



CUBA Newsletter

July 2009

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Contact us

The ACFS meets on the 1st Thursday of the month at 6.30pm at **NSW Teachers Federation Building, Lvl 1, 33 Mary St, Surry Hills.**

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

Web: www.sydney-acfs.org

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Vale Sid Doleman

Sid Doleman was a dedicated and long standing member of ACFS, a great friend of Cuba, a socialist schooled in a hard working life almost from childhood, a trade unionist, a distinguished ex-serviceman and a kind and generous man. Sid was also a stalwart of the Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Society and will be remembered by all of us for his tireless work, political commitment and hatred of injustice. Goodbye comrade.

Southern Cross Brigade to Cuba

Join the Southern Cross Work/Study tour. Support Cuba in the most direct manner by working (picking fruit or pruning fruit trees) and then visiting schools, hospitals, urban agriculture projects, etc. You will experience at first hand the cultural, political and social conditions in revolutionary Cuba. This year we will be having a closer look at Cuba's innovative approaches to the environment and climate change. See the flyer in this issue for more information

New meeting venue for the ACFS Sydney Branch

All ACFS monthly meetings will now be held at a new venue. Starting at our next meeting on 2 April 2009, will meet at 6.30pm at the NSW Teachers Federation building, Level 1, 33 Mary St, Surry Hills.

NEWS UPDATES FROM CUBA

Cuba Passes New Labour Law: Allows More Than One Job

June 29, International Institute for the study of Cuba (IISC)

The Cuban Council of State passed on June 26th, 2009, a new Decree-Law number 268 entitled: "Reform of the Labor Regime" which was published by the daily Granma newspaper. The law allows for workers to have more than one job and for students to work in part-time jobs. It also frees up enterprises in Havana to hire workers from other provinces directly instead of them having to be hired through the state employment agency.

US State Department bans Songwriter Silvio Rodriguez from Visiting the United States

May 04, Cuban News Agency (abridged)

The US Department of State, headed by Hillary Clinton, banned renowned Cuban songwriter and singer Silvio Rodriguez from travelling to the United States, where he had been invited to an homage gala for the 90th birthday of legendary US musician Pete Seeger.

Pete Seeger (born May 3, 1919 in New York) has visited Cuba five times and he has been very critical of the 50-year US economic, financial and commercial blockade of Cuba.

In a letter published by Cuban media Rodriguez stated, "I believe that the attitude of the State Department is very contradictory, given the desire expressed by President Obama to bring the United States closer to Cuba. As a Cuban cultural worker, I continue to feel blockaded and discriminated against by other governments. Hopefully this will truly change someday."

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Secretary's Report

Progressive groups across the world, including ACFS, are celebrating along with the Cuban people, the 50th anniversary of their revolution this year. ACFS is joining with the Latin American Film Festival organisers and Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC) to put on the first Cuban Film Festival in Sydney on the weekend of July 24, 25 and 26. A poster exhibition will also feature. (See enclosed flyer).

The promotion of culture has always been a key project of the Cuban government and the support of the film industry has been a major part of this, even during the Special period when resources were scarce.

With the revolution in 1959 the Cuban film industry broke out of Hollywood's cultural domination and became a true national cinema. The Cuban government established ICAIC, the Cuban Film Institute soon after the revolution, and demonstrated the new government's concern for culture and, specifically, for cinema.

While the 1960s and 70s were a period of flowering of Latin American cinema, often film makers were persecuted and their films banned – except in Cuba - where a history of critical film making continues to this day. Film flourished after the revolution in a new and

unique way, reflecting the Cuban people's sense of national identity, self-determination

and critical awareness. Cuban people are an informed and critical film audience in contrast to the cultural disempowerment typical of the pre-revolutionary period.

The US blockade, imposed in an attempt to destroy Cuban socialism, has a devastating effect on all aspects of life in Cuba. It has hit the Cuban film industry hard, not only in hugely increasing the costs of needed equipment but also in denying a ready market for the films.

Cuban film makers have also been denied entry to important film events in the US and US film makers penalised for working in Cuba e.g. Michael Moore. Despite this, Cuba has become a serious name in the world of film and a hub for film makers. Students from all over Latin America travel to Cuba to attend film school.

We hope you will come and see some of the exciting films that cover 50 years of Cuban cinema and give an insight into life in Cuba that you won't find in the mainstream media.

In April the WA branch of ACFS hosted the annual National Consultation with members from branches across Australia and New Zealand attending. Guests of honour Rigoberto Zarza from the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the People (ICAP) in Cuba, the Cuban Consul and Consul General and the new Cuban Ambassador to Australia, Abelardo Curbelo Padron also attended. We also welcomed Rigoberto at a meeting in Sydney where he spoke about the current situation in Cuba. This was of great interest and we hope he will visit us again in the near future.

A number of ACFS members and friends travelled to Cuba for the 50th anniversary May Day celebrations. We have had some interesting and inspiring discussions at our meetings from Sydney ACFS members who went to Cuba for this

historic occasion and we hope to hold a public meeting where we will have the opportunity to hear more.

New Zealand Friendship Society member Annalucia Vermunt spoke in Sydney recently about the International Youth Meeting in Solidarity with the Cuban Five and May Day in Cuba.

ACFS members also attended a meeting, organised by the Cuban Children's Fund, with guest of honour Dr Eutivides Aguilera Sanchez, a cardio-paediatric

surgeon at the William Soler Hospital, in Havana.

Members have also attended a commemoration of Cuban national hero Jose Marti at an event in Ibero-American Square in Sydney in May.

The campaign to free the Cuban Five from US jails continues. The US Supreme Court rejected the appeal of the Cuban Five, political prisoners in the US jailed on trumped up charges in 2001. This has shocked, although perhaps not surprised the international movement to free them. Such a travesty of justice does nothing for the reputation of Barack Obama who many thought may be at least more fair minded than his unsavoury predecessors. Although he could free them with the stroke of a pen, he chooses not to do so. ACFS will be joining with supporters of the Cuban Five anti-terrorists in events to demand an end to their vicious and unjust imprisonment. A movement is building internationally to 'free the five' and to put pressure on the US government to do so. Please do what you can to raise this issue of these US political prisoners remaining in jail, isolated from their families for years on totally fabricated 'evidence'. See this issue for more information and keep in touch to find out about ACFS events to free the five.

ACFS members were saddened to hear of the death of our long standing and active member Sid Doleman. Some of us were on the brigade in 1997 when Sid fulfilled a long time dream of travelling to Cuba and we remember him as a dedicated brigadista and generous friend of Cuba. Sid was a fighter for a better society and an irascible hater of 'bullshit'.

In solidarity,
Joan Silk, Secretary ACFS Sydney



CUBAN JOURNALISTS CALL ON COLLEAGUES AROUND THE WORLD TO SPREAD TRUTH ABOUT CUBAN FIVE

Willy Wright,
June 23, 2009
<http://www.cubanow.net/>

The Cuban journalists called on their colleagues around the world to intensify the spread of information about the truth of the case of the five Cuban antiterrorist fighters held in US prisons for over 10 years now.

In its call, published in main Cuban newspapers, the National Presidency of the Cuban Union of Journalists (UPEC) denounces the wall of silence, the censorship and the indifference by mainstream media on the case of Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labañino, Fernando Gonzalez, Rene Gonzalez and Antonio Guerrero, known as the Cuban Five or the Miami Five.

"The People of the United States has the right to know the truth about the five Cuban heroes," the call reads and adds that "if the mainstream media in the US empire wants to make a contribution to the struggle against terror, it is their duty not to continue keeping silence on the unfair and cruel imprisonment of the Cuban Five."

Alternative media, made up of thousands of networks, community radio, publications of social movements, unions and solidarity-with-Cuba organizations and of progressive governments have joined the struggle for the cause of the five revolutionaries, the document reads.

The alternative media, which is not fed by financial or economic interests, will continue faithful to justice and truth, along Cuban journalists in this legal battle with a political background, in order to

achieve the return of the Cuban Five to their homeland, the call points out.

THE MAJORITY OF CUBANS IN THE UNITED STATES WANT CUBAN BLOCKADE TO END

*Translated by Susana Hurlich
December 10, 2008
<http://www.cubanow.net/>

According to a survey, more than half of the Cubans who live in the United States want an end put to the embargo against Cuba that that nation imposes for over 45 years.

A poll carried out by the University of Miami and circulated by Fox News television, reveals that in recent years a change of opinion exists among Cuban-Americans in favor of putting an end to Washington's restrictions on the small Caribbean island.

The news that was published today in the Cuban media indicates that 55% of Cubans resident in the United States, nationalized or not, want an end put to the restrictions on the Island.

According to the survey these results have much to do with the election of North American president-elect Barack Obama, with whom a different expectation opens for approaching the conflict between the two nations.

There is much speculation about the measures that Obama will apply, comments the Florida news channel. Obama

promised to end restrictions on travel and remittances of Cuban-Americans to the Caribbean country, applied by outgoing president George Bush. However, the Miami channel recalls that the decision to lift the embargo rests with the legal authority of the US Congress, although the head of

state can take initiatives to achieve this.

Cuban-Americans in Florida have political weight in that state and representatives in Congress, from which they expect battles within that legislative body because of a division of political interests.

A group of Democrats and some Republicans have been proposing various amendments in recent years to eliminate measures that impede

trade, travel and exchange between the two nations.

A sector of US business people who sell foodstuffs to the Island under severe restrictions also are pressuring for an end to the embargo.

President Raúl Castro has stated on four occasions his willingness to negotiate with the head of the White House.

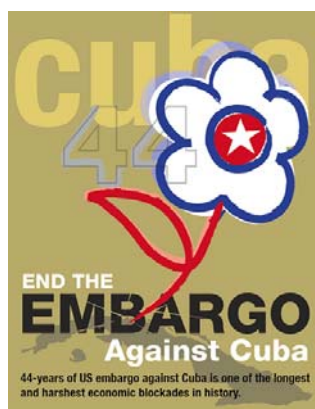
Leader Fidel Castro, who maintains great political influence although he's in retirement, also stated one week ago that one can negotiate with Obama but without harming national sovereignty. Fidel Castro also rejected what he called the carrot and stick policy, denouncing any attempt by Washington to negotiate from positions of force combined with peaceful offers.

Obama, for his part, also stated his willingness to meet with Raúl Castro once he takes possession of his office.

The conflict between Cuba and the United States has gone on for 50 years, since it emerged in the first months after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution and rapidly became worse

In 1963 the trade embargo was established. Cubans designate this a commercial and political blockade due to the sum of restrictions and measures that impede Cuba from carrying out foreign trade and in particular with the United States.

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**TWO CUBAN COUNTER-
REVOLUTIONARIES INVOLVED
IN COUP AGAINST MANUEL
ZELAYA AL GAMES**

<http://www.cubanow.net/>
July 9, 2009

Otto Reich, former US Undersecretary of State under the George W. Bush administration, and Ricardo Montaner acted as advisors to the coup perpetrators that ousted Honduras' Constitutional President Manuel Zelaya, an article on Granma newspaper denounced.

The information published in Granma was taken from Miami Radio, a South Florida radio station that revealed a secret report sent to a European country, which is a close ally of the United States. The document offers enough details about the participation of the two counter-revolutionary men in the military coup that broke constitutional order in the central American nation.

Montaner and Reich were always in contact with coup plotters in Honduras either through phone calls or by means of intermediary agents, the article explains and adds that Montaner himself told coup leaders to resist all international pressure to prevent any attempt by President Manuel Zelaya to return to the country and to advance presidential elections, scheduled for the end of the year.

Carlos Alberto Montaner, an agent with the US Central Intelligence Agency has been given the mission of state terrorism activity first in Puerto Rico and later in Spain, as

well as harassment actions against the Cuban government, while Otto Reich, who is a furious enemy of the Cuban Revolution, has been in charge of coups and destabilization actions against progressive governments, plus the protection of terrorist Luis Posada Carriles, the article published in Granma reads.

**HAVANA FILM FESTIVAL
DENOUNCED REPRESSION
AGAINST FILM
PROFESSIONALS IN
HONDURAS**

Willy Wright, July 10, 2009
<http://www.cubanow.net/>

Havana's International Festival of the New Latin American Cinema denounced the repression unleashed in Honduras against film professionals at the hands of the coup perpetrators who try to silence the struggle of the people for the reinstatement of constitutional order in the country.

A letter read by Festival director Alfredo Guevara on TV and addressed to intellectuals of the world explains that the coup perpetrators try to silence radio and TV stations and threaten and physically attack journalists and movie professionals.

They try to keep the people ignorant about the world rejection of the de facto government, the letter reads and adds that the life of film professionals is in real danger, the cameras that expose the events turn into the targets of cold and calculated persecution.

There is nothing as similar as the Condor Plan, the letter recalls, which was led by the US Empire in an effort to wipe out the left wing movement in South America. The letter calls on film professionals of the world, and particularly in the region, to massively speak out to break the silence.

'We need to avert the risk of complicity, cowardice, calculation and maneuvers from the heart of the empire aimed at sacrificing Honduras and its people', the letter concludes.



**CHE MUSEUMS IN CUBA AND
ARGENTINA SIGN AGREEMENT**

July 7, www.radionuevitas.co.cu

Representatives of the Ernesto Che Guevara Memorial sculptural site in the Cuban central city of Santa Clara and of La Pastera museum dedicated to Che, in Argentina, will join their efforts to spread facts about the life and work of the Argentinean-born revolutionary.

The two institutions recently signed a cooperation agreement for a term of five years with the purpose of exchanging experience and information that will help both centers learn more about Che Guevara both as a guerrilla and a government official, and specifically about his strategic thinking about public administration.

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

CUBA AT THE UN'S HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

By Tim Anderson

Here's something you won't hear from the US corporate media: Cuba's human rights record was examined by the UN's Human Rights Council, and the country came out looking pretty good. There was a great deal of praise, some constructive criticism and relatively few intransigent issues.

Such reports are rarely reported on in meaningful terms. The corporate media, generally looking for a single story line, spin it their own way or ignore it – especially if the news does not suit their pre-determine stereotypes. The Cuban media presented some short, positive stories.

Let's look at some of the detail.

Since 2006 Cuba has participated more freely in the UN's Human Rights Council precisely because the Council has more equitable processes than the old Commission. The voting structure allows a wider range of countries to participate and the main accountability process is the 'Universal Periodic Review' (UPR), which applies to all countries.

The big powers no longer pick and choose their favourite 'human rights offenders' for UN scrutiny, as they did in the old Commission. The US tried to target Cuba (particularly during the administration of that great champion of human rights, George W. Bush) at the Commission, and for this reason Cuba refused to fully cooperate. But since the restructuring of 2006, things have changed.

In the eleventh session it was Cuba's turn for a UPR, and the little socialist country faced scrutiny from all participating countries plus a wide range of NGOs.

The structure of a UPR leads to the subject state either accepting, considering or rejecting submissions. The Human Rights Council report on Cuba, like all UPR

reports, is not a UN opinion but summarises the scrutiny process and sets out the state's responses to all the criticism or praise.

The UN summarised the responses as follows: sixty of the recommendations by other states were supported by Cuba; seventeen recommendations would be "examined" and responded to by Cuba; and eleven recommendations "did not enjoy the support of Cuba".

The most positive responses came from developing countries. Several urged Cuba to "continue in the path towards the building of socialism", others praised its remarkable solidarity efforts and domestic achievements, especially in health and education. Cuba accepted recommendations to strengthen its treaty commitments, anti-discrimination programs, human rights education, youth programs, disabled support, gender equality, disaster management and general cooperation with UN agencies.

Bolivia, the major recipient of Cuban health sector assistance (with more than 5,000 young Bolivians on Cuban medical scholarships) urged Cuba to keep sharing its experiences in health, science and cooperation. Others praised Cuba's sustained efforts in health cooperation.

Cuba accepted the recommendation of Brazil to maintain its moratorium on the death penalty (this has been suspended since 2003), and of Mexico to strengthen national capacities to assist the victims of domestic violence. It also accepted the Russian and Pakistani recommendations to maintain its efforts in support of religious freedom, respect and tolerance.

Cuba accepted recommendations from several delegations, including the Palestinians, to continue to promote and defend international

self-determination and right to development initiatives. It agreed to "promote the active participation of civil society" in preparing the country's national human rights reports.

Cuba did not accept eleven recommendations from Israel and several of the European powers. It said these were either based on false premises or involved an interference with sovereign rights. For example, Israel and the United Kingdom had urged the repeal of laws by which citizens can be charged with collaborating with a foreign power to subvert the constitution, and urged the immediate release of "unlawfully imprisoned human rights defenders, journalists and others". Cuba says those referred to have been tried under legitimate sovereign law.

Canada had urged that Cuba lift restrictions on the media (e.g. allowing the prerogatives enjoyed elsewhere by private media companies) and several states urged the "unconditional" release of a group of 'political prisoners'. Many

of these were arrested in 2003 and charged with collaboration with the Bush administration in the prelude to a feared invasion of Cuba, around the time of the Iraq invasion. Cuba says these

convictions were based on evidence of payments made under US programs to overthrow the constitution of Cuba, against the will of the Cuban people. As well as being used in open court proceedings this evidence was published in several reports and books.

There were several complaints about mistreatment of prisoners and poor health facilities in prison, but Cuba rejected the claims. For many years Cuba did not allow UN investigators into its prisons, anticipating a propaganda manoeuvre by the US. However in 2008 Jean Ziegler became the first of what is likely to be a series of UN

It is notable that no country raised any of the most serious violations against Cuba - such as torture, detention without trial, disappearances and kidnappings, death squads, wars of aggression, war crimes and rape by soldiers. The same cannot be said about some of Cuba's close neighbours.

investigators entering the country and the Cuban prison system.

Cuba took away to consider and respond to the recommendations that they: "ratify and implement" several human rights treaties they have recently signed, consider acceding to the Rome Statute and the International Criminal Court, establish a national human rights institution, invite more UN special rapporteurs, open further to independent international organisations such as the Red Cross, establish a UN led review of their prison system, review trial processes and travel permit arrangements to ensure they are consistent with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and move towards complete abolition of the death penalty.

It is notable that no country raised any of the most serious violations against Cuba - such as torture, detention without trial, disappearances and kidnappings, death squads, wars of aggression, war crimes and rape by soldiers. The same cannot be said about some of Cuba's close neighbours.

Importantly, there is a new spirit of cooperation and trust, brought on by the restructure of the UN human rights system, and that has encouraged Cuba to resume participation.

Reference: UN Human Rights Council (2009) 'Universal Periodic Review: report of the working group on the Universal Periodic Review: Cuba, A/HRC/11/22, 29, May 2009.

CUBA LAUNCHES ANTI-HOMOPHOBIA CAMPAIGN

Patricia Grogg
Mar 30, Inter Press Service

The 2009 campaign for respect for freedom of sexual orientation, under the slogan "Diversity is Natural", will try to contribute to "the education of society in general, with an emphasis on university students, about respect for people's free and responsible sexual orientation and

gender identity, as an exercise in equity and social justice."

The National Centre for Sex Education (CENESEX) "cannot do this work on its own, which is why we have called on the youth of the country, who will become the future professionals and leaders of society," said Mariela Castro, the head of CENESEX, which has developed a wide-ranging program in support of the right to sexual diversity since 2004.

Castro addressed the opening event of the campaign, a forum and debate held on Mar. 26 at the headquarters of the University Students Federation (FEU) at the University of Havana. There was standing room only at the forum, which was attended by students, university professors, CENESEX staff and representatives of the gay community.

Biology Professor María Fuentes said promoting this debate, which will continue at the university on a fortnightly basis, was an excellent initiative, because young people are agents of change. "It is a strategy that looks to the future," she said, regretting that none of the students from the biology department had attended.

According to CENESEX's Sexual Diversity Project, the campaign includes educational activities under the National Sex Education Programme, small group meetings, workshops, video-debates, talks and exchanges "to stimulate and promote reflection and debate among university students."

"This year we want to focus on audiences capable of being multiplier agents and extending the work, like the university population," said Castro. With this goal in mind, CENESEX initially worked on the campaign design with members of the Young Communist League and the FEU in

Havana, and will later branch out into the provinces.

In an interview with IPS, the head of CENESEX and daughter of Cuban President Raúl Castro said the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO) will be celebrated in Havana this year on May 16 and will be devoted to young people, and also to families, so that "parents may better understand" their homosexual or transsexual children.

She added that a date has still not been set for the Cuban parliament to debate a draft law to reform the Family Code, in force since 1975. The reform bill includes proposals on gender identity and the rights of sexual minorities.

"The work that we are doing will help to ease the prejudices behind these processes," she said.

Castro also said that the Catholic Church had communicated its negative views on the proposed reforms to the authorities. "There have been conversations. They were concerned about homosexual marriage, and were told that this is not being proposed," nor the adoption of children by homosexual couples, she said.

The reform bill would allow legal recognition of same-sex unions, and grant them the same rights as civil unions between heterosexual couples.

As for sex change operations for transsexual persons, approved in June 2008 by a Health Ministry resolution, which is another matter of concern to the Catholic Church and other religious denominations, Castro indicated that the decision remains in force.



Mariela Castro Espin

Resolution 126 signed by Health Minister José Ramón Balaguer established a facility for comprehensive health care for transsexual persons as the only institution in the country authorised to carry out total or partial sex change operations.