



*The Newsletter of the Canadian Network on Cuba
Over 60 Years of Friendship
- Issue 3 - Fall 2010 -*

Cuba for Haiti Fundraising Campaign An Important Achievement!

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A Cuban trained Haitian doctor, a member of the Henry Reeve Emergency Medical Contingent, treats a child after the earthquake in Haiti

*Keith Ellis**

Our Cuba for Haiti fundraising campaign has been going very well. Thanks to our efforts and to the generosity of fellow Canadians, the Canadian Network on Cuba has been able to send \$143,231.63 so far to the account established in Havana to help fund the outstanding work being done in Haiti by the Cuban-led team, composed mainly of Cuban doctors, together with Cuban-trained Haitian doctors, and other international graduates of Cuba's Latin American School of Medicine. We must continue to bear in mind the fact that Cuba has promised Haiti the new health care system so badly needed by that country, and that Cuba takes such promises very seriously.

In the meantime, urgent challenges continue to be faced by the Cuban-led team, especially with the departure from Haiti of several other medical teams. In addition, the threat of diseases such as diphtheria is looming; the need for the treatment of patients with

ailments related—and not directly related—to the earthquake and for post operative care in its aftermath, are all areas of pressing concern. Cuba has already sent epidemiologists, physical therapists, psychologists, art therapists and artists to meet some of these urgent needs. With its characteristic humanitarian imagination, Cuba cannot ignore, for example, the great need for prostheses as a consequence of the many amputations necessitated by earthquake injuries.

Cuba has made plans to build a laboratory in Haiti to meet this need. Such commitments are heavy economic burdens for Cuba. The country has spent more than \$400 million so far in direct aid to Haiti. This is without taking into account the expenses that have been ongoing since 1998, when Cuba began its medical mission in Haiti, expenses which have included the medical training to graduation of 620 Haitian medical students. This aid has all along been unstintingly given, even in unanticipated circumstances. For example, Cuba was operating a medical school in Haiti that had achieved an enrolment of 300 students when the coup, led by the United States, France and Canada, overthrew the elected government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The Americans billeted their soldiers in the school, putting an end to its functioning. Cuba responded by transferring the whole student body to a medical school in Santiago de Cuba.

It is necessary for us to continue our campaign with full zeal, with agile imagination and in the spirit of Cuba, with an acute awareness of clever propaganda that can subtly undermine our efforts. For exam-

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www.canadiannetworkoncuba.ca



What is the Canadian Network on Cuba?



Canadian Network on Cuba Executive members:

Co-Chairs & Newsletter Editors:

Isaac Saney
Tamara Hansen

Secretary:

Sharon Skup

Projects and Campaigns:

Dave Bleakney
Rolf Gerstenberger
Dave Thomas
Ray Viaud

Thank you to all the member groups who submitted articles, ideas, and reports to this issue of North of Havana!

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This issue of North of Havana was designed by members of Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC)

To contact
the Canadian Network on Cuba:
cnc@canadiannetworkoncuba.ca

Isaac Saney, CNC Co-Chair and
National Spokesperson:
902-449-4967

Tamara Hansen, CNC Co-Chair
and Quebec Liaison:
778-882-5223

CNC DECLARATION

Since the early days of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, many Canadians and Canadian organizations have supported the far-reaching and progressive achievements of the Cuban people. A number of these individuals and groups came together in the fall of 2002 to establish the Canadian Network on Cuba (CNC). The CNC believes that Cuba's efforts to eliminate illiteracy, poverty, racism and gender inequality through measures such as universal education and health care, its internationalist compassion, vision and dedication, its commitment to the individual, the community and to democracy--all these achievements deserve to be defended. And we also believe they must be actively defended because Cuban sovereignty has been continually threatened by a number of governments, particularly that of the U.S.A. These threats have been military, e.g., an invasion and countless acts of terrorism, and economic, e.g., the illegal and immoral Blockade. Just as we defend Canada's right to self-determination, so, too, we support Cuba's sovereign right to choose its own path to development, without outside pressure or interference.

OBJECTIVES OF THE CANADIAN NETWORK ON CUBA

We are committed to the strengthening of friendship and solidarity between the peoples of Canada and Cuba. To this end, we work with the Cuban Institute for Friendship Amongst the Peoples (ICAP) and other international and national partners in order to promote social, cultural, political and economic relations between Canada and Cuba on the basis of mutual respect and non-interference. We:

- * Initiate, coordinate and cooperate in cultural, educational, political and aid campaigns and projects involving Canada and Cuba.

- * Counter media and other distortions of Cuban reality by disseminating information about the achievements of the Cuban revolution in areas such as education, public health, culture, democracy and human rights.

- * Work to improve Canadian foreign policy on Cuba.



*Approved at the
CNC Convention
of September 4, 2006*

Canadian Network on Cuba Honours Cuba's Dreamcatcher Role in Haiti

**Isaac Saney
& Tamara Hansen**

On May 5, 2010 a moving ceremony was held in Havana, Cuba to mark the continuing success of the Canadian Network on Cuba (CNC)'s Cuba for Haiti Campaign. The campaign, launched in January 2010 in response to the earthquake disaster has thus far raised over \$100,000 to support the Cuban Henry Reeves Medical Brigade in Haiti. Participating in the event, held at the headquarters of the Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos (Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples - ICAP), were Raciél Proenxa Rodríguez, Director of Economic Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Commerce and Investment, Isaac Saney, Co-Chair and National Spokesperson of the CNC, officials of ICAP, members of the Canada-Cuba solidarity movement and Haitian youth studying in Cuba. Proenxa thanked the CNC for its contribution and explained where the money is being spent.

At the time of the earthquake in Haiti, 402 Cuban internationalists, 302 of them medical personnel, had already been helping Haitians, Proenxa pointed out. Since the earthquake, he explained, Cuban cooperation has grown to 1,304 persons, with 679 Cubans, and 625 graduates and students from 26 other countries, trained and educated free of cost at Cuba's Latin American School of Medicine. He further noted that as of May 4, 2010, 330,306 patients have been treated, with 8,428 surgeries performed. Proenxa emphasized that Cuban assistance encompasses more than just the provision of immediate medical attention. It is now also focused on strengthening and rebuilding the Haitian healthcare system. Toward those ends, the Cuban medical and paramedical internationalists work in 56 hospitals and healthcare centres, and have installed and equipped 30 rooms, in which 85,401 patients have

been treated.

On behalf of the CNC, Saney stressed that the Cuban internationalist mission not only assists the Haitian people at a time of great need, but underscores the magnitude of the island's generosity and national altruism. In this regard, the success of the Cuba for Haiti Campaign lies not only in the money that has been raised but also in the



Mr. Proenxa Rodríguez, along with 5 Haitian Youth Studying in Cuba, holding the Dreamcatcher gift from the CNC. On the upper right are Isaac Saney co-chair of the CNC and Nels Larson, Chair of NSCUBA.

possibility it offers to participate in a truly humane solidarity project, Saney said. Saney recalled that in 1998 at a meeting between then Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and Cuban President Fidel Castro, the leader of the Cuban Revolution proposed a joint Cuba-Canada cooperative project to rebuild the Haitian healthcare system. Cuba could provide the personnel and Canada could contribute the material resources required, Castro pointed out. Even though Chrétien ignored the proposal, the CNC decided to take it up, Saney said.

The fundraising for Haiti via the Cuban internationalist mission has been very warmly received by Canadians, he said. Despite being ignored by the Canadian monopoly media, the cam-

paign demonstrates the confidence that the Canadian people have in Cuba, he added. He pointed out that some of the contributions have been given by people simply on the grounds that if the money they want to give to Haiti goes through Cuba, they feel confident it will safely reach its destination and not be squandered in corruption or misused. This shows the respect and

admiration of Canadians for the Cuban people and their efforts to build and defend a society centred on independence, justice and human dignity, Saney said.

Saney concluded by presenting Proenxa with a dreamcatcher made by the Mi'kmaq people of Nova Scotia. Dedicated to the Henry Reeves Medical Brigade, Saney noted that just as the dreamcatcher allows only good dreams to pass through while destroying nightmares, so too the Cuban medical and educational internationalist missions

stop the nightmares of disease and illiteracy from reaching the people, while demonstrating the alternatives which permit people to realize their deepest aspirations, and that another better world is possible.

For information about the Cuba for Haiti campaign of the CNC please visit: www.canadiannetworkoncuba.ca or to make a contribution contact: cnc@canadiannetworkoncuba.ca

To contribute directly make cheques out to 'The Mackenzie-Papineau Memorial Fund,' indicating on the cheque memo line 'Cuba for Haiti' and mail to: Mackenzie-Papineau Memorial Fund Friends of the Ma Pap Battalion (Int'l Brigades), Att: S. Skup 56 Riverwood Terrace, Bolton, ON L7E 1S4.

One of the World's Best Kept Secrets Cuban Medical Aid to Haiti



*Emily J. Kirk**
*and John M. Kirk***

Media coverage of Cuban medical cooperation following the disastrous recent earthquake in Haiti was sparse indeed. International news reports usually described the Dominican Republic as being the first to provide assistance, while Fox News sang the praises of U.S. relief efforts in a report entitled "U.S. Spearheads Global Response to Haiti Earthquake"-a common theme of its extensive coverage. CNN also broadcast hundreds of reports, and in fact one focused on a Cuban doctor wearing a T-shirt with a large image of Che Guevara--and yet described him as a "Spanish doctor".

In general, international news reports ignored Cuba's efforts. By March 24, CNN for example, had 601 reports on their news website regarding the earthquake in Haiti-of which only 18 (briefly) referenced Cuban assistance. Similarly, between them the New York Times and the Washington Post had 750 posts regarding the earthquake and relief efforts, though not a single one discusses in any detail any Cuban support. In reality, however, Cuba's medical role had been extremely important-and had been present since 1998.

Cuba and Haiti Pre-Earthquake

In 1998, Haiti was struck by Hurricane Georges. The hurricane caused 230 deaths, destroyed 80% of the crops, and left 167,000 people homeless.[1] Despite the fact that Cuba and Haiti had not had diplomatic relations in over 36 years, Cuba immediately offered a multifaceted agreement to assist them, of which the most important was medical cooperation.

Cuba adopted a two-pronged public health approach to help Haiti. First, it agreed to maintain hundreds of doctors in the country for as long as necessary, working wherever they were posted by the Haitian government. This was particularly significant as Haiti's health care system was easily the worst in the Americas, with life expectancy of only 54 years in 1990 and one out of every 5 adult deaths due to AIDS, while 12.1% of children died from preventable intestinal infectious diseases.[2]

In addition Cuba agreed to train Haitian doctors in Cuba, providing that they would later return and take the places of the Cuban doctors (a process of "brain gain" rather than "brain drain"). Significantly, the students were selected from

non-traditional backgrounds, and were mainly poor. It was thought that, because of their socio-economic background, they fully understood their country's need for medical personnel, and would return to work where they were needed. The first cohort of students began studying in May, 1999 at the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM).

By 2007, significant change had already been achieved throughout the country. It is worth noting that Cuban medical personnel were estimated to be caring for 75% of the population.[3] Studies by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) indicated clear improvements in the health profile since this extensive Cuban medical cooperation began.

Improvements in Public Health in Haiti, 1999-2007[4]

Health Indicator	1999	2007
Infant Mortality, per 1,000 live births	80	33
Child Mortality Under 5 per 1,000	135	59.4
Maternal Mortality per 100,000 live births	523	285
Life Expectancy (years)	54	61

Cuban medical personnel had clearly made a major difference to the national health profile since 1998, largely because of their proactive role in preventive medicine-as can be seen below.

Selected Statistics on Cuban Medical Cooperation Dec. 1998-May 2007[5]

Visits to the doctor	10,682,124
Doctor visits to patients	4,150,631
Attended births	86,633
Major and minor surgeries	160,283
Vaccinations	899,829
Lives saved (emergency)	210,852

By 2010, at no cost to medical students, Cuba had trained some 550 Haitian doctors, and is at present training a further 567. Moreover, since 1998 some 6,094 Cuban medical personnel have worked in Haiti. They had given over 14.6 million consultations, carried out 207,000 surgical operations, including 45,000 vision restoration operations through their Operation Miracle programme, attended 103,000 births, and taught literacy to 165,000. In fact at the time of the earthquake there were 344 Cuban medical personnel there. All of this medical cooperation, it must be remembered, was provided over an 11-year period before the earthquake of January 12, 2010.[6]



Cuba and Haiti Post-Earthquake

The earthquake killed at least 220,000, injured 300,000 and left 1.5 million homeless.[7] Haitian Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive described it as "the worst catastrophe that has occurred in Haiti in two centuries".[8]

International aid began flooding in. It is important to note the type of medical aid provided by some major international players. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), for example, an organization known for its international medical assistance, flew in some 348 international staff, in addition to the 3,060 national staff it already employed. By March 12 they had treated some 54,000 patients, and completed 3,700 surgical operations.[9]

Canada's contribution included the deployment of 2,046 Canadian Forces personnel, including 200 DART personnel. The DART (Disaster Assistance Response Team) received the

most media attention, as it conducted 21,000 consultations-though it should be noted they do not treat any serious trauma patients or provide surgical care. Indeed, among the DART personnel, only 45 are medical staff, with others being involved in water purification, security, and reconstruction. In total, the Canadians stayed for only 7 weeks.[10]

The United States government, which received extensive positive media attention, sent the USNS "Comfort", a 1,000-bed hospital ship with a 550-person medical staff and stayed for 7 weeks, in which time they treated 871 patients, performing 843 surgical operations.[11] Both the Canadian and US contributions were important-while they were there.

Lost in the media shuffle was the fact that, for the first 72 hours following the earthquake, Cuban doctors were in fact the main medical support for the country. Within the first 24 hours, they had completed 1,000 emergency surgeries, turned their living quarters into clinics, and were running the only medical centers in the country, including 5 comprehensive diagnostic centers (small hospitals) which they had previously built. In addition another 5 in various stages of construction were also used, and they turned their ophthalmology center into a field hospital-which treated 605 patients within the first 12 hours following the earthquake.[12]

Cuba soon became responsible for some 1,500 medical personnel in Haiti. Of those, some 344 doctors were already working in Haiti, while over 350 members of the "Henry Reeve" Emergency Response Medical Brigade were sent by Cuba following the earthquake. In addition, 546 graduates of ELAM from a variety of countries, and 184 5th and 6th year Haitian ELAM students joined, as did a number of Venezuelan medical personnel. In the final analysis, they were working throughout Haiti in 20 rehabilitation centers and 20 hospitals, running 15 operating theatres, and had vaccinated 400,000. With reason Fidel Castro stated, "we send doctors, not soldiers".[13]

A glance at the medical role of the various key players is instructive.

Comparative Medical Contributions in Haiti by March 23[14]

MSF	Canada	United States	Cuba
No. of Staff			
3,408	45	550	1,504
No. of Patients			
54,000	21,000	871	227,143
No. of Surgeries			
3,700	0	843	6,499

These comparative data, compiled from several sources, are particularly telling as they indicate the significant (and widely

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ignored) medical contribution of the Cubans. In fact, they have treated 4.2 times the number of patients compared with MSF (which has over twice as many workers, as well as significantly more financial resources), and 10.8 times more than the Canadian DART team. (As noted, Canadian and US medical personnel had left by March 9). Also notable is the fact that the Cuban medical contingent was roughly three times the size of the American staff, although they treated 260.7 times more patients than U.S. medical personnel. Clearly, there have been significant differences in the nature of medical assistance provided.

It is also important to note that approximately one-half of the Cuban medical staff was working outside the capital, Port-au-Prince, where there was significant damage as well. Many medical missions could not get there, however, due to transportation issues. Significantly, the Cuban medical brigade also worked to minimize epidemics by making up 30 teams to educate communities on how to properly dispose of waste, as well as how to minimize public health risks. Noted Cuban artist Kcho also headed a cultural brigade made up of clowns, magicians and dancers, supported by psychologists and psychiatrists, to deal with the trauma experienced by Haitian children.

Perhaps most impressively, following the growing concern for the health of the country, due to a poor and now largely destroyed health care system Cuba, working with ALBA (the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América) countries, presented to the WHO an integral program to reconstruct the health care system of Haiti. Essentially, they are offering to rebuild the entire health care system. It will be supported by ALBA and Brazil, and run by Cubans

and Cuban-trained medical staff. This is to include hospitals, polyclinics, and medical schools. In addition, the Cuban government has offered to increase the number of Haitian students attending medical school in Cuba. This offer of medical cooperation represents an enormous degree of support for Haiti.[15] Sadly, this generous offer has not been reported by international media.

While North American media might have ignored Cuba's role, Haiti has not. A pointed remark was made by Haitian President Mr. René Préval, who noted, "you did not wait for an earthquake to help us".[16] Similarly, Haiti's Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive has also repeatedly noted that the first three countries to help were Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela.

Sadly (but not surprisingly), while Cuba's efforts to assist Haiti have increased, international efforts have continued to dwindle. The head of the Cuban medical mission, Dr. Carlos Alberto García, summed up well the situation just two weeks after the tragedy: "many foreign delegations have already begun to leave, and the aid which is arriving now is not the same it used to be. Sadly, as always happens, soon another tragedy will appear in another country, and the people of Haiti will be forgotten, left to their own fate". Significantly, he added "However we will still be here long after they have all gone." [17] This in fact has been the case. Canadian forces, for example, returned home and the USNS Comfort sailed several weeks ago. By contrast, Cuban President Raúl Castro noted: "we have accompanied the Haitian people, and we will continue with them whatever time is needed, no matter how many years, with our very modest support".[18]

A representative of the World Council of Churches to the United Nations made the telling comment that "humanitarian



Cuban Medical Team in Haiti 2010, "One of the world's best kept secrets."



aid could not be human if it was only publicized for 15 days”.[19] Today Cuba, with the support of ALBA and Brazil, is working not to build a field hospital, but rather a health care system. And, while international efforts have been largely abandoned, the Cuban staff and Cuban-trained medical staff will remain, as they have done for the past 11 years, for as long as necessary. This is a story that international media have chosen not to tell—now that the television cameras have gone. Yet it is an extraordinary story of true humanitarianism, and of great success in saving lives since 1998. Moreover, in light of Cuba’s success in providing public health care (at no cost to the patients) to millions of Haitians, this approach to preventive, culturally sensitive, low cost and effective medicine needs to be told. That significant contribution to this impoverished nation, and Cuba’s ongoing commitment to its people, clearly deserve to be recognized. Until then it will sadly remain as one of the world’s best-kept secrets.

** Emily J. Kirk will be an M.A. student in Latin American Studies at Cambridge University in September.*

*** John Kirk is a professor of Latin American Studies at Dalhousie University, Canada. Both are working on a project on Cuban medical internationalism sponsored by Canada’s Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). Professor Kirk co-wrote the book “Cuba’s Medical Internationalism: Origins, Evolution and Goals” (Palgrave Macmillan). He spent most of February and March accompanying the Henry Reeve Brigade in El Salvador, and working with the Brigada Medica Cubana in Guatemala.*

Continued from cover

ple, U.S. sources, knowing of the effectiveness of Cuban humanitarian efforts, have placed in U.S. newspapers items that have suggested that the United States is cooperating with Cuba in its work in Haiti. This kind of “information,” which is in fact completely false, implies a genuine positive U.S. internationalism of humanitarianism and cooperativeness that gives undue credit to the U.S.. It also tends to make any Cuban opposition to U.S. activities seem like obstinate obstructionism. It is certainly harmful to our fundraising efforts, since it gives the impression that, with the great material resources that the United States can potentially command to help Cuba’s work in Haiti, our efforts to support Cuba to help Haiti are not of vital importance. In fact, these great material resources are chimeral for Haitians, since the substantial amounts pledged to Haiti by the U.S. (and other wealthy countries) have not been reaching Haiti, unless one counts as part of those amounts the money that pays for keeping 20,000 U.S. troops in that country. We must remember that, within 24 hours of the occurrence of the earthquake, Cuban doctors had attended to 1,109 Haitian patients and that the U.S. medical team, represented by the U.S. hospital ship USNS Comfort, spent nearly two months in a Haitian harbour giving very useful aid to only 871 patients.

Our campaign has been well supported throughout Canada. Of the total collected, \$90,000 have come from the CCFA-Toronto, in part because of one large contribution of \$42,000. Please remember that the monies that have been donated to the Cuba for Haiti campaign are being spent on pressing needs and that there is a constant need for these funds. Remember too to tell potential donors that the Cuba for Haiti campaign represents the most effec-

tive way they can use their money to help Haiti, while giving them the same charitable tax relief benefit offered by other less efficient charities that are fundraising for Haiti. They should make their donations payable to the **Mackenzie-Papineau Memorial Fund**, taking care to write “**Cuba for Haiti**” on their cheque’s memo line, and mail their cheque to The Mackenzie-Papineau Memorial Fund, Att: Sharon Skup, 56 Riverwood Terrace, Bolton, ON L7E 1S4. A charitable receipt will be issued to them by the Mackenzie-Papineau Memorial Fund (*Charitable Org – Revenue Canada Reg. #88876 9197RR0001*).

The **Cuba for Haiti** contributions go into a special account in Cuba, ensuring that **100% of all donations** are used for medical support and aid to Haiti. We have no administrative expenses. All work on this campaign is voluntary. We are working directly with the Cuban Embassy in Ottawa and the Consulate General in Toronto.

I wonder sometimes if some of the funds raised should be kept in reserve in case the hurricane season proves difficult this year; but the Cubans say no: that Haiti is of the utmost urgency.

I thank Sharon Skup, the treasurer of the Canadian Network on Cuba, for her skillful and energetic work on behalf of the campaign.

** Keith Ellis is the Coordinator of the CNC’s Cuba for Haiti Campaign*



The Terry Fox Family Visits Cuba

Elizabeth Hill*
and Paula Lorrondo**

"Rolly, Judith and I will always be grateful for the opportunity to travel to your beautiful country that keeps alive Terry's dream." Betty Fox told the participants at the first meeting in Havana. The Fox family was in Cuba in March for the 12th Annual Terry Fox run in Cuba.

The first morning they met with the planners of their visit: INDER (Cuban Sports and Culture organization) and MINREX (Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Also attending were representatives of Canadian Embassy in Havana.

Mr. Carlos from the Cuban Sports and Culture organization (INDER) told the family that when they arrived at the airport, there was an important baseball game being played, and their arrival was announced on the televised game, so now 50% of Cubans know they are in Cuba. He told how 30,000 volunteers help organize the run and are very excited. "The star shines" he said "because it is exposed. What Terry did is poetry, he knew, from my view, what he was doing. For the rest of us in sport, we know the suffering he must have gone through every hour"

CCFA Toronto worked for three months with Jorge Soberon and Raul Delgado at the Cuban Consulate in Toronto in order to achieve this visit and everything was very well coordinated with the Cuban Government and the Canadian embassy in Havana. The CCFA expresses its appreciation to the Canadian Auto Workers who provided the Air Canada return tickets for the family from Vancouver to Toronto. We also would like to give a special thank you to Bob



Terry Fox Run. Cuba, March 21, 2009

Reid and his team at Sherritt Gordon, for helping finance the Fox family visit to Cuba, and the Sherritt team who enthusiastically participated at the run.

Five members of the CCFA executive participated in the Terry Fox run in Havana -Elizabeth Hill, Paula Larrondo, John Richmond, Sean Smith and Irene Kuusela. It was a very inspiring moment to hear Mrs. Fox speaking to the participants and broadcast over the radio to millions of Cubans. Mr. Fox had the honour of firing the starting pistol at 10 A.M. which began simultaneously across Cuba, the largest Terry Fox run outside Canada.

At the run, Betty signed people's shirts for over an hour, and an elderly Cuban who was a marathon runner many years ago, gave Mr. Fox the last medal he had achieved, as a way of paying respect to Terry.

In addition to the run itself, the family visited the Latin American School of Medicine, Institute of Oncology, Tarara where over 20,000 Ukrainian children from Chernobyl have been treated free of charge, a National Symphony Orchestra concert honoring Terry Fox, an art sale sponsored by the Canadian Embassy in Havana, and elementary and secondary

schools as well as media interviews.

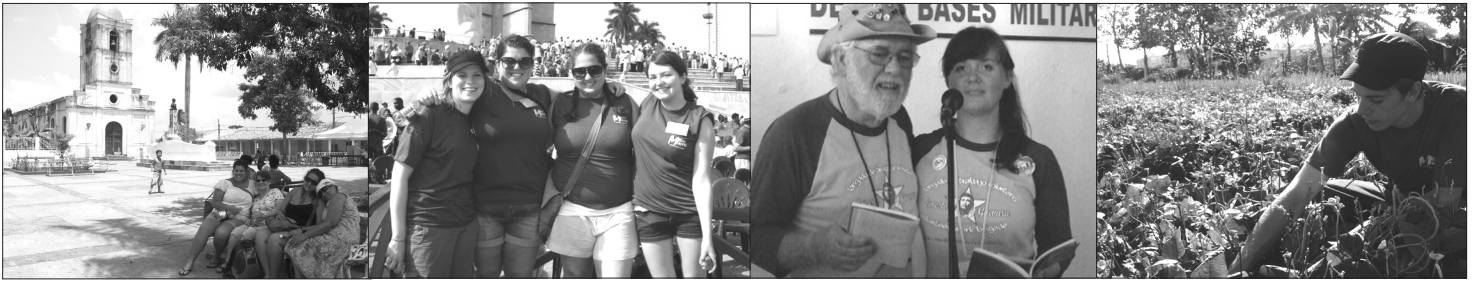
Each school had activities prepared by the students which really impressed the family.

Students the family met at elementary, secondary and university level felt honoured to meet Terry's family. Betty Fox particularly enjoyed meeting young students and telling them the story of her son Terry and his own battle against cancer and his dream to raise funds for research to find a cure and help others.

Everywhere Betty was escorted she was stopped by Cubans to thank her for having Terry and being his mother, and she was praised for her son adopting her values. The CCFA looks forward to following up with the Fox Foundation on some of the projects that were born from this trip around cancer research.

** Elizabeth Hill is a founding member and currently President of CCFA Toronto, and was a public school trustee for 18 years.*

*** Paula Larrondo is on the CCFA Executive, is a medical social worker and has been doing solidarity projects with Cuba for many years.*



Join the Ernesto Che Guevara Volunteer Work Brigade in Cuba! 2010 Che Guevara Brigade, a Great Success!

Tamara Hansen*

On April 28, 2010, 33 Brigadistas landed in Havana for the 18th Ernesto Che Guevara Volunteer Work Brigade, for three weeks of volunteering, education and fun. Some Brigadistas reunited, familiar from previous trips, but most were meeting each other for the first time. They came from all over Canada: British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia, and were joined by two international friends: from the United States and Mexico. It was a record breaking Brigade for its diversity of age groups with a young Brigadista of only seven, and a Brigadista who turned 70 while in Cuba! For the second year the Coordinator of the brigade was Tamara Hansen, co-chair of the Canadian Network on Cuba (CNC). Also joining the Brigade was Dave Thomas who is on the CNC Executive and is President of the CCFA - Niagara.

The Che Brigade was welcomed with open arms, *besos* and *abrazos* (kisses and hugs) to the Julio Antonio Mella International Camp (CIJAM). There we met some of our energetic Cuban hosts with the Cuban Institute of friendship with the Peoples (ICAP) – Raul, Esperanza and Juan Carlos. Set in the red-dirt and fertile flats of Havana Province, CIJAM is the home of the Brigade only 40 minutes outside downtown Havana.

Within the first days of arrival, the Che Brigade was honored to participate in the celebration of International Workers' Day where two million Cubans marched through the city of Havana united for a better world. Small boys waved flags from the shoulders of their fathers, university students marched proudly with their federation, a gigantic contingent of 20,000 women from the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) chanted powerfully and held up pictures of

women who fought for rights and equality all over the world. For the Brigadistas, the experience was irreplaceable.

The next day, the Che Brigade participated in an International Solidarity Conference held at Cuba's grand convention hall. Over 300 people gathered to express their solidarity with Cuba and were also able to hear a dynamic speech from Ricardo Alarcon, President of Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power.

When the majority of the Brigade travelled to Veradero for three days, a three person delegation of the Che Brigade was honored to travel to Guantanamo Province to participate in the First International Seminar Against Foreign Military Bases.

After enjoying the sun in Veradero, and a brief return to CIJAM, it was time to depart for Pinar del Rio Province.

Pinar del Rio would be our base for the next 12 days. On the weekdays we woke up and put on gardening clothes for a morning of work in one of the city's *Organiponicos* (Urban Organic Gardens). We worked before it got too hot – picking carrots, weeding, and planting new seeds – all under the direction of our Cuban co-workers. This was an excellent time to really share with the farmers and exchange our life experiences, learning from one another not only about plants and gardens, but about Cuba and Canada.

During the afternoons and on the weekends we continued a dynamic program of learning and exchange with many different sectors of Cuba society. Sharing important meetings with the Municipal Assembly of People's Power, the Union of Young Communists (UJC), the Cuban Central Trade Union (CTC) and the "Abel Santamaría Cuadrado" Ophthalmology Centre. We also had lots of fun visiting



the vistas of Viñales, the *Cueva del Indios* (Indian Caves), the Mural of Pre-history, *La Casa del Habano* Cigar Factory and a fantastic block party with the Cuban Federation of Women (FMC).

Our trip to Cuba would not have been complete without a meeting with the families of the Cuban Five political prisoners held in US prisons, spending free time in downtown Havana, and cultural performances at ICAP's *Casa de la Amistad* (House of Friendship).

Our final night in Cuba was "Brigade Night" where Brigadistas work together to provide entertainment and food for our new-found Cuban friends at CIJAM. This year we were lucky because our Cuban friends at the Cuban Rap Agency *Obsesión* agreed to come and provide the evening's entertainment, which was of course alongside some great performances from the Brigadistas themselves.

Every year the Brigade experience is unforgettable. Lifelong friendships are formed and everyone comes away with a new perspective of love and solidarity with the Cubans we were able to share so much with on our journey. We come back ready to join the people of Cuba in the struggle against the US blockade and to Free the Cuban Five, having learned so much about their reality and many of us planning to return as soon as possible!

For more information go to:

www.canadiannetworkoncuba.ca/brigade
<http://brigadacheguevara.wordpress.com>

* Tamara Hansen is a co-chair of the Canadian Network on Cuba as well as the national coordinator of the Che Brigade.

Cuba and South African Liberation: The Unknown Story

Isaac Saney*

CUBA's direct, critical and extensive role in the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa is little known in the West. November 5th, 2005 marks the 30th anniversary of Cuba's deployment of troops, at the request of the Angolan government, to repulse a major South African invasion of October 1975. In 1987-1988, a decisive battle occurred in the south-eastern Angolan town of Cuito Cuanavale. When it occurred, the battle was the largest military engagement in Africa since the North African battles of the Second World War. Arrayed on one side were the armed forces of Cuba, Angola and the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO); on the other, the South African Defense Forces, military units of the Union for the Total National Independence of Angola (the South African-supported organization) and the South African Territorial Forces of Pretoria-controlled Namibia.

The Battle of Cuito Cuanavale is marginalized in Western 'mainstream' scholarship, frequently ignored, almost as if it had never occurred. However, the overarching significance of the battle cannot be erased; it was the turning point in the struggle against apartheid. In Black Africa - particularly in southern Africa - the battle has attained legendary status. It is considered THE debacle of apartheid: a rout of the South African armed forces that altered the balance of power in the region and heralded the demise of racist rule in South Africa. Thus, the battle is often referred to as the African Stalingrad of apartheid: the decisive event that defeated Pretoria's objective of establishing regional hegemony - a strategy which was vital to defending

and preserving apartheid - and directly led to the independence of Namibia and accelerated the dismantling of apartheid. Cuba's contribution was crucial as it provided the essential reinforcements, material and planning.

Cuba's involvement in Angola began in the 1960s when relations were established with the Movement for the Popular Liberation of Angola (MPLA). The MPLA was the principal organization in the struggle to liberate Angola from Portuguese colonialism. In 1975, the Portuguese withdrew from Angola. However, in order to stop the MPLA from coming to power, the US government had already been funding various

military assistance was decisive in not only stopping the South African drive to Luanda, the capital, but pushing out of Angola. The defeat of the South African forces was a major development in the African anti-colonial struggle. The significance was underscored by *The World*, the foremost Black South African newspaper, which declared: "Black Africa is riding the crest of a wave generated by the Cuban success in Angola. Black Africa is tasting the heady wine of the possibility of realizing the dream of 'total liberation'."

Cuban involvement in Southern Africa was repeatedly dismissed as surrogate activity for the Soviet Union. In an acclaimed and award-winning book, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959-76*, Piero Gleijeses unequivocally demonstrates that:

1) the Cuban government - as it had repeatedly asserted - decided to dispatch combat troops to Angola only after the Angolan government had requested Cuba's military assistance to repel the South Africans, refuting Washington's assertion that

South African forces intervened in Angola only after the arrival of the Cuban forces; and

2) the Soviet Union had no role in Cuba's decision and was not even informed prior to deployment.

In short, Cuba was not the puppet of the USSR. Even *The Economist* magazine, in a 2002 article, acknowledges that the Cuban government acted on its "own initiative."

In 1987, the FAPLA, the Angolan armed forces, launched an offensive against UNITA. The Cubans had advised against this operation because it



groups, in particular the Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) led by the notorious Jonas Savimbi.

In August 1975, South African Defence Forces (SADF), with the support of Washington, invaded Angola. This was followed by a much larger invasion in October. On November 5, in response to a request from the Angolan government, the Cuban government initiated the deployment of combat troops in Operation Carlota, named after the leader of a revolt against slavery that took place in Cuba on November 5, 1843. It must be emphasized that all military service in Angola was on a voluntary basis. Cuban



Nelson Mandela and Fidel Castro meet in Cuba upon Mandelas' release from prison.

would create the opportunity for a significant South African invasion, which is what transpired. The South Africans invaded, stopped and threw back the Angolan forces. The fighting became centred on the town and strategic military base of Cuito Cuanavale, which was important as a forward air base to patrol and defend southern Angola. Pretoria committed its best troops and most sophisticated military hardware to its capture.

As the situation for the besieged Angolan troops became critical, Havana was asked by the Angolan government to intervene. On November 15, 1987 Cuba decided to reinforce its forces by sending fresh detachments, arms and

equipment, including tanks, artillery, anti-aircraft weapons and aircraft. Eventually Cuban troop strength would rise to more than 50,000, with 40,000 deployed in the south where the major engagements were occurring. Cuba was also able to achieve air supremacy, which was a critical factor

in repelling the South Africans. It must be emphasised that for a small country such as Cuba the deployment of 50,000 troops would be the equivalent of the US deploying 1.25-million soldiers.

The Cuban government viewed preventing the fall of Cuito Cuanavale as imperative. A South African victory would have meant not only the capture of the town and the destruction of the best Angolan military formations, but, quite probably, the end of Angola's existence as an independent country.

At Cuito Cuanavale, the SADF were dealt a decisive defeat. As the South Africans withdrew, the Cubans, together with Angolan and SWAPO forces, advanced toward the Namibian border. This advance exposed the insecurity and vulnerability of the South African troops in northern Namibia.

This was further compounded by another South African debacle, when on June 27, 1988 at the south western Angolan town of Tchipa a major South African offensive was resoundingly routed when the SADF was encircled. The defeat was described in South Africa as "a crushing humiliation."

This defeat on the ground forced South Africa to the negotiating table, resulting in Namibian independence and dramatically hastening the end of apartheid.

Nelson Mandela underscored Cuba's vital role in a July 1991 speech delivered in Havana:

"The Cuban people hold a special place in the hearts of the people of Africa. The Cuban internationalists have made a contribution to African independence, freedom and justice unparalleled for its principled and selfless character - We in Africa are used to being victims of countries wanting to carve up our territory or subvert our sovereignty. It is unparalleled in African history to have another people rise to the defense of one of us - The defeat of the apartheid army was an inspiration to the struggling people in South Africa! Without the defeat of Cuito Cuanavale our organizations would not have been unbanned! The defeat of the racist army at Cuito Cuanavale has made it possible for me to be here today! Cuito Cuanavale was a milestone in the history of the struggle for southern African liberation!"

Cuba's role in Angola illustrates the division between those who fight for the cause of freedom, liberation and justice, to repel invaders and colonialists, and those who fight against just causes, those who wage war to occupy, colonise and oppress.

**Isaac Saney is a Co-chair of the Canadian Network on Cuba and professor at Dalhousie University.*

Resources

A more detailed article is available: Isaac Saney, "African Stalingrad: The Cuban Revolution, Internationalism and the End of Apartheid," *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 33, No. 5 (September 2006): pp. 81-117.

There are also numerous Cuban memoirs and films on the topic.

Some recommended additional reading in English:

- Nelson Mandela & Fidel Castro, *How Far We Slaves Have Come!* (New York:Pathfinder Press, 1991)
- Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959*
- 1976 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001)
- John Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1978)
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report: Volume Two: Repression and Resistance* (London: Macmillan Reference Limited, 1999)



Cuban designed poster.

CNC Member groups and Cuba solidarity activists unite across Canada to send off the 21st Pastors for Peace Caravan to Cuba!



Kingston



Ottawa



Ontario/New York Border Crossing



Bus donated to Cuba from Salt Spring Island, BC

Thomas Anthony Davies*

It might seem like a mirage on the hot summer roads of North America – a humanitarian aid Caravan of brightly painted buses driving through Canada, the US and Mexico on a mission to break the US blockade against Cuba. For the 21st time the IFCO/Pastors for Peace US-Cuba Friendship Caravan has done just that. In July 2010, 85 people from the US, Canada, Mexico, and Europe successfully defied US laws that bans US citizens from traveling to Cuba and restricts the delivery of humanitarian aid.

As part of the 2010 Caravan there was also a record number of Canadian Caravanistas – 10! Three came from Ontario and seven from British Columbia, with many of us participating as



BC/Washington Border Crossing

route coordinators and speakers. In total the Caravan also visited 15 Canadian cities (the Comox Valley, Nanaimo, Salt Spring Island, Victoria, Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Regina, Winnipeg, Windsor, Ottawa, Kingston, Toronto, Hamilton and Montreal).

The bus I travelled on began its journey on Salt Spring Island, BC. This small community, under the leadership of Lou Ellis and our bus driver Axel Dollheiser, spent a year fundraising in communities across BC to successfully buy, fix, paint, and fill an entire school bus. Another bus was bought with the almost \$10,000 raised across Canada for the Caravan this year! In all, nine school buses and over 100 tons of humanitarian aid were donated for use in Cuba hospitals, school and community centers.

Despite some challenges, solidarity from both sides of the border ensured that all the routes were successful in coming across the US/Canada border.

Powered by bio-diesel, sweat, and love my bus then made the entire 5000 km journey with only one small mechanical hiccup! All in all, the 12 routes of the Caravan stopped in 120 cities in 46 US states and 6 Canadian provinces, educating communities about the effects of the US blockade on Cuba and Cuba's gains despite the blockade.

After an orientation in McAllen, Texas, the next big step is the US/Mexico border crossing. Driving up to the US customs officials we are never sure what to expect. This year, they chose to seize five computers which had been donated to the Caravan in Vancouver. They were Pentium 4 PC's that were seized for the so-called "necessity" of the US to inspect and determine if they could be used, "for military purposes".

After many hours at the border we were finally on our way to Tampico, Mexico to load the aid onto containers with the volunteer help of Mexican dock-workers, and then FLY TO CUBA!

This year the Pastors for Peace Caravan to Cuba was dedicated to the children of Cuba. Healthy, independent and dignified, the children of Cuba stand up to the US blockade against Cuba every day.

Every day the Caravan was reminded that Cuba has:

- One Teacher for Every Ten Primary School Children
- 13 Vaccination Programs Against Preventable Diseases
- A Lower Infant Mortality Rate than the US
- 100% Literacy Rate
- No Homeless Children

All Caravanistas spend time in the capital Havana, and everyone was able to see Cuba for themselves – beyond the Cuba that the US and corporate media have portrayed. We visited hospitals, schools, and were witness to the outstanding and diverse level of cultural development in Cuban society.

Twelve lucky Caravanistas, including one Canadian, Janine Solanki from Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba, were even able to attend a private event on July 26th with Cuban artists, intellectuals, and Fidel Castro himself. They reported Fidel looked strong and spoke even more strongly.

While some visited the postcard perfect province of Matanzas, and others the official July 26th celebration in the province of Santa Clara, I was able to visit the amazing rural province of Sancti Spiritus. We got our hands dirty at the largest urban organic farm in the province, toured the UNESCO World Heritage Site town of Trinidad, and danced the night away with Cubans during the Carnivale.

When we left Cuba, the journey was not quite over. There is one more step to the Caravan to Cuba – the Reverse Challenge. Upon reaching the Mexico/US border on our way back to the US we openly and proudly declare that we have travelled to Cuba. The border officials are always waiting to ask us questions and try to find out more information about our trip. This year we again refused to answer their questions and all crossed back into the US. The US government does not have the right to license travel to Cuba – love is our license. Mission accomplished...until next year!

For more information about Pastors for Peace and the Caravan to Cuba visit: www.pastors-forpeace.org

* Thomas Davies has been on the Pastors for Peace Caravan twice and was a route coordinator for the 2010 caravan. He is also a founding member of the Free the Cuban 5 Committee Vancouver



Left to right: Manolo de los Santos translates for Dr. Aleida Guevara. Day 1 crowd: Jahanzeb Hussein (VCSC), Sarah Alwell (FC5C - Victoria), Manuel Yepe (Cuban journalist and revolutionary), Nestor Ortega (FC5C - Van)

3rd International Che Guevara Conference “Cuba and Revolutionary Internationalism”

Tamara Hansen*

On June 26th and 27th, 2010, the Third Annual International Che Guevara Conference was held in Vancouver, Canada. This year's conference, an annual event organized by Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC), was on the theme of “Cuba and Revolutionary Internationalism”. More than 400 people attended this important conference, with speakers from across the US, Canada, Cuba and Venezuela.

Saturday, June 26th began with a press conference at the Russian Hall in Vancouver, which was well-attended by local media. The press conference also marked the unveiling of a graffiti mural for the Cuban Five political prisoners held in US jails, the first public mural of its kind in North America. The mural is the work of local artist Josue Gonzalez.

More than 200 people filled the hall to see the film “Aleida Guevara Remembers Her Father, Che” and to hear Dr. Aleida Guevara share further recollections of her father, the legendary revolutionary Che Guevara. Dr. Guevara is a lifelong Cuban revolutionary leader, a pediatrician and the author of the book, “Chavez, Venezuela and the New Latin America”.

The first workshop was “Cuba Today: How Far the Revolution has Come”, featuring a dynamic and interesting presentation by speaker Miguel Fraga, Press and Cultural Attaché at the Cuban Embassy in Ottawa.

The second workshop concentrated on “Cuba's Internationalism and its Influence on the Bolivarian Revolutionary Process” and was led by Samira Amndan, Diplomatic Attaché at the Venezuelan Consulate in Toronto.

Larry Mosqueda, a professor of political economy at the Evergreen State University in Olympia, Washington delivered an interesting and dynamic third workshop, “The Origin of Revolutionary Internationalism: Through the Eyes of Marx and Engels”.

The first day of the conference finished off with special reflections and stories about working with Che Guevara from Manuel Yepe, a journalist and professor at the Superior Institute of International Relations in Havana, Cuba.

Following the workshops and discussion section of the day, the conference was transformed

into a special evening for the Five Cuban Heroes held in US prisons. More than 120 people attended this special evening event, which featured poetry, live Latin-American music, hip hop, as well as speeches by Manolo de los Santos, a project coordinator for IFCO/Pastors for Peace in New York, Walter Lippmann, the editor in chief of CubaNews and a long-time social justice activist, and Dr. Aleida Guevara.

The second day of the conference began with a special presentation by Arnold August, author of the book “Democracy in Cuba and the 1997-98 Elections” and the forthcoming book “Cuba: Participatory Democracy and Elections in the 21st Century”.

The first workshop of the day was on “The Concept of Internationalism in Cuba's Foreign Policy”, a presentation delivered by Manuel Yepe. Manuel gave an extensive history of the internationalist base of Cuba's foreign policy since the beginning of the Cuban revolution.

“Cuban Youth and Revolutionary Internationalism” by Manolo de los Santos, Alison Bodine and Tamara Hansen. Manolo and Alison are both project coordinators for IFCO/Pastors for Peace and Tamara is the coordinator of Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba and the co-chair of the Canadian Network on Cuba.

The next workshop was “Looking at the Past: the Third International and Looking at the Future: the Creation of the Fifth International”, given by Ali Yerevani, the political editor of the Fire This Time Newspaper and a long-time social justice activist. Ali discussed the need for working people and all progressive forces around the world to unite in a common struggle

for social justice, and in particular, the need for a revolutionary leadership in this struggle.

The next workshop, “The Concept of Internationalism in Cuba's Foreign Policy: Internationalism in Theory and Practice”, was delivered by Isaac Saney, a professor at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada, the author of the book “Cuba: a Revolution in Motion” and a co-chair of the Canadian Network on Cuba. Isaac gave a comprehensive presentation focused on Cuba's internationalist missions.

Conference participants were all ears to hear the final presentation, “Che Guevara, Revolutionary Internationalist: Are His Ideas Relevant to the 21st Century?” This workshop was delivered by featured conference speaker, Dr. Aleida Guevara. Dr. Guevara captivated the hall with her speech on Che's ideas on internationalism and their importance in the world today. Her informative and vibrant presentation was met by a standing ovation by all in attendance.

Following a thank-you to Aleida Guevara and all of the conference speakers, a conference closing was delivered by Aaron Mercredi, an editorial board member of the Fire This Time Newspaper and an organizer with the Indigenous Rights and Action Project.

The Third International Che Guevara Conference was a success in delving deeper into the concept of Revolutionary Internationalism, both in theory and in practice as we see it in the Cuban Revolution. *Hasta la Victoria Siempre!*

** Tamara Hansen is one of the co-chairs of the Canadian Network on Cuba as well as the national coordinator of the Che Brigade.*



The first public mural of its kind in North America, the Che Guevara Conference marked the unveiling of a graffiti mural for the Cuban Five political prisoners held in US jails. The mural is the work of local artist Josue Gonzalez and is seen here on display at the Under the Volcano Festival in Vancouver, B.C.



Danny Glover*
& Saul Landau**

From the Ontario California airport some 60 miles east of downtown Los Angeles we drove north on Highway 15, the road to Las Vegas. Cars with expectant amateur gamblers and loaded big rigs climb and descend the mountains where the Angeles and San Bernadino National Forests meet.

To the east lies the high desert, some 4,000 feet above sea level. Amidst junipers, Joshua trees and sagebrush we turn off from the man-made freeway to the jester's creation of a shopping mall in Hesperia where we pick up Chavela, Gerardo Hernandez' older sister.

We pass fast food joints with chain names, nail and hair salons, tattoo parlors, gas stations and mini-marts (a drive-by of American culture) going west and then north on 395 to the six-year-old U.S. Federal Penitentiary Complex, a 630,000 square foot high-security prison (it cost \$101.4 million to build); designed to cage 960 male inmates.

In the institutional grey Visitors' Lobby a guard hands us forms with numbers on top, nods at a book to sign and eye-signals to a pile of pens. We write, hand him back the forms and sit in the gray waiting room with other visitors – all black and Latino.

We wait for twenty minutes. A guard calls our number. We empty our pockets except for money. We pass through a sensitive airport-type screening machine, pick up our belts and eyeglasses that have gone through X-ray, and extend our inner forearms for stamping by another uniformed guard. Two black women and an elderly Latino couple get the same treatment. We exchange nervous smiles. Visitors in a strange land!

He passes our IDs through a drawer connected to another sealed room on the opposite side of a thick plastic window. A guard there checks the documents and pushes buttons to open a heavy metal door. The group enters an outdoor passage. Blinding, late-morning sun and desert heat shocks our bodies after the air-conditioned chambers. We wait. A guard confers through a small slit in the door of the

- Cuban 5 Update - "Visiting Gerardo in Prison"

building housing the inmates – gun towers on each side; masses of rolled barbed wire covering the tops of concrete walls.

We wait, get hot, then enter another air-cooled chamber; finally, a door opens into the visitor room. A guard assigns us a tiny plastic table surrounded by 3 three cheap plastic chairs, on one side (for us) and one on the other for Gerardo. African American and Latino children exchange places on their fathers' laps as daddies in khaki prison overalls chat with their wives. Chavela spots him 20 minutes later, waving and bouncing across the room smiling. Chavela, almost crying, says, "He's lost weight." He seems the same weight as when (Saul Landau) saw him in the Spring. Gerardo hugs and kisses his sister, embraces Saul and then Danny, thanking him for his efforts to spring him from the hole, where he spent 13 days in late July and early August.

Gerardo informs us that two FBI agents investigating an incident unrelated to this case had questioned him in prison. Right after, prison authorities tossed Gerardo into the hole, although there existed no evidence, logic or common sense that could possibly have implicated him into the alleged unrelated incident. The temperatures inside the hole rose to the high nineties. "I had to use my drinking water to keep me cool, pouring it on head," Gerardo told us. "It didn't help my high blood pressure. I couldn't even take my medicine. But, I think, thanks to the thousands of phone calls and letters from people everywhere, they let me out."

Chavela kept bringing junk food to the table – the only kind available from the vending machines. We nibbled compulsively while Gerardo told about living in a sweatbox for almost two weeks. "No air circulated in there," he laughed, as if to say "no big deal."

We talked about Cuba. He kept up on the news, reading, watching TV -- and from visitors who informed him. He felt encouraged by steps President Raul Castro had taken to deal with the crisis. He had watched, on the prison television, parts of Fidel's speech and the questions and answers at the Cuban National Assembly Meeting. "I saw Adriana [his wife]," who sat in the audience. His smile faded.

"You know what's painful. She's 40 and I'm 45. We don't have that much time to have a family together. The United States won't even give her a visa to visit me. She's behaved with such courage and dignity throughout

this ordeal."

Gerardo Hernandez, one of the Cuban 5, is serving two life sentences for conspiracy to commit espionage and aiding and abetting murder. Prosecutors presented no evidence of espionage at the Miami trial. The aiding and abetting charge presumed evidence, not shown, that Gerardo sent flight details to Cuba of the Brothers to the Rescue planes shot down by Cuban MIGs in February 1996 -- which he did not. The charge also assumed that he knew of secret Cuban government orders to shoot them down, also not true.

The 5 men monitored and reported on Cuban exile terrorists in Miami who had plotted bombings and assassinations in Cuba. Cuba then shared this information with the FBI. Larry Wilkerson (retired army Colonel and Secretary of State Colin Powell's former Chief of Staff) compared the 5's chance of getting a fair trial in Miami to an accused "Israeli's chance of justice in Teheran."

We sipped cloyingly sweet, bottled, iced tea. Chavela brought more potato chips.

Gerardo, reanimated the mood by recalling an incident when in the 1980s, as a Lieutenant in Cabinda, Angola, he had escorted top Cuban officers to a dinner-party with visiting Soviet brass. "I told my Colonel I had memorized a short Mayakovsky poem in Russian (from his school classes) and could recite it to the Soviet officers."

He recited the poem to us in Russian. We applauded. He smiled. "They were roasting a pig and had bottles of booze, a party."

"I recited the poem. The Soviet Colonel hugged me, kissed me on both cheeks -- very emotional. I had to repeat my performance for the other officers. Finally, the Cuban Colonel told me I'd milked the scene long enough and I left."

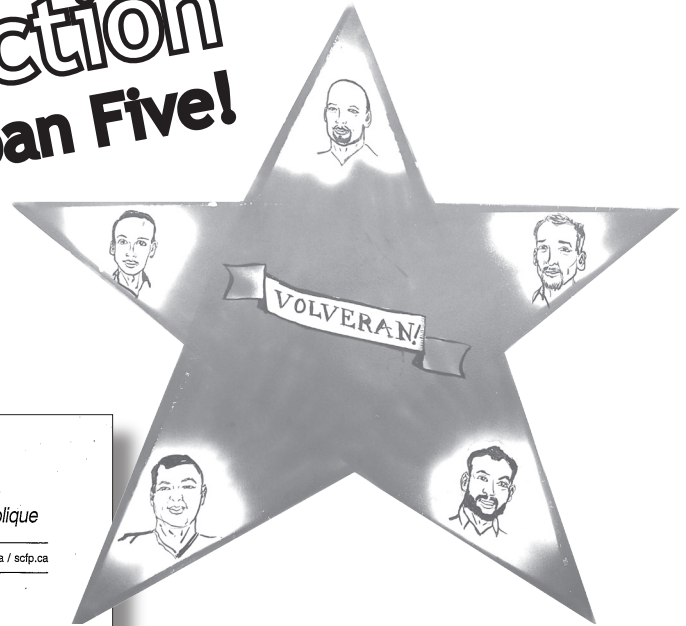
Two hours passed quickly. We waited for the guards to let us out. Gerardo stood at attention against a wall near the cellblock door next to another prisoner. We gave him a fist salute. He returned it. His sister blew a kiss. He grinned reassuringly – as if to remind us. "Stay strong."

Reprinted from <http://www.counterpunch.org/>

**Danny Glover is an activist and an actor.*

***Saul Landau is an Institute for Policy Studies fellow.*

"It is Time for Action" CUPE Says Free the Cuban Five!



CUPE·SCFP

Canadian Union of Public Employees
Syndicat canadien de la fonction publique

1375, boul. St. Laurent Blvd., Ottawa, ON K1G 0Z7 (613) 237-1590, Fax/Télé.: (613) 237-5508, cupemail@cupe.ca / courriel@scfp.ca / cupe.ca / scfp.ca

April 12, 2010

Email: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/organizations>
Fax: 202-456-2461

Barack Obama
President of The United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

**Re: Rene Gonzalez Sehwerert, Ramon Labanino Salazar,
Fernando Gonzalez Llort, Antonio Guerrero Rodriguez and
Gerardo Hernandez Nordelo 'The Cuban Five'**

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) represents 605,000 working women and men in Canada. We are appealing to you for the release of the men known as the 'Cuban Five'.

In March 2010, the Cuban government requested the United Nations' (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC) to reactivate the case of the Cuban Five, whose detentions have been termed arbitrary. Anayansi Rodriguez, of the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs, raised again, that the determination of the UN working Group on Arbitrary Detention, showed the illegality of their imprisonment, in its opinion, in 2005. UN experts stressed that imprisoning the five men and depriving them of their freedom is arbitrary and violates international laws. She also noted that the wives of two of the men are still prevented from visiting their husbands.

After so many years, it is time for action. It is time to release these men and ensure their safe passage home to their families in Cuba.

Yours truly,

PAUL MOIST
National President

cc: Claude Gagnéux, CUPE National Secretary-Treasurer
CUPE National Executive Board
Kenneth Georgetti, Canadian Labour Congress, President
Manuel Luna, CUPE 3903

w/cope 491

PAUL MOIST - National President / Président national CLAUDE GÉNÉREUX - National Secretary-Treasurer / Secrétaire-trésorier national

DANIEL LÉGERE - LUCIE LEVASSEUR - BARRY O'NEILL - TOM GRAHAM - PATRICK (SID) RYAN - General Vice-Presidents / Vice-présidents généraux



R01

Cristian Castillo & Brien Young*

The following Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) letter to President Obama was obtained through the efforts of many, including a long-time member of the Free the Cuban Five Committee, Toronto, Professor Manuel Luna.

CUPE is the largest Union in Canada with more than 605,000 members, and its endorsement of this important cause is a positive step in obtaining support amongst the Canadian public.

Professor Luna is a long-time Cuban Solidarity activist and is a Professor in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics of York University.

He is also a former Vice- President and former Treasurer of CUPE Local 3903, where he continues to be very active. As a solidarity activist and long-time supporter of Cuba, he is currently negotiating to ship 125 high-end computers to the University of Havana.

**Cristian Castillo and Brien Young are both executive members of the Free the Cuban Five Committee - Toronto*

CAMPAIGN TO FREE THE CUBAN FIVE LEAPS FORWARD

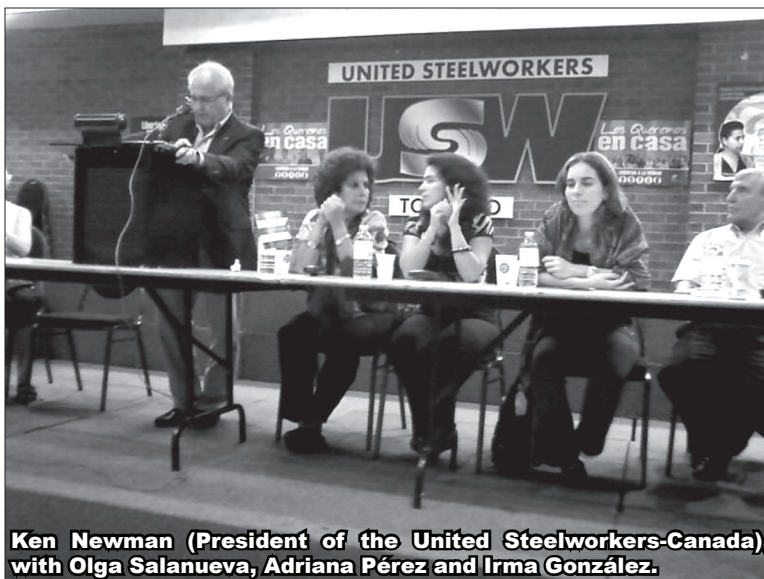
Morteza Gorgzadeh*

"On one occasion Gerardo said that justice would only come from the 'verdict of millions'. It is our turn now to mobilize those millions wherever we may be." Ricardo Alarcon, from the book "Forbidden Heroes: The Untold Story of the Cuban Five"

On Sunday August 8th, the movement to free the Cuban Five, Rene González, Gerardo Hernández, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando González and Ramón Labañino, leaped forward in a major way by the hosting of a reception for the family members of the Cuban Five in Toronto, organized by the active support and participation of the leadership of organized labour, which included: United Steelworkers-Canada, Service Employees International Union (U.S.A.), Workers Uniting (England) and United Steelworkers (International President).

The family members of the anti-terrorist Cuban Five political prisoners of the empire who addressed a packed Steelworkers' Hall, were Olga Salanueva, Adriana Pérez (the wives of René González and Gerardo Hernández respectively, who are being denied visitation rights to see their husbands) and Irma González. They spoke about the ordeal that Gerardo Hernández had

just faced throughout approximately two weeks of complete isolation, while seriously ill and suffering from high and complicated blood pressure. They explained how international solidarity forced the U.S. authorities to take him out of these brutal and torturous conditions of confinement. All three women addressed the unjust conditions that the Cuban Five have been subjected to since Sept. 12th, 1998 (the date of their arrest) as well as the need to organize more solidarity actions, in order to win visitation rights and, ultimately, freedom for the Cuban Five.



Ken Newman (President of the United Steelworkers-Canada), with Olga Salanueva, Adriana Pérez and Irma González.

The reception was led and chaired by Ken Newman, President of the United Steelworkers-Canada, who communicated to the enthusiastic participants that the International President, Leo Gerard, sent his greetings as well as his apologies for not being able to attend in person due to an unexpected family emergency. After the presentations of the family members, which were often interrupted by the audience's applause, the President Emeritus of the SEIU, Andy Stan, and the Joint General Secretary of Unite (the UK's largest Union), Tony Woodley, spoke strongly in support of the families and of the need to continue pressuring the U.S. government until the Five are free.

Jack Layton, the leader of the New

Democratic Party of Canada, was also invited to speak and he announced his commitment of raising the issue of the Cuban Five in the Parliament on behalf of the NDP and of doing whatever they can, in order to raise awareness about the case of the Five.

At the end of the presentation, it was announced that a letter addressed to President Barak Obama, Secretary of State-Hillary Clinton, and Eric Holder, will be signed by the leadership of the unions represented and will be mailed to voice their support and commitment to the cause of the Cuban Five. Participants were also asked to pick the

colourful and professionally printed brochure, "The Miami Five", signed by the Cuba Solidarity Network, which displayed the logos of the British TUC, SEIU, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Workers Uniting, Unite the Union and the United Steelworkers.

The depth of solidarity for the Cuban Five, heroes of Cuba and of humanity in the struggle against U.S.-based terrorism, could be witnessed by the presence of a couple in their 80's, who had traveled for approximately 4 hours,

in order to attend the reception. The same couple had also taken part in the previous Tuesday's emergency rally in solidarity with Gerardo Hernández and the Cuban Five in Toronto.

With this major boost of the campaign, **NOW** is the time to increase the pressure and to continue organizing educational sessions on the issue, while mobilizing the largest number of endorsers, until family visitation rights are granted to Olga and Adriana and until the Cuban Five are finally freed and returned to their loved ones in Cuba.

**Morteza Gorgzadeh is a founding member of Toronto Forum on Cuba.*

Cuban Consul General Speaks in Windsor, Ontario



May 2nd, 2010

Canadian Cuban Friendship Association - Windsor Event
Toronto Cuban Consul General Jorge Soberón Luis, speaking on how Cuba dealt with the special period and emerged proposing alternatives. In the background is the city of Detroit and the GM buildings, symbols of US power, flanked by two Cuban flags.

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JOIN THE 2011 PASTORS FOR PEACE CARAVAN TO CUBA!



Next summer, for the 22th time, the Pastors for Peace Friendshipment Caravan to Cuba will challenge the US government's economic and travel blockade on Cuba. The Caravan kicks off July 3 and will travel through up to 140 cities in the US and Canada, raising awareness about the US blockade and gathering humanitarian aid to take to Cuba. Participants will then spend nine days in Cuba, participating in a variety of educational and cultural events.

For more information contact IFCO/Pastors for Peace:

212-926-5757

cucaravan@igc.org

www.pastorsforpeace.org

Federation of Cuban Women Re-establishes Ties to BC

Ray Viaud*

At the end of April CCFA (Vancouver) in conjunction with the Vancouver and District Labour Council organized a special tour of two representatives from the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC). The main purpose of the tour was to re-establish FMC contacts and to establish new ties between Canada and Cuba. In a way it was also a follow up on the very successful tour of Consul General Jorge Soberon in January (who came to speak at our Jose Marti anniversary).

From April 28th to May 2nd Yanira Kuper, a member of the National Committee of the Federation of Cuban Women and an official of the FMC's foreign relations department and Maritzel Gonzalez-Quevado, FMC Foreign Relations official in charge of North American area were able to meet with a broad range of groups and individuals.

In some cases, as with Vancouver Status of Women, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and the Simon Fraser University Women's Centre it was a matter of re-establishing contact. In others, as with the Women of Power Group at the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre,

Women Elders in Action (WE ACT) and the Raging Grannies, the meetings represented new contacts.

They were able to meet with the City of Vancouver Woman's Advisory Committee. Hosted by Councilor Ellen Woodsworth and School Trustee Jane Bouey, and addressed a public meeting hosted by the Fraser Valley Peace Council. The audience at this meeting included many

The key in organizing this tour was having the VDLC May Day Committee agree to have an FMC representative as their special international guest speaker for the May 1st May Day event. Yanira presented a very moving speech which was recorded by WorkingTV.com for broadcast on Shaw Cable and the internet.

Of course, as noted elsewhere in the Newsletter, the FMC reps spoke to our AGM and before they left for home via Toronto, the executive hosted a farewell dinner in their honour.

Yanira and Maritzel were pleased with the variety of people they met and the tour seems to have been judged a complete success. The most im-

portant lesson that we learned is that a tour like this requires at least 3 months to properly organize. If you want formal support from groups like trade unions which meet monthly, ample advance notice is essential. (--And try not complicate things by organizing a tour during the Stanley Cup playoffs)

**Ray Viaud is the President of the CCFA-Vancouver and Executive Member of the Canadian Network on Cuba*



Yanira Kuper and Maritzel Gonzalez-Quevado of the FMC with Junie Desil of the SFU Women Centre in a meeting at the centre.

people from the South Asian community who were especially interested in the role that Cuban doctors played in Pakistan after the earthquake.

Yanira and Maritzel were also able to visit Vancouver Island for meetings organized by Victoria Goods for Cuba. Upon returning from Vancouver Island, they traveled to the Sunshine Coast for a public meeting sponsored by the Council of Senior Citizens Organizations (COSCO).

Contact CNC member groups!

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Canadian-Cuban Friendship Association-Vancouver
viaudray@vcn.bc.ca
www.ccfavancouver.ca

Cuba Education Tours
1-877-687-3817 Toll Free
778-859-1048 or 604-677-2944
info@cubafriends.ca
www.cubafriends.ca

Free the Cuban 5 Committee-Vancouver
604-719-6947
cuban5_van@yahoo.com
www.freethe5vancouver.ca

Victoria Goods for Cuba
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250-384-1608
vicc@telus.net

Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba
778-882-5223
vancubasolidarity@gmail.com
www.vancubasolidarity.com

ALBERTA

Canadian-Cuban Friendship Association-Calgary
ccfacalgary@shaw.ca
www.ccfacalgary.ca

Cuba Edmonton Solidarity Committee
njt.edmonton@gmail.com

MANITOBA

Manitoba-Cuba Solidarity Committee
204-783-9380
dlzack@shaw.ca

AcheCuba Holidays
egonzalez2054@yahoo.com

ONTARIO

Ottawa-Cuba Connections
613-225-6232
webmaster@ottawacuba.org
www.ottawacuba.org

Destination Cuba
mpacheco@gbrownc.on.ca

Canadian-Cuban Friendship Association-Toronto
416- 410-8254
info@ccfatoronto.ca
www.ccfatoronto.ca

Canadian-Cuban Friendship Association-Niagara
905-382-3468
ccfaniagara@yahoo.ca

Canadian-Cuban Friendship Association-Kingston
info@kingstonccfa.com
www.kingstonccfa.com

Canadian-Cuban Friendship Association-Windsor
ccfawindsor@yahoo.ca

Hamilton Friendship Association with Cuba
info@cubacanada.org
www.cubacanada.org

Communist Party of Canada
www.communist-party.ca

Free the Cuban Five Committee-Toronto
executivecubanfive@yahoo.com

Young Communist League
416-964-3894
johan@ycl-ljc.ca
www.ycl-ljc.ca

Toronto Forum on Cuba
torontoforumoncuba@rogers.com
www.torontoforumoncuba.tyo.ca

The Free the Five Cultural Committee
416-603-9858
free5cc@gmail.com
www.freethefivecc.org

MONTREAL

Communist League
514-272-5840
cllc_can@bellnet.ca

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