



# CUBA Newsletter

Winter 2008

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## Contact us

The ACFS meets on the 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of the month at 6.30pm at **Level 1, CEPU Building, 741 George St, Sydney**

All friends of Cuba and those who would like to find out more are welcome to attend meetings.

**Mail:** PO Box K364, Haymarket NSW 1240

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## Newsletter Contributions

We welcome contributions to the Cuba Newsletter. If you would like submit an article, please contact: [newsletter@sydney-acfs.org](mailto:newsletter@sydney-acfs.org)

## SECRETARY'S REPORT

### Allende commemoration

The late Chilean president, Salvador Allende, would have been 100 on June 26. Under his government, solidarity between Cuba and Chile led to Chile re-establishing relations with Cuba. This was the first foreign policy measure of Allende's Popular Unity government and was in defiance of the bitter US blockade against Cuba still in force today. This led the way for other Latin American countries to eventually also defy the blockade. President Allende died in combat on September 11 1973, defending the constitutionality of his government against the fascist military coup of General Pinochet. Cubans, Australians and others around the world have commemorated this anniversary with lectures, concerts and other events to show that this legacy is not forgotten. With the intense destabilisation efforts by the US government against progressive governments in Latin America and elsewhere continuing today, it is particularly timely for us to remember the example of the popular struggle in Chile and the heroic actions of the people who made it. We are honoured to have a number of members of the ACFS who participated in this struggle and who today are still working for equality, peace and justice in the world. One of these members has written a deeply personal recollection and tribute to Salvador Allende in this edition of Cuba News, which I commend to you.

### Salud screening raises \$1520 for Cuban hospital appeal

Last month, ACFS celebrated the 80th anniversary of Che Guevara's birth and launched our humanitarian project in Cuba with a screening of the film ¡Salud! at the Tom Mann Theatre. The ACFS project is the refurbishment of the Dermatological Department of the Dr. Ernesto Guevara de la Serna Hospital in Las Tunas, Cuba. We raised \$1520 from the film night and donations from members towards that project. Thanks to all our members and supporters for their hard work and generosity. ¡Salud! shows some of the practical consequences of the Cuban revolution – a free, high quality healthcare system for all Cubans, 28,000 Cuban health professionals serving in 68 countries around the world, 30,000, international medical students in Cuba including from Timor Leste and more than 100 students from disadvantaged communities in the USA.

### The US blockade of Cuba

I just came across this quote from the famous paediatrician, Dr. Benjamin Spock: *"I believe very few Americans realize what our country is trying to do down there -- starve people into submission and deprive children and old people of medicine."* 'Dr. Spock Takes Aid to Cuban Kids' in American Medical News, February 22, 1993.

### Future events

Up and coming events to note are the *July 26 celebration* of Cuba's revolution, to be held on Saturday, July 26 at Casa Latina at the Addison Road Community Centre. The *Work Study brigade to Cuba*, one of the highlights of our year, is going ahead as usual with a number of people from around the country expressing interest in participating. See enclosed flyers for these events. Don't forget to keep up with the brigade organisation at the website [www.cubabrigade.org.au](http://www.cubabrigade.org.au) and check out other ACFS activities at our Sydney ACFS website at [www.sydney-acfs.org](http://www.sydney-acfs.org).

We are also having discussions in ACFS about organising celebrations for the *50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cuban revolution* next year. Please contact us if you would like to be part of this exciting event.

## **SECRETARY'S REPORT (CONTINUED)**

Stay tuned for more information on the visit of Cuban Confederation of Trade Unions representative Gilda Chacon Bravo. Gilda's visit is sponsored by a group of progressive unions and she will be speaking in Sydney at the end of this month. For all ACFS information contact us at the addresses on this newsletter or ring Nick on 0414 691 732.

### **Research on solidarity with Latin America**

Historians and ACFS members Robert Austin and Viviana Ramirez are writing a short history of the Australian solidarity movement with Latin America and are wanting to contact people who would be interested in sharing their views. This is a very interesting and worthwhile piece of history that will show aspects of Australian history that too often are excluded from mainstream history writing in Australia. If you would like to participate in this project or find out more about it, please contact Robert or Viviana directly at [viviana.ramirez@westnet.com.au](mailto:viviana.ramirez@westnet.com.au) or [jhenriquez2@westnet.com.au](mailto:jhenriquez2@westnet.com.au).

Finally, if you would prefer to receive the ACFS newsletter by email, please email us at [secretary@sydney-acfs.org](mailto:secretary@sydney-acfs.org). Each new edition, as well as previous editions, are also available on our website, [www.sydney-acfs.org](http://www.sydney-acfs.org).

### **SALVADOR ALLENDE PRESIDENT OF CHILE 1970-1973**

*By Lucila Flores (ACFS, Sydney)*

I apologise for my poor English, but these words came from my heart. Last month all over the world we celebrated Salvador Allende's hundredth birthday. Salvador Allende had the friendly nickname, El Chicho. He won the presidential election as leader of the Popular Unity (U.P.) coalition. We in the Communist Party gave him strong support.

He came from the high middle class and became a practitioner pathologist, one of the best at that time, he embraced the ideas of Marxism-Leninism and he believed that we could make revolutionary changes with a Constitution made to defend the bourgeois interests.

The bloody events of "the other 9/11", "the forgotten", demonstrated that the oligarchic groups in the US and elsewhere, always will, at any price, use all the available mechanisms to defend their privileges.



He believed in his principles, he was loyal to "The U.P. Programme and The 40 Forty Essential Changes" i.e.: milk and school for all children, child care in workplaces, pay and rest pre and postnatal for the pregnant women; work, food and clothing for lower income families, etc.

He believed and lived his ideas and died for them. We live with the suffering and the bitterness of our dreams destroyed. The most shameful fact we have to recognise is that today his message has been violated. The true and authentic progressive groups from the ex-U.P. today are outlawed, encountering persecution, jail; they inherited a Constitution that does not let them have representation in the Parliament.

But thanks to the legacy of Salvador Allende, because in his short government, he made many achievements i.e. flourished the scientific investigation, the universities opened their doors to peasants, workers and the military; many international personalities came to see "the social experiment"

and they left a legacy. It was an atmosphere of high moral and high spirit of values, like solidarity, cooperation, generosity, voluntary work, etc. These were some of the seeds that it started to grow and a future new generation was able to kick down the dictatorship and today it continues the effort in order to get true changes, a new constitution that allows genuine representation of the progressive forces, and softens their lives, creating a more balanced world.

### **ALLENDE'S LEGACY**

Santiago, Chile, 28 June (Prensa Latina)

Cuban historian Eusebio Leal highlighted the legacy of deceased Chilean President Salvador Allende Saturday, and reminded that Cuba was at his side until the last moment. Leal added that after the military coup in 1973, Cuba received thousands of Chilean exiles and put the names of Chilean heroes on some of its streets, hospitals and schools. He pointed out that Cuba was always the homeland of Beatriz, daughter of Salvador Allende, and that the grave of Laura, his sister, is also in Cuba. Leal highlighted the importance of a reflection by Cuban Revolution leader Fidel Castro, published Friday, which showed the intimate relation he had with Salvador Allende, in his intervention for the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Chilean hero. He said that Cuba saved important documents written by Allende, including letters written to Fidel Castro, Ernesto Che Guevara and other personalities. He pointed out Allende's call for the unity of the workers, farmers and intellectuals, and said Allende would never be forgotten. Guillermo Teillier, president of the Chilean Communist Party, Isabel Allende, president of the Salvador Allende Foundation, and thousands of Chilean citizens were present in the activity in front of Palacio de la Moneda presidential headquarters with images of Salvador Allende.

## **AUSTRALIA JOINS CAMPAIGN TO GAIN VISAS FOR THE FAMILIES OF THE CUBAN FIVE**

On 9 May over seventy people attended an official launch of a postcard campaign calling on the United States Government to grant Olga Salanueva and Adriana Perez humanitarian visas to visit their husbands in U.S. prisons. It is one of many ongoing actions to raise awareness of the case of the 'Cuban Five' in Australia.

The event was chaired by Dr Tim Anderson from the Department of Political Economy at the University of Sydney. Alistair McDonald from the Australia Cuba Friendship Society and Free The Cuban Five Committee, provided a brief overview of the case and an update on the actions being undertaken in Australia and internationally to secure the Five's freedom.



*Wives of the Cuban 5 petition the UN*

The postcard, which is addressed to the U.S. Ambassador for Australia, was officially launched by the NSW Greens Member of Parliament, Dr John Kaye MLC. Dr Kaye expressed his solidarity with the Cuban Five and called on Australians to join the postcard campaign. Dr Kaye condemned the continued violation of the Cuban Five's basic human rights and reiterated his support for the ongoing campaign for the five's freedom.

Members of the audience filled in the postcard, which will be distributed by activists across the country.

The ACFS is calling on all members to join the campaign by signing and mailing the postcard to the U.S. Ambassador in Canberra.

If you would like extra copies or can assist with promoting the distribution of the postcard, please contact the Free The Cuban 5 Campaign via email at [freethefive@yahoo.com](mailto:freethefive@yahoo.com).

## **CUBAN 5 PROTEST HELD AT U.S. CONSULATE IN SYDNEY**

Over 30 members of the Australia-Cuba Friendship Society, Free the Cuban Five Committee, Leonard Weinglass Tour Committee & Committee in Solidarity with Cuba-Western Sydney held a protest rally outside the US Consulate in Sydney on 12 June.

After years of legal wrangling, on 4 June the US Appeals Court upheld the convictions of Gerardo Hernández, René González, Antonio Guerrero, Ramon Labañino, and Fernando González. These revolutionaries have now spent a decade in US prison on political frame-up charges.

While the convictions were not overturned, the Appeals Court did rule that the life sentences of Antonio Guerrero and Ramon

Labañino, and the 19-year sentence of Fernando González were too harsh given that "no top secret documents were gathered or transmitted." Their sentences will be reviewed and reduced. However, the double life sentence of Gerardo Hernández and the 15-year sentence of René González were upheld.

## **CELEBRATING CHE'S BIRTH**

A very successful event was organised by the ACFS on June 14 to celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Ernesto Che Guevara.

Over 120 people turned out to see the film ¡Salud!, a film about the Cuban health system. It shows the Cuban revolution in action – some of the thousands of Cuban doctors volunteering in different countries from Africa to South America and the medical students from around the world who are studying in Cuba.

Nélida Hernandez Carmona, Cuban Consul-General in Australia spoke



*Activists outside the US Consulate*

about the political legacy of Che Guevara and Dr Tim Anderson, Senior Lecturer in Political Economy, University of Sydney spoke about the role of Cuban doctors in East Timor and the Pacific, and the training of students from the area in medical schools in Cuba.

The meeting launched the ACFS project to refurbish the Dermatological Department of the Dr Ernesto Guevara de la Serna Hospital in Las Tunas, Cuba, raising \$1500 on the night.

To find out more about the film visit the website [www.saludthefilm.net](http://www.saludthefilm.net) or contact the ACFS if you are interested in organising a screening.

## **EU'S LIFTED SANCTIONS TURNING POINT FOR CUBA?**

*Council on Hemispheric Affairs Press Release (Abridged)*

On June 19, the European Union announced that it would lift its diplomatic sanctions against Cuba. The gesture was predominantly symbolic, as the restraints, which had been put in place in 2003, had been temporarily suspended since 2005. The decision came about largely due to Spain's 2005 initiative to normalize its relations with Cuba, despite opposition from several other EU members. While the EU's sanctions only froze development aid and visits to Cuba by high-level European officials, the move to lift them may signal a commitment to increased dialogue and openness between the EU and Havana. Perhaps most importantly, it serves as a contrast to the hard-line policy of the United States, which has maintained an unbending trade embargo against Cuba since 1964.

**CUBA APPROVES FIRST THERAPEUTIC VACCINE FOR LUNG CANCER**

June 26, 2008 (The Guardian)

Cuba has approved what is believed to be the world's first registered lung cancer vaccine and is offering it to Cuban and foreign patients in its hospitals.

The therapeutic vaccine CimaVax EGF extends life with few side effects, and is another step in Cuba's expertise in biotechnology. It was unveiled on Monday at Havana's centre of molecular immunology.

It has been shown to boost survival rates by an average of four to five months, and in some cases much longer. It does not prevent lung cancer. Unlike chemotherapy, CimaVax EGF is said to have few side effects because it is a modified protein which attacks only cancer cells.

"It's the first such vaccine registered in the world," said Gisela González, who headed the project begun in 1992. The drug is in various clinical trials, some in Canada and Britain, and is expected to be approved next in Peru.

Several companies had been licensed to market the vaccine, but it will be made in Cuba, said González. It has been approved for trial in the United States but use there is at least two years away, she added.

The vaccine triggers an immune response which, in addition to extending life, can ease symptoms such as difficulty breathing and lack of appetite. The idea was to "maintain or consolidate" the effects of chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

Tania Crombet, the centre's director of clinical investigations, said foreigners were welcome for treatment, though its cost had not yet been set. "It's possible to provide this vaccine to any patient. Because it's available in Cuba, it's

*The vaccine triggers an immune response which, in addition to extending life, can ease symptoms such as difficulty breathing and lack of appetite.*

approved by the Cuban drug agency, so we can receive patients from outside."

As well as helping the health services of other countries with its abundance of doctors, Cuba has used its clinics to draw thousands of overseas patients each year. Its scientists are respected by foreign peers as producing good results on tiny budgets. Fidel Castro championed biotechnology in the 1980s; by the 1990s Cuba had produced and marketed vaccines for meningitis B and hepatitis B.

**CUBAN ENERGY REVOLUTION HIGHLIGHTED**

Havana, July 10 (Prensa Latina) Cuban Minister of Basic Industry Yadira Garcia said on Thursday that energy is guaranteed in Cuba and will continue increasing as the country's economy and power and fuel savings grow.

Garcia presented a thorough report to the plenary of the National Assembly of the People's Power (Cuban Parliament) in session prior to the First Ordinary Period of Sessions of the 7th Legislature, scheduled for start tomorrow.

Referring to one of the main programs of the Energy Revolution, she mentioned the free replacement of nine million incandescent light bulbs by energy-saving bulbs and also the sale of three million of energy-saving bulbs.

The installation of 6,299 emergency generators currently guarantees the safe, smooth operation of crucial facilities, including hospitals, meteorological stations, production and water pumping units and schools, among others, she said.

The Cuban minister also referred to an increase in oil and gas prospecting and production, as well as the replacement and rational use of transportation equipment.

Finally, she concluded that the most important of all programs is that which entails fuel and power saving, mainly in public sectors, as a significant contribution to the Energy Revolution.



Cuban Minister, Yadira Garcia

**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**