



Australia - Cuba Friendship Society

CUBA Newsletter

Spring 2005

In this issue

End of Year Event	1
Farewell Denis Kevans	2
Secretary's Report	2
ACFS National Consultation April 2006	3
Asia Pacific Solidarity Conference	3
Hurricane Katrina: - Cuba a U.N. Model	3
Update on Cuban Five	4
ACFS Membership & Donation Form	4

Contact us

The ACFS meets on the
1st Thursday of the month
Level 1, CEPU Building
741 George St, Sydney

Mail: PO Box K364,
Haymarket NSW 1240

Web: www.sydney-acfs.org

Email:
secretary@sydney-acfs.org

Newsletter Contributions

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

You are invited to the...



END OF YEAR SOLIDARITY FIESTA

Sunday, 11 December 2005

1.00pm – onwards

Addison Rd Community
Centre

142 Addison Road,
Marrickville

Live Cuban Folkloric Dancing
and Music Show

Traditional South American Food

Organised by: Australia Cuba Friendship Society
(Sydney), Amigos De Cuba and Committee in
Solidarity with Cuba (Western Suburbs)

For Further information, please contact
Nick on 0414691732

FAREWELL DENIS KEVANS (1939 – 2005)

Many of you already know that we lost a valuable activist, folk musician, poet and friend on August 23. Denis Kevans, also known as the 'Poet Lorikeet', died suddenly at the age of 66, following complications from heart surgery.

Denis will be long remembered for his contributions to the environmental, labour and peace movements in Australia and for his internationalism in solidarity with struggles across the world. Denis was a long-term Cuba solidarity activist, contributing to many events through his poetry and music. He will be very missed by the Sydney Cuba Friendship Society. We send our deep condolences to Denis Kevans' daughter Sophia and partner Sonia Bennet.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Joan Silk

On November 8, for the 14th consecutive year, the UN General Assembly voted on the cruel and illegal US blockade of Cuba. The result was a record vote of 182 to 4 (with 1 abstention) in favour of lifting the blockade. The "no" voters, unsurprisingly, were the United States, Israel, Palau and the Marshall Islands. Micronesia abstained and El Salvador, Iraq, Nicaragua and Morocco didn't vote. Last year, the vote was 179 to 4, with several countries not voting. Once again we see the double standards of US foreign policy. Year after year the international community has condemned the blockade which is designed to destroy the Cuban economy by preventing US trade, investment, travel and cultural contact with Cuba. The US is also attempting to bully other countries to join it. The blockade, imposed by the US over 40 years ago, has caused over US\$79.3 billion worth of damage to Cuba. The US continues, with the support of Israel and a few subservient states, to veto the lifting of the blockade. ACFS asks how the United States, a nation that prides itself on 'freedom' can justify a policy of deliberately causing poverty, disease and suffering to the Cuban people in an attempt to starve them into submission?

Despite the horror of terrorist activities across the world, a culprit we don't hear much about is the convicted

terrorist Luis Posada Carriles whom Washington seems keen to protect. This Cuban-born Venezuelan national has a decades-long history of terrorist activities against civilians in Cuba and is wanted in Venezuela for the bombing of a Cubana tourist airliner in 1976 – an act that murdered all 73 people aboard. Carriles, an ex-CIA operative, entered the US illegally this year seeking refuge following a presidential pardon from Panama where he had been convicted of terrorist crimes. While he is in jail in the US pending a number of immigration hearings, it seems he will not be deported or punished for his crimes. The ACFS asks how the US government is able to ignore an extradition treaty with Venezuela, which has filed for Carriles' extradition. Despite Venezuelan assurances to the contrary, the US claims that it will not extradite to a country where a suspect might be tortured. Tell that to Mamdouh Habib! Compare this case to that of the Cuban Five.

These five Cubans, whose only 'crime' was to try to monitor terrorist activities planned by expat Cuban mafiosi in the US, were convicted in a notoriously biased Miami court on trumped-up charges, receiving up to double life sentences for trying to protect lives in Cuba. Worldwide action to expose this act of injustice has led to a successful appeal in all 5 cases. Now Washington demands that the appeal be reheard by a full bench of 12 judges meaning months, or years, of further delay! It seems that obstacles are continually being put in the way of justice being done in these cases. And why? Because both the Cuban and Venezuelan people are building their own societies outside of US domination.

To raise awareness about Cuba, ACFS held a well-attended rally outside the US Consulate on the afternoon of November 8 when the blockade vote went to the UN. We called for the blockade to be lifted, the terrorist Carriles to be extradited from the US to Venezuela to stand trial for terrorist bombings against Cuban civilians and for the release of the Cuban Five. Thanks to our very active members and supporters, we had various speakers, some live music, handed out about 200 information leaflets and spoke to a number of people about justice for Cuba.

The hurricane that swept through the New Orleans area has shown clearly some of the differences between socialism and capitalism. Cuba has an excellent record of facing the devastation wrought by hurricanes with a coordinated and humane response. Compare this to the US, where there was fighting and looting, people barricaded in their houses and marauding bands roaming the streets with poor, mostly black people trapped, terrorised and helpless amid floodwaters, disease and despair. This couldn't be more different to the way Cuba has responded, evacuating huge numbers of people to safety when it has been struck by hurricanes. It's just another example of how the Cuban social system is not just economically and politically different to the US, it actually shapes the relationships between people. Of course, this is what all social systems do - but the contrast here is between relations based on competition and exploitation and those of cooperation and caring. And this is the nation that the US wants to destroy. It's sometimes a challenge to interest people in Cuba when other important issues seem more urgent. But the US government and its backers never forget Cuba and are ready to take any opportunity that is offered to bring it down. We should never assume that the US is no longer interested or that it is 'too busy' elsewhere. Vigilance is necessary.

Other recent ACFS activities include a section of our meeting devoted to feedback from members who participated in the World Youth Conference in Venezuela. They spoke about their experiences at the conference, meetings with workers in Venezuela and Argentina and information on current developments in Cuba. The Communist Party of Australia recently organised a meeting which some of us attended with several Cuban visitors who were passing through Sydney on their way from an alternative energy conference in Melbourne. The delegates spoke about the Cuban drive to cut energy costs and explore new sources of energy. Unfortunately time was limited – they had a plane to catch – but it was good to be able to welcome the visitors and hear about energy developments in Cuba. In October we held an information afternoon for the brigadistas who will be going on our Work/Study Brigade this year.

A number of past and present brigadistas attended the afternoon and it was a great opportunity to share information, food and experiences. Our good wishes go with them to Cuba and we know they'll have a great time.

Looking forward to catching up with members and friends at our end-of-year function – see the front page of our newsletter.

Yours in solidarity,
Joan Silk, Secretary, Sydney branch,
Australia Cuba Friendship Society

Advanced Notice: ACFS National Consultation 8-9 April 2006

The 2006 National Consultation will be held in Adelaide on 8th & 9th April, 2006.

Alicia Corredera and Juan Pozo from the Asia and Oceania Section of the Cuban Institute in Solidarity with the Peoples (ICAP) will also attend.

The National Consultation is an excellent opportunity for activists from around Australia and New Zealand to come together and share information, pass resolutions for action and strategise about future activities.

ACFS South Australia is looking forward to a great gathering in Adelaide in 2006.

Participants will need to RSVP to the ACFS SA Branch by 30 March, 2006. If you would like to participate in the National Consultation email the ACFS Sydney Branch for an application form:
secretary@ sydney-acfs.org

Call for the 3rd Asia-Pacific Regional Conference of Solidarity with Cuba

MESSAGE FROM ICAP

To all the Cuban Friends and Friendship societies with Cuba in Asia-Pacific:

With a view to maintaining and strengthening the world peoples movement for solidarity with the Cuban people and following the two World Conferences held in Havana

City, Cuba, and the two Regional Conferences held in Calcutta, India and Hanoi, Vietnam, the All India Solidarity Committee with Cuba and the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP) will hold the Third Asian-Pacific Regional Conference of Solidarity with Cuba.

The solidarity Conference will take place on the 20 and the 21 of January in the city of Chennai, capital of the State of Tamil Nadu, a place rich of cultural and human heritage.

We call to all the friends and Friendship Societies in this region who raise the flag of the Cuban solidarity to send their delegates to join us and participate in this very important gathering in support of the Cuban Revolution and the People of Cuba.

Once again, the Cuban Revolution is being harassed by the present North American administration. President Bush wants to implement his doctrine of changing by force to the governments that are not obedient to his interests. The economic blockade is more tight and cruel than ever before, Washington tries to isolate Cuba from the International Community and the International forums and also prepare plans of military aggressions against Cuba.

Right now in one exercise of double standards in relation with terrorism, the Bush administration protect the Cuban born terrorist Luis Posada Carriles, and his criminal hood who are responsible for the bombing of a Cuban civil plane which caused the death of 73 persons and refuse to extradite him to Venezuela to be prosecuted for this crime according to the International law.

The working commissions of the conference will analyse how to increase the solidarity with Cuba in the world context we are living now, which can mean a rich interchange of experiences.

Besides, there will be debates about the ways and actions to contribute to the freedom of the Five Cuban Heroes who are in prison for fighting the terrorism against the Cuban people and other peoples of the world.

We look forward to the early confirmation of your attendance.

Hurricane Katrina: Loss of Life is Avoidable - Cuba a U.N. Model

The massive loss of life in Louisiana and Mississippi was avoidable, if those making decisions were interested in funding emergency measures rather than spending money on war and occupation. Cuba lies directly in the path of many hurricanes, and yet the loss of life is usually minimal, because the government has systems in place to aid orderly evacuations, provide emergency shelter, and look after the elderly, the handicapped, and the poor.

In 2001, when Hurricane Michelle, a level-4 storm, hit with sustained 125-mile-per-hour winds and widespread floods, more than 700,000 people were evacuated. Only five Cubans lost their lives in the storm.

In September 2004, Cuba endured Ivan, the fifth-largest hurricane ever to hit the Caribbean, with sustained winds of 124 miles per hour. Cuba evacuated almost 2 million people--more than 15 percent of the total population. One hundred thousand people were evacuated within the first three hours. An incredible 78 percent of those evacuated were welcomed into other people's homes. Children at boarding schools were moved. Animals and birds were moved. No one was killed. The UN declared this to be a model of disaster preparation.

Cuba, a country blockaded and isolated by the U.S. for 45 years has been able to evacuate millions of people in an orderly fashion without loss of life. Natural disasters do not have to be catastrophes.

Thanks to Mike Clear for forwarding this article.

Have you got an article, poem, photo or news item to share with the ACFS? Send your submission to the Newsletter Coordinator – contact details are on the front page!

World parliamentarians demand release of the Five



MORE than 50 parliamentarians from all regions of the world participating in the 113th General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, from October 17-19, have signed a petition calling for the release of the five anti-terrorist Cubans still unjustly imprisoned in U.S. jails despite the ruling of the Atlanta Appeals Court, which annulled the trial in which they were sentenced.

The parliamentarians, deputies and senators from parties with different political affiliations from Latin America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Oceania all backed the petition, which ends by affirming: "After the overturning of their sentences, there is no justification whatsoever for their retention in prison and their immediate release is demanded."

During this IPU meeting, a new president of this international body was elected, with this responsibility going to Italian Deputy Pier Ferdinando Casisni, current president of his country's Chamber of Deputies.

Jaime Crombet Hernández-Baquero, vice president of the Cuban National Assembly of People's Power, headed the island delegation to the Assembly.

Violations of family law in the case of the Five - Granma

THE 6th Ibero-American Conference on the Family yesterday devoted a special session to detailing the obstacles placed in the way of family visits to René, Gerardo, Antonio, Fernando and Ramón, political prisoners in the United States for seven years.

Invited to the meeting together with wives and mothers of the five Cuban heroes, Ana Mayra Rodríguez Falero from the National Assembly of People's Power explained to those participating the antecedents of the case, the legal procedures and the current situation in the wake of the verdict of the Atlanta Appeals Court. "It is moving how the Five and their families have become one big family," Rodríguez Falero noted, "what happens to one happens to the rest and every time one family member talks in public on this issue the reference is to the case of all of them.

Elizabeth Palmeiro, wife of Ramón Labañino, expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to share information with specialists on family matters, as it is precisely in this context that the Five have experienced the worst abuses of their basic rights in order to break them "Difficulties in obtaining visas to the United States," she noted, "mean that we can only visit once or twice a year, when it is their right to receive them monthly."

Free The Cuban 5!

However, Elizabeth Palmeiro described these visits as a "privilege" (we see them in this way because the visa concessions are on the margin of our natural rights). , while she detailed the situation of Olga Salanueva and Adriana Pérez, wives of René Sehwerert and Gerardo Hernández respectively, as the cruelest cases of the violation of family visiting rights.

The psychological pressure and constant frustrations suffered by Olga and Adriana are compounded by the inexplicable delay in processing visas for other family members to enter the United States, the disparate approval of visas for wives and young children that complicates or make the journey impossible in practice, and the unjustified solitary confinement of the Five for periods when they have not even been allowed letters or family phone calls.

"After the Atlanta ruling," Ramón's wife affirmed, "we are in a more hopeful position and hope that the absurd arguments that have been utilized to revoke visas and impede communication will finally lose meaning and collapse.

Delegates from various nations affirmed that they were aware of the case and expressed their solidarity with the families of the five Cubans. "What is happening should not surprise us because these are the habitual violations practiced by the U.S. government against those that it considers its enemies, and Cubans who defend their revolutionary ideas are the greatest enemies of all for them," observed Guatemalan Felipe Poll in the session. "Justice is late, but it is coming," emphasized Poll, "and Cubans never give up, but fight, and do so with the solidarity of many."

HAVE YOU RENEWED YOUR ACFS MEMBERSHIP LATELY?

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

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

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

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ **Email:** _____

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