel and Bush - Democracy, in Cuba?

On July 9th 2007, Cuba announced a new round of general elections to take place in Cuba this fall and winter. This began a great new war of words, or Battle of Ideas between Cuba and the US government over democracy and the electoral system in Cuba.

Cuba's Council of State called for the general elections to begin on October 21st 2007 with the election of municipal assemblies across the country. This will lead to the election of provincial delegates and deputies to the National Assembly for sometime in early 2008.

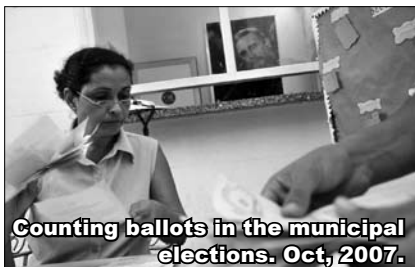
The day after Cuba announced its elections the debate and public discussion began. In a July 10th Agence France-Presse (AFP) article, US State Department spokesman Tom Casey is reported to have said, "If Castro-lite, meaning Raul Castro, wants to



hold elections-lite, meaning the kind that they have held in the past -- single party elections that don't allow the people to have a choice and only allow them to ratify the rule of the current dictatorship -- whether its Fidel Castro's name that is on top of the ballot or Raul Castro's doesn't really matter much."

Then on October 19th in his "Reflections of a Commander in Chief" entitled, "the Elections". Fidel Castro responded. An article in the South Florida Sun-Sentinel explained, "Fidel Castro lampooned U.S. elections Saturday as corrupted by corporate money aimed at "brainwashing" the few Americans who still

bother to go to the polls. The Cuban leader's comments came a day before the island holds elections featuring 37,258 candidates vying for 15,236 seats on local assemblies. Today begins a process that culminates with parliamentary elections next spring."



On October 24th when George W Bush opened his mouth to speak about Cuba, he had this to say, "Today I also am announcing a new initiative to develop an international multi-billion dollar Freedom Fund for Cuba. This fund would help the Cuban people rebuild their economy and make the transition to democracy. I have asked two members of my Cabinet to lead the effort -- Secretary Rice and Secretary Gutierrez. They will enlist foreign governments and international organizations to contribute to this initiative. And here's how the fund will work: The Cuban government must demonstrate that it has adopted, in word and deed, fundamental freedoms. These include the freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of press, freedom to form political parties, and the freedom to change the government through periodic, multi-party elections. And once these freedoms are in place, the fund will be able to give Cubans -- especially Cuban entrepreneurs -- access to grants, and loans and debt relief to help rebuild their country."

Wait, "Especially Cuban Entrepreneurs?" While Bush is complaining about the poor in Cuba, and the so-called "misery" of the Cuban people, he plans to help by giving them loans? What a generous humanitarian!

Cuba responded only a few hours later, when Felipe Perez Roque, Cuba's Foreign minister, adamantly rejected Bush's anti-Cuba speech. Juventud Rebelde, the newspaper of Cuban youth, explained, "The diplomat [Felipe Perez Roque] cited one particular phrase by Bush, who said "the operative word in our future dealings with Cuba is not 'stability'; the operative word is 'freedom.'" Responding to this Pérez Roque commented, "Cuba understands those words —which demonstrate frustration, desperation and Bush's personal hatred of Cuba— as an invocation to the use of force and a call to violence, which Cuba rejects categorically."

Now, let us be clear that the government of the United States, whether it was the democrats or republicans in power, have labeled the Cuban government as tyrannical and undemocratic basically since the victory of the Cuban revolution. The reason? The United States government was not happy that Cuba's revolutionary government, led by Fidel Castro, kicked US economic interests and exploitative businesses off their island. This is also why the US government is so interested in "helping" Cuban entrepreneurs.

The final word in this round of debate has come honorably and powerfully from the National Bureau of the Union of Young Communists (UJC) who rebutted Bush saying, "Mr. President of the United States, Your ridiculous words are embarrassing and disgusting to the Cuban youth. We wonder how it is possible that a man in charge of ruling over the richest country of the world can make such foolish remarks, blinded by hatred and powerlessness. [...] The Cuban youth, raised on values completely different to the model you represent, are not a bunch of uncommitted and fanatic people that will run after your cynical offerings. We know our history and have learned very well the lessons of

sovereignty that so many generations have left us throughout many years. [...] There are many young people in this world to whom our everyday reality is just a dream, unreachable due to the genocidal wars and unsustainable consumption models that you defend no matter the consequences. [...] We know very well that the day that is coming will be the end of the criminal blockade and the overbearing and arrogant empire that threatens the human species. We will never negotiate our Homeland's independence, for which many of its better sons paid the high price of their lives."

What are elections like in Cuba?

Walter Lippmann, a long time social justice activist, writer, photographer and the moderator of the CubaNews e-mail list (a very popular source for a great collection of news on Cuba), was in Cuba for the recent October elections. Below are some of his very interesting observations.

"This route took me past dozens and dozens of places where the voting was going on. My guess is Cuba must be the easiest place in the world to vote, and voting is very, very strongly encouraged, though voting is not mandated by law. The polls opened at 7 AM and were active until 6 PM. Voter registration lists are posted outside each location, so everybody knows everybody. They're staffed by local volunteers, and a pair of Pionero children who salute each person after they deposit their



hand-written ballot in the box. After 6 PM the polls close and the ballots were hand-counted there. Outside each place there were sample ballots posted, and some also had the real ballots posted with the actual names of the candidates, two to four of them, for that circumscription (in the U.S. we would call that a voting precinct). Each candidate had their personal history and organizational linkages posted with a color photograph, about 4x6 inches. In the past these photos had been black-and-white images printed like a driver's license or ID card photo. None were smiling. Some of the men looked like they hadn't had a tie on in a very long time."

The basic explanation of how Cuban voting is set up:

1. The Cuban government has three main elected levels: municipal, provincial and national.
2. Elections begin at the municipal level, with residents in each constituency (a smaller area within a municipality) nominating between 2 and 8 candidates at public meetings held several weeks before the municipal election. Out of these candidates the constituency elects one delegate to their municipal assembly.
3. Once the municipal representatives have been elected they receive suggestions from nomination commissions for who should be elected to the provincial assembly and as the deputy to the national assembly. The municipal councils then vote on this grouping of suggested representatives.

4. This grouping is then sent to the population for ratification.

Who participates in the constituency elections? Article 132 of the Cuban Constitution ratified in 1992 states, “All Cubans over 16 years of age, men and

women alike, have the right to vote except those who: a) are mentally disabled and have been declared so by court; b) have committed a crime and because of this have lost the right to vote.” Who can be nominated as a candidate? Article 133 of the Cuban constitution states, “All Cuban citizens, men and women alike, who have full political rights can be elected. If the election is for deputies to the National Assembly of People’s Power they must be more than 18 years old.”

Who is in these ‘nomination commissions’? In accordance with Cuba’s Electoral Law, it is the municipal, provincial or national, executives of the Central Cuban Workers’ Organisation (CTC), the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR), the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP), the University Students’ Federation (FEU) and the Intermediate Level Students Federation (FEEM) who give the suggested nominations to the elected municipal representatives.

Interestingly, ballots are counted publicly, at the end of the days polling. Anyone interested in watching the vote count is free to do so, including national and foreign media, diplomats, tourists, etc. The reason for having civil society groups create a nomination commission is to make sure that groups who were traditionally excluded from elections: workers, women, Afro-Cubans and young people all have organizations representing their interests involved in the elections process.

Some of the impacts of this can be seen in an interesting article by the IPS news agency, who did a special story on Marisol Cabrera, a woman who is both the President of her municipal Assembly of People’s Power in Placetas and a member of the National Assembly of People’s Power. Some of her comments on elections in Cuba provide interesting insight from a woman’s perspective. “I wondered whether I was capable of this, it felt like a huge challenge. There was no tradition of women in this post.” She continued, “I have always been self-confident, but when I was elected president of the municipal government I had my doubts. I felt that I was on probation, and I drove myself hard. Now I don’t feel I have to be everywhere at once. We’re a team.”

The IPS article continues, “The [Cuban] system has its detractors, who argue that free elections are impossible without a multi-party system. But Cabrera says that in her view, it is one of the most democratic systems in the world. “It isn’t the governing Communist Party that nominates candidates, but local people themselves, and the election doesn’t depend on how much money candidates have,” she says.”

Also interesting is that during the Cuban municipal elections in October there were 37,328 candidates running to represent their constituency in one of Cuba’s 169 municipalities. Of this total, 10,799 of the candidates were women, which is 1,600 more women candidates than the 2005 municipal elections.



Should the US really be talking about democracy? 2007 Municipal Elections in Cuba – an overwhelming turnout!

Important to note is that, with all of Bush's talk about democracy his approval ratings currently stand at 32% according to a Gallup/USA Today poll (mid-October 2007). Indeed, I must admit, this is up from the summer, when it sat at 27%. But does that really matter? In over 100 polls taken by over 10 different organizations since January 2007 Bush has never had over a 38% approval rating. Who is the United States to judge and evaluate electoral systems and democracy, when over 40% of voters do not even come out for elections and their president doesn't even have a 50% majority approval?

Whereas the United States Federal Election Commission, shows that voter turnout has sat between 49-55% in the last 3 US elections. The President of National Electoral Commission in Cuba, María Esther Reus, announced on October 27th that Cuba's recent municipal elections had seen 96.45% of eligible voters come out to the polls. According to Reus, a total of 92.99 percent of the electoral ballots were valid, while 3.93% were left blank and 3.08% were disallowed.

On a trip to Cuba this summer with the Che Guevara Volunteer Work Brigade, we had a workshop about democracy in Cuba. I asked a question about blank ballots. The response I received was basically that, like in every country, not everyone supports the electoral system some people leave a blank ballot because they are not sure who to vote for, some because they don't approve of any candidates or the electoral system, they will never know why some ballots are cast as blank. However, no one is forced to vote and casting a blank ballot is a legal act that dissenters have a right to.

According to the BBC in the 2003 elections, "Dissidents had called on voters to hand in blank ballots, dismissing the election as a "parody" of democracy." However, only 0.86% of the votes for the 2003 provincial elections came in blank. Basically these 'dissidents', which the US, British, and other bourgeois media pay so much attention to, are a tiny minority in Cuba – and in many cases a reactionary, counter revolutionary minority funded by projects such as the US Government's "Freedom Fund for Cuba".

The vast majority of Cubans do indeed want to see improvements and changes in their country, one of the things you will hear everyone say is, a better world is possible – un mundo mejor es posible. However, this is not a request for the United States to intervene and "give" Cuba some Iraq-style military "freedom" or "democracy". They want to see these changes happen under revolutionary leadership, with their grassroots organizations, unions, youth, women and the Communist Party of Cuba at its forefront.

