

EDUCATIONAL OF THE YOUNG COMMUNIST LEAGUE

Cuba Solidarity

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SELECTED READINGS

Excerpt from Dynamic Magazine

The Brigadistas: Fight To End the Cuba Travel Ban

By Bonnie Massey

The first brigades participated in sugar harvests and subsequent contingents have done agricultural and construction work. By 2006, over 9,000 people had traveled with the Brigade, none of them with a U.S. government license to travel. While, in the past, the U.S. had granted "people to people" licenses (used by cultural institutions and non-profit organizations for educational and cultural trips), the Brigade has never requested permission, based on the belief that there is a constitutional right for U.S. citizens to travel where they wish.

Four years ago Venceremos joined with a group called IFCO/Pastors for Peace to organize and call for open and public "travel challenges" to Cuba. With these "challenges," not only do brigadistas travel unlicensed but also they do so openly, calling as much attention to these act of civil disobedience as possible. They take trips to Cuba and prepare for a legal and political battle upon return, and are always prepared for a political fight all the way up to the Supreme Court.

The political context of unlicensed travel is quite different than it was 38 years ago when the brigade began. There is now majority public support for an end to the travel restrictions, with polls showing that between 67 and 75 percent of the American public, including over 50 percent of the Cuban American community, support an end to the travel restrictions. Many Republican and Democratic politicians business people, and farmers, who have a financial interest in free trade between Cuba and the U.S., no longer support restrictions on travel or the economic blockade. Both houses of the U.S. Congress have voted not to enforce the travel restrictions.

On the other hand, President Bush has unleashed an unprecedented attack on travel to Cuba. Throughout his term, Bush eliminated 90 percent of legal travel to Cuba, doing away with the most common categories of legal travel, which include the people-to-people licenses. The new rules also severely restrict licenses to Cuban Americans for family visits and academic licenses. The Bush administration has gone after

Cuba travelers by increasing harassment against them and ordering the Office of Foreign Asset Control (the wing of the Department of Treasury charged with enforcing the travel restrictions) to carry out legal cases against those accused of traveling to Cuba. Most recently, Bush has called for the criminal prosecution of people deemed to be organizers of unlicensed travel to Cuba.

The travel restrictions fall under the Department of Treasury. Why? Tourism is an extremely important aspect of the Cuban economy, and the prevailing assumption is that travelers to Cuba spend money there, aiding the economy of a perceived "enemy" of the U.S.

A more important reason for the blockade is political rather than economic. If people don't travel to Cuba they can't know what is going on there and will thus continue to believe only the image of Cuba projected by the U.S. If these travel sanctions are ended, the entire blockade will come crumbling down behind it.

It is not just those who want to end the blockade that sees the importance of the travel to Cuba. Those who support these policies know that travel to Cuba is the blade that will keep cutting at the lies about Cuba and, ultimately, normalize relations with the island nation. In fact, in threatening letters to Brigadistas, OFAC has written that their travel to Cuba "causes serious harm to the sanctions program." All of the reports issued by Bush's "special commission on transition" in Cuba over the last three years have included measures to severely restrict travel.

Did you know...

66% of Americans want to normalize relations with Cuba.

Terrorism against Cuba has also targeted travel. Over the last few decades, travel agencies that coordinated travel to Cuba have been bombed and travel organizers assassinated. The most infamous act of terrorism against Cuba occurred in 1976 when a civilian Cubana plane was blown out of the sky and 73 passengers were killed. In the early 1990s, a string of bombs went off in Havana hotels and an Italian tourist was killed. In

fact, the last piece of evidence presented to the U.S. by Cuban security exposed a plot to bomb American planes going from

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the United States to Cuba. But whom did the US government pursue? Not the terrorists planning the bombing. Instead they arrested and imprisoned the Cuban Five, a group of Cuban men who were actually investigating these crimes.

The American people cannot allow the U.S. government to instill fear into people's hearts and stop us from exercising our right to travel to Cuba. Our right to travel is our right to know, our right to associate of our own free will, and our right to freedom of speech. Cuba and the Cuban people are not our enemy. If we are not allowed to go to Cuba, how can we know the truth?

Taken from the People's Weekly World (May, 2005)
Bring the terrorist to justice- vindicate the Cuban Five
By W.T. Whitney, Jr.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said May 22 that his country would consider breaking diplomatic ties with the U.S. government if Washington refuses to extradite Luis Posada Carriles.

Since Posada's arrest May 17 for illegal entry into the United States, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency has held the terrorist without bail in El Paso, Texas. A hearing is scheduled for June 13 to decide whether he will be extradited to Venezuela, sent for trial in another country or remain in a U.S. jail. His lawyer maintains that as a longtime CIA agent, Posada deserves U.S. asylum.

Posada is a citizen of both Cuba and Venezuela. In 1985, he escaped from jail in Venezuela, where he had served nine years on charges relating to a bomb attack that brought down a Cuban airliner in 1976 and killed 73 people. Twenty members of Congress sent President Bush a letter May 18 demanding Posada's extradition to Venezuela. The LA Times has called for a quick extradition. "If Washington disregards its

extradition treaty with Venezuela," the paper said, "other countries will feel free to disregard their extradition treaty obligations with the U.S."

On May 18 National Security Archives of George Washington University posted declassified FBI files on its web site that clearly demonstrate Posada's guilt and U.S. complicity in the airliner attack. Before the attack, U.S. Embassy personnel in Caracas knew that one of the men who planted the bomb was Posada's employee, that he may have bombed the Guyanan Consulate in Trinidad, and that he was headed for Barbados, the site of the bombing. U.S. officials suspected he "may have been trained in the use of explosives" by Posada and they knew that his team had previously tried to bomb two other Cuban planes. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was informed that Posada had boasted at a party: "We are going to hit a Cuban airliner."

President Fidel Castro, speaking before 200,000 Cubans elaborated on the connection between the U.S. tolerance of Posada's crimes and its cruelty to five Cuban anti-terrorists jailed in the United States. He detailed how hotel bombings in Havana staged by Posada in 1997 set off a sequence of events that led to the "Five's" victimization. It's a story marked by deceit and arrogance.

Did you know.....

More than 220,000 Cuban doctors, nurses and other medical personnel have served abroad since 1963. Right now, another 100,000 Cuban medical personnel are being trained to work abroad.²

Castro reported that while the hotel bombings were going on, U.S. officials provided the Cubans with useful intelligence information about other possible attacks originating in Florida. Cuban leaders began talking with U.S. officials to develop a united front against terrorist attacks. They met several times in early

1998.

Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez, serving as Cuba's unofficial emissary to the Clinton administration, met with high officials in Washington on May 7, 1998. "We have common enemies," one of them affirmed.

The two countries developed plans for sharing intelligence and Cuba was to provide the FBI with information gathered by its anti-terrorist agents working in Florida. Cuba handed over

reams of material on June 17, 1998. Then there was silence. The FBI arrested the five Cubans Sept. 12.

Castro charged that Miami FBI chief Hector Pesquera single-handedly broke up the joint anti-terrorist venture. Four months

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ago Pesquera, now retired, admitted in an interview that the Cuban Five had done the U.S. government no harm. In addition, Castro noted that at the same time the five were being investigated and prosecuted, 14 of the 19 men responsible for the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks were living and training in South Florida.

Venezuelan Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel last week condemned the U.S. double standard. "What is the final position of the American government, and particularly President Bush, with respect to terrorism?" he asked. "It seems that for some there is a good terrorism and a bad terrorism."

Taken from People's Weekly World (Sept., 2006)
Campaign to free the Cuban 5 Pushes Forward
By W.T. Whitney, Jr.

The legal struggle for the freedom of the Cuban Five continues, despite a recent adverse appeals court ruling. Defense lawyer Leonard Weinglass, however, has called for enlarging the political fight.

Weinglass is confident that someday the five unjustly imprisoned men will go free. But "this is an essentially political trial and, in particular, a trial of U.S. policy against Cuba," he told the Florida-based Progresso Weekly, Aug. 28.

"The United States cannot be an accomplice to a crime and at the same time try the people who oppose it," he said.

The crime here is U.S. terrorism against Cuba's sovereignty and its socialist revolution. The Cuban Five were defending their homeland and the people of the U.S. against repeated acts of terror organized by right-wing extremists in Miami. While doing so, they were arrested by federal agents and

charged with a variety of conspiracy-related crimes.

The "Worldwide Days of Action in Solidarity with the Cuban Five," now in progress, are all about exposing how terrorism has been used to further Washington's political ends. The days run from Sept. 12, the day eight, years ago when Gerardo Hernández, Fernando González, René González, Antonio Guerrero, and Ramon Labañino were arrested, through Oct. 6. On that day, 30 years ago, Luis Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch bombed a Cuban airliner, killing 73.

In between falls Sept. 21, the 30th anniversary of the murders of ex-Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier and Roni Moffitt in Washington on orders of the Chilean dictator, Gen. Augusto Pinochet, with the connivance of Posada and others.

On Sept. 23, supporters of Cuban Five will march to the White House. They will be coming from throughout the nation. Other actions are taking place in San Francisco, Detroit and New York.

Meanwhile, new revelations about the anti-Cuba, right-wing terror network have surfaced.

- In June, Jose Antonio Llama revealed that he and other Cuban American National Foundation leaders spent \$1.5 million in the 1990s on 11 aircraft, seven boats and weapons to mount attacks on Cuban leaders. He was confessing to crimes. Law enforcement officials are silent.

- Santiago Alvarez was jailed November 2005 for possession of weapons intended for use against Cuba. Alvarez, a wealthy Miami developer, brought Posada to Florida illegally in March 2005. Faced with a trial outside Miami and deprived of a supportive Miami bias, Alvarez pleaded guilty Sept. 11 to a reduced charge carrying minimal jail time.

Did you know....

In July 2006, the Bush Administration released a second report calling for an illegal "regime change" in Cuba following the death of Fidel Castro. The report calls for spending \$80 million in the next two years to fund opposition groups in Cuba and a massive propaganda campaign. The report also calls for the privatization of schools and hospitals, the dismantling of social security and the persecution of political and mass organizations in Cuba under a US backed Cuban government.

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- Former CIA agent and past plotter Robert Ferro was jailed April 14 in Upland, Calif., for possession of 1,571 automatic weapons. He claimed membership in the terrorist group Alpha 66 and alleged that the U.S. government had supplied the weapons for use against Cuba. His trial date is still pending.

- Orlando Bosch, instigator of death and destruction, received a pardon from the first President Bush. Living unmolested in Miami, he recently boasted to the Vanguardia of Barcelona, Spain, about a 1971 assassination attempt against Fidel Castro and the destruction of the Cuban airliner.

- Luis Posada is still detained, charged only with illegal entry, despite a lifetime of crime. Treaties exist and court proceedings are pending in Venezuela, but Washington rejects Venezuela's request for extradition. Six countries have refused to take him in as a deportee. Posada has applied for U.S. citizenship based on his CIA service.

- The story of Hector Pesquera, who as FBI prosecutor kept the Cuban Five in solitary confinement for 17 pre-trial months, exemplifies U.S. government complicity in terror. In 2004 he attended planning sessions in Panama for the killing that year of Venezuelan prosecutor Danilo Anderson. In August, his role as "consultant" to Guantanamo torturers in 2002 and 2003 became public knowledge.

Richard Klugh, defense attorney for Fernando González, one of the Cuban Five, told reporters that the new revelations of terrorist plotting could back up demands for a new trial.

Solidarity activists say the new reports bolster the political fight for the five prisoners by showing why they were doing what they were doing. They say the jailing of the Five, who were trying to stop terrorism, exposes the hypocrisy of the Bush administration's "war on terrorism."

Endnotes

1. Build, Bob. Cuba survives and inspires. People's Weekly World 7/28/2007. <http://www.pww.org/article/articleview/11476/1/383/>
2. Build, Bob. Cuba survives and inspires. People's Weekly World 7/28/2007. <http://www.pww.org/article/articleview/11476/1/383/>
3. Bottoms, Geoffrey. International month of action set for Cuban Five. People's Weekly World 7/20/2006. <http://www.pww.org/article/articleview/9517/1/148/>

Discussion Questions

1. Why might the fight to lift the travel ban gain sympathy from people that don't necessarily identify as "Left" in the United States?
2. How does the US economic blockade dictate other countries' policy towards Cuba?
3. How does the US's response to Posada and the Cuban Five represent an attack on Cuba's path to socialism in particular and the world socialist movement in general?
4. What can your club do on the local level to help end the travel ban and defend the Cuban Five?