



CUBA Newsletter

Spring 2006

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Contact us

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Newsletter Contributions

We welcome contributions to the Cuba Newsletter. If you would like submit an article, please contact: the Newsletter Coordinator, Gonzalo by email at: newsletter@sydney-acfs.org

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Despite Australia's 'pocket imperialism', UN votes to lift blockade

Today the UN General Assembly for the 15th time voted overwhelmingly to end the US blockade of Cuba. The blockade is an attempt to force Cuba into submission to a US puppet regime by creating suffering and hardship for the Cuban people. The Bush administration has steadily tightened the embargo. Foreign Minister Perez Roque said that the blockade had cost the island more than US\$4 billion (€3 billion) over the last year. "We don't have even a millimetre of hope that the blockade will be reduced or weakened in Bush's remaining two years," he said. "To the contrary, we are prepared for persecution against Cuba to increase. At the instigation of the US, Australia put up an amendment that attempted to divert attention from the blockade towards so-called human rights violations in Cuba ...and, no, it wasn't referring to Guantanamo. Cuba stands out in the region with not a single political execution, torture or 'disappearance' yet plumbing new depths of sycophancy, Australia acted obediently in its role described by Minister Perez Roque as a kind of "pocket imperialism". The amendment, of course failed to do anything but display the complete moral bankruptcy of its perpetrators. ACFS encourages all members and supporters to express their concern to Downer and Co. about the lies and hypocrisy displayed by their actions.

Sydney Salutes Fidel concert

A recent highlight of our activities has been the celebration of the Cuban revolution on the occasion of Fidel's birthday on August 13. This was a multicultural concert organised and supported by ACFS, the Communist Party of Australia, Amigos de Cuba, the CFMEU, the Sydney Bolivarian Circle and Resistance and a number of other individuals and groups. We had a great turn-out on the night and some fabulous music and poetry. Supporters attending included Marrickville Mayor Sam Byrne and Greens parliamentarian Lee Rhiannon. All the performers donated their services in honour of the Cuban Revolution and concert proceeds were donated to a humanitarian project in Cuba. Trade union activist and teacher Bob Treasure gave a vibrant speech highlighting the progress of the revolution. He pointed out the huge achievements in equality, universal access and high quality health and education in a poor, tiny country like Cuba and drew some contrasts with a big rich one like Australia. We ended the evening with dancing to massed Latin bands.

Latin American Conference, Free the Five Rally

Some of our recent activities include participation in the Latin American Conference in Sydney. ACFS members spoke about the Cuban Five political prisoners held in the US on trumped up charges and on a panel discussing building solidarity in Australia. With members of the Australia Venezuela Support Network and Dr. Tim Anderson, we also participated in the Free the Five rally held last month outside the US Consulate. ACFS President Peter Weitzel was one of the speakers. The rally also drew attention to the US harbouring of the convicted terrorist Luis Posada Carriles who is wanted in Venezuela for the 1976 bombing a Cabaña airliner, killing all 73 on board.

Thanks, members and supporters

Finally, a thank you to all our members and supporters for their commitment and work during the year. We are only as strong as our members and in all sorts of ways ACFS members continue to build solidarity and to show that we can learn from Cuba about building a more humane and progressive society. A particular thank you to some of our North Coast members who have been doing some great letter writing and bringing a bit of reality into some of the nastier flights of fantasy about Cuba by a local journalist.

We hope members will us at our end-of-year event (see enclosed leaflet with this newsletter) and look forward to working together in future.

In solidarity,
Joan Silk, Secretary, Sydney ACFS

LATEST NEWS ON THE BLOCKADE

The proposed amendment presented by Australia to the draft resolution entitled "Necessity of Ending the Economic, Commercial and Financial Embargo Imposed by the United States of America against Cuba", is unacceptable to the Cuban people. The decision to present such an amendment has resulted from the pressures of the Washington authorities to negatively impact the overwhelming pattern of votes in favor of the draft resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly every year on the issue and which in 2006 rose to 182 countries.

Why did the United States decide to keep this amendment secret until today? There is a simple answer to this. They cannot sustain and provide arguments for it in a public debate and have resorted to the surprise factor, seeking to confuse some and pretending to deceive others. Nor was it easy for them to find a government willing to take on the unworthy role of go-between for the imperial interests.

On October 17 2006, Cuba started to circulate the draft resolution to be adopted. From that date onwards, numerous bilateral consultations were held with the concerned delegations. Until today, no delegation has requested that our country introduce any changes whatsoever to the text of the draft – which, for all intents and purposes, is practically the same as the one adopted by the General Assembly in the last few years.

The agenda item to be debated tomorrow, November 8, is very clear and specific. Human rights issues are addressed under the relevant agenda items of this Assembly. There are specialized bodies to adopt decisions in that area, both the Third Committee and the Human Rights Council.

If the United States were really interested in the respect for and the enjoyment of the human rights of the Cuban people, it would have already ended its inhumane policy of blockade and hostility against Cuban men and women, against its elderly people and its children, for it even affects their chances of enjoying the right to food and health.

If the United States were concerned about human rights, it would have

already closed down its center for arbitrary detentions and torture in Guantánamo and would have allowed the Cuban people to exercise their right to self-determination on that portion of their territory illegally occupied by the US Naval Base.

The United States, through this amendment whose public sponsorship has been taken on by Australia, intends to legitimize the pretext that it has fabricated in order to provide continuity to and further tighten their blockade policy against the Cuban people, a policy that has been overwhelmingly rejected by the international community and which runs counter to the most basic norms of International Law. Voting in favor of the resolution presented by Cuba is also to reject the enforcement, by the United States, of a policy that is overtly extra-territorial.

Voting in favor of the US amendment presented by Australia would be equivalent to assisting in the fabrication of the pretext allegedly used to justify the blockade against Cuba and the International Law violations that it entails.

P.S. Despite Australia's posturing, on the 9 November 2006 the UN General Assembly passed for the 15th year in a row, a resolution condemning the economic, commercial and financial blockade of the US against Cuba. With 183 votes in favour and 4 against (US, Israel, Marshall Islands and Palau).

WHAT YOU CAN DO

The Australia Cuba Friendship Society is calling on all members and friends to write or email the Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, expressing outrage at Australia's position on the blockade. You can contact Downer via email: minister.downer@dfat.gov.au

or write to:

PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

We must continue to call the Howard Government to account for being blatant apologists of the Bush Administration.

TWILIGHT OF THE ASSASSINS



October 6 1976 was the date of the first act of airline terrorism in the Americas. Thirty years ago, 73 people died in the bombing of a Cuban passenger plane. Now, one alleged mastermind lives freely in Miami, while another awaits trial on other charges in Texas.

Both Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez insist the CIA was behind the bombing. Justice is yet to be as the criminal Luis Posada Carriles, a self confessed terrorist and former employee of the CIA, continues to be protected by the US Government.

30 YEARS AGO



(Picture Above) One week after that disastrous October 6 bombing of the Cuban plane in 1976, the Plaza de la Revolución was too small as more than one million Cubans shared the pain of the terrorist act.

LETTER BY GIUSTINO DI CELMO (FATHER OF FABIO DI CELMO) TO US ATTORNEY GENERAL ALBERTO GONZALEZ

Havana, September 14, 2006 Mr. Alberto Gonzalez United States Attorney General:

My name is Giustino Di Celmo. I am an 86-year-old man, and with indignation my family and I read in the papers that Judge Norbert Garney recommended the release of Luis Posada Carriles from immigration detention in El Paso, Texas.

If you do not intervene, in a few days this criminal could be freed from jail. We cannot understand how the decision was possibly made to free one of the world's most notorious terrorists, on exactly the same day that the fifth anniversary of the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers was being commemorated.

It seems to be a mockery to the pain of all of us who have been victimized by acts of terror.

My wife and I live with the pain of having lost Fabio, the youngest of our children, to one of the bombs that Luis Posada Carriles had planted in a Havana hotel. As published in The New York Times on September 12 and 13, 1998, Posada Carriles admitted to his having paid a Salvadoran mercenary to place the bomb in the Copacabana Hotel. During the interview, when the journalist asked him if he felt sorry for Fabio's death, without reservation he said "No. The Italian was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I sleep like a baby."

The man who uttered these words -- the confessed murderer of my son-- is the one who they now want to set free. Dear sir; we do not wish revenge - we ask for justice. You can make the decision to keep this terrorist in prison and have him tried for his numerous crimes, by those who demand that he be handed over to justice.

If you have children you will be better positioned to understand this plea we make before you.

DAUGHTER OF ONE OF THE "CUBAN FIVE" IN NASSAU



Irma Gonzalez, daughter of Rene Gonzalez one of five Cubans serving sentences in the United States arrived in Nassau yesterday saying she wants the Bahamian public to know the truth about her father's situation. She was met by members of a

recently formed group known as "The Bahamian Friends of the Cuban Five". They are joining an international campaign for the case of the five to be examined for human rights violations, claiming the original trial was unfair.

SYDNEY PICKET OUTSIDE THE US CONSULATE DEMANDS "FREE THE CUBAN FIVE!"

To mark the international month of action to free the Cuban Five, activists in Sydney held a small but vocal picket outside the US consulate in Sydney on 13 October 2006. The thirty protesters condemned the imprisonment of the Cuban Five and demanded their freedom.

Dr Tim Anderson from the University of Sydney and Peter Weitzel from the ACFS delivered powerful speeches, highlighting the hypocrisy of the US Government's position on the Cuban Five, who were working to stop terrorism, while the US Government continues to shelter known terrorists such as Luis Posada Carriles.



Similar protests were held around the world to mark the international month of solidarity with the Cuban Five – US protest at Washington pictured above.

ATLANTA COURT REQUESTS MORE INFORMATION ON THE CUBAN FIVE CASE

Havana, Oct 26 (ACN) The Eleventh Circuit of Appeals of Atlanta requested supplementary reports from both the Defense and the Prosecution in the case of the five Cuban antiterrorist fighters, who have been unjustly imprisoned in the US for eight years now.

Nuris Pineiro, the legal adviser to the relatives of the Cuban Five —Gerardo Hernandez, Antonio Guerrero, Rene Gonzalez, Ramon Labañino and Fernando Gonzalez—, said during Wednesday's TV program The Round Table, that on October 19th the US judicial authority requested both

parties to provide more information about the appeal.

The defense team representing the Cuban Five appealed to the court on 24 arguments. So far the panel of judges has ruled only on one, the argument that stated that Miami was not the proper place to conduct the trial.

On August 9, the court overturned a ruling they had made a year earlier when they pronounced in favor of a new trial outside of Miami.

The Cuban Five defense attorneys are now faced with a November 18 deadline to present their supplementary reports. Afterwards, the prosecution team representing the US government will have 30 days to present theirs.

Nuris Piñeiro also spoke about the increasing lack of communication between these five men and their families, as well as about the rising international solidarity with their struggle.

She added that last October 2, the United States once again denied a visa to Adriana Perez to go and visit her husband Gerardo Hernandez, based on the argument that her presence in the country constitutes a threat to national security.



CUBA DEFENDS ITS RIGHTS TO COHIBA CIGARS

Havana, Nov 7 (ACN) Cuba is determined to stand up for its right to the Cohiba Cigar brand, which American transnationals are trying to seize with the help of the Bush administration, said Habanos S.A Vice President Manuel Garcia.

The executive of the joint venture, a world leader in the distribution of the famous Cuban cigars, pointed out that it is a matter of principles to continue defending the Cuban hallmark "whenever there is a legal framework where we can claim our product."

In a press conference, Garcia explained that the Cohiba brand was created by Cubans, "along with the Revolution," adding, "we will continue fighting for our right," reported the Opciones weekly newspaper.

He explained that the company's sales have continued a steady rise over the first nine months of this year, and the results for this period are even better than expected, despite the strong worldwide campaign against smoking.

Garcia said that even though various European countries have been implementing measures against the habit, the Habanos Corporation has grown in relation to the same period last year.

During the press conference, the executive announced the celebration of the 9th Festival of the Habano, which will kick off February 26, 2007. He said the event will be led by the Cohiba, Montecristo, Romeo y Julieta, Partagas, Hoyo de Monterrey, H. Upmann and Jose L. Piedra brands.

Experts and regular participants — including smokers, cigar dealers and Habano lovers— have named the Habano Festival the world's most important public relations event in the arena of premium cigars.

Garcia told the press that Cuba has been able to introduce itself in all markets of the world except the United States, where the Cuban cigars can not be marketed because of prohibitions against US trade blockade with the island.

MEXICO OPENS EYE SURGERY CENTRE DONATED BY CUBA

Havana, Oct 27 (ACN) Cuba donated a modern ophthalmologic centre to Mexico, which was inaugurated on Thursday by the governor of the state of Michoacán, Lazaro Cardenas.

The centre, which was integrated into the local general hospital, has capacity to offer free-of-charge eye surgery to thousands of patients, PL news agency reported.

The setting up of the center in Mexico followed the surgical eye treatment in Cuba of 2,500 Mexicans, said Cuban Ambassador to that Central American nation Jorge Bolaños, who noted that the center is outfitted with modern technology.

After mentioning the collaboration Havana maintains with other nations, the ambassador pointed out that without good health it is difficult to achieve development goals.

CUBA DEMANDS DISCLOSURE OF U.S. SECRET ANTI-CUBA PLAN

Havana, Nov 8 (ACN) Today at the United Nations General Assembly, Cuba urged US President George W. Bush to make public the content of

the secret annex of his cabinet's most recent project against the island, the Bush Plan for Transition in Cuba.

Speaking at the UN headquarters, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque pointed out a peculiarity in the 93-page document, a secret annex that cannot be made public for "security reasons" or for "their effective accomplishment."

Perez Roque asked if this secret section includes plans for the assassination of high-ranking Cuban officials, more terrorist attacks or a new military aggression, reported Prensa Latina.

In his speech before the UN General Assembly, the Cuban diplomat presented for the 15th consecutive year the draft resolution entitled, "Necessity of putting an end to the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States against Cuba."

Perez Roque briefed the audience on the latest White House aggressions to reinforce the blockade, including an increase of illegal radio and television broadcasts and the implementation of harsh penalties against individuals and companies that violate the blockade.

He also talked about Washington's measures against the exchange between US and Cuban churches, and the prohibition of sending humanitarian aid to religious organizations on the island.

Likewise, the Cuban Minister criticized US efforts to hinder cooperation programs developed by Cuba in the field of healthcare. He said that Washington might attempt to blockade Cuba from acquiring the necessary medical equipment.

HAVE YOU RENEWED YOUR ACFS MEMBERSHIP LATELY?

Your membership fee and donations directly support our solidarity work and community projects in Cuba. Every cent towards our work counts!

Enclosed is a \$20/\$10 (concession) for 1 year membership.

Enclosed is a donation of _____ towards the work of the Society.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Please return to ACFS, PO Box K364, HAYMARKET NSW 1240