

# cuba news

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*It's often difficult to find out basic facts about Cuba, yet there are many people in Australia interested in learning more. The rightwing media doesn't exactly fall over themselves to provide accurate information, so we thought we would put some information together based on questions we are often asked.*

### **Cuba Fact Sheet**

The Republic of Cuba is at the entry to the Gulf of Mexico in the Caribbean Sea. It has a population of around 11 million people and is about 90 miles off the US coast.

In 1959 the Cuban revolution established a socialist system. For 47 years now, US governments have tried to weaken and isolate Cuba, hit the most vulnerable and impose 'regime change', ie. capitalism, on the people. They count on creating hunger, sickness and chaos in the country to encourage the people to rise against Cuban socialism.

While Cuba has never attacked another country, US governments from Eisenhower to Bush, have supported terrorist actions and imposed an economic blockade. The blockade is aimed at destroying the Cuban economy. It is the longest-standing blockade in modern history and has cost the Cuban economy over US\$ 79.325 billion. Trade is restricted and some essential materials such as fuel, spare parts, machinery and certain medical supplies are expensive or unavailable. The US government also tries to enforce US laws on third-country businesses and citizens.

In Cuba, all people have access to free social services and guaranteed provision of essential goods and basic food items. Cuba fights against racism and sexism and has initiated major environmental protection. There is no

homelessness. A sign in Havana says '200 million children sleep in the streets today – not one of them is Cuban'.

The Cuban health care system is free. There is a doctor in every community, school and factory. With one doctor for every 165 people, Cuba has the best doctor-patient ratio in the world.

The Cuban economy has experienced unprecedented growth reaching 11.8% in 2005. At 2% unemployment, Cuba has lower unemployment than the USA.

The Cuban education system is free from kindergarten to university. Over 99% of Cuban children receive a secondary education. The workforce is highly educated, child labour is banned and Cuba has one of the highest literacy rates in the world.

Cuban life expectancy is 75-76 years (for both black and white people) rivaling that of developed nations. Compare this to the life expectancy of indigenous people in Australia - 56 years for men and 63 years for women.

Cuban democracy includes popular control over the army, police and other state institutions; neighborhood committees; real power for trade unions; and replaces corporate power in industry and agriculture by worker's control.

Currently, there are 9,000 students from 24 different countries studying free of charge at the Latin American School of Medical Sciences. This includes 80 students from disadvantaged communities in the US.

Since 1986, over 17,000 radiation-affected people, mostly children, from the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, have been treated without cost in Cuba.

Cuba is the only country in the world that has legislated for gender equality in all fields including the right to equality within the home. Women are represented in all sectors of society.

In Cuba, the retirement age is 55 for women and 60 for men with 50% of the highest salary over a 10 year period paid in benefit. It has one of the most advanced maternity leave laws in the world with fully paid leave for 18 weeks, followed by 60% pay until the child is one; four weeks paid vacation; free health care, education and training; and cheap housing costing less than 10% of salary. Workers are covered by collective agreements negotiated by unions. Cuban law guarantees the right to strike.

Cuba is the only country in Latin America where

since 1959, no person has been executed or “disappeared” because of their trade union activities or for other political reasons.

Within the electoral system the people have the right to choose, nominate, elect, control and **recall their representatives**. Involvement in elections is more than 95% even though voting is not compulsory.

Guantanamo Bay, the infamous US base on Cuban territory is illegally occupied by the US military under threat of war.

Cuba demonstrates the possibility of an alternative way of life to that imposed by global capitalism. One that delivers a more democratic, equitable, humane and creative society where people are valued and private profits are not the driving power. Cuba stands for everything the US powers fear and loathe.

### **Has Cuba benefited or suffered under Fidel Castro’s 47-year rule? Response by Dr Tim Anderson to Rupert Cornwell’s article in *The Independent*, 3 August 2006**

Dear Editor, Rupert Cornwell’s article on Fidel Castro’s legacy in Cuba is a notch above the average commentary on Cuba coming out of Washington. In a methodologically reassuring ‘pros and cons’ approach it acknowledges Cuba’s remarkable achievements in health and education, and correctly observes that a ‘post-Castro Cuba’ is unlikely to become a US client state. However the article contains some errors.

First the UNDP figure for Cuban GDP per capita (the 2004 report that Rupert cites) is not US\$3,600 but US\$5,259. Of course, these average income figures often tell us little, especially in a country which has free education, health, housing, childcare, and subsidised basic food. That is why it is most significant to observe that - apart from similar life expectancy - Cuba has better indicators than the US in several areas: infant mortality, adult literacy, low birth weight infants, HIV infections and inequality.

Second, the Cuban economy is hardly “stagnant” at the moment. The economic growth rate in 2005 was 11.8% according to the Cuban government, and 8% according to the CIA. Either way a very strong performance, and largely through increased trade with Latin America and China. A socialist government gets to deploy most of this surplus, and in 2006 there

was investment in much needed infrastructure, such as power grid renovation, housing and transport; as well as into the health system and biotech industry.

Third, tourism is no longer the principal foreign exchange earner, as income from medical services now roughly matches that from tourism. This fits the Cuban self-impression that, after decades of investment in education and health, their ‘comparative advantage’ is in human resources, and not just pretty beaches.

Fourth, while it is true that comparisons between Cuba and other countries can be difficult, as a researcher looking at health systems I found the Cuban data to be easily accessible and more reliable than that of some other Latin countries, such as Mexico. There is no mystery about this. The Cubans are systematic about their epidemiology, the population is medically registered, the data is published, and there is international collaboration (PAHO, WHO, UNDP) in and surveillance of the health system

Finally, the claim of “appalling” human rights violations is presented as assertion without evidence. Yet Cuba does not invade and bomb other countries, nor kill and torture its own citizens. The 2004 US State Department human rights report acknowledged that Cuba in 2003 had: “no political killings ... no reports of politically motivated disappearances”, no reports of religious repression, little discrimination, compulsory and free schooling, a universal health system, substantial artistic freedom, and no reports of torture. The arrest and jailing of 70 dissidents in early 2003 was not, as is widely claimed, for their stated anti-government views. They were charged and convicted of taking money from the US government, as part of a program to overthrow the Cuban government and constitution.

One important legacy of Fidel Castro may be that Cuban opposition figures (as distinct from Cuban-Americans), such as Osvaldo Paya, have declared they want to keep the health, education and social security systems that the Castro government has built up, oppose Bush’s Washington-based ‘transition manager’ (Caleb McCarry) and oppose the mass privatisations proposed as part of the US plan for a ‘transition to democracy’.

Best wishes,  
Dr Tim Anderson,  
Political Economy, University of Sydney

## WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT CUBA?

Sydney ACFS holds monthly meetings on the first Thursday of each month (except January) at the CEPU building, 1st floor meeting room, 741 George Street, Sydney.

All interested in finding out more about Cuba solidarity are welcome. For more information, contact us at [secretary@sydney-acfs.org](mailto:secretary@sydney-acfs.org).

To join Sydney ACFS, send \$20 or \$10 concession for your annual membership, with your name and contact details to ACFS, PO Box K364, Haymarket NSW 1240.

Don't forget, you can also access our newsletters on [www.sydney-acfs.org](http://www.sydney-acfs.org) and join various mailing lists for regular information on solidarity events around Sydney and elsewhere

### ACFS secretary's report

#### ***Fidel - leader and symbol of the revolution made by the Cuban people***

The recent illness of Fidel Castro has unleashed a deluge of spiteful wishful thinking from the mainstream media via the US government and the Miami ultra-right ratbags. Fidel is a heroic and honoured figure in Cuba but the media refuses to acknowledge that it is masses of people not individuals who make revolutions. They would love us to believe that Cuba is held in a stranglehold by one man but they've got to be dreaming to think we'd swallow that one. If Cuba really is a 'dictatorship' as some so-called journalists are claiming, it's pretty strange that the people haven't shown any sign of rising up against it. After all, there are accessible weapons in every neighbourhood to protect against the very real threat of US invasion. But the myth of one-man rule is convenient for the anti-Cuba forces, ready to attack in the event of any weakening of Cuba's defences. But they are incapable of understanding the strength of the Cuban people and their passionate defence of their socialist independence. Fidel is an elderly man and he will die one day. His death will be a huge loss of a much-loved and honoured leader of international stature. But just as the anti-apartheid movement was not only its leader, Nelson Mandela, so the Cuban revolution, made by the Cuban people is symbolised by but is not only, Fidel. In this issue there's an invitation to a concert in honour of Fidel's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday on August 13. The Sydney Salutes Fidel concert celebrates what Fidel stands for –

Cuban socialism and independence and the achievements of a society that puts people before profits. Come along and help celebrate. A rich multicultural array of artists from across Sydney will be performing at the concert, with MCs Adriana Navarro and Lex Marinos.

#### **Cuban trade Unionist Speaks in Sydney**

The July visit of Cuban trade unionist Gilda Chacon Bravo, sponsored by the Western Australian branch of the CFMEU, was very successful in raising awareness of the contrasts between the role of workers in a socialist state and their place under capitalism. Gilda spoke at a dinner attended by about 150 people at the CFMEU building in Lidcombe. Dr Tim Anderson, lecturer in Political Economy at Sydney University also spoke about the economic development of Cuba. There is very little about the recent economic growth in Cuba in the mainstream media and we were grateful to Tim for giving us such a detailed and interesting overview of what's been happening. *See also in this issue, Tim's response to an article on Cuba in The Independent.*

#### **Latin American Solidarity Conference**

The Empire's Weakest Link – Venezuela, Cuba and the Rebellion in the Americas, the 4th National Latin America Solidarity Conference, will be held in Sydney on September 30, 2006. The conference will begin on Friday evening September 29 with a public meeting featuring special guest Comandante William Izarra, a key leader of Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution, The conference aims to spread awareness and understanding about the exciting developments in Latin America, and to coordinate actions in solidarity with the continent's people. The aim is to make the conference as broad and inclusive as possible, bringing together activists from a range of progressive movements, trade unionists, academics, and progressive political & community organisations. The conference venue is yet to be confirmed. Visit [www.venezuelasolidarity.org](http://www.venezuelasolidarity.org) for updates or email [sydney@venezuelasolidarity.org](mailto:sydney@venezuelasolidarity.org).

Finally, don't forget about the annual Work / Study Brigade to Cuba leaving this year in late December. Brigadistas have the opportunity to do voluntary work with Cuban people on a co-operative farm, visit workplaces, educational, health, cultural and scientific institutions as well as museums, historical sites, beaches and mountains. There are also concerts, performances, music and dancing and free time to pursue individual interests. For more

information on the Work / Study Brigade, please contact Ingrid Paling on (02) 9716 7819 or email [ipaling@mail2me.com.au](mailto:ipaling@mail2me.com.au) or if you prefer to speak Spanish, contact Hugo Nardini on (02) 9822 5891 or email [hugo@hn.ozemail.com.au](mailto:hugo@hn.ozemail.com.au)

In solidarity, Joan Silk, Secretary, Sydney ACFS

**We demand - free the Cuban Five  
- extradite the terrorist Carriles**

In September 2006, it will be eight years since five Cuban men were arrested in the US by the FBI. The Cuban Five have been unjustly imprisoned for the "crime" of risking their lives in order to stop violent terrorist attacks organised and launched from the U.S., upon Cuba. They remain in prison, despite the fact that one year ago a circuit court ruled that their conviction should be set aside. But the government, in an extraordinary move, appealed that decision to the full court. Lawyers for the Five, including well known human rights lawyer Leonard Weinglass, reargued their case in February this year and await a new decision. September 2006 will also mark the 30th anniversary of the car-bomb murder in Washington DC of Orlando Letelier and Ronni Moffitt by Cuban counter-revolutionaries working closely with the CIA. Letelier was Chile's ambassador to the U.S. during the time that Salvador Allende was president of Chile. After the bloody CIA coup, Letelier was a leading voice in exposing the crimes of the Pinochet regime and its U.S. backers. For speaking out, he and his aide, Ronni Moffitt, were assassinated. Two weeks after the murder of Letelier and Moffitt, the same terrorist network bombed a Cuban airliner in flight over Barbados, killing all passengers. It was to stop these kind of horrific attacks that the Cuban Five — Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando González and René González — came to south Florida and infiltrated the terrorist groups which operate there with impunity. September 12 is the anniversary of the arrest of the Five. It will mark the beginning of a series of days of action extending through to October 6, the anniversary of the bombing of the Cubana Airlines flight by Luis Posada Carriles. Shamefully, the US government has resisted calls for Carriles' extradition from the US to Venezuela to stand trial for the murder of the 73 people on board the bombed plane. Actions around the world including in Sydney will demand that the US free the Five and extradite Carriles.

**Cuba Condemns Attack on Qana**

Havana August 4 (Granma) The Ministry of

Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba expresses its most energetic condemnation of the cowardly, vile and criminal attack perpetrated on the Lebanese town of Qana by the Israeli government on July 30, 2006, in which at least 60 civilians were killed.

**Fidel Message Sent to Bolivia**

La Paz, Aug 5 (Prensa Latina) Cuban Deputy President Carlos Lage on Saturday expressed a friendly and fraternal greeting to the Bolivian people on behalf of the Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro, who is recovering favorably after an intestinal operation. Lage arrived in La Paz to participate in the central activities for the establishment of the Constituent Assembly to take place on August 6 in the southern city of Sucre, Bolivia's historical capital. Lage declared that his presence in that country is a sample of the great admiration of his people and the leader of the Revolution for President Evo Morales and the struggle he heads to re-found the nation. In relation to Fidel's health, Lage said he is recovering satisfactorily and expressed thanks for the solidarity messages received from the entire world.

**Brazil Daily Warns of Cuba Attack**

Rio de Janeiro, Aug 5 (Prensa Latina) The Brazilian newspaper O Globo published Saturday an article on arrangements of a terrorist group training in Miami to attack Cuba. The text, signed by special correspondent Jose Meirelles Passos, is entitled "Ready to attack Fidel Castro's Island" and shows how elements from counterrevolutionary group Alpha-66 are training. The group, states the document, aims to encourage the creation of disobedience actions in Cuba, and conditions for a decisive military intervention to the island. Ernesto Diaz, chief of that terrorist group, told O Globo with euphoria that "a civil war in Cuba is today within the possibilities."

In his speech, Diaz stated that in addition to these military arrangements, the group tries to incite riots in the island through "the voice of Alpha-66" broadcast by Radio Mambi.

**US blockade makes internet access expensive**

June 22, 2006 (Granma)  
in 2005, Cuba paid more than \$4 million to be able to connect to the Internet via satellite, given that connectivity by undersea fiber optic cable is prohibited under the 40-year-plus U.S. blockade, said officials at the Ministry of Information Science and Communications.