



**The Newsletter of the Canadian Network on Cuba
Over 60 Years of Friendship
- Issue 2 - Winter 2009 -**

The Canadian Network on Cuba leads A Successful Cuba Hurricane Relief Campaign

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By Keith Ellis*

On behalf of the Canadian Network on Cuba (CNC), I wish to thank all of our affiliates, all the members of the affiliates, all the friends of Cuba, all Canadian citizens and residents who helped in making our fundraising campaign for relief from the devastating damage caused to Cuba by hurricanes during the past year. I also thank especially the Consulates in Toronto of Cuba, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Kitts, Nevis and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Our campaign was launched at the beginning of September 2008. At that time we knew that Cuba, particularly the province of Pinar del Río and the special municipality of Isla de la Juventud [Isle of Youth], had been hit hard by hurricane Gustav. We did not yet know that winds of unprecedented force for the Caribbean, gusting to more than 360 kph, had demolished almost everything in their path, including structures that had withstood several previous hurricanes. Then came hurricane Ike which entered the northeastern end of Cuba and virtually traversed the entire island with fierce winds and flooding rains. A third hurricane, Paloma, died after wreaking havoc on the southern part of Camagüey province, one of the few parts of Cuba that had been left relatively undamaged by the combination of Gustav and Ike.

The total damage to housing, communications infrastructure, agricultural equipment, crops, community buildings, storage facilities and their contents amounted to more than US \$9 billion. One aspect of the cost that the Cuban authorities do not want to include, because the effect of it is incalculable, is the amount spent on moving about one million people to places of safety from the hurricanes, so that injury and deaths (six in all) were kept at levels that were a small fraction of what occurs in similar circumstances elsewhere.

Having raised some \$82,000 in the previous campaign two years earlier, in early September we set ourselves a target

of \$100,000. When we became aware of the extent of the damage, the more than 600,000 residences badly damaged or totally destroyed, for example, and also when our government responded with an indirect donation of \$400,000, we raised our target to \$400,000. As of August 17, 2009, we have raised a total of \$405,287.43, all of which (but for \$402.46, which we have on hand), has gone to Cuba

hurricane relief. Incidental expenses, such as the postage for tax receipts, were paid for out of funds from other sources.

Some of the total amount which we solicited, a very large donation from a company doing business in Cuba and substantial donations from trade unions, for example, was sent directly to Cuba. As our very able treasurer Sharon Skup has previously reported, in the initial phase of our response we financed the shipping of some thirteen forty-foot containers of donated goods to Cuba. In the second phase we have focused entirely on the rebuilding process in Cuba and specifically on the Isla de la Juventud



Cubans repair hurricane damage on the Isle of Youth.

which was shattered by the most intense winds. We have contributed funds for the rebuilding of facilities at a community concert centre in the capital city of Nueva Gerona. We have replaced lost or destroyed musical instruments and equipment at that centre. We have sent 22 pianos to the Cuban Ministry of Culture for distribution to provinces most affected by the hurricanes. The Ministry chose Pinar

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www.canadiannetworkoncuba.ca



What is the Canadian Network on Cuba?

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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)

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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*

Welcome to the Winter 2009 Edition of North of Havana!



By Isaac Saney
& Tamara Hansen

Welcome to the second issue of North of Havana. The response to the inaugural issue was warm and positive. We hope to build on these sentiments and create a publication that reflects the multifaceted forms and expressions of Canada-Cuba friendship and solidarity. In Canada, 2009 has been marked by a series of significant events commemorating the 50th anniversary of the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. These include: the international conference, "Cuba: A Measure of the Revolution"; the First International Festival of Poetry of Resistance; the Second International Che Guevara Conference and the symposium, "Transformation: Latin America On The Move".

Perhaps, the most poignant demonstration of the fraternal ties between the peoples of Canada and Cuba is the very successful CNC hurricane relief and reconstruction campaign. This campaign has now reached a new stage: the funding of a special cultural and community project. This outpouring of support and empathy reflects the deeply held Canadian sentiment that Cuba possesses, as do all peoples, nations, and countries, the inviolable right to self-determination and sovereignty. It is also a concrete manifestation of admiration for Cuba's efforts, under very difficult conditions, to create a society centred on social justice and human dignity.

One the goals of the CNC is to ensure that these expressions of friendship and solidarity find voice in the policies of the government of Canada. The Canadian vote at the United Nations in favour of the resolution opposing the United States' illegal and immoral economic sanctions against Cuba is welcome. On October 28, 2009 for the 18th consecutive year, the United Nations resoundingly rejected the United States policy of economic aggression against Cuba with

an overwhelming 187 to 3 vote (with two abstentions). Nevertheless, despite its support for the UN resolution, Ottawa's current policy falls far short of a truly principled and ethical position.

The UN vote represented more than a rejection of Washington policy, but also the reaffirmation of Cuba's right to independence, sovereignty and self-determination. However, the Canadian government has yet to truly articulate a position that upholds the fundamental rights of the Cuban nation. At the April 17-19, 2009 Summit of the Americas in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, the Canadian government missed a historic moment to uphold the fundamental tenets and norms

of international law and stand with the region by insisting on Cuba's right to chart its own path without any external interference. An inalienable right enshrined in, among others, the United Nations Charter. Instead, Ottawa's silence on this question was conspicuous in the midst of this unequivocal demand by the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. This silence was reflected in several later unacceptable statements by Canadian officials, parroting

Washington's disinformation campaign, and arrogantly arrogating to themselves a right that only belongs to the Cuban people: the right to decide how to organize their own society. Let us be clear, Canada's relations with Cuba should be based on mutual respect and equality, not on outmoded colonialist ideas and practices. If the Canadian government is truly interested in assisting the Cuban people then it must insist on the end of all forms U.S. aggression, which along with the economic war being waged against the island includes sponsoring and giving safe haven to anti-Cuba terrorists. In short, Ottawa should respect international law and publicly uphold Cuba's right to self-determination and independence.



CNC Co-chairs Isaac Saney and Tamara Hansen present President of Cuba's National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcon (center) with the first issue of North of Havana.

The Cuba-Nova Scotia Art Exchange

By Sheila Morrison*

Some people just seem to ooze excitement and enthusiasm. It's in their pores. And it's contagious. Jude Caborn leans slightly forward when she talks and you know from her eyes that something is up – something really good.

Nova Scotia is rich in the arts. They are what give us our voice, they enable us to be there for each other and they join us to the rest of the world. We twin our schools with those in Japan, we put African musicians in the kitchen parties of Cape Breton, and we share canvasses with Cuban artists. Our words are in our tapping toes and dancing fiddles, in our looms and our paintbrushes.

"Just feel that brush!" Jude interjects as she explains the Cuban Project. No wonder she can hardly contain herself. She and her fellow artists have twinned their paintings of seascapes, boats, landscapes and blooms with similar work of Cuban counterparts. Their work is mounted back to back – a Nova Scotian dory on one side, a Cuban fishing boat on the other – on foam boards and strung three to a line to suspend and twirl as viewers stroll. You can almost smell the salty fog and feel the sun.

Watching Jude paint while she tells how it all began is a treat in itself. She's fast; her colours are fresh and the scenes beckon you to walk barefoot on the shore, snoop in the gardens, and scamper over rocks. Equally talented Cuban artists have accomplished similar matching invitations and the lesson is clear: basically we are all the same. Our foliage may vary in shape but we all need the sea, the earth, the air and each other. It's a lovely way to experience the global essence in a time when global supply chains are breaking down and we all tend to become a little more protectionist. It is a warning not to lose the loveliness of the whole, the

interplay that nourishes humanity. A reminder that we need to protect not just ourselves but our buddies and to give them the credit that is their due. These paintings by Canadians and Cubans are the notes of a beautiful symphony.

Jude's artistic leanings began at an early age. Growing up in Nova Scotia, where land and sea shape the culture, she could likely "hear" the colours and "smell" the sounds. She likes the idea of art being appreciated by all the senses. "I want these works to travel to and be among people, to walk with them, ruffle their hair as the pictures rotate when viewers pass through the spaces between the columns. I want people to see what is similar and what is different between cultures."

The idea for the show began in 2005. The Pinar del Rio and Nova Scotia Cultural Exchange was formed following a watercolour exhibition of Nova Scotian works at the Galeria Arturo Reguerio (GAR). The initial collaboration began with a workshop at the GAR with Jude Caborn, Eliza Schurman and Ruth Wilton instructing assisted by Laird Wilton. When Jude returned to Cuba laden with supplies and her enthusiasm the project took off. More trips, more supplies, more excitement and the show was born: "Same Yet Different." Accompanying the columns is a show of children's art on the walls showing their impressions of their own provinces.

"Same Yet Different" will travel around Nova Scotia in 2009-10. In the fall of 2010 Heriberto Acanda Ramos (GAR Director) and three Cuban artists, with others, will exhibit at the newly acclaimed National Museum, Pier 21, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, as well as the Lunenburg Gallery. In the winter of 2011 "Same Yet Different" will tour Havana and Pinar del Rio while Jude teaches in Cuban communities.

Art is a great enabler. Art is truly for

everyone whether you are the viewer, or the maker. Art needs to be passed around like a family photograph and what better way than this – to travel around Nova Scotia and Pinar del Rio

"Same Yet Different"

Cuba



Boys and their Toys - Dominoes



Tourism - Viñales, Pinar del Rio



On The Hoof - Both Share similar farm animals

— to town centers, businesses, and people's homes so that everyone can experience the art with all the senses. "Same Yet Different" is creative in content, in format, in presentation and in its ability to do what art is supposed to do — get out there and meet the people.

** Sheila Morrison is a freelance writer living in Halifax, Nova Scotia.*

"Same Yet Different"

Nova Scotia



Boys and their Toys - Sailboats



Tourism - Peggy's Cove, Nova Scotia



On The Hoof - Both Share similar farm animals

Special Cuban School Impresses Visitors



By Ray Viaud*

On my last trip to Cuba in February, I was able to stop in at the Abel Santamaria Special School in Ciudad Libertad, which has had longstanding ties with Canadian Cuban Friendship Association Vancouver. The visit to the Abel Santamaria School for the Blind was a wonderful experience.

School director Jose Manuel Perez expressed his deepest gratitude to the CCFA for all of its past solidarity and contributions to the school. Jose had personally traveled to Varadero to retrieve the Braille machines that were donated last year. (These Braille writers, purchased with funds donated in memory of Beth Chobotuck, were brought to Cuba with the last CCFA tour but they had been tied up in customs and the tour group couldn't actually deliver them to the school.)

Though other such special schools have been established throughout Cuba, Abel Santamaria was the first and only school for blind children in Havana. The CCFA's solidarity with the school since its founding has greatly assisted their work with blind and developmentally disabled children. At present there are 102 students living at the school and another 70 students attending on a daily basis. The staff consists of 54 teachers with specialties in psychology, eyesight, and special education. Programs for the students include basic academic courses and in addition classes in sports, music and culture which assist the students in integrating into society. Many of the students upon graduation attend higher level schools.

The CCFA is extremely proud to keep assisting the Abel Santamaria School, as we have done for almost 50 years in the spirit of our past presidents Gladys Bjarnason and Peggy Chunn, and members Harry Rankin, John Donaldson, Bill Tarasoff, Allan Chunn and Beth Chobotuck. A visit to the Abel Santamaria School is always a deeply moving experience that leaves visitors re-committed to providing more support.

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

Do you want to travel to Cuba?



Join the Ernesto Che Guevara Volunteer Work Brigade in Cuba!

By Tamara Hansen*

On August 27, 2009, 25 people met at the Toronto airport. Some friends for many years, many complete strangers, they were about to embark on a great 3 week long journey together as members of the 2009 Ernesto Che Guevara Volunteer Work Brigade. Eighteen brigade members were from British Columbia, 4 from Manitoba and 3 from Ontario – some held passports from countries other than Canada. The youngest of the group was 17 years old, while the youngest at heart was 67. Each person came with a different history and background, but all Brigadistas were committed to going to Cuba to learn first hand about the gains and challenges of the Cuban revolution, during this annual trip organized by the Canadian Network on Cuba (CNC).

The brigadistas landed in Havana at 3am, and were picked up by their friendly hosts from the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP). They were taken to the Julio Antonio Mella International Camp (CIJAM), 45 minutes outside of Havana, where they would spend their first nights in Cuba. After becoming a bit acclimatized (as much is possible in Cuba's summer heat)

the Che Brigade made its way to its host city of Sancti Spiritus (SS).

Over the course of their 2 weeks in SS, the brigadistas had a full program. Weekday mornings were spent at the "Celia Sanchez" Organic Farm, where Brigadistas worked side by side with Cuban workers learning about the different produce grown at the farm. At lunch time they returned to their residence, at a school for the blind in the heart of the city, where they had some time for eating, roaming, and a much needed siesta. Afternoons were filled with visits to prominent historical sites, hospitals, schools, and/or lectures about Cuban reality. Evenings featured free time, cultural activities, as well as dance lessons – both salsa and reggeaton! Both weekends were a surprise, Brigadistas had a chance to visit a resort and also to visit historical sites outside of the host city.

Throughout the program the Che Brigade provided the opportunity to look at the gains and victories of the Cuban revolution, as well as see Cuba's challenges first hand, particularly the impacts of 50 years of illegal economic blockade from the United States.

During the third week the Che Brigade returned to CIJAM. Activities during the last week included free-time in Havana,

more volunteer work, meeting with the relatives of the Cuban 5 and spending time with members of the Latin American Brigade, which was also staying at the camp. This opened a different type of exchange and understanding about the impact Cuba has had on people of other countries. Finally on August 16th it was time to return to Canada.

Every year people from across Cuba receive the Che Brigade with warmth and friendship, and every year many brigade members leave their new Cuban friends promising to return. This strong connection is felt because the Che Brigade's presence in Cuba reaffirms to many Cubans that the difficult social change they are carrying out in their country is important, not only for them, but for the whole world.

If you are interested in the Ernesto Che Guevara Volunteer Work Brigade please contact Tamara Hansen at: 778-882-5223 or chebrigade@gmail.com

For more details of the 2010 brigade, which will be in Cuba for 3 weeks in May please visit: www.canadiannetworkoncuba.ca/brigade

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

Long Live the Memory of Compañero Juan Almeida Bosque!



Dearest Compañeras y Compañeros,

The Canadian Network On Cuba, on behalf of the Canada-Cuba solidarity and friendship movement, expresses its profound sorrow and condolences to the Cuban people and its revolutionary leadership on the death of Juan Almeida Bosque, Commander of the Revolution. As a historic leader of the Cuban Revolution, Compañero Almeida was a model of revolutionary ethics and dedication to the task of building and perfecting a society founded on justice, independence and human dignity. During the revolutionary struggle and from the triumph of the Revolution, Compañero Almeida stood side by side with Fidel, Raul and Che. His life was one of steadfastness and commitment to principles and convictions. His memory lives on in the work of the Cuban Revolution and its demonstration that a better world is possible.

Long Live the memory of Compañero Juan Almeida Bosque!

Long live the Cuban Revolution!

Isaac Saney & Tamara Hansen
Co-Chairs, Canadian Network On Cuba

Reflections of Fidel: Almeida Lives Today More than Ever

I have been watching for hours now on television the tribute that the entire country is paying to Commander of the Revolution Juan Almeida Bosque. I think that facing death was for him just another duty as so many others he discharged throughout his life. He did not know neither did we how much sadness the news of his physical absence would bring to us.

I was privileged to know that young black militant worker who would successively be the leader of a revolutionary group, a combatant at the Moncada, a comrade in prison, a platoon captain at the time of the Granma landing, an officer with the Rebel Army --held back by a shot on his chest during the violent combat at Uvero-- the Commander of a column marching on to create the Third Eastern Front, and the comrade sharing the leadership of our forces in the last successful battles to overthrow the tyranny.

I was an exceptional witness to his exemplary conduct for over half a century of heroic and victorious resistance in the struggle against the bandits, during the Giron counteroffensive, the Missile Crisis, the internationalist missions and the resistance to the imperialist blockade.

It was a pleasure to listen to some of his songs, especially the one particularly emotional where he bade farewell to human dreams in response to the homeland's call to "win or die". I was not aware that he had composed over 300 songs in addition to his literary work, a source of historical narratives and enjoyable readings. He defended principles of justice that will be defended at any time and age while human beings breathe on Earth.

Let's not say that Almeida is dead!

Almeida lives today more than ever!



Fidel Castro Ruz
September 13, 2009
3:12 P.M.

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONDEMNS US BLOCKADE ON CUBA

On October 28, 2009 Cuba had an unprecedented victory at the United Nations. In a vote to condemn the United States and its cruel and illegal blockade against Cuba, 187 countries voted with Cuba- effectively demanding and end to the blockade.

Only 3 countries, the United States, Israel and Palau voted to uphold the blockade, there were also two abstentions from Micronesia and the Marshall Islands. This was the same number of opposing and abstenting votes as in 2008, while Cuba made two more allies increasing their support to 187 from 185 last year.

This was the 18th year in a row that Cuba has won this vote at the UN, and the time for the United States to end their inhuman blockade is now. The Canadian Network on Cuba congratulates Cuba for this great victory, and encourages you to read the sharp response delivered by Cuba's Foreign Affairs Minister to the US Ambassador's comments on why the United States supports a continuation of the blockade. ~ Editors

Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla's Refutes Statements by US Ambassador Susan Rice at the United Nations

Taken from: www.periodico26.cu

"I feel obligated to respond to the speeches given by the United States, the European Union, and Norway.

I should say to the European Union that Cuba recognizes absolutely no moral authority to dictate models or give advice on the matter of democracy. I want to remind it of its complicity in the acts of torture that occurred at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib and reiterate that as long as it maintains a two-faced and hypocritical position, it will not enjoy any credibility.

Mrs. Rice, who unfortunately is not here in the room at the moment, started out by saying "here we go again." With that phrase she recognized what 17 representatives from the United States have come to do in the past.

I respect her opinions and recognize that her career is totally distinct from that of a neoconservative like Bolton; but she has had the sad task of defending the policy of the blockade here, which began, according to a classified memo, on April 6, 1960 with the professed aim of causing hunger, desperation, and discouragement among the Cuban people.

The only remnant of the Cold War that has been discussed here is precisely the blockade. Lift the blockade and that remnant will disappear.

Mr. President:

Cuba is a democracy that is closer to Lincoln's principles, with a government of the people, with the people and for the people, than the plutocracy or government of the rich that operates in this country.

Here, the U.S. representative described as dissidents or political prisoners those who in reality are agents of a foreign power, mercenaries paid by the U.S. government. If they want to talk about political prisoners, they should free the five Cuba antiterrorist heroes, subjected to cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment in U.S. prisons.

Mr. President:

Mrs. Rice has said that the word genocide is inappropriate for describing the blockade. I quote Article 2, paragraphs b) and c) of the 1948 Geneva Convention against the Crime of Genocide.

Paragraph b) "Genocide is causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group," referring to a human group.

Paragraph c) "Genocide is deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part."

I recommend that the State Department study that Convention better.

The blockade against Cuba is a unilateral and criminal policy that also has to be lifted unilaterally. It is not reasonable, just, or possible to wait for gestures from Cuba for an end to the criminal application of measures against the Cuban people, including its children and elderly, from the examples that I have described here.

The United States should lift the blockade and it should lift it now; first, because Cuba is not blockading the United States or occupying any portion of its territory with a military base, nor is it discriminating against its citizens or businesses; and, in the second place, it should do so because it is in the best interest of the United States itself and the will of U.S. citizens.

A free flow of information was addressed. Lift the ban on U.S. citizens to travel freely to Cuba, respect their right to freedom to travel. Lift the blockade against Cuba in the areas of technology and information; permit better connectivity with our country; export



software and information technology to Cuba and there could be advancement in this field.

Mrs. Rice has mentioned constructive advances. It's true that there have been a few steps in the correct direction, strictly limited to the relations between Cubans that live in the United States and their native country, but they have nothing to do with, nor do they mean or signify, any loosening of the blockade. They are correct steps but extremely limited and insufficient.

The blockade is not a bilateral question. Its extraterritorial application has been clearly shown with the many examples presented.

Mrs. Rice has mentioned the proposal to continue having exchanges and dialogue between the two countries, which had been proposed many years ago by Commander in Chief Fidel Castro and publicly reiterated several times by President Raúl Castro. If that is what the United States desires, it should respond to the proposal of an agenda for bilateral dialogue, presented by Cuba to that government on July 17, 2009.

Mr. President:

Mrs. Susan Rice said in August at New York University that "the United States leads by example, acknowledges mistakes, corrects course when necessary, forges strategies in partnership and treats others with respect."

She also said during that speech: "we are demonstrating that the United States is willing to listen, respect differences, and consider new ideas." It's deeply surprising to me that Mrs. Rice has had to say the opposite this morning.

Thank you very much."



Will Your MasterCard Work in Cuba?

By Dave Thomas*

The US blockade on Cuba is an inhuman, immoral and genocidal policy which has cost Cuba \$80 billion dollars in damages and has prevented Cuban people from accessing essential items such as medical supplies for almost 50 years (see page 8). However, the blockade does not only stop trade from the US to Cuba. Its impact is international, preventing US subsidiary companies around the world from trading with Cuba – effectively cutting off a large part of Cuba's potential trade and infringing on the right of other countries to trade with Cuba. Canadian trade with Cuba has been impacted by the blockade as well. One such example of this is Canadian-issued Credit Union MasterCards being refused in Cuba due to US law. The article below explains more about this case and the CNC's MasterCard campaign. ~ Editors

The Canadian Network on Cuba's "MasterCard Campaign" has its origins in May 2007 when MNBA, a division of Bank of America, bought Saskatchewan-based Credit Union Electronic Transaction Services (CUETS) Financial. Suddenly in September 2007 some Credit Union MasterCard holders got a message stating the cards would no longer be accepted in Cuba, Iran, Myanmar, North Korea and Sudan.

The Problem

October 1, 2007 was the date CUETS Financial's transactions began to be processed in the United States; not withstanding CUETS was now an American company, expected to follow American law even in their overseas operations as allowed under the US laws: 1992 Torricelli Act and the 1996 Helms – Burton Act. In response to these laws the Government of Canada, Mexico, the European Union and others drafted laws to protect their trade, business people and citizens from US incursion on their sovereignty. In Canada the Foreign Extraterritorial Measures Act (FEMA) became law in 1985. In 1992 and 1996 it was amended by order to protect against the increasing extraterritorial nature of the

above US laws.

But CUETS MasterCards are not the beginning or end of the problem: Try booking a Cuban holiday from the much advertised Expedia.ca. They will openly say they are not allowed to book Cuban travel. Wendy Holm of Bowen Island B.C. January 12, 2008, received a letter from her HSBC Canada, Customer Service Manager stating: "Unfortunately due to restrictions on our service providers, we will be unable to process transactions with Cuba". The letter goes on to say: "This includes all payments, trade service activities and wire transfer of funds in Canadian currency." Some Canadian banks have voluntarily stopped exchanging American currency for Cuba under threat of US law affecting their business with the US.

Mark Rushton of the Nova Scotia-Cuba Association did some initial research and found no charges or prosecutions had taken place under FEMA since it was proclaimed law in 1985. Several individuals from across Canada such as the Canadian Union of Public Employees and MP Alexa McDonald, did send letters of complaint to the various ministries of the Federal Government; mainly to former Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. All received identical responses suggesting the complainant contact "Director, RCMP Customs and Excise Branch", to request they investigate if there are grounds to proceed with charges.

Nino Pagliccia, another organizer in the CNC MasterCard Campaign, did send a letter on behalf of the CNC to the RCMP July 7, 2008. A reply was received September 30, 2008 to advise his complaint was under review.

November 13, 2008 Nino received a letter from Sgt. C.M. Coles and Cpl. P.R. (Peter) Haughn asking for documentation related to any individuals we may be aware of who had their MasterCards refused in Cuba. They promised timely communication until the investigation was completed.

March 23, 2009 the final reply from Sgt. Coles and Cpl. Haughn was received by Nino. They had received a legal opinion

from their "Federal Prosecution Service" which in summary stated: *"That Regina based Credit Union Electronic Services Financial Ltd. Has not committed any act that may constitute a breach of the Foreign Extraterritorial Measures Act. As a result of the legal finding we will not be taking any further action in this matter. Our investigation is concluded."*

Despite this response, this is an issue of great embarrassment for credit unions. In discussing the issue with Mr. Ron Ness, FirstOntario Chair of the Board, they feel caught: If they abandon CUETS / MBNA MasterCard – at great expense – they say their only alternative is Visa. And who knows if, or when, Visa may change operations or sell out to US investors? The solution rests with the Federal Government.

What Can Be Done?

Since receiving the letter, Nino has requested a copy of the legal opinion to which the RCMP has replied that "they do not send out those opinions". Our next course of action will be to locate a pro bono lawyer(s) to further investigate the matter. We will also seek to make this a political issue given Canada's current minority government status and pursue opposition political parties to ask questions on the government's lack of action to protect Canadian sovereignty.

The Canadian Network on Cuba is asking individuals who have been denied service such as Wendy Holm or who have been denied a MasterCard purchase in Cuba to send us any relevant documents and information. We are also calling on Cuba solidarity groups to identify local credit unions to which their members and supporters may belong. Attend their AGM and request time to speak or place a resolution on the floor regarding this issue.

For more information or materials on this issue, please contact Dave Thomas, member of the CNC executive at: cnc@canadiannetworkoncuba.ca

**Dave Thomas is the chair of the CCFA-Niagara and an Executive member of the*



Continued from Cover

del Río, Camagüey, Holguín and Isla de la Juventud. We are grateful to the Education Department of the Yamaha Corporation for selling these pianos to us for one-sixth of the normal price and to Cubana Airlines for transporting them and other equipment to Cuba at the nominal rate of one dollar per kilo.

The bulk of our remaining funds, a total of \$170,000.00 was sent, in early August, after consultation with the Cuban Embassy in Ottawa, to the Isla de la Juventud for housing reconstruction. They have decided to use these funds to supplement the cost of rebuilding, strengthening and improving the infrastructure of a *cuartería* in Nueva Gerona. A *cuartería* is a large originally privately-held mansion (the Kennedy man-

sion at Hyannisport shown recently on TV is an example) that in this case fell into disrepair before it was badly damaged by Gustav. When repaired and refurbished, a process that will take another 18 months, it will house seventeen families and will be recognized as a focus of our CNC contribution. More recently, with donations continuing to reach us, mainly from CCFA Kingston, we have been able to send a further \$7,000.00 for the *cuartería* project.

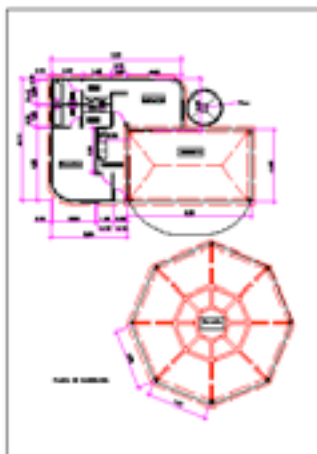
The people of Isla de la Juventud, through their representatives in the Assembly for Peoples' Power and the executive of the Nicolás Guillén Foundation, have repeatedly requested that our donors visit the island so that they can express to them their appreciation for our support. They have also asked that I pass on their thanks to everybody involved in the campaign.

Of course, Cuba is still faced with much of the task of recovering from these hurricanes. The wonderful spirit of cooperation and the tradition of fighting against difficult odds which are salient features of Cuban society have gone a long way to alleviating the suffering. But the deficit in housing, particularly, continues to be a troubling factor.

Many thanks are due to Sharon Skup for her customary energetic and efficient work, and to those throughout Canada who so generously devoted time and made donations to the campaign, thus fulfilling one of the main aims of the people who make up the CNC.

**Keith is a professor at York University and Chair of the CNC Hurricane Campaign*

Design for Community Centre, Nueva Gerona, Isla de la Juventud.



Cuban 5 Billboard in Canada!

By Ray Viaud

There is once again a Free the Five billboard hanging on Vancouver Island. It went up at the end of July and will be there at least until early October 2009. Whereas last year's was along the corridor between Victoria and Nanaimo, this time the CCFA Vancouver has placed it farther north to hit the people traveling between Nanaimo and Campbell River.

Since we own the billboard, (actually just a lightweight 10'x 24' vinyl tarp that folds up nicely when not in use), we decided to use it as a backdrop for our stage at this year's Moncada Day picnic, where we raised about \$2500 so that we could pay for the 'space' for this year's

billboard.

The event was a great success, and certainly everybody there now knows who The Cuban 5 are... which brings me to the objectives we hope to achieve with our billboard: 1. to make Canadians aware of the Five, (sadly, most of us have never heard of them), and then once they're aware, 2. to pass it on to their friends, and in particular to their American friends, so that finally, when



enough Americans know the truth about the Five, they will be freed. So, thanks for reading and now please go and email some friends about the 5... start by sending them to www.freethefive.org and/or www.thecuban5.org Thank you.

CUBA: 50 Years of Achievements

This fact sheet of Cuba's achievements was written by the Canadian Cuban Friendship Association - Toronto.

Some of Cuba's Achievements:

★ "Cuba is the top-ranking developing country when it comes to protecting children's rights according to a new Child Development Index (CDI)." *Save the Children UK, Jan. 2009*

★ Cuba currently has diplomatic relations with 182 countries and chairs the Non-Aligned Movement.

Health:

★ Free health care for life from pre-natal to seniors, stressing preventative care and including world famous mental health care approaches.

★ Cuba ended 2008 with an amazingly low infant mortality rate of 4.7 per 1,000 live births (better than some developed countries) and a life expectancy rate increased to 77.97 years.

★ Cuba has a biotechnology industry that has effectively introduced drugs and vaccines of its own—including the world's only meningitis B vaccine—along with a nascent pharmaceutical industry that has achieved considerable success in exports.

★ Cuba inoculates each child against 13 diseases. Cuba produces 12 of the vaccines itself.

Education:

★ Education is free from daycare to university levels and has a high rate of literacy.

★ Had created 65 art/music schools and 6,000 free sports centres.

★ Edits 39 million books a year.

★ Has 65 centres for higher education.

★ Has its own film industry.

Sustainability/Agriculture:

★ Cuba is the only country in the world that fulfills the minimum criteria for ecological sustainability.

Source: *Swiss ADENA Association, Beijing, 2006*

★ Cuba is the only country combining an environmentally sustainable per capita footprint and an acceptable quality of life, as measured by the U.N. Human Development Index.

Source: World Wildlife Fund

★ 70% of the vegetables and herbs grown in Cuba are organic.

★ Cuba is a prime example of urban /local food production with the government working with private individuals.

Women:

Women in Cuba are:

★ 43% of Members of Parliament and 46% of workers in the state civil sector

★ 60% of university graduates and over 62% of enrolled university students

★ 51% of science workers and 48% of research scientists

★ 66% of professionals and technicians in the state civil sector

★ 56% of doctors and 51.7% of health collaborators

★ over 70% of lawyers

Cuba's International Contribution:

★ Cuba has sent 700 educators to 28 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Also its literacy- Learn to Read program "Si, Yo puede! Yes, I can!" has proved successful in many countries and has been adapted to other languages than just Spanish.

★ Cuba has saved more than 1.9 million lives due to its international co-operation programs the last 10 years.

★ Exports 100,000 medical personnel, teachers, sports instructors and technicians to 104 countries.

★ In the last 10 years, has provided medical treatment to 13 million people in 43 countries.

★ Established in 1998, the Latin American School of Medicine has students from 30 countries (on full scholarships) and graduates 1,500 new physicians every year. The only requirement: to return and practice in areas with poor or no medical services.

★ Has provided aid to millions worldwide affected by natural disasters.

★ Is the country providing the largest contingent of doctors in the United Nations' campaign against AIDS.

★ Since 2004, Cuba's Operation Miracle program has cured more than 50,000 blind patients (who could not afford treatment) in 25 countries.

★ Cuba has provided, over the years, health care (plus schooling) free of charge to over 20,000 Ukrainian children and adults suffering from the Chernobyl nuclear disaster and still continues to do so.



Cuban doctor attends to a young patient in Guyana.



Excerpts from the speech given by Army General Raúl Castro Ruz, President of Cuba's Council of State and Ministers, at the Second Regular Session of the Seventh Legislature of the National Assembly of People's Power. Havana, August 1st, 2009

Comrades all:

We must be aware of our limitations, not to be afraid of them or wage them as a pretext to do nothing but rather to choose the best alternative and implement it.

The peoples and governments of Latin America and the Caribbean, proving again that deep changes occurred in the 50 years that have passed since the triumph of the Revolution and the failure of the attempts to isolate our country in this hemisphere, have unanimously claimed with renovated energy at the Summit of the Americas in Port of Spain the lifting of the US blockade.

It was a resounding victory obtained by ALBA and the entire region in San Pedro Sula, Republic of Honduras, when beating the US opposition they decided to unconditionally remove the anachronistic exclusion of Cuba from the Organization of American States, which we have no intention to join for obvious reasons that you all know well.

Cuba is actively involved in the different integration mechanisms of the region. Its admission to the Group of Rio as a full member last December was a very significant event.

Our political and economic relations with Venezuela and the other members of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) as well as with countries in the region and the world at large keep up their steady advance. The ALBA continues to consolidate as a forum of integration and solidarity. At the same time, it's starting to become the target of imperialist assaults.

This Assembly has just adopted a declaration on Honduras. Cuba has strongly condemned the coup d'état in that country and decidedly supported the immediate and unconditional reinstating of the legitimate president while expressing its solidarity with that sister nation. Whatever happens in Honduras shall be decisive for the future of Our America. The Honduran people will have the final say in this matter.

Despite economic and financial hazards we have honored our moral commitment to international cooperation and solidarity.

The two Central American nations that did not have diplomatic relations with us have established them in the past few months.

We could ask which country is really isolated in this region; it is certainly not Cuba.

We have followed attentively the attitude of the new US Administration towards Cuba.

Being true to facts, the economic, commercial and financial blockade remain intact and in full

"I was not elected President to return capitalism to Cuba or to surrender the Revolution."

force as evidenced in the persecution of our transactions with other countries and in the increasing number of fines given to American companies and their foreign subsidiaries. Likewise, Cuba is still unjustifiably included in the list of states sponsoring international terrorism annually prepared by the State Department.

A few weeks back, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that they are opened to a dialogue with Cuba but that they clearly want to see fundamental changes in the Cuban regime.

It is my obligation to respond to Mrs. Clinton, with all due respect, and also to those in the European Union who are asking for unilateral gestures in the sense of dismantling our social and political regime.

I was not elected President to return capitalism to Cuba or to surrender the Revolution. I was elected to defend, preserve and continue to perfect socialism, not to destroy it. (Prolonged applause)

As of the triumph of the Revolution there has not been in Cuba any extrajudicial execution, any missing or tortured person; I rectify myself: there has been torture in Cuba, at the Guantanamo Naval Base imposed to our homeland over one hundred years ago through the infamous Platt Amendment passed by the US Congress as a pre-condition to the end of the Yankee military occupation. People have been tortured there, and that is a portion of the Cuban territory, but we did not do it. That's why, with all due respect, we tell Mrs. Hillary Clinton, Sec-

retary of State of that country, that if she wants to discuss everything we are willing to discuss everything about here, but about there, too.

Those who think this way are doomed since the successive generations of revolutionary patriots, first of all our magnificent youth, will never be ideologically disarmed, and along with them and the Party in the frontline will stand the Mambises of the 20th Century: our glorious Revolutionary Armed Forces which this time did walk victoriously into Santiago de Cuba on January 1, 1959, headed by their Commander in Chief. (Applause)

Eloquent examples of this attitude are our Five Heroes, who for almost 11 years have remained incarcerated in US prisons for fighting the terrorist plans against Cuba. The world movement for their release keeps growing and this Assembly has just today agreed on an appeal to all parliaments and peoples in the world denouncing that injustice. From here we warmly embrace Gerardo, Ramon, Antonio, Fernando and Rene and we express our admiration for their uncompromising stance which is by now a symbol of the Cuban Revolution. (Applause)

We have accumulated enough experience of consultations with the masses during the 50 years of Revolution. The most recent nationwide consultation was the analysis of the July 26, 2007 speech in Camaguey. In the months of September and October discussions took place at the rank and file of the Party not limited to the subjects dealt with in that speech and encouraging the people to express themselves on any issue of their interest. The resulting data were very useful for the subsequent work of country's leadership. On November that year the collection of information and the elaboration of the summary were carried out and by December we were able to examine the final report in the Party. The discussions took place with the participation of over 5.1 million people, who made 3, 255, 000 contributions and 1, 301, 203 concrete proposals, of which 48.8% were criticisms.

As from January 1959, it has been an unchanged principle to analyze with our people every major problem, regardless of how hard. If we have been able to survive for half a century every challenge and aggression, it has been because the Revolution is the work of the immense majority of Cubans.

Firmly united, we shall be consistent with the legacy received from our people's long history of struggle, Fidel's teachings and our everlasting commitment to the fallen.

Thank you very much. (Standing ovation)

20th Pastors for Peace Caravan Challenges US Blockade Against Cuba



From Canada with love - Caravanistas paint bus sent to Cuba from Canada.

By Nita Palmer*

This summer, the Pastors for Peace US-Cuba Friendship Caravan challenged the US trade and travel blockade on Cuba for the 20th time. The annual caravan travelled through 140 cities in the US and Canada, holding events to raise awareness about the US blockade on Cuba and gathering aid to take to Cuba in defiance of the US blockade. After two weeks of travelling through the US, 130 caravanistas crossed the US-Mexico border with 132 tons of medical aid, vehicles, construction supplies, musical instruments, and many other things bound for Cuba. As most of the caravanistas are US citizens, the Caravan is also an act of civil disobedience to challenge the ban for US citizens on travel

to Cuba. After loading aid onto a container ship in Mexico, caravanistas then travelled to Cuba to spend a week experiencing Cuban culture and learning firsthand about the gains of the Cuban revolution in healthcare, education, culture, and many other fields of human development.

The Canadian Network on Cuba (CNC) has an ongoing campaign to support the caravan, with numerous caravan events held in Canada and participation from Canadian caravanistas. This year, the CNC purchased a school bus to send on to Cuba with funds raised by CNC member groups. Caravan events were held in 14 communities in Canada: Comox Valley, Salt Spring Island, Victoria, Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Regina, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Kingston, Toronto, Hamilton, Windsor, and Montreal. After holding events in Canada, the Caravan was sent off across the border into the US at four different locations: BC-Washington, Manitoba-North Dakota, Ontario-Michigan, and Quebec-Maine. Local groups held rallies and receptions to send the Caravan off with aid and caravanistas. Six caravanistas from Canada travelled with the caravan this year, from BC, Ontario and Newfoundland.

The participation of the Cuba solidarity movement in Canada in the Pastors for Peace Friendship Caravans is important, both in raising awareness among people in Canada about impact of the US blockade on Cuba and in demonstrating international opposition to the cruel, immoral US blockade on Cuba. If you are interested in joining next year's caravan, please visit: www.pastorsforpeace.org.

**Nita Palmer was a route coordinator and speaker with the 2009 Pastors for Peace Caravan and is an organizer with the Free the Cuban 5 Committee-Vancouver.*



Quebec-Maine border crossing.

40th Venceremos Brigade Challenges US Ban on Travel to Cuba

By Dave Thomas*

Every year since 1969, dozens of people from across the United States have joined the Venceremos Brigade in defying US law to show their friendship and solidarity with their Cuban brothers and sisters. Since a US travel ban makes it illegal for US citizens to travel to Cuba without a special license, members of the Venceremos Brigade participate in an act of civil disobedience to challenge this law. After crossing the border into Canada, the Brigade flies to Cuba to spend two weeks participating in volunteer work, educational events, and cultural exchanges. Brigadistas then fly back to Canada and cross back into the US, proudly declaring their opposition to the US blockade and travel ban against Cuba.

The Brigade crosses back into the US at the Niagara-Buffalo border crossing. In a show of solidarity with their brothers and sisters in Cuba and in the US, members of the Canadian Cuban Friendship Association – Niagara hold a send-off rally at the border as Brigadistas return to the US. The following is a report from the Canada-US crossing of the 40th anniversary Vencer-

emos Brigade contingent. ~ Editors

Returning from Cuba on Sunday August 2, over 140 Venceremos Brigadistas boarded three buses outside the United Steelworkers Hall in Toronto early Monday morning for the trip to Fort Erie's Mather Arch, at the foot of the Peace Bridge.

After a brief welcoming reception by the CCFA Niagara and a rally, the Brigadistas began crossing at 9:00am in groups of 15, at the direction of the Peace Bridge Authority Security. Once one group cleared U.S. Customs, the next group could begin the crossing dragging their luggage behind them.

The concern of the Bridge Authority with a mass crossing was the possibility of the Brigade shutting down the bridge as a protest. With over 140 Brigadistas the crossing took until noon to complete.

American Customs were organized to receive the group who were processed with a minimum of interference. Some luggage

was singled out for inspection but I did not hear of any over zealous inspections.

From the U.S. Customs Plaza Buffalo's Latin American Support Committee (LASC) of the Western New York Peace Center welcomed the Brigadistas at Front Park next door with banners and cheers.

LASC provided a lunch and reception where they were welcomed home by Buffalo's Vice-Mayor.

**Dave Thomas is the chair of the CCFA-Niagara and an Executive member of the CNC.*



Venceremos Brigade at Canada-US crossing.



By Evelyn Gervan*

Kingston's first Cubafest held May 1-9, 2009 was a resounding success. Conceived as a festival to showcase and celebrate Cuba's rich and diverse culture in the 50th year of the Cuban Revolution, our multi-faceted event delighted audiences and created a little piece of Cuba in our city. Cubafest brought to Kingston fine examples of Cuban music, dance, art and film, as well as food and drink typical of the island.

Cuban music was certainly in the air throughout the nine days. Juno-award winner, Jane Bunnett and partner Larry Kramer, bringing their musical genius and extensive knowledge of Cuban music, were a highlight of the festival. Masters of collaboration with other musicians, they performed in separate performances with Kingston Brasswerks, the Kingston Symphony, the Cuban choral group, Grupo Vocal Desandann and Los Naranjos from Cienfuegos.

Cubafest was a perfect opportunity to highlight our sister-city relationship with Cienfuegos. The mayor of Cienfuegos, Alberto Posada, made his first visit to our city and went away impressed by Kingston's beauty and the warmth of its citizens. Los Naranjos, the septet we invited from Cienfuegos, were a huge hit with audiences everywhere they played. And wherever they played-in schools, bars, night club cruise boat, Market Square, even St. Georges Cathedral-they had people up and dancing.

A Kingston artist, Jeff Childs, arranged for an exchange of digital art between Kingston and Cienfuegos. Several pieces of digital art by Cienfuegos artists were sent to Kingston to be displayed in the Grand Theatre during Cubafest, with a similar ar-

May 1-9, 2009 - A week of successful events celebrating Cuban culture in Kingston, Ontario

range being made for works by Kingston artists in our twin city.

Cubafest brought to Kingston several well-known Cuban artists-Eduardo (Choco) Roca, Ernesto Villanueva, Roberto Loreto, Raphael Rojas and Harold

Coego-who were invited to display and sell their work in some of the city's galleries. The visual arts exhibition also included photographs of Cuba by a talented photographer from the Kingston area, Brian Mantrop. In addition, CCFA K mounted a display of Gerardo Hernandez's political cartoons.

On Saturday, downtown Kingston's newly remodeled market square was the scene of much activity and fun. Bands played in the outdoor amphitheatre, dancers gave dance demonstrations to eager students of all ages, vendors sold Cuban items and CCFA Kingston handed out information to our citizens about various aspects of our work on behalf of Cuba. In a unique fundraiser, people eagerly paid money for a space on the sides of a newly-painted ambulance where they could write a message to the citizens of Cienfuegos. The ambulance was donated to CCFA K by Frontenac County and the City of Kingston to be shipped to Cienfuegos. During Cubafest, we raised almost half the cost of

shipping the ambulance.

The festivities ended with two fantastic and well-attended events. On the Friday night, people crowded the dance floor of a local nightclub to dance to a female group from Havana, the Caribe Girls, accompanied by Mario Rivera of Los Van Van and Leoni Torres, ex-lead singer of Charanga Habanera. We were honoured to have with us

that night of celebration and fun, Ricardo Alarcon, President of the National Assembly of People's Power of Cuba, as well as Her Excellency Teresita Vicente, Cuba's Ambassador to Canada.

The festival wrapped up on Saturday, May 9 with a fabulous cruise aboard the Island Queen. Although this first-ever Cubafest involved over a year of planning and intense organizing and hard work leading up and during the event, it was an exceptionally enjoyable experience that contributed a lot

to awakening Kingstonians to the Cuban reality, with its exceptional achievements and wonderful, talented people as well as its extreme difficulties and challenges.

CCFA Kingston and Queen's University are proud to have been able to mark the 50th year of Cuba's revolution with these two prestigious events.

** Evelyn is the President of the Canadian Cuban Friendship Association - Kingston*



Becky, a festival volunteer and Havana Club girls



Los Naranjos performing at Cubafest

2nd International Che Guevara Conference a Big Success!



*Cuban Consul General
Jorge Soberon.*



Isaac Saney addresses conference.

By Tamara Hansen*

On June 26, 27 and 28, 2009, the 2nd International Che Guevara Conference took place for the second consecutive year in Vancouver, Canada, hosted by Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC). While the 2008 conference focused on the ideas of Che Guevara, this year's theme was "50 Years of Dynamism of the Cuban Revolution". This years conference featured guest speakers as well as participants from across Canada, the US and Cuba, who took the over 250 participants through presentations and discussions which spanned both the historic and current aspects of the Cuban revolution, and how they have impacted revolutionary movements world wide, especially in Latin America.

On the opening night of the conference, Friday June 26, participants were welcomed by the evening's MCs Aaron Mercredi, a VCSC organizer and editorial board member of the Fire This Time Newspaper and Colleen Glynn, also a VCSC organizer and president of the New Democratic Party (NDP) Richmond. Tamara Hansen, Co-ordinator of Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC) and co-chair of the Canadian Network on Cuba (CNC) then gave the conference opening address, and the conference was officially in full swing. With a warm welcome, the keynote speaker of the evening, Isaac Saney, was invited up. Isaac Saney is a professor at Dalhousie University as well as the author of the acclaimed book "Cuba: A Revolution in Motion" and the co-chair of the Canadian Network on Cuba (CNC). He gave a presentation on the theme "Cuba: A Revolution in Motion and What We Need to Learn from the Cuban Revolution."

The second day was MCed by Tamara Hansen and Colleen Glynn. They began the day with an excerpt from the classic

Cuban film "Lucia." After the film, the first workshop of the day, "Roots and Causes of the Cuban Revolution" was presented by Walter Lippmann, Editor-in-chief of CubaNews. The next workshop took off from where the last workshop left off and went into "The Early Years of the Cuban Revolution: Guerrilla Warfare, Socialist Revolution, Challenges and Progress." This workshop was presented by Jorge Soberon, who is the newly appointed Cuban Consul General in Toronto, as well as the former Second Secretary of the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, DC.

In the afternoon, workshops continued with "The Cuban Revolution and Women's Liberation: A Revolution Within a Revolution." This workshop was presented by Lisa Valanti, who is the National President of the US-Cuba Sister Cities Association and participant in all 20 Pastors for Peace Caravans to Cuba, including a successful hunger strike for 94 days to release US-seized aid bound for Cuba. The next workshop, "US Imperialism and the Cuban Revolution: Socialism, the Blockade, and the Five Cuban Heroes" was presented by Gloria La Riva, Coordinator of the National Committee to Free the Cuban Five in the US.

The third and final day of the conference opened with a timeless film from the beginning of the Cuban Revolution, "A Cuban Story", in which US actor Errol Flynn shares his experience of seeing Cuba change from a US playground to a proud and sovereign country.

The first workshop, "Cuba and Human Rights: Achievements and Fundamental Progress in Social Equality" was presented by Tamara Hansen and Alison Bodine, who is the project coordinator for IFCO/Pastors for Peace in New York and on the Editorial Board of the Fire This Time Newspaper.

The next workshop, "The Cuban Revolution and Homosexual Rights: Revolution-

ary Leadership Rectifies Itself" approached another topic clouded by imperialist misinformation, and showed the progresses and leadership that Cuba has taken in advancing homosexual rights. The workshop was presented by Nita Palmer, who is an organizer with the Free the Cuban 5 Committee – Vancouver and on the Editorial Board of the Fire This Time Newspaper.

In the afternoon, the next workshop, "Cuba: Participatory Democracy and Elections in the 21st Century" was presented by Arnold August, an acclaimed journalist and author of the popular book on Cuba, "Democracy in Cuba and the 1997-98 Elections" and the upcoming "Cuba: Participatory Democracy and Elections in the 21st Century".

The final workshop of the conference was "Revolutionary Resistance and Recovery: The Collapse of the Soviet Union, the Special Period and the Tourist Industry" by Jorge Soberon. The presentation explained this challenging period which should have destroyed the Cuban Revolution, but which Cuba persevered through, and is now progressing forward from in many aspects of their revolution.

After three days of workshops, discussion, and multimedia presentations, the conference closed with a cultural celebration, which highlighted the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, as well as the fifth anniversary of Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC) with the beautiful music of local musicians and poets.

The 2nd International Che Guevara Conference was a great success. Through all of the topics discussed in this conference, from the roots of the Cuban Revolution, to the continuing advancement of their revolutionary progress, Cuba remains a beacon of hope for humanity in the struggle for a better world.

For more information on the "2nd International Che Guevara Conference" conference please visit: <http://vancouverinternationalcheconference.blogspot.com>

**Tamara is a co-chair of the Canadian Network on Cuba and coordinator of Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba.*



TODAY, CAN WE BELIEVE IN CHANGE?

An Open Letter to President Obama

By Arnold August*



September 12, 2009

President Obama,

Eleven years ago today five young Cubans, Gerardo Hernández, Ramon Labañino, Antonio Guerrero, René Gonzalez and Fernando González, were arrested after infiltrating extreme right-wing Cuban American groups based in southern Florida in an attempt to prevent further terrorist attacks against the Cuban people. Tried in 2001 during a judicial process in Miami in the biased and threatening anti Cuban environment, they were condemned to harsh and disproportionate sentences.

Before and since your election to the presidency, you have travelled not only throughout the USA, but also to many countries in the world including Canada, vowing that your administration is in favour change. When it comes to international affairs, you put accent on the need to respect other countries and deal with other nations on an equal footing, rejecting human rights violations so characteristic of your predecessor. Your message has been and is that people can and should believe

that this change is possible. There are many ways for you to prove it.

Today, seeing as that it is an important but regrettable anniversary, I would like to draw your attention to the case of the Cuban Five. You have the constitutional power, and I would add the moral obligation, to free the Cuba Five right now. You have just recently eased restrictions for Cuban-Americans to visit their families on the island. If you really believe in family families, how can you refrain from exercising your prerogative to

free the Cubans so that they can return to their families at home? By keeping the five innocent men in prison, you are insulting over 11 million Cubans who over this eleven-year period have grown to adopt the Cuban Five as part of their very own Cuban families. By maintaining their jailing, it is tantamount to imprisoning part of Cuban society right in US territory.

How can you even hope to establish improved relations with Cuba while Washington is keeping an element of Cuba in US prisons? You know very well that this is a political case and that they are political prisoners whose freedom has been demanded by innumerable personalities, heads of states and international organizations from every continent.

You also know about Luis Posada Carriles. He is responsible for many crimes such as the terrorist attack on September 4, 1997, in a Havana hotel. This caused the death of a young Italian-Canadian visitor to Cuba. At the time of his assassination, he was residing in my city, Montreal. His name is Fabio Di Celmo. The Cuban Five infiltrated the Miami-based terrorist group precisely in order to stop these types of actions. Fabio Di Celmo's assassin, Carriles, is today walking the streets of Miami with the protection of the US authorities. How can one explain this flagrant anomaly: anti-terrorists in prison, while terrorists are in liberty? If you really are interested in the people of the world believing that your administration is for change, there are many ways to prove this. Perhaps the most convincing way is to free the Cuban Five now.

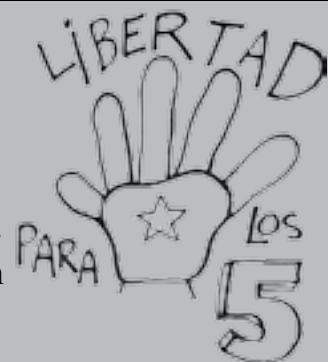
Signed: Arnold August

* Writer and member the Comité Fabio Di Celmo pour les 5 of the Table de concertation de solidarité Québec-Cuba and of the International Committee for the Freedom of the Cuban Five.

Get Involved in the Campaign to Free the Cuban 5!

For more information on the case visit:
www.canadiannetworkoncuba.ca
www.freethefive.org
www.thecuban5.org

To get involved in your local Cuba solidarity group working on the case of the Cuban 5, please see page 19 of this newsletter.



The Measure of a Revolution: Cuba, 1959-2009

Successful Conference Held at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario

This brief overview of the conference is based on the interview accorded by Montreal author Arnold August to Radio Centre-Ville's francophone program *Dimension Cubaine* on May 14, 2009.

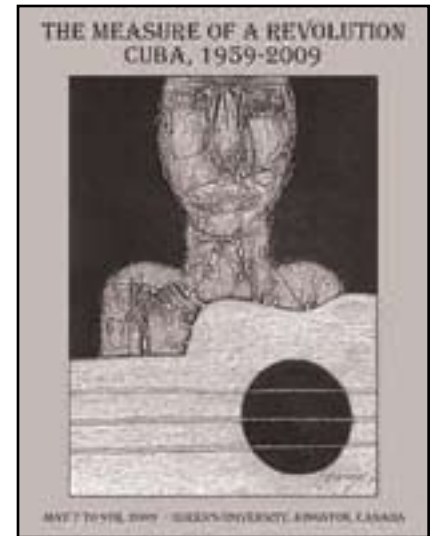
Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario was the host of this impressive gathering from May 7 to May 9, 2009. Some 200 experts including academics, writers and artists specializing in a wide variety of themes relating to Cuba, shared their knowledge and analysis. The conference entitled *The Measure of a Revolution: Cuba 1959-2009*, was initiated by, among others, Dr. Soraya Castro of the University of Havana which was facing a challenge: to find an appropriate place for the meeting of Cuban and American participants, their respective countries being inaccessible to each other because of travel restrictions imposed by Washington. Since the University of Havana has been developing mutual collaboration with Queen's University for several years, Professor Catherine Krull of Queen's University took the responsibility for her university, an ideal place for this historic conference. Louis A. Pérez, a renowned professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Susan Eckstein of the University of Boston, were the collaborators in the U.S. to organize this Conference attended by representatives of 14 countries, including Canada, Cuba, the United States and England.

Arnold August, expert on participatory democracy and elections in Cuba, was among the presenters in this conference on the panel

Popular Participation and the Revolution. His presentation was entitled "The Functioning of the Cuban State at all Levels".

"What had characterized the three-day conference was a wide range of views on Cuba, but all presentations, discussions and exchanges took place in an atmosphere of mutual respect among participants," said Mr. August. In a special panel, Caridad Josefina Vidal Ferreiro, from the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs, presented an overview regarding measures of isolation carried out by the United States for over 50 years against the Caribbean island. She demonstrated with figures revealing that the attempted isolation has failed to the extent that Havana now has diplomatic relations with 182 countries of the 192 UN country-members. In 2008, 36 heads of state from different countries had visited Cuba as well as 23 representatives of Ministries of Foreign Affairs. During her presentation Ms. Vidal explained about the participation of a group of specialized Cuban teachers in a new literacy program for aboriginal peoples in Canada; this program is based on the Cuban method *Yo si puedo*, a well-known technique for learning which has found great success around the world. "It's refreshing to learn that even in Canada, Cuba provides its valuable contribution in the fight against illiteracy," said Arnold August.

Members of the Canadian Network on Cuba (CNC) took advantage of this gathering to proudly present the first edition of their new journal, *North of Havana*, recording the achievements of the Cuban revolution and providing a portrait of solidarity actions be-



tween the two countries carried out by the affiliated member-organizations of the CNC. Members of the *Canada Cuba Friendship Association in Kingston* were also active throughout the conference by promoting important causes such as the denunciation of the U.S. blockade on Cuba and in favour of the release of the 5 Cuban political prisoners, detained illegally in the United States for over 10 years.

Arnold was very impressed by the closing remarks at the conference offered on May 9 2009 by Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada, President of the National Assembly of People's Power of the Republic of Cuba. Among other points, Alarcón made a profound analysis of current relations between Cuba and the United States since the arrival of President Obama to power. Alarcón also addressed the issue of democracy. He called for increased international solidarity in favour of the release of the 5 Cuban political prisoners.

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Report on the First International Festival of Poetry of Resistance, in Honour of the Cuban Five Toronto, April 24 - 30, 2009

By Lisa Makarchuk*

For one week this year, Toronto became the world capital for Poetry of Resistance in honour of the Cuban Five. This Festival brought together poets, musicians, speakers, interpreters of dance and music from all around the globe whose activities extended from university theatres to community centres, secondary schools, book stores and churches. Participants came from or represented various countries: New Zealand, Turkey, Cuba, Pakistan, the USA, Colombia, Peru, Chile, Puerto Rico, and El Salvador. They also came not only from Ontario communities (Peterborough, London, Toronto) but also from New Brunswick, British Columbia and Quebec.

The Festival was honoured to have the presence of Elizabeth Palmiero, the wife of Ramon Labanino, one of the Five, and of Bernardo Toscano from Cuba's Foreign Affairs Department. We were thrilled by the opportunity to speak by phone with Ramon himself at a Saturday evening Festival event, who sent along his best wishes for its success. Outstanding literary figures such as Pablo Armando Fernandez and Nancy Morejon, trova musician Orlando Silverio and Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples representative Diamela Prado were present. Orlando Silverio sang the poetry written by Ramon Labanino; Nancy Morejon spoke of the social role of poetry in Cuba and Diamela Prado spoke about the potential unity of culture and solidarity work. The chant to free the Five, accompanied by gestures, was well developed with audience participation by the end of the Festival, thanks to Charles Roach, poet and member of the Festival Committee.

Organizations offering support and participation came from representatives of Canadian writers' unions, the Canadian League of Poets, Canadian Arab Federation, Palestine House, local, national and international solidarity organizations, Union Art Service, trade union organizations such as CUPE and the Confederation des syndicats nationaux, Toronto Library Network contacts, and a community chorus of approximately 80 persons. The Festival established close mutually supportive links with diverse communities such as the Second International Faiz Ahmed Faiz Peace Festival (honouring one of the most famous poets in Urdu in the world), the Dub Poets Society, The Poetree,



David Miller, Mayor of the city of Toronto, at Festival press conference in City Hall.

the Krittibas Bengali Literary Group, the 519 Community Centre, District 12, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, the Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood Centre, the Unitarian and United churches, Aboriginal, Maori, and Quechua communities, etc. This linguistic and cultural diversity was unified into a Festival Declaration for peace with justice and freedom for the Cuban Five signed by poets, politicians, musicians, artists and participants who attended the event.

Poetry, music, panel discussions and art were the expressive vehicles: The hypocrisy of US government policies in the so-called war against terrorism was brought out in the information disseminated regarding the Cuban Five at each activity. Pakistani intellectuals expressed the threat to their country, on the one hand, by US forces and religious fundamentalists on the other. Topics that were discussed included social responsibilities of the writer, musician, poet and artist; poetry and exile; poetry and politics; poetry and the struggle for liberation, and the role of poetry in popular demonstrations and activities.

The Festival was the culmination of over a dozen events organized in different Toronto venues throughout the previous year in preparation for it.

*Lisa was the coordinator of the First International Poetry Festival of Resistance in Honour of the Cuban 5.



Poets: Carlos Angulo (exile from Peru), Pablo Armando (Cuba) and Nancy Morejon (Cuba).

Declaration of First Festival of Poetry of Resistance, April 29, 2009

We, poets, musicians, artists and cultural and community activists, participants in the First International Festival of Poetry of Resistance, firstly salute the creation of this forum and its openness to a plurality of languages, such as English, Spanish, Urdu, Turkish, French, Arabic, Yiddish, among others.

Because the themes and styles of the poetry and arts here brought together are nourished by the social soil in which they are rooted, we feel we have a responsibility to declare our support for the humanist principles that guide their diverse expressions in artistic creation.

In this first edition of the Festival, we have focused on the five Cuban heroes unjustly imprisoned in the United States for more than a decade. Themselves poets of action and word, we know that their destiny is the same as that of the Cuban people and of the entire world because, in the words of Jose Martí, "Homeland is humanity."

Meeting in Toronto, inspired by this first encounter, we demand immediate and unconditional freedom for René González Schwerert, Gerardo Hernández Nordelo, Ramón Labañino Salazar, Antonio Guerrero Rodríguez, and Fernando González Llort.

Free the Five Cuban Heroes!

Declaration signed by over 140 artists, intellectuals, poets, activists, politicians and supporters of the first International Poetry Festival of Resistance in Honour of the Cuban 5.

Contact CNC member groups!

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