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Socialist Voice #58, August 1, 2005

## **From Havana to Caracas and Beyond: The Spirit of Moncada Lives**

**By Derrick O'Keefe**

*(Derrick O'Keefe is an editor of Seven Oaks, a weekly online magazine based in Vancouver, British Columbia that "aims to be a non-sectarian voice for progressive change." This article originally appeared in the July 26 issue of Seven Oaks, which is published every Tuesday at <http://www.sevenoaksmag.com/>.)*

Five years ago, when I was in Cuba attending a student conference in Havana, a number of us took a day to make a solemn pilgrimage to Santa Clara to visit the mausoleum that houses the remains of Ernesto Che Guevara and his fellow internationalists.

Our little ad hoc group — a motley crew of Canadians, with a couple of adventurous Americans in tow — passed the hours riding back to the capital in heated discussion. We debated, flexing our incipient polemical skills over a range of topics, eventually settling on a long, circular discussion about the pros and cons of Marx's odd formulation: the dictatorship of the proletariat.

"The dictatorship we suffer from here is the Empire in Washington." Our driver, the unassuming man in late middle age who had been waiting for us and tending to us all day, had interjected a little perspective into our bull session, as the sun set and we approached the outskirts of Havana.

"The U.S. blockade has made our life here difficult. Things are not easy."

Modestly, and through translation, he continued, fielding our questions about his life's work. The Revolution had given him an education his peasant parents would never have imagined; he was proud to have served in Angola, a little known intervention in which Cuba aided the newly independent country hold off the racist army of South Africa. Many, including Nelson Mandela, point to Cuba's role there as a turning point in apartheid's fall and in neighbouring Namibia's independence struggle.

Despite all the scarcity and difficulties they have faced, the Cuban people have continued to demonstrate an unparalleled sense of solidarity. The island's doctors at one time were more numerous throughout the continents of the South than all the World Health Organization's missions combined. This, of course, along with the remarkable fact of Cuba's training for free doctors from throughout the Americas — they've even in recent years begun educating youth from disadvantaged groups in the U.S. — is largely unknown throughout the world.

We asked our driver if it was frustrating holding onto a socialist project, given that such a thing was largely perceived as an anachronism, at best an exotic, stubborn experiment doomed to soon to fade into history.

“Everyone said Cuba would fall soon after the Soviet Union disintegrated. It's been ten years. We are a patient people, we believe in the example we are upholding, and we know that new situations, new revolutions, will emerge.”

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It was fifty-two years ago this week that the attack on the Moncada garrison sparked the fire of rebellion that still, in many ways, animates Latin American politics. On July 26 1953 Fidel Castro and a hastily-trained group attempted a pre-dawn storming of Santiago de Cuba's military base. The operation, meant to initiate a nation-wide uprising against the U.S.-backed and recently re-installed dictator Fulgencio Batista, was thwarted quickly; dozens of the rebels were tortured and summarily executed.

The dictator's victory proved pyrrhic, though, as the repression only galvanized the population's hatred of the regime. The spirit of Moncada, and of the movement that took its name from the date of the attack, was one of total resistance and defiance. While the famous guerrillas of the Sierra dominate the historical lore, the urban leaders of the movement often carried out even more dangerous missions. Thousands were killed, but each grisly murder only further accelerated the demise of Batista. When the legendary Frank Pais was killed in 1957, 60 000 defied the authorities and marched through the streets of Santiago de Cuba.

Barely more than five years after the Moncada debacle Castro's rebel army and the urban resistance had driven Batista into exile. Since the 1959 triumph and the sweeping social reforms that have marked Cuba's transformation, the United States and its allies have spared no effort to topple the island's revolutionary government.

From the Bay of Pigs, or Playa Giron as the Cubans call the victory, to the October missile crisis, to the countless assassination attempts, acts of sabotage and aggressions, every imaginable scheme has been resisted.

Cuba's long embrace with the Soviet bear — which brought preferential terms of trade and invaluable military support along with some bureaucratic and stultifying political and economic prescriptions — ended in the early 90s, ushering in the “Special Period” of shortages and restructuring.

Through it all, Cuba has remained open to other peoples, as demonstrated by its concrete solidarity and its example that a world other than the capitalist one is indeed possible, if still a tenuous proposition in these years of strident neo-liberalism.

When they couldn't crush the revolution outright, the United States government concluded that their strategic focus had to be on keeping the virus restricted to a lone Caribbean island. Grenada broke the blockade with four brief years (1979-1983) of popular revolutionary government, before Maurice Bishop was murdered, paving the way for Reagan and the Marines to invade and "restore order." Nicaragua required more grisly and sustained intervention, much of it covert. The Central American revolutions were only turned back and defeated after a decade-long campaign of sheer terror by U.S.-proxy forces, with mass murder of civilian populations, mining of harbours and economic blackmail.

### **U.S. policy of isolating Cuba has failed**

In 2002, among the first acts of the gang that overthrew Hugo Chavez for 48 hours was to cancel oil shipments to Cuba. Like that coup against the democratically elected regime in Caracas, the U.S. policy of isolating Cuba has now failed rather dramatically. Indeed, a panicked Otto Reich has declared Cuba and Venezuela the real "axis of evil," and, apparently stuck on the adjective, lamented the continued influence of the "evil genius" Fidel Castro.

The Bolivarian Revolution, the "new situation" our driver had calmly anticipated, has certainly given a shot of oxygen to Cuba. Radical scholar and activist Isaac Saney, among others, has argued forcefully that the reciprocity of the relationship should not be discounted, tracing the critical role that thousands of Cuban medical personnel have played in the poorest neighbourhoods of Caracas, and emphasizing the political inspiration that Cuba's revolution has provided. Chavez has, for many years, flaunted his close friendship with Castro, though he has only recently come out explicitly in favour of socialism.

Meanwhile, a number of centre-left governments have been elected across Latin America. The Cuba-Venezuela axis now acts as a poll of attraction for the poor and working people of the continent, shaming governments like Lula's in Brazil that have held close to the dictates of international finance, and causing outright crises of legitimacy for some regimes — like that of the departed Gutierrez in Ecuador — that came to power on populist platforms.

So today Cuba has perhaps its most important Latin American ally in five decades of revolution. Venezuela provides much needed energy resources at fair or preferential prices, while the democratic and participatory *proceso* that is the Bolivarian Revolution can provide revitalization to the whole process in Cuba as well.

### **Returning Cuba's international solidarity**

Progressive-minded people in the North now have to hold up their end of the bargain. Efforts at solidarity with Cuba have been notoriously balkanised, with ideological and theoretical disagreements having too often held up or prevented important work. Even those who disagree strongly with Cuba's political system, if they uphold the principle of self-determination, have a

responsibility to oppose the U.S. and other governments' efforts at economic and political warfare against the island's people.

First and foremost, the demand must continue to be made for the U.S. to unconditionally lift the blockade. The repeated lop-sided votes in the United Nations show the truly shameless determination of the United States government to ignore the global community. Efforts at "breaking the blockade," such as the annual Pastors for Peace caravans, are particularly important.

Secondly, the case of the Cuban 5 needs to be more widely understood. The history of U.S.-Cuba relations, perhaps better than anything else, illustrates the utter hypocrisy of the "war on terror." Five Cubans have been jailed since 1998 in the U.S. on espionage and other charges; they were working covertly in Miami, but only to try and prevent acts of terror by far-right groups that have been openly operating in Little Havana for decades.

And of course the U.S. military has used the Guantanamo base on an illegally occupied piece of Cuban territory to carry out systematic torture of "enemy combatants."

Finally, on the flip side of the vilification that appears regularly in the media, the Shangri-La glorification of Cuba should be avoided. The tendency towards this is limited, naturally, to a small segment of the political Left, but it tragically mirrors the "othering" of Third World people that is symptomatic of the ugly western tourist. Here, the austerity that Cubans endure — very real, as in the current spate of rolling power blackouts — is romanticized in the name of denouncing the ills of consumerist capitalism.

But this minor tendency smacks only of denial. It is much better to be honest. Life in Cuba is not easy, and in part because those of us in the North have not marshalled enough solidarity to overcome the U.S. blockade.

The Cubans have indeed been a patient people, and unfailingly generous in volunteering around the globe. As exciting new situations emerge in Venezuela and across Latin America, it is high time for those of us in the North of the Americas to show some of that Moncada spirit of resistance and determination.

Cuba's international solidarity, after all, deserves to be repaid in full.

Socialist Voice #59, August 10, 2005

## **Cuba Five Win New Trial**

**by Julie Webb-Pullman, Mike Fuller**

*In a major victory for human rights, the US Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta this week overturned the convictions of the Cuba Five and ordered a new trial. The court unanimously ruled that the five men, falsely charged with spying for Cuba, could not and did not receive a fair trial in the right-wing Cuban exile stronghold of Miami.*

*The following articles were published today by the Havana-based press agency, Prensa Latina.*

### **Innocent, But Five and Families Still Suffer**

**by Julie Webb-Pullman**

Havana, Aug 10 (Prensa Latina) With the reversal of their convictions by the Atlanta Appeal Court Tuesday, a small shred of justice surfaced in the sorry saga of US misadministration of due process that convicted Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labanino, Rene Gonzalez, Fernando Gonzalez, and Antonio Guerrero.

While welcoming the Appeal Court decision as an important step towards their freedom, there is still the matter of remand to be addressed, and another trial to be endured by the defendants and their families.

In the US justice system, a person is considered innocent until proven guilty. The convictions of the Five have been reversed, rendering their guilt unproven. On 12 September these innocent men will have already spent seven years behind bars, during which time US prison authorities acknowledge they have all been model prisoners.

How long will the retrial process take to play out – another two, three, four, five years? Given the time already served by these innocent men, and their impeccable behaviour while incarcerated, is there any need to remand them to further periods of imprisonment pending the retrial?

As evidence from US military personnel at the first trial demonstrated, the Five posed no threat to US security, and these anti-terrorist fighters certainly pose no threat to the US public or to any peaceful citizen of the world, rather the opposite.

Do they pose a threat of flight? Hardly – they openly and voluntarily handed over all of the information on their activities to the FBI months before they were arrested, months during which they had plenty of time to leave the US, if that was their intention.

No, there is no justification to hold these five innocent men in prison for another moment, until and unless they are found guilty of a crime.

The miscarriage of justice identified by the Atlanta Appeals Court is compounded by miscarriages of human rights, the focus of considerable international concern by Nobel laureates

such as Nadine Gordimer, organizations such as Amnesty International, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention of the UN Commission on Human Rights, and thousands of citizens from over a hundred countries throughout the world.

In addition to the arbitrary and unnecessary use of solitary confinement, they expressed extreme concern that Gerardo Hernandez and Rene Gonzalez and their families have been subjected to cruel and inhumane punishment by the refusal of US immigration authorities to grant family members' visas to enable them to visit them in prison.

For all of these years, visas have been denied to Adriana Perez O Connor, unable to visit Gerardo since his arrest in 1998, and Olga Salanueva, unable to visit Ren, since 2000 when she was deported from the US.

Olga and Rene's seven year old daughter Ivette last saw him when she was 4 months old, chained to a chair in a prison, surrounded by guards.

Now that the convictions have been quashed, should the US immigration authorities continue to refuse visas to Adriana Perez O Connor and Olga Salanueva? Should innocent Ivette and her innocent father continue to suffer the cruellest, most inhumane, and most unjustified punishment of all, the theft of the rest of Ivette's childhood?

The answer to these questions can only be a resounding NO.

The US justice system has shown that however belatedly, it is capable of reconciling truth with justice – let it now reconcile the innocent families it has split asunder.

### **Weinglass: Cuban Five Owed Apology**

**by Mike Fuller**

Havana, Aug 10 (Prensa Latina) Defense council Leonard Weinglass stressed Wednesday that yesterday's overthrow of the Miami court decision which unfairly jailed five Cubans was a major victory and that they deserve an apology.

In a telephone conversation he said from his office in New York that the 93-page ruling by a three judge panel of the Atlanta appeals court places them in the same situation before they entered the Miami courtroom, and that the gratifying verdict is so strongly in their favor no lawyer would think they should enter again.

By a unanimous vote, the judges of the 11th US Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta overturned Tuesday the verdict handed down on them by a Miami court in June 2001, and also ruled that a new trial should take place, as requested by the defense, in a city other than Miami.

According to the ruling, the volatile anti-Cuban political climate and intense media coverage, both amplified in the wake of the Elian Gonzalez drama, made a fair trial in Miami an impossibility.

Since the very beginning, the defense attorneys had asked Miami Judge Joan Lenard to move the trial out of Miami in January, 2000.

After a trial legal analysts considered it was framed, the Cuban Five, Gerardo Hernandez, Antonio Guerrero, Ramon Labanino, Rene Gonzalez, and Fernando Gonzalez, detained in 1998 on several spying charges, were sentenced by Judge Lenard to harsh jail times, including double life in prison to one of the defendants.

Actually, they just were gathering information on anti-Cuban terrorist plans in Miami in an effort to thwart such violent actions that would also affect US citizens.

Hernandez, Labanino and Guerrero received life sentences from Lenard, who added a second life imprisonment to Hernandez. Rene Gonzalez was sentenced to 15 years in prison and Fernando Gonzalez to 19 years behind bars.

The Atlanta ruling comes less than a month after a UN panel ruled that the detention of the five men was arbitrary and in violation of international law.

The judgment came from the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, part of the Geneva-based UN Commission on Human Rights.

But “this is a political issue,” Attorney Weinglass warned, voicing fear over possible appeals by the US government prosecutors in an effort to delay the process, and said his team is reviewing appropriate steps for bail.

When asked if he supported Cuban Parliament Chairman Ricardo Alarcon ´s demand for their immediate release, he agreed, lamenting the fact that “They’ve already done seven years.”

In remarks to the media in Caracas, Venezuela, where he is attending the World Youth Festival, Alarcon hailed the ruling as “a victory against those who promote terrorism, against hypocrites who tout a supposed war on terror and in reality protect terrorists and jail young men who only acted to oppose terrorism in the United States.”

Amid a flurry of calls, the defense lawyer took time to comment on the future of his famous case, saying “the next step is up to the US government. They have 21 days to decide whether or not to take the case to the full circuit court.”

Massive protests on the island, deep-seated support from the international community and a considerable amount of backing from US people may have finally brought about an ethical judicial decision.

Gloria La Riva, coordinator of the National Committee to Free the Cuban Five, was quoted on [freethefive.org](http://freethefive.org) as saying, “This is a huge victory! We are ecstatic about this decision. It confirms that the five Cubans are completely innocent, as we know they always were.”

These victims of lawlessness have spent the better part of a decade languishing in US jails, two of them without seeing their families, and as Weinglass says, “instead of a retrial they deserve an apology from the US government and be sent home.”

Socialist Voice #60, August 13, 2005

## **Canada's Generals Promote Government's War Course**

**By Roger Annis**

### **Protests called for September 24 against Iraq, Afghanistan occupations**

The commander of Canada's armed forces, Gen. R.J. Hillier, is speaking out boldly in support of the U.S.-led imperialist war effort in the Middle East and Asia. He is spending the summer months on a lecture circuit as the point man of the Canadian government's new, more aggressive imperial foreign policy. Part of that role is to prepare the country for more deaths of Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan.

Two thousand Canadian soldiers are on their way to Kandahar in Afghanistan. There they will join the front lines of an expanding war led by the U.S. against those standing in the way of the foreign occupation of that country. At a press conference on July 13 to announce the Kandahar mission, Hillier told reporters of his views of the July 7 bombings in London and the Canadian role in Afghanistan.

He described the perpetrators of the London bombings as "detestable murderers and scumbags," and likened them to those opposing imperialist occupation in Afghanistan. "They detest our freedoms, they detest our society, they detest our liberties," he said. "We are going to Afghanistan to actually take down [sic] the folks that are trying to blow up men and women." "We are the Canadian Forces, and our job is to be able to kill people."

Hillier describes the targets of the Canadian military as a "ball of snakes," made up of terrorists, drug dealers and other "rogue" elements. His message is that it's time to toss away the myth of Canada as a "peacekeeper" in the world and pursue a far more aggressive foreign policy centered on military conflict with the country's perceived adversaries.

The commander believes that Canadian military policy must do more to facilitate and promote investment opportunities for Canadian capitalists. In a speech on July 22, Hillier likened Canada's military interventions to recent trips by Canadian political and business leaders to promote Canadian investments in "emerging markets."

### **Two decades of slaughter**

Another military spokesperson, Maj.-Gen. Andrew Leslie, bluntly posed the price the Canadian people will pay for this military adventure in a speech to the prestigious Couchiching Conference August 7, reported in the *Toronto Star*.

Referring to Canada's occupation, he affirmed that "Afghanistan is a 20-year venture." The human cost will be heavy, he warned, but "there are things worth dying for. There are things worth killing for." Nor will Canada's civilian population be spared: "Every time you kill an angry young man overseas, you're creating 15 more who will come after you," he conceded. "You have to be prepared for the consequences."



Needless to say, neither of the generals referred to any evidence that the Canadian people had asked for this crusade or approved it: the federal government has conscripted us all for its war, and that is that.

Former Canadian general and head of United Nations forces in Yugoslavia, Lewis Mackenzie, wrote in the *Globe and Mail* on August 1, "...our military's role is to kill as efficiently as possible once the political order has been given rather than participate in 'peacekeeping' missions that rarely meet the criteria for success."

### **Generals follow government lead**

The generals are speaking on behalf of a government that is carrying out a dramatic shift in foreign policy. Their comments have received enthusiastic support from the mouthpieces of corporate Canada. "Canadians are going to war," enthused a July 16 editorial in the *Globe and Mail*. "Like it or not, we are all in this together...Bravo to [Hillier] for saying it."

Prime Minister Paul Martin and Anne McLellan, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, have boosted the war course with dire warnings that Canada will become a target of bombings similar to those in London.

The groundwork for the new course was laid out by the government earlier this year. In May, it released a policy statement entitled "Canada's International Policy" that argued why Canada must become a more aggressive imperial power in the world, and how it will achieve that. Then in late June, the financial side of the policy was approved when the government passed its much-delayed budget, with New Democratic Party (NDP) support. It contains a massive boost in military spending, adding \$12.8 billion over the next five years. (Planned military spending for 2005 is \$13.4 billion.)

### **Powers to spy, detain, torture**

Prior to the new international policy statement, the government had already enacted "anti-terrorist" laws that give the police and courts vast powers to spy on, arrest, and indefinitely detain those whom it targets. New powers also take away rights and protections of people living in Canada who are not citizens.

Police threats or intimidation against people of Muslim faith or Middle Eastern origin have become commonplace in Canada since 2001. Some have been deported, and there are currently five men who have sat in jail for several years, or longer, with no charges laid.

Government and police pressure on Muslims has stepped up since the July 7 bombings in London. Like the Blair government in Britain, Canadian government spokespeople and newspaper editorials are arguing that people of Islamic faith who do not aggressively condemn Muslims labeled "terrorists" are themselves complicit in acts of violence.

(No such pressure is applied on people of other faiths who do not condemn the violence and murders of Palestinians by the Israel government, the torture and illegal detentions of people in U.S. jails in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay, or the killings and lawlessness in Haiti under the Canada-backed occupation.)

The public inquiry into the case of Maher Arar has shed light on how the government applies these new powers. Arar, a Canadian citizen, was kidnapped in New York City in 2002 by U.S. officials and then flown to Syria, his country of birth, where he was detained and tortured for nearly a year. As the inquiry revealed, his name was given to U.S. authorities by Canada's national police, the RCMP, as a possible "terrorism" suspect.

The Canadian government and its embassy officials in Syria did nothing to protest or reverse Arar's kidnapping, and only moved to request his return to Canada after a growing public campaign led by his wife shamed them into action. At the inquiry, embassy and police officials played dumb about the Syrian government's well-known track record as one that practices torture.

The inquiry has also revealed that while the Canadian government pretends on the world stage to oppose the use of torture, in fact it joined with the United States in a now frequent practice of "offshoring" torture by delivering detainees into the hands of authorities that can be counted on to use such methods and report the results. Canadian police have interrogated at least one detainee in the U.S.-run concentration camp in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

### **Afghanistan under occupation**

Although several thousand Canadian soldiers and political staff will soon be occupying Afghanistan, there is virtually no newspaper reporting in Canada on conditions there. The few articles that appear are puff pieces by "embedded" reporters in U.S. or Canadian army patrols. This is no coincidence. Four years after the occupation began, following a short but bloody war, the country remains mired in a social and humanitarian disaster.

Millions remain dependent on aid. According to the World Food Program, at least 6.5 million people out of a population of 21 million are dependent on food aid, and famine is a recurring risk in the most remote parts of the country. Only 25 per cent of the country's population has access to safe drinking water and sanitation. (At least eight people died of cholera, a water-borne disease, in Kabul in June. Yet, Kabul is the one claimed success story of the occupying powers.)

Of the \$13 billion promised to Afghanistan in aid by countries around the world, only \$3.1 has been set aside for reconstruction or social programs. The rest is earmarked for police and military spending. Two million refugees still live in camps in neighboring countries, while hundreds of thousands are living homeless or in makeshift accommodation within the country.

Only 40 per cent of children are vaccinated against disease. One fifth of children die before the age of five. Life expectancy is 44 years of age. There is one doctor in Afghanistan per 6,000 people.

Violence and lawlessness by occupying forces and their onetime allies in the former Taliban is rampant. As a result, many aid agencies have withdrawn from the country. Doctors Without Borders, which has worked in Afghanistan since 1980, withdrew in 2004. It strongly criticized the U.S.-led occupation coalition for using humanitarian aid as a tool in its political and military aims, thus making aid workers targets for anti-occupation fighters.

As in Haiti, the occupation forces in Afghanistan are allied with many of the most right-wing elements in the society. Socially progressive movements were largely destroyed during the years of U.S. support to the rightist forces that came to form the Taliban government.

### **Canada's role**

There are some 18,000 U.S. occupation troops in Afghanistan, and another 5,000 from other imperialist countries. The latter are serving under the command of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Canadian soldiers will soon be the largest military contingent in the NATO command.

Until now, the Canadian soldiers have served in the relatively safe confines of Kabul and the surrounding area. In plunking themselves down in Kandahar, they are taking their fight to an area of the country where opposition to occupation is deeper. Part of Hillier's speaking circuit is aimed at preparing the country for this. He is polishing up his answers to the difficult questions that will be asked when Canadian soldiers start to die.

The goal of the imperialist troop presence is to "pacify" Afghanistan by "killing people" who oppose the foreign military occupation. In so doing, the occupiers gain valuable military experience for use elsewhere, and they gain Afghan soil as a staging ground for intervention elsewhere in the region.

The countries that participate in the military effort in Afghanistan and elsewhere in Asia and the Middle East are those most likely to benefit from the exploitation of oil and human resources if "stabilization" is achieved. That is the message coming out of Washington, and Ottawa is acting accordingly, to advance its own interests.

Another sign of Canada's commitment to this course is the deal it is negotiating with the regime in the United Arab Emirates to allow it to establish a permanent military base, right on the shores of the Persian Gulf.

### **Layton backs government, Hillier**

While Hillier's war course has drawn criticism from many Canadians, the leader of the New Democratic Party, the party to which many trade unions are affiliated, has cheered him on. "A bit of strong language in the circumstances; I don't find that to be wrong," said Jack Layton on July 14.

The NDP opposed the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan, arguing that it should have been waged under the auspices of the United Nations. It took the same stand at the time of the Iraq war. But it supports the Canadian participation in the Afghanistan occupation. Its spokespeople usually evade the question of the ongoing U.S./British occupation of Iraq. When party leaders discuss Iraq, they advocate that the occupation be run by the UN.

Thankfully, many are not following the NDP's lead. In Vancouver, Mobilization Against War and Occupation held two protest rallies in July against Hillier's bellicose statements. The rallies were held at the doors of the Armed Forces Recruiting Center in Vancouver, and more are planned in August.

The Canadian Peace Alliance, a broad coalition based in Toronto, has issued an appeal to join international protests on September 24 against the occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The appeal states, "The Canadian Peace Alliance is calling on its member groups, individuals and supporters to mobilize for a pan-Canadian day of action against the wars of occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan and in support of U.S. military war resisters on Saturday, September 24th, 2005."

The statement goes on, "In Canada, the federal government is moving in exactly the opposite direction. They have doubled the military budget and increased support for the U.S.-led 'war on terror' by increasing troop levels in Afghanistan. As General Hillier's recent belligerent comments indicate, Canada provides increasingly open support for a broader campaign, led by the United States government, to assert control over the Middle East region. Also, Canadian corporations continue to profit from the war while people of Muslim and Arab backgrounds, such as the 'Secret Trial Five,' face ongoing harassment, intimidation and racial profiling."

The statement ends with the call, "End the wars of occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan, Let the war resisters stay. All out September 24th!" Many antiwar groups across Canada are taking up this appeal.

Socialist Voice #61, August 24, 2005

## **Cuba's People Cannot Be Cowed or Intimidated!**

**By Fidel Castro**

*Speech given by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, at the official function commemorating the 52<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the assault on the "Moncada" and "Carlos Manuel de Cespedes" garrisons in the Karl Marx Theatre, July 26, 2005.*

Dear people of Havana who, by your selfless, tenacious efforts and in hard-fought competition with the inhabitants of Villa Clara, Matanzas, Cienfuegos, Camagüey and Granma, won the right to hold this official function here in the capital: I congratulate you all.

Fighters of yesterday and today:

Distinguished guests:

Dearest fellow Cubans:

I thank our generous and heroic people for the privilege of commemorating this anniversary of the assault on the "Moncada" and "Carlos Manuel de Cespedes" garrisons when so much time has passed since those events took place. It could be that no one has even received such a great honor. It would be unforgivable not to keep in mind that more than 70 percent of the Cubans who today keep the Revolution alive had not even been born back then. They took the banners which, I think, they will never drop, from those who gave their lives in that action. I dare to say thank you on my behalf and on behalf of all of them, because on my conscience lies the enormous weight of having persuaded them to undertake such a bold action and yet fate has not prevented me from traveling the long, long road of revolutionary struggle down to this emotional moment 52 years later.

The Revolution today is experiencing a moment worthy of that memorable date.

The months preceding the 52<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the beginning of our armed struggle for Cuba's final independence have characterized by an exceptional degree of hostility directed by the Bush administration against Cuba. The Nazi-Fascist extreme right that has taken control of the Empire has not ceased to brood over its powerless hatred of our country. We should remember that May 20, 2002 when, at a meeting with the Miami terrorist mob, Bush demanded with unprecedented insolence that Cuba get a new constitution which would renounce the socialist nature of the Revolution. Those attending that meeting included Orlando Bosch Avila, a bosom friend of that family dynasty, and the main culprit behind the mid air destruction of the Cuban plane just minutes after it took off from Barbados where all of the passengers died.

Cuba's response to the imperial demand were enormous mass demonstrations all across the country in support of a draft amendment of the constitution, finally passed unanimously by the National Assembly of People's Power on June 26, 2002, stating that the socialist nature of the Revolution and the political and social system enshrined in the Constitution were irrevocable.

The atrocious September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on New York's Twin Towers had already happened.

Under pressure from that mob which had helped him win the presidency through a scandalous fraud, for more than four years, Mr. George W. Bush and his cronies did not cease for one minute from adopting cruel, hate-filled measures to destabilize and pound on Cuba and to try to do away with its independence and its people's right to a truly human and fair political system.

Hideous resolutions were passed to tighten the blockade and suffocate Cuba's economy. Hundreds of thousands of Cubans living in the United States were forbidden to visit their relatives in Cuba; they could only get permission to do so once every three years; family aid was reduced to almost nothing; the agreements on illegal immigration were breached; proposals for cooperating in such crucial areas as drug and persons trafficking and to hinder and prevent terrorist acts were rejected. Also, slanderous allegations rained down. Cuba was labeled a terrorist country. They made up insane lies about biological weapons production, plans to use electronic warfare to interfere with US government communications and other such things, the objective being to find excuses for a genocidal attack against our country, like they one they later launched in Iraq.

It is common knowledge that Bush's cronies set up a big committee to plan all the details of what they call "transition" in Cuba. This committee drafted a gruesome plan which included vaccination programs and literacy campaigns when the whole world knows that Cuba's health and education plans are much better than those in the United States and any other country in the world.

I couldn't help mentioning these things which are only a small sample of the series of attacks on Cuba by US governments and of all these governments, the Bush administration represents the incarnation of the most repugnant, evil hatred for a heroic, decent people which is not cowed nor can be intimidated by the powerful empire's threats and attacks.

One of Bush's most cynical measures was to use the Guantanamo naval base, which the United States occupies illegally against our people's will, to set up a concentration camp where he locks up, without trial or any kind of legal process, those whom he kidnaps anywhere in the world. And to top it all, that prison was turned into an experimental center of torture, the same as those later applied in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

An article in the October 17, 2004 edition of *The New York Times* admitted that abuse of prisoners in the Guantanamo naval base is "generalized and not limited to isolated cases as official versions claim". Quoting soldiers, secret agents and other officials, the newspaper described "a series of highly abusive procedures which continued over a long period of time". The world was amazed and shocked to hear about these unbelievable facts.

Democratic senator Joseph Biden, of the Foreign Relations Committee, said that the Guantanamo naval base had become the "greatest propaganda tool that exists for recruiting of terrorists around the world". Former president Jimmy Carter urged the Bush government to close the prison because the accusations of torture there are a "terrible embarrassment and a blow to the US reputation".

On September 13, 2004, the British newspaper *The Guardian* revealed that “the highest levels of George W. Bush’s administration were informed of the bad treatment and possible war crimes at the base in the Fall of 2002”, according to an investigative report by veteran journalist Seymour Hersh included in his book *Chain of Command*.

When visiting this torture center, a US member of Congress of Cuban descent, known in our country as the Big Bad She-wolf, a friend and defender of Posada Carriles, told the press that “she wished the Cuban people had the rights that the detainees in Guantanamo are given”.

Another of Mr. Bush’s cynical actions is the constant, increasing radio and television attacks on our people that violate the most elementary standards regulating the use of radio and TV frequencies and is in breach of international law.

The US government has invested vast amounts of money to no avail in this crazy, failed exercise.

In addition to its actions from outside, Bush and his mob have invested in excess one hundred million dollars to promote subversion and destabilization inside Cuba. More than any other US administration it has used that country’s Interests Section in Cuba to do this. There was a time, years ago, when subversion and espionage were carried out rather discretely but in Bush Jr. truly gangster-like era, all standards have been thrown overboard. Disgusting characters like James Cason, following the instructions of Otto Reich, Roger Noriega and other unscrupulous officials, have gone beyond the limits of basic decency and carried out unprecedented provocations inside our country.

The heads of the Interests Section have assumed direct leadership of the groups of mercenaries that, by various methods and under various pretexts, are provided with high personal incomes in convertible currency which, in a country like Cuba where services such as healthcare and education are totally free and others like housing, recreational activities, medicines and a significant portion of food cost a virtually symbolic amount in Cuban pesos, means that those who have convertible currency can enjoy a living standard far higher than that of Cubans who are paid their salaries and pensions in domestic currency.

There is no country in the world where the empire’s mercenaries enjoy the privileges they do in Cuba. None of them works or does any useful service whatsoever for society. The US Interests Section offices and residence in Cuba, protected by diplomatic immunity, have become the venues for meetings to organize provocations, facilitate communications and openly give orders to mercenaries inside the country.

And none of this is done surreptitiously. The Interests Section’s diplomatic pouch is brazenly used to smuggle in computers, communications equipment, printed materials, libelous articles and all kinds of objects and goods to give to their hirelings. Never, perhaps, has any government so abused and offended its diplomatic status and immunity as the US government by writing signs and exhibiting offensive placards attacking our country.

When, for some reason or other, they don’t want to be directly involved in this type of activity, they use their Czech or some such lackeys to carry out these extremely rude acts.

Our Interests Section in Washington and our officials have never, ever, used their diplomatic immunity for such illegal and disgusting acts.

In the last few days, while our people were working tirelessly to clean up the damage caused by Hurricane Dennis — tens of thousands of homes fully or partially destroyed, breaks in the electricity transmission and distribution grid, major damage to agriculture and other branches of the economy — the US government stepped up its subversive radio and television broadcasts to Cuba by increasing the frequency of illegal, provocative flights by the EC-130J aircraft which transmits the anti-Cuban radio and television signals.

The first broadcast from a US armed forces aircraft took place on none other than May 20, 2003, a date in history singled out for imperialist interference in Cuban affairs. Later on, from August 2004 onwards, once the loathsome “Transition Plan” allocating millions of dollars for radio and television broadcasts attacking Cuba was approved, the US government began four-hour transmissions from the military aircraft every weekend. In so doing, it has not only interfered with our television broadcasts, but has grossly violated international telecommunication standards while posing a dangerous provocation because of the military nature of the aircraft which has been previously used by the United States in actions against Viet Nam, Afghanistan and Iraq.

This past July 13, less than three weeks ago, five days after the hurricane had blown through the south, central and western regions of our country with its enormous power of destruction, the US Air Force transferred two EC-130J aircraft from the 193rd Special Operations Wing in Pennsylvania to the Naval Air station in Key West, Florida. One of these planes flew consecutively on Friday July 15, Saturday 16, Monday 18, Wednesday 20, Friday 22 and Saturday 23, broadcasting counterrevolutionary broadcasts in an escalation of provocation and aggression.

It was only six days after the hurricane and information about its devastating effects was still being collected.

Thus, in less than a year, there have been 46 broadcasts from the military aircraft while the daily broadcasts on nine frequencies, from the aerostatic balloon, have continued. These, and transmissions from other counterrevolutionary stations add up to 2,425 hours and 45 minutes of anti-Cuban radio and television broadcasts.

It is significant that, prior to the current escalation, the United States carried out three exploratory flights with RC-135 aircraft on Saturday April 30 and on May 7 and 14, 2005, at the same time the EC-130 was broadcasting to our country, their possible intention being to test the effectiveness and the parameters of our response to this television attack. It had been years since RC 135s had taken any action against our country.

While the US administration, which so furiously imposes the genocidal blockade on our country, in an entirely hypocritical and shameless way “compassionately” offered Cuba 50,000 USD to alleviate the damage caused by the hurricane, the lawmakers who support the Bush government policies, introduced a bill in Congress that would allocate 37,931,000 USD for the fiscal year 2006 and 29,931,000 USD for the fiscal year 2007, for anti-Cuban broadcasts. According to the



wording, the purpose of the bill is “to buy, rent, build and improve radio and television reception and transmission facilities and to buy, rent and install the necessary equipment, including aircraft, for radio and television reception and transmission”.

There has even been talk that they might purchase Boeing type aircraft that use technology similar to that of the EC-130J for future broadcasts to Cuba and they also want still more money to buy airtime on radio stations in the area close to our country.

The escalation in anti-Cuban broadcasts is happening in the midst of public disagreement between the Departments of State and Defense over whether to use military aircraft to broadcast to Cuba or to transfer them to the Middle East. The outcome shows that Condoleezza Rice’s position and the aggressive plans of the US administration, which stem from the pressure of, commitments to and influence of the Miami terrorist mob, have prevailed.

Dazed and delirious, a former spokesperson for the Cuban-American National Foundation and also one of Posada Carriles’ defenders has just brazenly announced on Miami television that Venezuela’s solidarity aid to Cuba to alleviate the effects of the hurricane “consists of a few thousand tons of masts to block US transmissions, equipment to rebuild the masts used for this type of jamming and the technology needed to establish repression”.

Such an abhorrent vision prevails in the US extreme right which is now also threatening to begin radio and television broadcasts to Venezuela, as a response to *Telesur* and to the Venezuelan government’s solidarity with Cuba.

According to Florida Republican Congressman Connie Mack, who introduced an amendment on this, “the Broadcasting Board of Governors could be authorized to initiate radio and television broadcasts similar to Radio and TV Martí’s current broadcasts to Cuba”.

With the same intensity as that shown by the White House in stepping up its electronic warfare, local radio and TV stations in Miami go to a lot of trouble to convey an image of crisis and chaos in Cuba where an unsustainable situation will lead to social upheaval. Whosoever listens to those media terrorists would be inevitably “convinced” that the Revolution has only a few hours left, which shows that these people never learn the lessons of history.

There have also been one or two foreign correspondents in Havana who have been swept up, consciously or unconsciously, by the current of provocation and treachery.

At almost the same time on July 13, only five days after the hurricane, about twenty members of the small groups I mentioned, shouted out insulting slogans as they walked outside the “Hermanos Ameijeiras” hospital. They were using the pretext of the tugboat accident that happened 11 years ago, which caused the regrettable death of a number of people including women and children, for which the Revolution was infamously blamed; the tug had been hijacked by armed persons at the dock where this type of vessel ties up. This provocation elicited an immediate, angry response from those living nearby and from hospital workers, which meant that the provocateurs had to be given protection by the authorities.

I should give a little more background. When the country was involved in a historic battle for justice with the Empire as it denounced the covert entry of Posada Carriles — he and Orlando

Bosch were responsible for the deaths of 73 people in the well-known Barbados tragedy — into the United States, under the protection of the Cuban-American mob and US authorities, and demanded his arrest and extradition to Venezuela, the Interests Section was working frantically to organize a so-called Assembly to Promote a Civil Society in Cuba officially convened for none other than May 20, a shameful, ill-starred date in our history. The whole thing was cooked up and funded by the US government.

Cuba's denunciation made on April 11 and the meeting in Havana of outstanding people from all over the hemisphere to demand the terrorist extradition to Venezuela and to denounce "Operation Condor" and the monstrous crimes committed by US soldiers with the US government's complicity — especially when Bush Sr. was head of the CIA and later US vice president coinciding with the dirty war against Nicaragua and the Iran-Contra scandal — put the Bush government and its main accomplices in a tight spot.

Before the Barbados terrorist act, Orlando Bosch and Posada Carriles, who took part in "Operation Condor", were given the responsibility for planning and organizing serious crimes against well-known Chileans and people from other Latin American countries.

It was obvious that the USINT (US Interests Section) and its hirelings aim was to orchestrate an act of provocation against the authorities of the Cuban Revolution in order to divert international attention from the scandalous conspiracy and complicity between Bush Jr. and the hemisphere's biggest terrorist that Bush had taken out of jail in Panama and allowed to enter the United States.

This so-called "Assembly to Promote a Civil Society in Cuba" was graced with the presence of the head of the US Interests Section and it even received a personal message from Bush and terrorist groups in Miami. Even Posada Carriles himself, who had not been arrested yet, sent his greetings and support to the "Assembly to Promote a Civil Society in Cuba". All information on and the impact of this grotesque meeting are on record and in due time will be made available to the public. The fact is that the Revolution's equanimity and *sang froid* wrecked this ridiculous maneuver but not without a great effort to contain the anger of the people living nearby who could not understand our tolerance of this mercenary, traitorous meeting.

When, this past July 22, all efforts were focused on rebuilding the country, "civil society's defenders" — emboldened by the seeming impunity of their adventures, cheered on by the Interests Section and greatly encouraged by the almost daily flights and broadcasts from the military aircraft with their subversive messages, plus the belief spread by the Miami mob that they were on the point of packing their bags because the Revolution was about to collapse — plucked up their courage to orchestrate a new act of provocation. But, this time the people, angrier than before over such barefaced acts of treason, intervened with patriotic fervor and didn't allow a single mercenary to move. And this is what will happen whenever traitors and mercenaries go a millimeter beyond the point that our Revolutionary people, whose destiny and lives are at stake in this stand-off with the most voracious, most inhuman and most cruel empire in history, is willing to accept.

The much publicized dissidence or alleged opposition in Cuba does not exist except in the overheated imagination of the Cuban-American mob and White House and State Department

bureaucrats. They deceive themselves or intoxicate themselves with their own lies. They pay opportunists, people divorced from all productive activity or useful service, often vagrants and frequently underclass or criminals who do not have anyone's esteem or support. Over and over again situations arise in which the authorities have to protect them when these people try to orchestrate some act of provocation; then the first thing the Interest Section does is to invite the foreign press.

The same thing happened when they invaded the country with armed mercenaries, many of whom were former Batista backers, assuming that the people would instantly rise up against the Revolution. Nobody knows these people in Cuba, they live off publicity abroad. The terrorist mob and the US government shamelessly take advantage of the facilities which Cuba has provided so that many international press agencies and correspondents can live in and send reports from Cuba without any restrictions whatsoever so that they can move around and act with complete freedom. Some in fact do so in total complicity with the US Interests Section in order to misinform and deceive the world about what happens in Cuba. Everyone knows full well that no revolutionary process has ever had the consensus and overwhelming support and trust that the Cuban Revolution has because of its steadfastness and fidelity to its principles and because of the gallantry, internationalist spirit and solidarity of the Cuban people.

It would be much better if the Empire did not allow itself to be carried away by illusions that might lead it to more serious mistakes, because nothing that has happened elsewhere will be comparable to what would happen here to anyone who tries to take control of Cuba.

A long time ago now, more than a century ago, Maceo warned them: "They will only reap her blood-soaked soil, if they do not perish in the strife". Today we could add: "They would not even reap the dust of her soil, and they would have to shed much more blood than anywhere else on the planet". This we swear!

I don't want to let this occasion pass by without raising some other issues of great importance to our people.

During the first six months of this year, the country had to face a complex situation brought about by the drought, the power shortage and, most recently, the consequences of Hurricane Dennis.

The enemies of the Revolution, as I have already explained, have jubilantly tried to use these events to show that Cuba is going through a serious economic crisis. They never learn and are once again underestimating our people's capacity to resist and struggle.

The sound growth that our economy has started to display since last year has increased during the first half of 2005, as I can show with some irrefutable figures which confirm this and I will now read out:

During the first half of the year the Cuban economy grew by 7.3% and an increase of around 9% is expected by the end of the year, as a result of the positive tendencies that have been observed.

This performance, recorded up until June, is based on the increase of 13 of the 22 sectors of the industry, among which ferrous metallurgy stands out with 15.5%, non-ferrous metallurgy with

9.2%; printing with 21.7%; the garments industry with 7.0%; the food industry with 3.6% and the beverage and tobacco industry with 4.4%.

Construction work increased by 8.2%, the communication sector by 7.1%, commerce by 10% and the public service sector by 13.3%.

The equivalent production of national crude oil and gas turns out around one million 900 thousand tons, that is to say, four times more than what was produced at the beginning of the special period. At the moment, a significant effort is being made to drill and set underway new oil and gas wells that will put the country closer on its way to self-sufficiency in terms of the energy sector.

Crude refining increased by 9.2%, making way for a saving of 29 million 700 thousand dollars on the total amount of refined products, when compared to their international prices. Fuel consumption, on the other hand, stayed at similar levels to the year before.

The production of electricity fell by 4% due both to the breakdowns in the electricity generating plants, and to the extension of their maintenance periods, which affected production and service, as well as the population.

In order to maintain these plants, the hard currency resources to be invested until December 2005 have doubled, exceeding the sum of 100 million USD.

A program is underway to improve the country's power supply, with an additional 50 million USD to be invested in this program, 34% of this investment has been made in the first five months.

This program will make it possible to reduce the total loss in power distribution from approximately 16.5% to 11%, and increase the quality of the service.

A profound revolution is underway with respect to the concept of production and the use of electricity. Equipment and material worth 282 million 100 thousand USD have been bought and are currently being installed, which, within a year, will provide us with a million more kilowatts of electricity.

I am using the US dollar here so that it is easier to understand the cost in convertible pesos. This aforementioned figure of new capacities of electricity production will be supplemented by 200 thousand kilowatts generated by a new combined cycle plant and a currently out of use thermoelectric plant adapted to consume accompanying gas. This new capacity, on top of the saving of no less than one million kilowatts which will be made possible by investing more than 250 million USD, will make available to production, services and family units twice the electricity they have now, starting on the second semester of 2006.

Along with the problem of electricity, it has been necessary to resolve the need for domestic fuel. Personally, as President of the Council of State and of the Government, I dedicate a significant part of my time to this problem, so what I said is not an exaggeration, as rather I speak with circumspection, keeping some things up my sleeve.

More than 3 million 100 thousand pressure cookers, 3 million 500 rice steamers, 3 million 100 thousand electric pressure cookers, 3 million 800 thousand electric hobs and one million 100 thousand 12-inch fans have also been purchased.

More than 5 million 300 thousand gaskets for refrigerators, 650 thermostats and 7 million gaskets for coffee makers have also been bought. This range of equipment and accessories, which are already being distributed in a gradual and attentive manner, will continue to be handed out during the second half of the year, as planned.

More than 100 million USD are being invested in the pharmaceutical industry. Production in this sector is steadily growing.

Work is underway to expand and remodel the factories producing soy bean yogurt, gradually increasing its production capacity to one million liters a day.

Work is being done and money invested in order to process 25 thousand tons of drinking chocolate a year. It is estimated that the level of production for the remainder of the year is 12 tons to be distributed among the population.

As part of the program of quality coffee production, 30 packaging machines, 2 new roasters and the replacement of 7 mills, which have already been ordered, are to be introduced and assembled in the plants currently functioning. In August distribution will commence in some provinces, in accordance with the established capacity.

In order to expand, guarantee and ensure the storage of cereals and legumes, the construction of capacities is underway for half a million tons of top quality metallic silos.

Work is also underway to expand the production capacity of pasta.

The current industries pertaining to the People's Power will be expanded in order to produce noodles and 15 similar new factories will be constructed.

Two new pasta factories will be built on the sites of the former mills "Noel Fernández" in Camagüey and "Marta Abreu" in Cienfuegos. A new pasta production line will be installed in the Vita Nuova factory, producing 750 kilograms an hour, and the Buona Sera factory in Santiago de Cuba will be subject to modernization.

The total capacity will be 70 thousand tons of different varieties of pasta.

The purchase of two new cocoa processing plants is anticipated, each with a capacity of 25 thousand tons.

Besides satisfying national needs, this decision will allow us to produce high quality cocoa butter for export, as well as other cocoa derivatives.

As part of the policy to improve our people's diet, a program is implemented to increase egg production. The aim is to reach an output of more than 2.2 billion eggs by 2006.

A series of investments has been decided upon to increase the availability of pork meat. Work is being done to recover the capacity of pork production, with a view to reaching a total production

of 80 thousand tons of meat, in live animals, by 2006 and to preparing conditions to reach 100 thousand tons by 2007.

The areas of protected and semi protected crops will be considerably expanded in order to produce high quality vegetables for both national consumption and export.

During the first half of the year, nickel production reached 38 thousand 200 tons, which is an increase from the year before. This export was the most important source of income for the country in terms of the export of goods, amounting to 545 million USD in the first half of the year.

The number of people visiting the country until June 30 had increased by 8%, and it is anticipated that this year the number of bookings will reach 2 million 300 thousand.

The income from the tourist sector increased by 11.5% compared with the year before, with a linear occupation level of 66.9%.

During 2005, 4 new hotels are scheduled to begin operations, which will contribute one thousand 921 rooms to the international tourist sector.

The electronics industry is doubling its production of software and televisions.

In this half of the year, the production of cement and steel rods increased by 20.8% and 5%, respectively.

With a view to responding to the most urgent needs to increase our building capacity, investments have been approved which are now being made to the tune of 62 million USD, which will increase the production of sand by 51%, stone by 74%, blocks by 59% and floor materials by 49%.

Currently, 7 thousand 300 homes have been completed in 2005. During the remaining months of this year the majority of homes partially affected by Hurricane Dennis will be repaired; no less than 10 thousand of the homes destroyed will be built again as new and the plans to finish and construct new homes to cover the most urgent requirements will continue, up to at least 30 thousand additional housing.

The material required to build a total of 100 thousand new homes in 2006 has already been or is in the process of being ordered, which will be by far the highest number in our history. This figure does not include a high number of repairs. Everything will depend on our efforts.

From 2003 until May 2005, the country was in the grip of the worst drought on record. The economic impact of this is estimated at more than 1.2 billion USD.

To deal with this, until 2004, 183 million USD were invested in hydraulic works, and this year it is calculated that an additional 60 million will be used.

It has also been necessary to invest more than 70 million USD in current expenditure, which includes 28 thousand tons of diesel and 14 thousand tons of gasoline, with the specific aim of taking water to the affected population, which exceeded 2 million 500 thousand people at the most critical times, distributing water by trucks to almost 2 million people.

In order to keep the economy healthy, it is essential to revitalize railway transport, which was seriously affected during these years of the special period. The special period and the blockade imposed by the United States dealt a harsh blow to railway transport, close to the point of collapse.

This year around 40 million USD are being urgently invested in railway freight transport. Actually, 32 freight cars have been repaired, while 18 locomotives and almost a thousand more cars should be restored to working order in the next few months to transport dry goods and cement for the works of the Battle of Ideas and the program for the construction of housing.

Presently, 12 new locomotives were bought from China that will arrive this November.

The amount cargo transported by railway rose by 47,900 tons in comparison to the first half of last year.

As for freight transport by motor vehicle, 486 trucks that were out of service have been repaired and are up and running.

In the first half of the year, the Ministry of Transport vehicle fleet transported 66 thousand 100 tons more than in the same period of 2004.

Port equipment, metal for railway tracks and equipment and spare parts for trucks have been purchased or are in the process of being purchased for 15 million USD.

One thousand modern busses for long distance transport, with fuel efficient engines have been ordered from China. 200 have already arrived in the country and are being used in areas where they are most needed. It is calculated that this year busses will transport almost 3 million more passengers than anticipated.

Inevitably, it will be imperative to review the fares, since the high cost of fuel and equipment will make it impossible to provide this service at the historically charged prices.

In the healthcare sector, investments received a significant boost during the first six months, which could never have happened in the past. The 448 rehabilitation wards that the country required were all completed.

Major repairs have been made to 123 polyclinics. Of the 444 existing polyclinics, almost all are now equipped with electrocardiographs, 396 have, for the first time, been given ultrasound equipment with three transducers, and 115 have new X-ray equipment. All of them will be equipped with endoscope facilities; every one of them now has 4 computers and a library, and 368 are connected to the Internet.

Since January 2004, 118 intensive therapy wards have been created in the municipalities that did not have it, where until February 2005, 42 thousand 561 patients had been provided care, the lives of 13,025 of whom were saved, that is to say, 92% of those who were at risk of death.

The dental clinics have been equipped with 851 new dentists' offices.

More than 50 hospitals are currently being renovated, expanded and equipped to offer excellent services to both national and foreign patients. The program began in 2004 with an estimated cost

of 835 million USD, which includes the latest equipment valued at approximately 400 million USD.

Among the high-tech equipment that we now have at our disposal, is the 27 one-slice CT equipment, with which all the provinces of the country are now equipped, 9 other 64-slice equipment, 8 of magnetic resonance imaging and 8 of three-dimensional ultrasound, which are being used for the first time in Cuba.

This program comes hand in hand with the construction of 44 buildings offering hospital accommodation, which will provide a total of 6,886 rooms. Numerous three and four-star hotels will also be used in the provision of an international health service.

The country is now able to operate and provide services in all branches of ophthalmology to hundreds of thousands of patients. One hundred thousand Venezuelan brothers and sisters will receive these services this year, in which, until yesterday, July 25, 25,024 patients from said country and a similar number of Cubans had been operated on.

No less than 15 thousand citizens of the Caribbean community will receive this form of medical care between the second half of June 2005 and June 2006. Venezuela and Cuba have offered to provide another 100 thousand Latin Americans with this service within the same period. This is a feat of solidarity and humanity unprecedented in the history of the world.

The educational revolution that our country has been carrying out in the heat of the Battle of Ideas has brought about an increase in quality that is also unprecedented in the educational and learning process.

In this sector, major repairs have been made to 111 large schools and work continues on 56 more, as well as on 5 Pedagogical Institutes.

Major repairs also began on 25 polytechnics for computer sciences, with a capacity for 40 thousand students, as well as 15 senior high schools in the province of La Habana, of the 40 that will receive this repair work. The cost of these programs amounts to more than 120 million USD.

Additionally, 118 Youth Computer Clubs were completed in the first six months of this year, at a cost of 21 million USD.

At the end of the present academic year, 1,197 works had been completed by the program for the Battle of Ideas, which benefit 503,174 students. Major repairs are being made to 16 Special Sport Schools, at a cost of over 14 million 600 thousand USD; one has already been completed, while work is still underway in another 113.

Meanwhile, 20 more university chapters were established in prisons, with some 590 students.

As proof of the potential of our economy, in May the minimum wage went up from 100 to 225 pesos, benefiting 1,657,191 workers that account for 54% of state employees, costing an annual total of 1.06 billion Cuban pesos. At the end of the first half of the year the average wage rose to 334 pesos, from 282 at the end of 2004.

In July wages rose in the healthcare and education sectors, which benefited 857 thousand 400 workers, at an annual cost of more than 523 million Cuban pesos.



In the Social Security sector the pensions of 1,468,000 people went up, just over 97% of the total number of pensioners.

In the area of Social Assistance, 476, 512 people benefited from an increase of 50 pesos monthly. Both measures annually cost 1.19 billion Cuban pesos.

These actions have benefited 4.4 million people, which accounts for 30.9% of the population, at an annual cost of 2.78 billion Cuban pesos. Wages continue to increase gradually in other sectors.

The export of goods and services grew by 26.3% in the first six months of the year as compared to the same period in 2004.

The favorable balance in the trade of services managed to compensate for the imbalance of the exchange of goods, resulting in a modest positive balance in the trade figures, even higher than the year before.

With regard to the export of goods, nickel stands out for its importance, as do generic and biotechnological medication, tobacco and raw sugar, insofar as the services sector, medical and tourist services play a decisive role.

These results are achieved in the midst of a process of reorganizing foreign commerce, in which the number of companies authorized to import goods decreased from 192 to 89 and in which 67% of all the country's imports are concentrated on 23 entities, also reducing the participation of middlemen by 26% over the last two years.

In response to an economic policy which ensures that social interests and the fundamental priorities of the country are met, a set of measures has been adopted in the monetary sector, aimed at strengthening the national currency. By mid 2003 the US dollar ceased being used in inter-company transactions and an exchange control system was established in the Central Bank for external operations. In November of 2004, in response to the threats made by the United States Government, the US dollar was also withdrawn from circulation in the chain of hard currency shops and a fine of 10% was applied to the exchange of this currency, a measure which was instituted offering maximum facilities to the population and without affecting their bank deposits.

At the beginning of this year, these actions were complemented by the act of revaluing the Cuban peso, with respect to the Cuban convertible peso, by 7%, with which the purchasing power of the Cuban peso increased in the chain of hard currency shops. Additionally, the Cuban convertible peso was revalued by 8% with respect to the US dollar and other hard currencies.

These measures have strengthened our monetary sovereignty and have brought about a greater equality between the social strata who receive income in different currencies. Now all currencies in circulation are issued by the Central Bank of Cuba, unlike in the past, when a part of it was issued by the monetary authority of a country that has imposed an iron blockade on Cuba.

Some practical effects of this have been: an increase in savings made in Cuban pesos of 32%, compared to September of last year, which reflects a stronger credibility of the national currency;

a rise in the ratio of deposits made in Cuban convertible pesos from the total amount of hard currency savings accounts, going from 20% to 50%; and a significant increase in the hard currency received by the Central Bank.

In this way it was possible to substantially reduce the participation of the dollar in the country's total inflow of hard currency in cash. In the past, the participation of the US dollar exceeded 90%, whereas now it maintains a rate of around 30%, which basically reduces the risk caused by threats made by the United States Government.

This year a rational centralization of decisions concerning the use of hard currency has been established. Authorization for these transactions must be obtained before obligations are contracted, which has led to a more effective process of contracting and a greater commitment to honoring the payment. Furthermore, this has contributed considerably to the fight against crime and corruption. It has also helped to make important decisions to get rid of the commercial middlemen that are not representative in international commerce, whose activity brought about a disproportioned increase in the prices of the goods and services that the country purchases abroad.

By way of this process, the State's hard currency income was concentrated in the Central Bank, thus increasing the possibility of using it, which has notably strengthened the negotiating capacity of the socialist State, with the resulting benefits in commercial and financial management. It has also made it possible to rigorously fulfill the obligations created by the new external financial commitments and the renegotiated debt, which has allowed us to access new credit facilities in more favorable conditions.

Finally, as part of the agreements emanating from ALBA, an affiliate of a Cuban bank has been opened in Venezuela and the creation of an affiliate of a Venezuelan bank in Cuba has been given the go-ahead.

For the first time since the beginning of the special period, in 2004 the balance of day-to-day operations was surplus, due mainly to the notable increase in the services exported. A more favorable result drawing from a higher income for services rendered is anticipated for the present year.

It is calculated that by June 30, sales in hard currency shops will have reached a figure 6.1% higher than that of the year before.

The agreement between the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Republic of Cuba, signed in accordance with the principles of ALBA, means a considerable step forward on the way to unity and the true integration of the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean. The Petrocaribe agreement is another extraordinary advancement and a true example of fraternal solidarity among peoples.

The commercial exchange between Venezuela and Cuba has already risen this year to no less than 3 billion USD.

Both countries will undoubtedly be the two that experience the most economic growth in the hemisphere this year.

Because of these noble, constructive and peaceful efforts, the imperialist government is accusing Venezuela and Cuba, Chávez and Castro, of destabilizing and subverting other countries in the region.

Faced with such accusations against Venezuela and Cuba, and if President Chávez agreed, a day like today would be most opportune to reply: Condemn us, it doesn't matter, history will absolve us!

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## **Cuba and Africa: A History Worthy of Pride**

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The role of Cuba in the world since 1959 is unprecedented.[1] For more than four decades, Castro has challenged and humiliated the imperial arrogance of the United States. In the 1960's, the fear of a second Cuba in Latin America dogged the leaders of the United States and impelled the creation of the Alliance for Progress. Since the end of the 1970's until the end of the 80's, Havana maintained a strong presence alongside those who fought for revolutionary change in Central America.

The arrival of 36,000 Cuban soldiers in Angola between November 1975 and March 1976 astonished the world; however, it was only one stage along the road beginning in 1959 that had taken the Cubans to Algeria, the Congo Leopoldville (later called Zaire), the Congo Brazzaville and Guinea-Bissau.[2]

At the beginning of the 60's, the Cuban leaders saw similarities between the Algerian revolution against French colonial domination and their own struggle against Fulgencio Batista and the United States. In December 1961, a Cuban ship took weapons to Casablanca for the Algerian rebels. It returned to Havana with 78 wounded guerilla fighters and 20 children from refugee camps. The epic struggle of Cubans in Africa had begun. The assistance continued after Algeria achieved its independence in 1962. In May 1963, a 55 member Cuban medical company arrived in Algiers. Just as it would be for all the missions that followed, up until 1978, the help was free. And in October 1963, when Morocco attacked Algeria, the Cubans rapidly deployed a contingent of 686 soldiers with heavy weapons in defense of the Algerians. This occurred despite the fact that Rabat had just signed a contract with Havana for the purchase of a million tons of sugar valued at \$184 million dollars – a considerable sum of hard currency in a moment that United States was trying to paralyze Cuban foreign trade.

The concern of Cuba towards sub-Saharan Africa was intensified at the end of 1964. The guerilla fighters fought in the Portuguese colonies of Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. In Congo Brazzaville, the new government proudly proclaimed its revolutionary sympathies. Above all, there was Zaire – where the armed revolt extended surprisingly quickly beginning in the spring of 1964. This was a threat to the survival of the corrupt régime that presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy had been able to impose. To save the Zairian régime, the Johnson administration

dispatched an army of a thousand white mercenaries in a broad “covert” operation that everybody knew about – except for the US press. This produced a wave of indignation, even among those African leaders who had good relations with the United States. For the Cubans, the conflict was not only an African problem. “Our view was that the problem of the Congo [Zaire] was a problem of the whole world,” wrote Che Guevara.[3]

In December 1964, Che Guevara went to Africa on a three-month trip that evidenced the increased interest of Havana in the region. In February 1965, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Che came to an agreement with the rebellious Zairians that Cuba would send a group of instructors to help them in their struggle. In April, a Cuban column of about 120 men under Che’s orders entered eastern Zaire through Tanzania. Some weeks later, a second Cuban column under Jorge Risquet’s control arrived in neighboring Congo Brazzaville at the request of the government of that country. The government was living “in fear” of an attack by CIA-backed mercenaries. The column had a more strategic task. As Raúl Castro pointed out “it was Che’s reserve column” that would spring upon the opportunity as soon it presented itself.[4] In the summer of 1965 there were 400 Cuban soldiers in central Africa.

But central Africa was not ready for the revolution. When the Cubans arrived in Zaire, the mercenaries had practically defeated the rebellion. The history of Che’s column is not one of major combat, but of the good sense of 120 men who were in an impossible situation in a world completely alien to them, but who maintained their humanity and behaved with discipline and commitment to the end. In November 1965, after the final collapse of the rebellion, the Cuban column left Zaire. Meanwhile, in the Congo Brazzaville, Risquet’s column stopped a military coup in June 1966 by means of daring and diplomacy, and without spilling a drop of blood. The Cuban doctors who were a part of the column carried out the first vaccination campaign against poliomyelitis in the country and 254 young Congolese went to Cuba to study – with Cuba covering all the expenses. In December 1966, the column returned to Cuba, although the Congolese government asked them to stay. Risquet understood, and made Havana understand, that there was no revolution in Congo Brazzaville. “He took us out at the opportune moment,” observed his second in command. “He knew how to be flexible.” [5]

The end of the 1960’s was a period of growing maturation in the relationship between Cuba and Africa. In those years – until 1974 – Cuba’s focus in the continent was centered on Guinea-Bissau, where PAIGC guerilla fighters were fighting to liberate their country from the yoke of Portuguese colonialism. At the request of the PAIGC, Cuban military instructors came to Guinea-Bissau in 1966 and stayed until the end of the war in 1974. This was the longest Cuban operation in Africa until the dispatching of troops to Angola in 1975; and it was also the most successful. According to the words of the first president of Guinea-Bissau, “we knew that we could fight and triumph because other countries and people supported us... with weapons, with medicines, with supplies... But there is a country that, besides material, political and diplomatic support sent their sons and daughters to fight on our side, to spill their blood in our earth alongside that of the best children of our homeland. This great people, this heroic people, we all know is the heroic people of Cuba, the Cuba of Fidel Castro, the Cuba of the Sierra Maestra, the

Cuba of Moncada... Cuba sent its best youth here to help us in the technical aspects of our war, to help us carry out this great struggle... against Portuguese colonialism.” [6]

The only foreigners who fought with the PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau were the Cubans. Likewise, throughout the duration of this long war, the only foreign doctors in the guerilla areas were Cuban (with a single and fleeting exception), and there were no Guinean doctors up until 1968. “The Cuban doctors really made a miracle”, said Francisca Pereira, a health worker of the PAIGC. She observed, “I am eternally grateful to them. Not only did they save lives, but also they risked their own. They were truly selfless.” [7]

The Cubans who went to Africa did so voluntarily. The mystic of the guerrilla war motivated them. “We dreamed about revolution” one meditated. “We wanted to be part of it, to feel that we fought for it. We were young and the children of a revolution.” The volunteers didn’t receive public praise in Cuba. They left “knowing that their history would remain secret.” [8] They didn’t win medals or receive material rewards. Upon their return they could not boast about their feats because what they had done was secret.

The North Americans knew that the Cubans were in Africa – in Algeria, Zaire, the Congo and Guinea-Bissau – but, as the US ambassador in Conakry observed from his position as an observer of the war in neighboring Guinea-Bissau, “the Cuban presence didn’t worry the State Department.” In its arrogance, the US could not imagine that such a small and poor country could play an important role in a distant continent. This helps us to understand why the US was amazed by the arrival of Cuban troops in Angola in 1975. “It was a true surprise,” observed Paul O’ Nelly, the manager of the Southern African Office of the Department of State from 1973 to 1975. “I don’t recall if we knew of the ties between Cuba and the MPLA, but even if we had, they would not have worried us.” [9]

These ties had been drawn tighter in 1965, when Che met with Agostinho Neto, Lúcio Lara, and other leaders of the MPLA in Brazzaville in an “historic encounter”, as Raúl Castro called it. “We spoke, we debated,” Lara remembers. “We only wanted one thing: the Cuban instructors. The war was becoming difficult and we didn’t have experience... Guevara promised that he would speak with his Party and his government so that instructors would be sent to us.” [10] Risquet’s column trained MPLA guerillas fighters in the Congo and some of the Cubans were with the MPLA in the Angolan enclave of Cabinda acting as advisors, instructors, and combatants, forging bonds that would never be forgotten.

In 1966, the MPLA pulled out of Cabinda and centered its efforts on a new front in the east of Angola that would open up starting from the frontier with Zambia. There was no longer reason for the Cubans to stay in the Congo. Nor could instructors be sent to the new front in the east of Angola due to opposition from Zambia.

When the Portuguese dictatorship was overthrown on April 25, 1974, the MPLA faced the ambitions of the FNLA that, according to the CIA chief stationed in Luanda, “was directed by corrupt men, completely lacking principles.” MPLA also would have to face the UNITA of Jonas Savimbi, a commander whose devouring passion was absolute power. Civil war exploded in the spring of 1975. As the November 11th independence day approached, the MPLA was winning

and conquering the FNLA-UNITA coalition. They were winning not because of help from Cuban troops (there were no Cubans yet fighting in Angola) or because of superior armaments (the FNLA and UNITA had a slight advantage in weapons thanks to help from the United States and South Africa). The MPLA was winning because, just as the Luanda CIA chief said, the MPLA was by far the most disciplined and dedicated of the three movements. The leaders of the MPLA were more effective, better educated, better trained and more motivated than those of the FNLA and UNITA; “their supporters were also more motivated.”[11]

To prevent the MPLA victory, South African troops – in a column called “Zulu” – invaded Angola on October 14th, transforming the civil war into an international conflict. South Africa was well aware of the unwavering hostility of Neto toward apartheid and his commitment to aid the Southern African liberation movements. Even so, it is possible that Pretoria would not have invaded had there not been the prompting of Washington.

Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had decided that Angola could provide an easy victory that would lift the prestige of United States – and his own – after having been defeated by the communists in Vietnam the preceding April. He presented the struggle in Angola in classic cold war terms: the FNLA and the UNITA – supported by the West – would crush the MPLA that was backed by the Soviet Union (in fact, Soviet assistance to the MPLA was very limited because Moscow distrusted Neto and did not wish to endanger the SALT II Treaty negotiations).

While the South Africans advanced quickly toward Luanda, the MPLA resistance collapsed in the face of the enormous military superiority of the invading forces. Zulu would have taken the city if Castro had not decided, on November 4, to send troops in response to an urgent request from the MPLA. The Cubans, accompanied by the young armed forces of the newly formed Popular Republic of Angola, checked the South African advance. They later pushed Zulu back until, on March 27, 1976, the last South African troops retreated to Namibia.

Angola expanded Castro’s horizons. In Ethiopia, in 1978, 16,000 Cuban soldiers helped to repel the invading Somali army. Tens of thousands of Cubans remained in Angola during the 1980’s, offering invaluable assistance. Smaller Cuban military companies served in the Congo, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Benin. The Cuban military instructors trained Namibian, Rhodesian and South African guerrillas.

I have presented this outline of Cuban policies in Africa to be able to reflect upon the motivations behind these policies. However, I should explain the limits of my sources.

I have carried out extensive research in Cuban archives, but I only had access to documentation referring to Cuba’s policies in relation to Africa. I have also not been able to interview the key people who directed these policies – Fidel and Raúl Castro. My investigation has been limited to the period 1959-1976, with an important exception, the relations with Angola that I have studied until the end of the 1980’s.[12]

I have examined the policies of Cuba not only through Cuban documents but also through the eyes of non-friendly governments – combing the files of the US, Great Britain, Belgium and Western Germany – and of through the eyes of the government of the German Democratic Republic, a sensitive and difficult friend whose perceptions very closely reflected the perceptions

of the USSR (there is no declassified material of value on this theme in Russian archives). I have supplemented my archival research with interviews of more than 160 people – Cuban, American and African; and I have reviewed press reports from 30 countries in the Western Hemisphere, Europe and Africa.

It is interesting to point out that during the 1960's, while the leaders of the United States denounced Cuba as a Soviet puppet, the analysts of the CIA and the State Department's Office of Intelligence and Investigations (INR) pointed out the resistance of Castro to Soviet counsel and his open critiques of the USSR. An analysis from 1968, which reflected the consensus of the intelligence services, concluded, "Castro does not have the intention of being subordinated to Soviet discipline and direction, and he has increasingly disagreed with Soviet concepts, strategies and theories." [13] Castro also criticized the Soviet Union for dogmatism and opportunism, being stingy in its assistance to the governments and liberation movements of the Third World, and excessively anxious to accommodate the United States. He did not hide his dislike toward the inadequate assistance from the Soviet Union to North Vietnam, and in Latin America he pursued policies that clashed with the desires of Moscow. The reports of the CIA and of INR unceasingly discussed the motivations of Cuba in Africa and Latin America, and neither of them once indicated that the Cubans were acting at the request of the Soviet Union.

Therefore, if we eliminate the Soviet "ingredient," what were the Cuban political motivations? What do the enemies say?

The analysts of the CIA and the INR pointed out that the two decisive factors of Cuban foreign policy were self-defense and idealism. In terms of self-defense, US intelligence analysts did not have qualms recognizing that Castro had repeatedly outlined his will to explore a modus vivendi with United States – in 1961, 1963, and 1964. With the fleeting and very delicate exception of October-November 1963, the US always rejected his overtures. The United States answer was paramilitary operations against Cuba, murder attempts against Fidel Castro and the strangulation of the Cuban economy.

Then the Cubans reached a very blunt conclusion: if Washington insisted on aggression, the best defense would be the one of counterattack – not a direct frontal attack against the US, this of course would have been suicidal, but via paths in the Third World. Cuba would assist revolutionaries of the Third World everywhere possible, winning friends this way and weakening the US's influence. Just as the CIA had said, Castro considered the survival of the revolution as dependant "on the emergence of 'other Cubas'... [Castro thought] that United States would ultimately be forced to accept Cuba when it had to simultaneously face 'several' other revolutionary governments." [14]

When Che Guevara went to Africa in December 1964, US intelligence analysts emphasized this self-defense aspect. With much more wisdom than the later biographers of Che – particularly that of Jorge Castañeda, the former Mexican Secretary of State. They never said that Guevara was acting independently of Castro. On the contrary, the director of the State Department's Office of Intelligence and Investigation, Thomas Hughes, observed that "the three month trip of Che Guevara to Africa is an important part of a new Cuban strategy." This strategy, he



explained, was based on the Cuban belief that Africa was ready for the revolution and that it was in Cuba's interest to extend the revolution there. It would win new friends for Havana and would weaken the influence of United States on the continent.

"It was almost a reflection," said Victor Dreke, the second in command under Che in Zaire. "Cuba defended itself by attacking its aggressor. That was our philosophy. The Yankees were harassing us, so we went to face them along other roads in the world. We had to divide their forces, so that they could not pounce on us with all their power, or on any other country." [15]

However, to explain Cuban activism in the 60's only in terms of self-defense would be to deform reality – an error that US intelligence didn't make.

There was a second decisive factor, just as the CIA and the INR frankly recognized: idealism, or a "sense of a revolutionary mission." [16] As the president of the National Council on Accounting ? National Accounting Office told the director of the CIA in September 1963, "[Castro] is above all a revolutionary." [17] Report after report emphasized the same point: Castro was "a compulsive revolutionary," a man with a "fanatic devotion toward his cause" who was "inspired by a messianic sense of mission." He believed that he was "was immersed in a great crusade." The people who surrounded him shared his sense of mission: "the revolution is their *raison d'être*." Just as Hughes said, Castro and his *compañeros* were "dedicated revolutionaries, entirely convinced that one day they could catalyze radical change throughout Latin America and that they had to do it." [18]

The Cuban leaders were convinced that their country had a special empathy with the Third World. Cuba was racially mixed, poor, and threatened by a powerful enemy. Culturally, it was Latin American and African. Therefore, it was a special hybrid: a socialist country with a Third World sensibility in a world that as Castro correctly said, was dominated by the conflict between the privileged and the impoverished, a struggle of humanity against "imperialism", [19] and where the main dividing line was not between socialist and capitalist states, but between the developed and underdeveloped countries.

These were, thus, the two motive forces of Cuban activism in the 60's: self-defense and idealism. But did this continue being the case in the 70's? Plus, concretely, how does it allow us to explain the dispatching of Cuban troops to Angola in November 1975?

Documents sweepingly demonstrate that the shipment of Cuban troops was a rich example of two things: the independence of Cuba vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, and the idealism of Cuban foreign policy.

Just as a high Soviet official said it in his memoirs, the Cubans sent their troops "on their own initiative and without consulting us." In fact, the evidence is already so overwhelming that even Kissinger, who he loved to negate the Cubans saying that they were Soviet peons, reflected saying, "At that moment we thought that [Castro] was operating according to instructions from the Soviets," he wrote in the last volume of his memoirs. "We could not imagine that he would act in such a provocative manner so far from his country unless Moscow pressured him for repayment of their military and economic support. The proof available today indicates that it was the opposite." [20]

What was it then that motivated Castro's daring decision to send troops to Angola? It was not the narrow interests of Cuba, and certainly not realpolitik. With his decision to send troops, Castro did more than to stop informing the Soviets – he challenged Moscow, because he knew very well that Brezhnev was opposed to it. The operation bore a serious military risk for Cuba. Pretoria, at the request of Washington, could expand its intervention and the Cuban soldiers would have to face the full force of the South African army without any guarantee of Soviet help. He had to wait two months before Moscow began to offer basic necessary logistical help to transfer Cuban troops to Angola. Also, dispatching troops endangered Cuban relations with western countries at a moment in which they were notably improving: the United States was discussing a modus vivendi; the OAS had just lifted sanctions imposed on Cuba since 1964, and the countries of Western Europe were offering low interest development assistance loans.

Realpolitik would have demanded that Cuba ignore the peremptory requests of Luanda and not send troops. Though a client of the Soviet Union, Castro was showing his independent mettle.

It was idealism that motivated the decision to send troops. The victory of the Pretoria-Washington axis would have meant more than the defeat of the MPLA, the old friend of Cuba. It would have meant the victory of apartheid and the reinforcement of white domination of the people of Southern Africa. It was a defining moment. Castro sent his soldiers. As Kissinger explains so well in his memoirs, "Castro was perhaps the most genuine revolutionary leader in power in those moments." [21]

I do not know of any other country, in the modern epoch, for which idealism has been such a key component in its foreign policy. I do not know any other country than Cuba that for such a relatively long duration (17 years, if I limit myself to the period that I have investigated in depth) has demonstrated so much generosity and courage in its foreign policy. As one leader of the PAIGC said, "The Cubans understood better than anyone that they had the duty to fight and help their sisters and brothers to be free." [22]

There is something more: the Cubans treated movements and governments that depended largely on their help with deference. This was something that I had not imagined when I began my research, because I had never before encountered that in the foreign policy of other countries. I did not believe that this could be possible. In relation to the PAIGC, the MPLA, or the government of Angola, Cuba was a large power and a benefactor; but it acted with a sense of respect that I believe is the only instance in the annals of the conduct of larger powers in relation to those who depend on their help. The Cuban government's behavior was equaled by the behavior of the Cubans on the ground. In all moments, the Cubans showed a sensibility and empathy that made them different, as much different from their socialist allies as their western enemies.

If we ask what the Cubans achieved with their revolutionary foreign policy, the balance is very positive. They contributed to the containment of Morocco in 1963. They offered a valuable help to the MPLA in the Congo in 1965-66, and in Guinea-Bissau the Cuban contribution was of great importance. Without a doubt, the most stunning success was in Angola, where they conquered Washington and Pretoria, and prevented them from installing a government in Luanda

that was dependent on South Africa. And following Angola, a tidal wave was released by the Cuban victory that extended throughout Southern Africa. Its psychological impact and the hope that it awoke is very well reflected in two news articles – from opposing sides, but saying the same thing – that were released in the South African press in February 1976 when the Cuban troops were pushing Pretoria's army back toward the Namibian border.

In the Rand Daily Mail – one of the most important newspapers in South Africa – a South African military analyst wrote, “In Angola, black soldiers – Cuban and Angolans – defeated white troops in combat. In the context of racial conscience on the battlefield, it didn't matter if the brunt of the offensive was borne by Cubans or Angolans. The only thing that is certain is that they are winning and that they are not white. The psychological advantage, an advantage that whites have enjoyed and exploited for more than 300 years of colonialism and empire, is disappearing. White supremacy has been delivered an irreversible blow in Angola, and the whites who were there know it.”

The “white giant” had retreated for the first time in recent history – and the Africans celebrated. The World, the main black newspaper of South Africa, observed, “Black Africa is riding on the crest of the wave unleashed by the Cuban victory in Angola, black Africa is tasting the intoxicating wine of the possibility of achieving the dream of total liberation.” [23] There would only have been the pain of more defeat, and not those feelings of intoxication, had the Cuban troops not arrived – defeating the plans of Washington, defeating Pretoria and challenging the Soviet Union.

The impact was more than moral. It had concrete consequences. It forced Kissinger to take a position against the white racist government of Rhodesia and kept Carter on the right track until Rhodesia finally ceased to exist and Zimbabwe emerged in 1980.[24] It also marked the true beginning of Namibia's war of independence. As a South African general wrote, “Many military observers consider March 27, 1976 the date that [SWAPO's] war of insurrection really began ...for first time they obtained what constituted more or less, the prerequisite for a successful insurrectional campaign, which was a border that offered safe refuge.”[25] For twelve years Pretoria continued to refuse to leave Namibia and used it to launch destructive incursions into Angola. This continued until the spring of 1988 when Cuban troops stopped the South African lunge against Cuito Cuanavale in the southeast of Angola and followed this victory with a successful advance toward the Namibian border.

Reagan's deputy Secretary of State for African affairs sought out Jorge Risquet, Castro's point man for Africa. He wanted to ensure that Cuban troops would not enter Namibia. “A question that arises is the following one,” he said. “Does Cuba have the intention of stopping its advance at the border between Namibia and Angola, because its troops are not very far from that border?” Risquet replied, “I cannot give you that answer. I can't give you or the South African's tranquilizers.... I have not said that they won't stop or that they won't advance. What I have said is that they are not constrained by anything and that they can only be limited by an agreement. Understand me well, I am not threatening. If I told you that they won't stop, it would be making a threat. If I told you that they will stop, I would be giving you a tranquilizer, or a Tylenol; and I

wish to neither threaten nor anaesthetize... What I have said is that only the agreements [about Namibian independence] can give guarantees.”

In his cable to the US Secretary of State, Chester Crocker, the deputy secretary wrote, “To discover what the Cubans think is an art form. They are prepared for war as much as they are for peace... we are witnesses to a great tactical virtuosity and a true creativity at the negotiation table. This has as a backdrop, the unparalleled projection of the military might of the Cuban army on the ground.” [26]

In December of that same year, Pretoria accepted to withdraw from Namibia and to recognize its independence. Although it would be simplistic to affirm that only Cuba deserves the credit, it is undeniable that Cuban troops played an indispensable part. It was a noble and just end to a history worthy of pride.

Like in the 60’s, when hundreds of Cubans went to fight in Africa joined by hundreds of civilian aid workers providing technical assistance (primarily in the health fields), the thousands of Cubans who went to fight in Angola in 1975-76 were soon joined by thousands more civilian aid workers. And in the 80’s, to the tens of thousands of Cuban soldiers who went to Africa were added tens of thousands civil aid workers. At the same time, tens of thousands of scholarship holders from Africa went to study in Cuba. The help was free, or offered at nominal costs. This help continues today with the presence of thousands of Cuban doctors in Africa and Latin America, living and working in the poorest areas. It also continues through the Latin American School of Medicine in Havana that is training 7,000 doctors from these two continents – without being paid a cent. In the words of Dean Juan Carrizo, “the school is a door open to hope.” [27] It is another example of the generosity of the Cuban Revolution.

Nelson Mandela highlighted this generosity when he was in Havana in July 1991. His words triggered a “wave of condemnation” in the United States. “We come here with the feeling of the great debt that we have contracted with the people of Cuba,” he said. “What other country has a history of greater altruism than Cuba has showed in its relation with Africa?” [28]

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## **Notes and References**

1 This essay is based on the book *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959-1976*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002. To avoid notes too long, in this essay, I will indicate only the sources when it applies to direct quotes. I would like to thank to Dr. Gloria León, a scholar in the Cuba-US relations, without who’s valuable assistance, neither this book nor this essay would have been possible.

2 In colonial times there were two Congos: one governed by Paris and the other one by Brussels. When becoming independent in 1960, both maintained the name of Congo, each qualified with the name of their respective capitals, Brazzaville and Leopoldville. In October 1971, the former Belgian Congo became Zaire and in May 1997 the former French Congo became the Democratic Republic of the Congo. To avoid confusion, in this essay I refer to the former French colony as “the Congo” and the former Belgian colony as “Zaire.”.

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25 Jannie Geldenhuys, "A General's Story: From an Era of War and Peace," Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1995, pp. 58-59.

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27 Interview with Juan Carrizo Estévez, Havana, January 17, 2004.

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