



Australia-Cuba Friendship Society
NEWSLETTER
OCTOBER 2008

Next Meeting
Monday 6th
October
7.30pm
CEPU Office
139 Queensbury St
Carlton

Melbourne	Sydney	Perth	Brisbane	Canberra	Hobart	Adelaide	Central Coast	NSW/Vic	New Zealand
PO Box 1051	PO Box k364	PO Box 1455	PO Box 5727	PO Box 6139	GPO Box 323	Box 381	PO Box 1082	Sthn Border	220a Adelaide Rd
Collingwood	Haymarket	South Perth	West End	Kingston	Hobart	N. Adelaide	Gosford	PO Box 854	Newtown Wellington
Vic. 3066	NSW 1240	WA 6951	Qld 4101	ACT 2604	Tas. 7001	SA 5006	NSW 2250	Albury	New Zealand
								NSW 2640	

Dear Comrades,

28th September, 2008

Open your hearts and your wallets because Cuba needs your help. So please make an effort to come along to our special Hurricane Fund-Raising Film Night on Monday 6 October at 7.30 pm. The combined action of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike that passed through the island between August 30 and September 9 were the most destructive in Cuba's history. Seven people died and there were huge crop and stock losses and damage to more than 444,000 homes - 63,249 were completely destroyed. In the western region alone, there was severe damage to 26 hospitals, 18 polytechnics, 191 doctor's offices, 14 senior citizen's homes and 41 pharmacies, with an even worse situation on the Isle of Youth. Preliminary estimates put the loss at more than 5 billion dollars, mostly in the areas of housing, electric power generation, communications, economic infrastructure and agriculture. As Fidel Castro said: ***'I can't find the words to relate to you what I saw...in all my life I have never seen anything like it and the people I talked to had never seen anything worse... at the moment, human solidarity is the most important thing.'*** A real tragedy virtually ignored by our media, which focussed on what might happen to a few US cities.

And now they're obsessed with America's Cash for Trash saga. Thanks to years of unfettered Wild West laissez-faire voodoo capitalism, corruption and rampant militarism, the US faces an economic meltdown, the biggest man-made crisis since the Great Depression. But the corporate shysters who pocketed obscene 'performance' bonuses and created the mess are demanding a Robin Hood in reverse, a US\$700bn bail-out from the public purse - a figure plucked out of the air - when none of them know what to do, especially their demented president. Give us money, these blackmailers demand, or we'll bring down the global economy, the same characters who make outrageous profits by polluting our air and water, by destroying our forests and biodiversity and who happily take individual's private property for 'development', outsource jobs (gone for good), avoid paying a living wage, gain financially from war and gouge us at the petrol pump. Blackmailer-in Chief Henry Paulson insists he needs a 'clean' plan, meaning a taxpayer-funded bailout with no strings attached with immunity from any legislative or legal 'review'! Paulson's got more brass than a military band! What else can you expect from a nation that calls its institutions Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac!

It gets worse. The US hasn't got \$700bn to bail anyone out and will have to borrow from abroad. And what happens if the \$700bn doesn't stem the tide? Will Paulson demand another \$700bn? And what happens if the debt is called in? Foreign lenders could simply close the US down. And what about America's military budget? **The largest ever, with the true figure hidden, because up to 40% is 'black'.** Out in the real world, but also hidden from western eyes, more than 24,000 children die every day from the effects of poverty and war and western exploitation. More than a million people lie dead in Iraq, an invasion that has cost more than US\$5 trillion! A new book has exposed how the Israel-US relationship has been the driving force behind all Middle East decision-making over the past decade, which brought us wars - to knock off any potential Palestinian ally - regime change and instability, especially the fragmentation of any Middle Eastern state that might challenge Israel. The bad news is that even with the eclipse of Wolfowitz and his ilk, they were only the tip of the iceberg and the Israeli/neocon nexus lives on in policy-making councils and is about to be passed on to the next administration, whether it be Democratic or Republican.

Henry Kissinger was no slouch when it came to illegally bombing and invading countries he and President Nixon considered were not sufficiently servile, but even he must be intrigued by the latest antics of despotic bully-boy vice-president Cheney and his presidential side-kick. The duo condemned Russia for its military response to Georgia's merciless rocketing of South Ossetia and the killing of its citizens, because the US-educated and supported Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili stupidly sent in troops and got a hiding in spite of all the training and weaponry received from US instructors! As usual, instead of trying to engage Russia through diplomacy, Washington chose confrontation. Russia is currently being encircled by US and Nato bases and missiles, creating a US Iron Curtain, a danger exacerbated by the mendacious reporting of western media that Russia is wholly responsible for the war in the Caucasus and is therefore a pariah. Cheney even had the effrontery to say ***'we believe in the right of men and women to live without the threat of tyranny, economic blackmail or military invasion or intimidation.'*** Sometimes words are inadequate to express one's disgust.

In their War on the World, Bush mobsters are fomenting incipient military coups in Venezuela, Bolivia and possibly Paraguay, democracies whose governments oppose Washington's ongoing interventions. 'Plan Colombia' is the model for a mostly unreported assault on Mexico, an 'initiative' which will allow the United States to fund 'the war on drugs and organised crime', a cover for militarising its nearest neighbour and ensuring 'business stability'. **How much longer can we in the non-American world tolerate such barbaric malevolence?** In the US, dissent will be muted because 'Support Our Troops' is the American mantra, especially in an election year. If a US citizen doesn't wave a flag or two and say how wonderful their troops are - even when killing Pakistani children - they are regarded as unpatriotic, seen as a heinous crime. A US official recently told the New York Times, 'we have to be more assertive'. I can't wait. Like us, Britain is well and truly in the US loop. **A British 'School of the Americas' is to be built in Wales, where British soldiers will train killers from all corners of the US Empire in the name of 'global security'.**

I look forward to seeing you on Monday 6 October with a little bit of something for supper, so you don't have to sing for it! Cheers.

Joan Coxsedg, ACFS President, Melbourne (03) 9857 9249

This Month...

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Official information on preliminary data of damages caused by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike

Consulate General of Cuba

THE combined action of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike in winds, rain and flooding as they passed through almost the entire country between August 30 and September 9 — including the previous and subsequent effects as the hurricanes entered and left national territory — unquestionably made them the most destructive in the history of these meteorological phenomena in Cuba with respect to the magnitude of the material damage caused.



For our people, prepared for years to confront natural disasters thanks to the organization and efficiency demonstrated by their strong, energetic and farsighted Civil Defence — as Fidel

described it — the experiences of hundreds thousands of directly affected compatriots have been horrific, as have images broadcast by the media in the locations affected.

In the face of such significant effects on the nation's economic/productive activities, services and entire infrastructure, it is only the Revolution that is preventing the provinces of Pinar del Río, Holguín, Las Tunas and Camagüey and the special municipality of the Isle of Youth — to mention those that were hit hardest — from being declared disaster zones, and their inhabitants from being immersed in desolation. On the contrary, what prevails in those regions and throughout the country is the confidence that we will leave this complex situation behind; it is the security that, united under the Party's leadership, we will develop an intense and effective, although prolonged, process of recuperation and reestablishment.

Both Hurricane Gustav and Ike, as they followed their courses, placed virtually the entire country in tension beginning August 25, when the Civil Defence issued its first note on those hurricanes, placing the eastern provinces in the informative stage, until Note No. 9 referring to Ike on September 11, which placed Pinar del Río in the recuperation stage.

Between the two meteorological events, not a single province escaped their threat and impact. In the run-up to Ike's landfall and its exit via Pinar del Río province, just a few kilometres' distance from the location of its predecessor — Ike placed the entire country in the alarm phase. The story is sufficiently known.

As people know, as soon as risk possibilities are forecast, the country's first priority in these circumstances is to safeguard human life. Some data illustrates the scope of efforts made in this context.



In total, 3,179,846 people were protected from these two hurricanes — 2,772,615 during Ike — only about 500,000 of whom were in evacuation centres; the rest received solidarity shelter from friends and neighbours. More than 10,000 means of transport were employed, and hundreds of shelters outfitted for the occasion. In addition, as a consequence of the measures adapted for Ike, 176,113

students were returned home from their boarding schools, and 2,818 tourists were relocated.

More than 87,000 comrades worked in the service of the Civil Defence system and related missions during the two hurricanes, including those who were mobilized and personnel at command posts, both national and in defence zones.

And although during Gustav no human lives were lost, during the days of Ike — as was opportunely reported — we mourned the deaths of seven citizens in a number of provinces, not just as a direct result of the hurricane's effects, but of a failure to strictly observe measures adopted by the Civil Defence authorities.

SUBSTANTIAL MATERIAL LOSSES

Very preliminary assessments of the damage caused in the less than 10 days during which the two hurricanes impacted national territory place total losses at around five billion dollars.

Unquestionably, one of the most calamitous effects of Gustav and Ike was on housing: more than 444,000 homes damaged, a large number of them with partially or totally destroyed roofs and other impacts; and of that total, 63,249 houses completely demolished.



Every province was affected. The final figures have not yet been determined, given that these could increase due to the combined effects of heavy rainfall and the passing of the

first few days. However, the majority of the effects were directly related to those places hit hardest by the worst of the rainfall and winds, in addition to flooding and coastal deluges before, during and after: Pinar del Río and the Isle of Youth, particularly by Gustav (with its Category 4), and Holguín, Las Tunas and Camagüey by Ike (Category 3).

This may also be described as the most complex type of problem — not only because in the case of housing it leaves more than 200,000 people homeless for some time, and hundreds of thousands more whose homes require repairs — but because building and rebuilding involves financial investment and resources in the millions, and requires years of intense work.

MAIN EFFECTS OF GUSTAV IN OTHER AREAS

The preliminary assessment of Gustav's damage reveals that the most significant impact was in the special municipality of the Isle of Youth and Pinar del Río province, mostly in the towns of San Cristóbal, Los Palacios, Consolación del Sur, Viñales, La Palma, Minas de Matahambre, Candelaria and Bahía Honda.

It should be taken into account that estimates of housing losses are based on historic and conventional prices, not real values at international prices. Suffice it to say that in order to have a durable house that can stand up to the fiercest winds, one essential element is necessary and very scarce: a labour force. This is needed both for temporary repairs and lasting construction. That labour force has to be divided among all centres of production and services, some significantly damaged, which is why the real value of a house in the

world and the recovery of the corresponding investment is much greater.

- The situation is critical for the 120,105 houses affected by Gustav in Pinar del Río province, particularly in the municipalities of Los Palacios and San Cristóbal.



- Associated with the impact on housing, more than 4,000 water storage tanks for apartment buildings were damaged.
- In western Cuba, serious impacts were reported on the electric power infrastructure: Along the 220-kW Mariel-Pinar del Río transmission line, 137 towers were destroyed, and along the 110-kW line, 13 towers were destroyed. Among other elements: 4,500 posts knocked down, 530 transformers broken and 5,000 streetlights damaged.
- In the special municipality of the Isle of Youth, 100% of electrical lines were affected.
- More than 55,700 hectares of crops suffered total losses in western Cuba, mostly tubers and sugar cane. In addition, 877 organic vegetable gardens and 392 intensive farming sites were affected.
- Eighty percent of the Isle of Youth's poultry industry was seriously affected, and 100% of that industry was affected in the eight municipalities of Pinar del Río that were hit.
- In the tobacco sector, 3,414 storage facilities were destroyed and 1,590 damaged, and more than 800 tonnes of tobacco was affected.
- More than 180,000 hectares of tree farms were affected.
- In industrial food production: 28 bakeries, eight sweet shops and a fruit and vegetable preserves enterprise were affected, mostly by the total loss of their roofs, but they did have generators.
- 4,355 tons of food in warehouses and neighbourhood stores were affected.
- The main damage to the national radio system occurred as a result of the total destruction of its medium-wave towers (2) and the television tower on the Isle of Youth, affecting radio and television services. A similar situation occurred in Pinar del Río, to the towers of facilities in San Cristóbal, La Palma and Los Palacios and their three television centres. In Havana, the centres in Artemisa and Bauta were damaged.
- In telecommunications, 9,316 services were affected, most of them in the special municipality (7,797) and Pinar del Río (1,021).
- Losses are still being calculated in computer equipment, televisions and VCRs. In the health and education sectors, 794 computers were affected.
- In the public health sector in the western region, considerable damage was done to 31 facilities, including 26 hospitals, 18 polyclinics, 191 doctors' offices, 14 senior citizen homes and 41 pharmacies, with the most critical situation on the Isle of Youth and several municipalities in Pinar del Río: San Cristóbal, Los Palacios, La Palma and Consolación del Sur.
- In education, 1,160 schools were affected, included 599 in Pinar del Río, 218 in La Habana province, 225 in City of Havana, and 87 on the Isle of Youth.
- Important installations were destroyed in the Nueva Gerona port, and the Isle of Youth's airport, and almost all passenger transport was affected there.

MAJOR DAMAGE CAUSED BY IKE

Without assessments being concluded, at the close of this report on September 12, the worst damage by province occurred in the aforementioned provinces, mostly in the following municipalities:

- Guantánamo: Baracoa and Maisí.

- Holguín: mostly in the capital city of Holguín, Banes, Antilla, Moa, Rafael Freyre, Mayarí and Gibara.
- Las Tunas: the capital, Puerto Padre, Manatí and Jesús Menéndez.
- Camagüey: the capital, Nuevitas, Guáimaro, Najasa, Florida, Sibanicú, Minas and Santa Cruz del Sur.
- Ciego de Avila: the capital, Venezuela, Baraguá y Majagua.
- Sancti Spíritus: the capital, Trinidad and La Sierpe.
- Villa Clara: Manicaragua, Encrucijada, Santo Domingo and Sagua la Grande.
- Cienfuegos: Cumanayagua and Aguada de Pasajeros.
- Matanzas: the capital, Unión de Reyes, Calimete, Perico and Jagüey Grande.

All municipalities in those provinces were affected, with only the worst affected listed above. Losses in the other municipalities will not be ignored.

With respect to principal effects, major losses were reported in the provinces of La Habana and City of Havana, although proportionally not as much as in the rest of the country. Once again, Pinar del Río and the Isle of Youth were lashed by the winds, and this time, much more by water. The after-effects of the hurricane were slow to disappear.

- Electric power services were affected throughout almost the entire country, which was left in darkness by the direct effect of the wind and heavy rains and by the measures of protection applied to prevent further damage.

- Moreover, reconstruction work was complicated in almost every province 24 hours after the storm headed out to sea.

- Initially, electric power was re-established with the use of micro-systems via generators, which are being gradually phased out with the activation of the National Electric Power System, except in the provinces of Santiago de Cuba, Granma and part of Guantánamo, where it was possible to connect them to the Renté thermoelectric power plant. Pinar del Río province and the special municipality of the Isle of Youth are still getting power from micro-systems, and will continue to do so until transmission lines are re-established, which will be done as soon as possible.

As of September 12, the provinces had electric power in the following percentages: Las Tunas, Camagüey and Holguín: not above 30%, due to the magnitude of breakdowns in their basic distribution networks; Granma and Santiago de Cuba in excess of 99%, and Guantánamo, 94%, although Maisí and Baracoa, the hardest-hit municipalities, were at 53% and 79%, respectively; Ciego de Avila in excess of 92%; La Habana, almost 92%; Matanzas, 90%; Villa Clara, 87.2%; Cienfuegos, 94.7%; and Sancti Spíritus, 84%, all with their provincial capitals, as a rule, at higher percentages. Some of the most backward municipalities also suffered major damage to their grids.

City of Havana exceeded 98%, although there were specific outages to be resolved (burned-out transformers, branch lines, etc.), concentrated in Boyeros, Habana del Este, Plaza, Cerro and Playa.

The regions most compromised and complex, Pinar del Río and the Isle of Youth, were at a little over 55% and almost 67%, respectively.

- Mini- and micro-hydroelectric plants have been seriously affected.
- Wells for supplying manufactured gas to the capital have continued to operate. Only one Energás turbine is working to maintain vitality, for which some wells are being kept open to provide gas to the system.
- There are generalized outages in communications due to fallen trees, telephone posts and transmission towers, with some community television stations deactivated.

- Damage to agriculture is reported as a consequence of Ike in 205 greenhouses, and most of the facilities for semi-protected crops.

- All coffee-growing areas in eastern Cuba were affected, essentially destroying the harvest in some of the most productive municipalities due to the combined action of rain and wind in areas like Mayarí, Sagua de Tánamo, Maisí and Granma province.

- In the eastern provinces, 32,305 hectares of plantain were lost, plus more than 10,000 hectares of other crops.
- At the close of this report, more than 500,000 poultry had been registered as lost, 100,000 of which were slaughtered and sold to the population. Damage to poultry stock was significant in Sancti Spiritus, Matanzas, Las Tunas and Camagüey.
- In sugar cane, 156,600 hectares were reported as flattened, 518,879 hectares flooded and 3,895 hectares of new cane lost, and approximately 40,000 tons of sugar was reported as requiring reprocessing due to having got wet.
- There were also notable effects in the Ministry of Sugar varied crop areas, with damage recorded to more than 10,000 hectares of plantain, rice, beans and others, including organic vegetable gardens.
- Generalized serious effects to roofs and windows of industrial facilities were reported. Production at all factories was halted for different reasons, and many of these remain in that situation.
- The Ministry of Domestic Trade reported damage to 49,000 tons of storage capacity, with the worst to Holguín's Warehouse Base, where 12,750 tons of products and 1,111 stores were seriously damaged.
- Partial or total destruction was reported to 2,642 Ministry of Education facilities, mostly roofs and windows, as well as 186 child care centers, and severe damage was reported to schools in Holguín, Las Tunas and Camagüey.
- The Ministry of Higher Education reported damage to the universities of Cienfuegos, Sancti Spiritus, Matanzas, Villa Clara, Holguín; the municipal headquarters of Puerto Padre in Las Tunas and the Institute of Agricultural Science in Havana.
- Damage was reported to 146 cultural institutions and 82 sports facilities, including six sports initiation schools (EIDE); 13 athletics colleges (ESPA) and academies; two faculties of Physical Culture; five provincial baseball stadiums and 32 municipal ones; eight multipurpose auditoriums; 13 community schools and two swimming pool complexes.
- In health facilities, the greatest damage reported was to the neonatal services of the Enrique Cabrera, Aballí, Gineco-Obstétrico Eusebio Hernández, 10 de Octubre and William Soler hospitals, as well as the Fructuoso Rodríguez Orthopedic Hospital.
- Roads were affected by fallen trees and flooding. All the bridges on Cayo Coco causeway and its water pipeline were damaged. Access, with much precaution, can be had over La Farola, Guantánamo province; the Las Tunas-Holguín and Holguín-Moa sections are being inspected, and access was blocked on two sections of the National Highway. Thousands of kilometers of roads and streets were damaged throughout the country.
- Seven ports are closed and there is serious damage to the roofs of port warehouses in Vita, Carúpano and Nuevitas, with damage to pedestrian walkways and signs at the entrances to all ports.

With respect to the volume of accumulated water in the country's 239 reservoirs managed by the National Institute of Hydraulic Resources, at the close of September 12, it was in excess of 7,892,005 million cubic meters, 86% of the total of usable capacity retained, which signifies an increase of 1,791 million of cubic meters with respect to Friday, September 5.

Currently, 128 reservoirs are releasing water into drainage channels, 94 more than before Ike's passing.

In the last week, all provinces, except for the special municipality of the Isle of Youth, experienced increases in reservoir volumes. Those at 90%-plus capacity include Pinar del Río, Villa Clara, Cienfuegos, Holguín, Granma and Guantánamo; Santiago de Cuba is over 99%. Four more provinces are over 80%.

Much more information and data could complete and compliment the situation created in the country in less than one month by the impact of four meteorological phenomena, particularly Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, because of their

destructive capacity. The country's economic, social and housing infrastructures have been devastated like never before.

"Now comes the time to analyze the objective factors, the rational and optimum use of material and human resources; what must be done in every concrete place, where we should or should not invest; what to do with every cent; respond to every question that has to be asked in situations of emergency. And under normal circumstances, when everything returns to its place and the normal lives of children, adolescents, and adults continuing moving forward, always prepared to fight and win without ever becoming disheartened in the face of the adversities of today or of tomorrow," as Fidel recently wrote.

The government has not wasted a single minute and, within a few hours, began sending material resources from its reserves to the affected territories, even though it is not possible for everything to get to everybody immediately.



The people's solidarity has been present from the first moment, and there are many examples of that. We have been educated that way over almost half a century of Revolution.

There will be no lack of rigor and rationality, as called for by Fidel and indicated by the Party, in the inevitable readjustment of economic and social programs and plans, given that our top priority today is to recover.

Support from the outside has not been lacking, either. The authorities of many governments, agencies and institutions have contacted us and sent initial aid. The seed of our internationalist conduct and solidarity has been germinating for decades. Our gratitude goes out to all of them. Admiration is due to the cadres and members of our glorious Party; the valiant combatants of our Revolutionary Armed Forces, Ministry of the Interior and Civil Defence; the men and women of our working class; our mass organizations; our media; our journalists and intellectuals and the rest of the citizens of our heroic nation, who, with valor and discipline, have confronted this extremely hard blow dealt by nature.

We will work more united than ever, always remembering that "our duty is to overcome!"

September 15, 2008 - 15:14

CUBA NEEDS YOU!

Join the Australia-Cuba Friendship Society

The Australia-Cuba Friendship Society aims to promote and encourage friendship, understanding, cultural, trade and other exchanges between the peoples of Australia and Cuba.

☐ I wish to join the ACFS. Enclosed is a cheque/money order for \$25 (full membership) \$10 (concession)

☐ I am interested in the annual work/study trip to Cuba. Please send me information.

☐ I wish to donate \$ _____ towards the material aid campaign for Cuba.

Name: _____

Address: _____

P/C _____ Phone: _____

Send to: ACFS PO Box 1051, Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia

STATEMENT FROM THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Cuba will come through. Neither hurricanes, nor blockades, no aggressions can prevent that

AT 11:50 yesterday, Tuesday, September 9, the U.S. State Department sent Verbal Note No. 252/18 to the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, in which, after expressing its regret at the additional damage caused to the Cuban people by Hurricane Ike, it insists on sending "a humanitarian assessment team" to our country "to inspect the areas affected."

Today, September 10, at 7:20 p.m. the Cuban Interests Section in Washington sent the State Department Verbal Note No. 046/08, in which it thanks the U.S. government for its expressions of regret at the damage caused in Cuba by Hurricane Ike, and reiterates that Cuba does not require the assistance of a humanitarian assessment team, as it has sufficient specialists who are trained to carry out this task.

The note emphasizes that if the government of the United States has a genuine will to cooperate with the Cuban people, it would ask it to allow the sale to Cuba of essential materials, such as roofing covers and other items to repair houses and re-establish electricity networks.

At the same time, it reiterates the request that the U.S. government suspend the restrictions preventing U.S. companies from granting private commercial credit lines to Cuba in order to buy foodstuffs in that country.

The Note equally calls the attention of the State Department to the fact that allowing the sale of the above materials and authorizing private credits for food purchases does not require the visit to Cuba of a humanitarian assessment team.

Finally, the Verbal Note from the Cuban Interests Section emphasizes to the State Department that that its Note No. 252/18 persists in a request to which the government of Cuba responded in its Note No. 1886 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on September 6, 2008 and, what is more significant, that it has not really responded to the two concrete requests that the Cuban government made to the government of the United States in order to confront the damage caused by Hurricane Gustav and which it reiterates in the Note presented today.

On the other hand, in the last few hours, U.S. government spokespersons have tried to justify President Bush's refusal to allow the sale to Cuba of essential materials and to authorize private commercial credits to acquire foodstuffs in that country. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice affirmed categorically on Sunday, September 7, "I don't think that... the lifting of the embargo would be wise."

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack insisted in a press conference on

Monday, September 8, on the alleged importance of Cuba accepting an assessment team to make an "in situ" inspection of the damage. In response to the observation by journalists that other countries have supplied aid without demanding a prior inspection of the damage on the ground, McCormack evasively replied, "See if the Cuban government changes its mind about allowing us to help the Cuban people."

For his part, Cuban-American Carlos Gutiérrez, secretary of commerce and co-president of the committee responsible for applying the Bush Plan against Cuba, hypocritically stated yesterday, "...we reiterate our offer to allow a USAID assessment team to travel to Cuba to assess the situation."

The government of the United States is behaving in a cynical way. It is trying to suggest that it is desperate to cooperate with Cuba and that we are refusing that. It is lying unscrupulously.

Why is the U.S. government insisting on the pretext of making an inspection on the ground when information circulated on the serious damage provoked in Cuba by the hurricanes is ample and evident?

Why is it placing as a condition the sending of an inspection team, something that no other country of the dozens that are already offering us their generous cooperation has done?

Why is the U.S. government refusing to allow Cuba to buy materials there for repairing houses, roofing covers or components to re-establish electricity networks?

Why is it prohibiting U.S. companies and their subsidiaries in any country from offering Cuba private credits to buy foodstuffs, currently essential in order to guarantee the alimentation of the affected population and replace the country's reserves in anticipation of other hurricanes?

Those are the questions that the government of the United States should be answering.

Those are the questions that the international community, which overwhelmingly supports Cuba in its fight against the blockade, is putting to the government of the United States.

Cuba has not asked the government of the United States to make it a gift of anything. Just that it allows it to buy. The rest is pure rhetoric, pretexts and justifications that nobody believes.

Cuba will come through. Neither hurricanes, nor blockades, nor aggressions can prevent that.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Havana,
September 10, 2008

APPEAL FROM THE CUBAN INSTITUTE OF FRIENDSHIP WITH THE PEOPLES

To all Cuba solidarity organizations and friendship groups
To all friends of Cuba

Once again, the United States government is displaying its double standards and its aggressive and genocidal anti-Cuba policy.

This time, it is trying to benefit in the media from the disaster caused by the passage of hurricanes Gustav and Ike through our country and Cuba's supposed "intolerance" in not accepting supposed humanitarian gestures from the Bush administration.

With respect to that, our friends should know that:

The damages caused by these destructive hurricanes are extensive. According to preliminary estimates, losses total more than \$5 billion, mostly in the areas of housing, electric power generation, communications, economic infrastructure and agriculture. Cuba, with a long record of solidarity with numerous countries that have suffered from different natural disasters, has now begun to receive material help from many governments, international institutions and friends, which we urgently need and for which we are deeply grateful, including that which comes from or may come from honest friends and individuals in the United States.

However, as stated in the Verbal Note from the Cuban Interests Section in Washington delivered to the State Department of the United States of America this past September 14th, Cuba cannot accept a donation from a government that for almost 50 years has imposed a ruthless economic, commercial and financial blockade against our country. Even less so if the donation is made on the condition of inspections and internal assessments by that power, as unnecessary as they are unacceptable.

Cuba does not need any gifts. As was stated in the abovementioned note, what it wants is to be able to buy indispensable materials that U.S. companies normally export to other markets, and it is asking for authorization for a supply of these materials, as well as the credits that are normal in all commercial operations; that would make it possible to acquire materials and food that are not only necessary for facing the recovery from the severe damages caused by these hurricanes, but also contribute to replacing the necessary reserves of these resources, taking into account that the most dangerous months of the hurricane season are still to come.

The greatest humanitarian gesture that the U.S. government could make at this time is to definitively lift the blockade of Cuba, in line with the demand to do so that has been made for decades by the immense majority of the international community and important, increasingly larger groups in U.S. society itself. If not, they should at least ease the blockade for the time period requested by Cuba (6 months); anything else would be pure propaganda and a serious case of double standards.

The Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples calls on friends of Cuba throughout the world to demand that Washington demonstrate its supposed humanitarian vocation in a clear and concrete way; it calls on them to expose any attempt to benefit in the media from our country's just and dignified position, and to continue to intensify the struggle against the genocidal, arbitrary and illegal blockade of Cuba.

Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples
Havana, September 19th



(Translated by Granma International)

WHEN the U.S. government hypocritically offered \$100,000 as aid in the face of the disaster brought about by Hurricane Gustav, subject to an on-site inspection to confirm the damage, the response was that Cuba is unable to accept any donations from the country that is blockading us; that the damage had already been calculated and that what we were calling for was that it not prevent the export of essential materials and credits associated with commercial operations.

Certain people in the North starting screaming their heads off that Cuba's rejection was inconceivable.

A few days later, when Ike lashed the country from Punto de Maisí to Cabo de San Antonio, the neighbors of the North were a bit more subtle. They sweetened their language. They talked of aircraft ready to leave with materials worth \$5 million; that it wouldn't be necessary to assess because they had already done so by their own means, which cannot be any other than spying on our country. This time they would put the Revolution in a predicament, so they believed; if they [the Cubans] dared to reject the offer, they would find themselves in problems with the population. Perhaps they thought that nobody had seen the images broadcast by U.S. television of the UN occupation forces in Haiti dispatching food to a hungry population who fought for it across barbed wire fencing, with the result of even children being injured.

Hunger in that country is the fruit of the historic and ruthless plunder of nations. Right there, in Les Gonaïves, our doctors were risking their lives helping the population of that city as they are doing in almost 100 percent of that nation's municipalities. That cooperation continues there, as in dozens of nations of the world, despite hurricanes. The categorical response to the new and astute Note was: "our country cannot accept a donation from the government that is blockading us, although it is disposed to buy indispensable materials that U.S. companies place on the export market, and requests authorization for supplies of the same, as well as the credits that are normal in all commercial operations."

"If the government of the United States does not wish to do this on a permanent basis, the government of Cuba requests that it authorize this for the next six months, particularly taking into account the damage occasioned by hurricanes Gustav and Ike, and that the most dangerous months of the cyclone season are yet to come."

It was not made arrogantly, because that is not Cuba's style. It can be appreciated in the Note that the idea was modestly expressed of how the prohibition being suspended for a limited time period would be sufficient for us.

Carlos Gutiérrez, the U.S. secretary of commerce, discounted any temporary lifting of the blockade on Friday the 12th.



It is obvious that the government of that powerful country cannot understand that the dignity of a people has no price. The wave of solidarity with Cuba, ranging from large to small countries with resources and even without resources, would disappear on the day that Cuba ceases to be honourable. Those in our country who are upset about that are totally mistaken. If it was \$1 billion instead of \$5 million, they would meet the same response. There is no way to pay for the harm to thousands of lives and the suffering, or the more than \$200 billion that the blockade and Yankee aggressions have cost.

The partial official report explains to the people that, in less than 10 days, the country was affected by damages assessed at more than \$5 billion. But it was also explained that those figures were based on historical and conventional prices that have nothing to do with reality. The very clear explanation that, "calculations on the loss of housing

stock are based on historical and conventional prices, not the real value in international prices," should never be forgotten. Suffice it to note that in order to have an endurable housing stock that can resist the strongest winds, one element is required, which is in very short supply: a workforce. This is needed both for temporary repairs and for lasting construction. That workforce has to be divided among all the other centers of production and services, some of which were significantly damaged, hence the real value of homes in the world and recouping the corresponding investment is many times greater."

The blow from Nature was severe, but it is also heartening to know that there will be no truce or respite in our battle.

The economic crisis that is hitting the United States and, as a consequence, the rest of the nations of the world, has no definitive response; but here, yes, there are responses to natural disasters and to any attempts to put a price on our dignity.

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Bailout Main Street

Author: [PWW Editorial Board](#) - People's Weekly World Newspaper, 09/19/08 12:40

The largest crisis in U.S. financial history shook the foundations of Wall Street this week. The aftershocks of the earthquake that toppled the 158-year-old Lehman Brothers investment bank, Merrill Lynch and the AIG insurance giant — all within a 24-hour span — shook capitalist markets around the globe.

At one time in capitalist development, financiers “greased the wheels” of industry, turning out real goods, infrastructure and services.

But in the era of deindustrialization, mega-mergers, deregulation and privatization of public institutions, the “industry” that finance capital greased — in its global search for the highest rates of profit — was a house of cards built on subprime loans, speculation and other financial devices. A rickety, greed-based structure that created nothing of use.

This led not only to the biggest financial crisis in U.S. history, but also to the largest global income gap in history with a few at the top enjoying trillions while 95 percent of us struggle.

Today 3 billion people in the world live on less than \$2 per day. In the U.S., workers are earning less and have a declining standard of living even though they are more productive than ever. The average U.S. household is \$9,000 in debt.

The government is injecting billions to bail out failed financial companies. Don't the nation's communities and working families deserve the same so they don't “fail?”

So what to do?

For starters, Congress should enact an immediate stimulus package that includes extension of unemployment benefits for the duration of

unemployment, a moratorium on foreclosures, public investment in needed infrastructure projects and an infusion of federal tax dollars back to hard-hit state and local budgets. The AFL-CIO has proposed such a package.

Two, the federal government must invest in manufacturing, science and technology so we get back to producing “real” goods, infrastructure and services to rebuild a “real and green economy,” while protecting our planet. Investment in our nation's human capital — creating well-paid jobs, quality public education and universal health care — is the key to restoring our economy.

Three, banks and financial capital must be closely regulated — for the benefit of the public.

None of this will happen if the country is saddled with another anti-worker, Wall Street administration like the current one. All that would do is cause a whole lot of McPain for working people.

OPINION: Ramming through the bailout

Author: [Sam Webb](#) - People's Weekly World Newspaper, 09/23/08 16:02

Bush, Paulson make Dillinger look like a Boy Scout

As the Bush administration attempts to ram a bailout package of nearly one trillion dollars through Congress, it begins to feel like Colonel Sanders asking the public to trust him to take care of the chickens.

If it weren't so damn serious, there would be something almost comical about it. Here we have the White House, which has squandered trillions of dollars over eight years, and its point man, Hank Paulson, fresh from 38 years of gaming the financial system while working at Goldman Sachs, insisting that Congressional leaders hand over a trillion dollars to them with no debate and no strings attached.

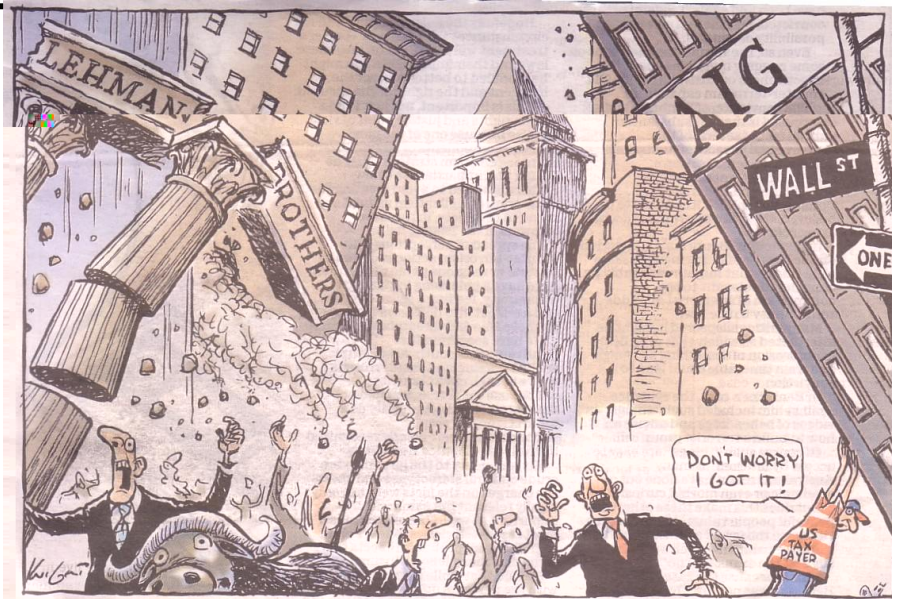
In this real life drama, Bush and Paulson make John Dillinger, the legendary bank robber of the Depression years, look like a Boy Scout.

Nothing to do with socialism

This is not “socialism for the rich,” as some have suggested. Socialist measures would thoroughly clean up and stabilize the financial system to be sure, but a socialist-led government would also place the good as well as the bad assets of the responsible parties (commercial and investment banks, private equity firms, and hedge funds) into the hands of a public democratically run authority. It would turn the Federal Reserve Bank, which during the Greenspan era was one of the main architects and cheerleaders of bubble economics (hi-tech, stock market and, its latest version, housing) into a publicly controlled institution. And it would bring those responsible to trial and penalize them appropriately, if convicted.

At the same time, a socialist-led government and its congressional allies would funnel money to homeowners and working people and enact special measures to assist communities of the racially oppressed, not to mention our rural towns. It would rebuild our nation's deteriorating infrastructure, invest in renewable energy and green jobs, and bring the Iraq war to a quick end. It would also propose the people's takeover of the energy complex, which has also turned into a cash cow of the wealthiest corporations.

Use common sense



Does it make any sense to give control of our financial and economic system for the indefinite future to the same individuals, who while gaming the system, got us into this mess in the first place? I can't think of anything that is less democratic or goes against the grain of common sense.

In the money and banking textbooks that I read years ago, our financial institutions and system supposedly channelled idle money to productive uses – to new technologies and business startups, to build homes and create jobs, to invest in new plant and equipment, and to construct and renew our nation's infrastructure, while extracting handsome profits all the while.

Looking back, it is fair to say that banks and investment houses did perform this function for a period in capitalism's development, but that period has largely passed.

Finance capital's rise and ultra-right rule

Indeed, with the rise to dominance of the extreme right and the reassertion of power by finance capital three decades ago, our financial system has operated more or less independently of other sectors of the economy, functioned largely free of any regulatory body, and grown exponentially.

Finance capital – in its quest to maximize its rate of profit – has drained dollars from the private economy (especially the manufacturing sector) and the public treasury into incredibly risky and speculative financial schemes; it has spawned a series of complex financial instruments and paper transactions which few understand, but fabulously enrich the buyers and borrowers of these exotic instruments, most of which have nothing to do with the real economy.

Finance capital has facilitated megamergers, takeovers and corporate flight to off shore locations; it has wreaked havoc on sovereign states and their economies, particularly in the developing world; it has without as much as a thought introduced enormous instability into the arteries of the U.S. and world economy, evidenced by the frequent financial contagions at home and globally.

And, it has been one of the main class agents to successfully engineer the biggest transfer of wealth in our nation's history from wealth creators -- the world's working people -- to wealth appropriators, the upper crust of U.S. finance capital, while leaving at the same time our nation with an astronomical pile up of household, government and corporate debt that cannot be unwound overnight.

In short, the reassertion of finance capital to a dominant position in the political economy of our country, which was only possible because of the right wing dominance of our nation's political levers of power, has come at a heavy price for the American people and people worldwide.

Clinging onto power

And yet, despite this incredible wreckage, this almost incomprehensible corruption, this reckless speculation, these merchants of plunder, debt and hardship are still attempting to resolve this financial crisis in a way that continues to leave them in charge of the main levers of power and their wealth intact.

As I said earlier, this is not socialism. A more apt description is parasitic state monopoly-finance capitalism. According to marxism, the main mission of the state is to reproduce the conditions for the reproduction of the class structure and economic relations of capitalism. If I am not mistaken, isn't this precisely what Bush, Paulson and team are doing now?

Arena of struggle

Of course, Marxism also says that state is an arena of struggle. While the ruling class employs the state apparatus, including violence when necessary, to impose its interests on society, a united working class and people can successfully resist these measures from within as well as outside state structures. This was done in the 1930s and in so doing, secured important victories for the nation's working class and its allies. It was also done in the 1960s and in doing so brought down the system of legal segregation. And we see it again today in the incredible efforts of millions of working people of all races and nationalities and their allies to elect Barack Obama and larger Democratic Party Congressional majorities in November. Indeed, it is a task that takes on even greater significance given the financial storm that is shaking our country.

For the moment however, the American people and their friends in Congress are faced with a first class challenge – to impose their own imprint on the way in which this financial crisis is resolved. Let's have no doubt that our financial system can be stabilized and restored to its orderly functioning in a way that meets the needs of the American people and our country. But will take a fight!

Economic Meltdown: John McCain and the "Old Boy's Network"

By [Joel Wendland](#) 9-19-08, 9:38 am



The labor movement sharply criticized the Bush administration's and John McCain's responses to the failure of two major US financial institutions this week. In a statement for the press, Sept. 17th, AFL-CIO President John Sweeney charged George W. Bush with rushing to come to the aid of Wall Street, while ignoring the ongoing crisis that working families face.

Lehman Brothers failed to open its doors early this week after it became clear that it could not cover its nearly \$1 trillion debt.

American International Group Inc. (AIG), a large insurance and banking institution, also prepared to fail until a Federal Reserve bailout package totaling nearly \$85 billion kept it open. According to the details of the agreement, the US government will have a controlling interest of close to 80 percent and power to fire senior management.

A third major bank, Merrill Lynch, avoided failure only after a hasty buyout deal with Bank of America. These major financial calamities caused the US stock markets and others around the world to crash, erasing hundreds of billions in value.

Two of the largest Wall Street firms, Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley, remain in jeopardy as some estimates put their debt at higher than Lehman Brothers.

According to some media accounts, the US government's seizure of AIG relied on congressionally mandated authority adopted after the collapse of the US economy before the Great Depression.

The cost of the AIG bailout alone is four times the amount of an economic stimulus package for working families, which Republicans are now blocking in Congress.

By all accounts, the collapse of these major banks, along with Bear Stearns earlier this year, resulted from holding bad mortgage-backed

securities, which failed as the housing market crashed. Further, the lack of regulatory oversight by federal authorities to halt faulty loans and an endless chain of selling faulty mortgage-backed securities throughout the global market contributed to the crash.

Many Republican officials criticized the nationalization move, arguing that free markets and more deregulation are the proper solution.

Labor criticized the Bush administration for moving only to shore up Wall Street and to socialize the costs of saving banks who had made poor business decisions, while ignoring the plight of middle-class Americans.

Through its affiliate Working America as well as its regular e-mail list of members and supporters, the AFL-CIO sent out an e-action item called "Fix the Real Economy Now." The e-mail asked supporters to demand of Congress a moratorium on home foreclosures, expanded unemployment benefits, fiscal relief for states and more funding for anti-poverty programs, along with new investments in infrastructure development.

"What about ordinary Americans who are already hurting and going to hurt more?", Sweeney wondered. "With record joblessness, health care in crisis, crumbling infrastructure and lost homes, we must be every bit as determined to not allow Main Street to fail as we are to save Wall Street and our foreign central bank creditors."

Their make-shift response to the collapsing financial market showed the flaws in the Republican Party's approach to the market, Sweeney contended. "The Republicans have no economic strategy; they're scrambling to put out fires their policies created and doing so with taxpayer money."

For his part, Republican presidential candidate John McCain emphasized his belief in deregulation and strongly criticized government intervention – until this week when he dramatically switched his position and called for a commission to find out what happened in the financial markets. Even still, McCain repeated to a Jacksonville, Florida audience this week that he thinks the "fundamentals of the economy are strong."

At a campaign stop in Nevada this week, Barack Obama chastised McCain for his refusal to take the economic crisis seriously and for his support for

the economic policies that caused the financial meltdown. Obama said that the causes of the financial crisis are linked to the problems with Washington, which John McCain represents: "CEO's got greedy and Washington lobbyists got their way."

Obama ridiculed McCain's claim that he would take on special interests, or as McCain himself put it, "the old boy's network." Obama replied, "In the McCain campaign that's called a staff meeting." By some estimates, 177 lobbyists work for the McCain campaign in some capacity.

Subsequently, Barack Obama released a campaign memo to the media this week outlining several key reforms needed to stabilize the markets. He called for an economic stimulus package for working families, including direct investment in rebuilding the country's infrastructure and creating new jobs quickly.

He also called for several reforms targeting the housing crisis. He wants legislation passed that would assist homeowners re-negotiate their defaulting loans in order to stay in their homes – a measure that John McCain has opposed.

Mortgage-lending reforms, the Obama campaign added, should ensure home loans are clarified for buyers and made secure for lenders, as well as cracking down on predatory lenders. Bankruptcy reforms would help people in debt adjust the terms of their debt in order to avoid losing their homes.

In the markets themselves, Obama called for modernizing and streamlining the regulatory agencies, first, and then imposing oversight over markets where speculation and market manipulation – the causes of much of the current collapse – are taking place.

In assessing Obama's plan, the AFL-CIO's Sweeney emphasized, "We need transparency and effective regulation of Wall Street. If we're going to bail them out, at least we must hold them accountable."

Sweeney added, however, relief for working families must come now as "Americans can't wait until November."

• TODAY'S afternoon news wastes nothing:

"Bush cancelled all his activities. He intended to travel to Alabama and Florida to participate in campaign fundraising events."

"He said on Thursday that he was worried about the financial markets and the U.S. economy..."

"Markets have plummeted," the cables continue to report. "The government has seen itself forced to nationalize the giant insurance company American International Group (AIG), and the Federal Reserve, in a coordinated action with other central banks, has injected \$180 billion into the financial markets."

"The president reaffirmed that his government is taking aggressive and extraordinary measures 'to appease the markets.'"

"Authorities all over Asia are trying to stop their currencies, stock markets and securities from falling to prevent the Wall Street crisis from affecting the region."

"President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil today blamed the international financial crisis on speculation, and

admitted he was worried about the danger of a possible recession in the United States .

"He also sympathized with the situation of major banks in the United States which, in the past, have criticized Brazil and other emerging countries, and called into question the international financial system.

"He said, 'There is a crisis in the United States , a very big crisis that has extraordinarily shaken up the largest economy in the world.'

"It is not that we are not worried. The United States is the world's largest economy and its largest importer."

He concluded by saying, "It is with a certain degree of sadness that I see how important banks, very important banks that were always giving advice about Brazil and about what we should or should not do are now broke or have declared bankruptcy."

The hurricane winds of the financial like are also threatening all of the world's "provinces." The weather forecast is uncertain; it's been talked about for weeks, and gusts of more than 200 kilometers per hour are now being felt. As Rubiera would say, its [the hurricane's] devastating power is increasing geometrically from one category to the next.

It is very difficult to closely follow and understand the fabulous figures of fresh money that are being injected into the global economy. They are huge doses of paper money, which are inevitably leading to a decline in its value and purchasing power.

Higher prices are inevitable in consumer societies and disastrous for emerging countries, as Lula da Silva said. If the largest importer in the world stops importing, this will impact on the rest; if it goes out to compete, this will impact on other producers.

The big banks of the developed countries are imitating and trying to coordinate with the banks of the United States ; if the U.S. banks go broke, theirs will too, and they will devour each other.

Fiscal paradises are prospering; people are suffering. Is this how humanity's well-being can be guaranteed?

Fidel Castro Ruz
September 18, 2008
8:46 p.m. •

CHRONICLE OF AN INJUSTICE

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE CASE OF THE CUBAN FIVE

Leonard Weinglass

After decades of enduring attacks within its own borders (acts of arson, sabotage, assassinations and the use of biological weapons) perpetrated by anti-Cuban terrorist groups based in southern Florida that enjoy the support and consent of the US government, and after the United States repeatedly refused to implement measures to prevent such attacks, a group of unarmed men travelled from Cuba to the United States to monitor the activities of mercenary groups responsible for those attacks and organizations that support them and to warn Cuba of their aggressive intentions.

In September 1998, five of these men, who would later be known as the Cuban Five, were arrested in South Florida by FBI agents and kept in isolation cells for 17 months before their case was even brought before a court. Initially, they were accused of the vague crime of conspiracy which, according to US law, constitutes a commitment to carry out acts of espionage (the US government never accused them of actual espionage, nor did it affirm that real acts of espionage had been carried out, as no classified military document had been confiscated from the men). In addition the men faced minor charges associated with the use of false names and for failing to inform federal authorities that they were working on US soil on behalf of Cuba.

Seven months later, a new charge was brought against the accused: again, that of conspiracy, but this time to commit murder. This charge was brought specifically against one of the Five, Gerardo Hernández, the result of an intense public campaign which sought to avenge the downing, by Cuba's Air Force, of two light airplanes piloted by members of an anti-Castro group and the death of its four crew members, an event that had taken place two years before, when those airplanes were within Cuban airspace. The planes belonged to an organization which, in the 20 months preceding the incident in which they were downed, had penetrated Cuban airspace 25 times, something which had been denounced repeatedly by the Cuban government. The downing of the planes took place after Cuban authorities had officially warned the United States that it would defend its airspace.

In spite of the vigorous objections raised by the Five's defence, the case was tried in Miami, Florida, a community that is home to more than half a million Cuban exiles with a long history of hostility toward the Cuban government, an environment that a US federal court of appeals would later describe as a "perfect storm" of prejudices, which, in this case, prevented the holding of a fair trial. Each and every one of the 12 members of the jury selected to try the case

expressed negative opinions regarding the Cuban government and was a hostile jury member. The three potential jury members who expressed a neutral stance toward Cuba were disqualified by the government

The trial, which lasted over six months, became the longest trial that the United States had known until then. More than 119 volumes of testimony and over 20,000 pages of documents were compiled, including the testimonies of three retired Army generals, a retired admiral, a former Clinton advisor on Cuban affairs (all called by the defence) and high Cuban officials. Near the trial's conclusion, when the case was about to be presented to the jury for its consideration, the US government presented an extraordinary appeal before a higher court, seeking its intervention, recognizing that it had failed to prove the main charge of conspiracy to commit murder and alleging that it was facing an "insurmountable obstacle" in connection with winning the case. After that appeal was turned down, the jury nonetheless found the Five guilty of all charges, under intense pressure brought to bear on them by the local media, whose cameras followed jury members even while driving, so that their license plate numbers were made public, and by anti-Castro activists, who did not cease their protests before the court.

Found guilty, the Five were given unprecedented long sentences and imprisoned in five completely separate maximum security prisons.

Gerardo Hernández was given two life sentences; Antonio Guerrero and Ramón Labañino a life sentence each, Fernando González 19 years and René González 15 years. The three men sentenced to life imprisonment became the first three people ever to be sentenced to life imprisonment for espionage in the United States in a case where no secret document was ever handled.

Gerardo Hernández Nordelo	2 life sentences plus 15 years
Ramón Labañino Salazar	1 life sentence plus 18 years
Antonio Guerrero Rodríguez	1 life sentence plus 10 years
Fernando González Lloret	19 years
René González Sehwerert	15 years

The initial appeal process lasted 27 months and concluded with a decision by a three-judge panel of the court of appeals that revoked all of the convictions on the grounds that the five accused had not received a fair trial in Miami. In an unexpected move, the government asked the twelve judges of the Court of Appeals of the Eleventh Circuit to review the panel's decision through a so-called en banc procedure. Exactly one year later, in spite of the strong disagreement voiced by two of the three judges who made up the panel, the Court plenum revoked, by majority, the 93-page decision of the three judges and refuted the claim that a climate of violence and intimidation prevailed in Miami. In the quarter century before this decision, that court had never ruled in favour of a person accused of a federal crime.

All the while, on May 27, 2005, the UN Work Group on Arbitrary Detentions, after reviewing the arguments advanced by the family of the Cuban Five and the US government, concluded that their imprisonment was arbitrary and urged the US government to take the measures needed to rectify the situation.

The Work Group stated that, based on the facts and the circumstances in which the trial was held, the nature of the charges and the severity of the convictions, the imprisonment of the Five violates Article 14 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Liberties, to which the United States is a signatory.

On August 20, 2007, an oral hearing called by a three-judge panel took place at the Atlanta Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit. As in the two previous hearings held in March 2004 and February 2006, the parties- US government and the defence- put forth their arguments and replied to the questions put to them by the judges.

This hearing was yet another step in the long appeal process for the Cuban Five undertaken the moment they were sentenced in 2001. On this occasion, the US government once again proved unable to refute the arguments of the defence or to substantiate its accusations.

The defence, however, offered irrefutable proof of the improper conduct shown by the government throughout the legal proceedings brought against the Five, a flagrant violation which affects the entire case, related to prosecution's invention of crimes which it could not prove during the trial, promotion of a hostile atmosphere and manipulation of the evidence and the jury.

The lack of evidence needed to substantiate the two main charges- conspiracy to commit espionage and conspiracy to commit first-degree murder- and the imposition of completely irrational and unjustifiable life sentences, has been another key argument advanced by the defence in its efforts to reveal the arbitrary nature of the process. The government itself recognized during the trial that it could not produce a single secret document to prove the charge of espionage and that it had met an "insurmountable obstacle" in its efforts to prove the charge of conspiracy to commit murder.

Throughout the rigged process, the government admitted that its true aim was to protect the anti-Cuban terrorist groups that operate, with complete impunity, from Miami and to punish those who fight against them.

On June 4, 2008, the 3-judge panel expressed its opinion, ratifying the guilty verdicts of the Five; ratifying the sentences of Gerardo Hernández and René González; annulling the sentences of Antonio Guerrero, Fernando González and Ramón Labañino and referring the cases once again to the Miami District Court so they could be re-sentenced at a hearing to be called for this purpose.

On September 12 these five men will have served their tenth year in prison for crimes they did not commit, but for having tried to protect Cuba from terrorist actions. Cuba, like the United States and any other country in the world, has a legitimate right to defend itself from this scourge, which has already claimed many lives.

The case against Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando González and René González is still in the appeal process at the Atlanta Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Between the time of their arrest and trial, the Five were detained, with no right to bail, for 33 months. In addition to this, they were kept in isolation cells for 17 months. They were denied all contact with their relatives and small children and even each other.

In August 2001, before they were convicted at their hearings, they were once again sent to the "hole" for 48 days.

Just as the defence was preparing to submit their documents to the court and the appeal process for the cases was about to commence in March 2003, the Five were once again summarily sent to isolation cells, "on orders from Washington", as the administrators of the local penitentiaries declared, perplexed at that order, as the Five had maintained exemplary conduct during their imprisonment.

At the time the US Department of Justice decided to keep the Five in solitary confinement for "national security" interests. US authorities applied the so-called Special Administrative Measures (SAMs) by virtue of federal regulations passed in 1996. These measures are applicable in cases where there is reason to suspect that communication between federal prisoners can put the country's national security at risk or lead to acts of violence or terrorism.

The Five were once again sent to the "hole", thus prevented from any contact with the world. All communication with their lawyers was denied them. They were not allowed to receive visitors, not even from the consulate. They were not allowed to receive any correspondence or make telephone calls, not even with their families. This measure was adopted by the US government at a crucial stage of the legal process, when contact between lawyer and client is crucial and the defense was preparing its declarations for the appeal.

The "Special Administrative Measures" were amended by virtue of the 2001 Patriot Act, which extended the period of time these measures can be applied from 120 days to a year, and modified the norms governing the approval of such extensions. As a result of this amendment, the "Special Administrative Measures" could be applied to the Five again at any time in the future.

The Five have been in prison for more than 9 years. During this time, Adriana, Gerardo Hernández' wife, has never been granted a visa that will allow her to visit her husband. Olga, René González' wife, has also been denied the possibility of visiting her husband. With respect to the other relatives, the US government has continued unnecessary delays in the granting of entry permits. The average number of visas granted for every member of the family (including

parents, wives and children) is solely one visa for every family member a year.

As a result, in most cases, relatives have been able to visit the Five on average only once every year, when, in conformity with the regulations governing visits at the different prisons, more frequent visits could have been coordinated, had the visas been granted for this purpose.

Amnesty International has condemned these acts as violations of international law. In a letter addressed to the US Department of State, Amnesty International declared: "Such denial of family visits for convicted prisoners would represent a substantial hardship in any case. This is of even more urgent concern in the present cases given the serious questions which have been raised about the fairness of the convictions", adding: "this measure is unnecessarily punitive and contrary both to standards for the humane treatment of prisoners and to states' obligation to protect family life."

THE MOST RECENT DECISION IN ATLANTA

On June 4, 2008, the three-judge panel of the Atlanta Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit responsible for reviewing the case of the Five, made up of Judges Stanley Birch, Phyllis Kravitch and William Pryor, expressed its opinion, after that Court plenum August 9, 2006 annulment of its previous decision of August 9, 2005 that overturned the convictions of the Five and called for a new trial, having found that they had not received a fair trial. On that occasion, the plenum instructed the judges to review the other arguments behind the appeal.

In its new opinion, the panel ratified the guilty verdicts of the Five, ratified the sentences imposed on Gerardo Hernández and René González, annulled the sentences imposed on Antonio Guerrero, Fernando González and Ramón Labañino and referred these last three cases to the Miami District Court, so that they would be re-tried at a hearing to be held for that purpose.

Unanimously, the panel defeated each and every one of the arguments advanced in the appeal by the defence, alleging that they were "devoid of merit", save those related to the sentences imposed on Ramón, Antonio and Fernando. Only in connection with the charge of conspiracy to commit murder brought against Gerardo, a charge which the prosecution itself recognized before the court of appeals during the trial that it could not prove, the decision was 2 to 1, with a 16-page decision presented by Judge Kravitch, who affirmed that the government had not presented any evidence to prove that Gerardo was guilty of such a crime.

The 99-page decision was drawn up by Judge Pryor, member appointed in 2007, who, with a politicized language completely out of place in a legal document, explicitly favoured the government's position and even changed a number of facts invoked by that same panel in its previous decision in favour of the Five, regarding the issue of venue, and manipulated other facts in the case files.

Pryor, whose appointment as federal judge proved highly controversial (owing to his far-right positions) and which was denounced by important US newspapers as well as criticized within the Senate, was proposed by Bush in April 2003 and disallowed on that occasion by the Senate. Subsequently, in June 2005, he managed to secure his appointment, although 45 senators voted against, through a negotiated arrangement with the presumed current Republican presidential candidate John McCain.

In an interview for Cuban television aired the day after the three-judge panel made its decision public, attorney for the defence Leonard Weinglass affirmed:

*"When the Five were arrested in 1998, the Pentagon and the Department of Justice issued a statement saying that the United States' national security had not been damaged. Now, after they've been in prison for 10 years, we have an assertion from a high-level court that **there was no espionage and that no top secret information was obtained or transmitted**. That's what the Court found. Yet, they are remanded to be re-sentenced and we're not sure what the new sentence will be.*

Gerardo's case (2 life sentences plus 15 years) was the simplest, according to all the lawyers, and could have been withdrawn. However, although his case is easy from the legal point of view, given the lack of evidence for the charge of conspiracy to commit murder he is accused of; it is the most difficult one from the political point of view, due to the political climate that exists in Miami. The [Florida] Court did not have the courage to set aside such a sentence even when the government itself acknowledged in writing at the trial that it could not prove it.

When one reads the Appellate opinion, in particular the first 40 pages, it is very clear to attorneys there is ideological prejudice in the emitted decision.

This 99-page ruling finds that Judge Joan Lenard made mistakes when she sentenced Fernando. She made mistakes when she sentenced Antonio; she

made mistakes when she sentenced Ramón. She made mistakes in the instructions she gave the jury about Gerardo and -- according to two of the three [Atlanta] judges -- made a mistake when she denied a change of venue.

Despite these six or seven serious errors, the [Atlanta] court remands the case to Judge Lenard

Lamentably, this is one of those situations where the government of the United States is utilizing its justice system to achieve a foreign-policy objective, and can be compared to the opposite tack in the case of Posada Carriles.

Historically when this happens and the existence of political prejudice is revealed, the American people feel greatly ashamed at the failure of their system of justice and the courts of justice."

DIFFICULTIES SURROUNDING FAMILY VISITS TO THE CUBAN FIVE IMPRISONED IN THE UNITED STATES

During these years of unjust imprisonment, the delay in the granting of visas to the relatives of the Cuban Five, imprisoned in the United States since September 12, 1998, has, in most cases, prevented these relatives from visiting the Five more than once a year on average, despite the regulations of the different prisons allowing monthly visits.

Since 2006, when a new procedure for the request of temporary entry visas was introduced, this situation has worsened, and the time relatives have had to wait to obtain a visa and, thus, the time the Five have been denied visits from these relatives, has increased significantly (up to 19 months, to date).

According to these regulations, relatives in the United States must request the visit at the US Interests Section in Cuba via phone. This has forced the relatives of the Five to resort to an exceptional mechanism which has made the securing of visas an even more complicated process than before 2006.

What follow are some examples of the above-mentioned difficulties:

Gerardo Hernández Nordelo (2 life sentences plus 15 years): Since the time of his arrest on September 12, 1998, he has not received a single visit from his wife, Adriana Pérez.

- From 2002 to date, the US government has denied his wife, Adriana Pérez, the authorization to enter US territory to visit the prison where her husband is held. On 8 different occasions, Adriana Pérez has requested a visa to visit him and, on these 8 occasions the US Government has denied it.

- In 2002 she was granted a visa and, upon arriving at the airport in Houston, Texas on July 25, 2002, authorities arbitrarily detained her for 11 hours, denied her recourse to Cuban consular officers and revoked her visa, preventing her from entering the United States.

All of this has been psychologically torturous for Gerardo Hernández who, sentenced to life imprisonment, will therefore never see his wife again.

- His sister, Isabel Hernández Nordelo, submitted her visa request on November 2, 2006 and had to wait until November 21, 2007, to receive the visa, that is, **she had to wait 12 months to receive a visa.**

René González Schwerert (15 years): August 16, 2000 was the last time he was visited by his wife Olga Salanueva.

- From 2002 to date, the US government has denied his wife, Olga Salanueva, authorization to enter the United States to visit the prison where her husband is held. She has requested the visa to visit him on 8 occasions and has been denied it by the US government on all 8 occasions. In 2002, she was granted a visa. This visa was revoked the following week.

- His mother, Irma Schwerert, had to wait **17 months** (from September 12, 2006 until February 5, 2008) **to obtain her last visa.**

- His father, Cándido René González, presented his visa request on April 16, 2007, and it was granted him on February 5, 2008, **10 months after he requested it.**

Ramón Labañino Salazar (life imprisonment plus 18 years): For exactly two years, since June 2006 to date, he has not received any visits from his relatives owing to the delay in the granting of visas.

- His wife, Elizabeth Palmeiro, and his two daughters, Laura Labañino and Lisbeth Labañino, have been waiting for **19 months, since September 2006**, when they presented their visa requests at the US Interests Sections in Havana (USINT). They have yet to obtain them.

- Ramon's older daughter, Ailí Labañino, presented her visa request on November 2, 2006. The visa was granted **12 months later**, on November 6, 2007, but, upon arriving at the prison, its complete shut down was decreed as a result of disturbances in which Ramón Labañino did not participate. As a result of this, she was unable to make a single visit in the course of her 29-day stay.

Fernando González Lloret (19 years): He has been unable to see his mother, Magali Lloret, and his wife, Rosa Aurora Freijanes, for a year, owing to the delay in the granting of visas.

- From the time of his transfer to Oxford prison in Wisconsin, until 2007, his mother and wife, the only relatives who have ever visited him, were not recognized as such by prison authorities and were not included in the list of visitors. Thus, not only did they face the usual difficulties to obtain the visas, their visits to the prisons required special authorization from the establishments.

- His mother, Magali Lloret, **has been waiting for 15 months** (since March 19, 2007, when she presented the visa request) to obtain a visa.

- His wife, Rosa Aurora Freijanes, presented her visa request on December 15, 2006 and had to wait **11 months**, until November 2007, when she finally received it.

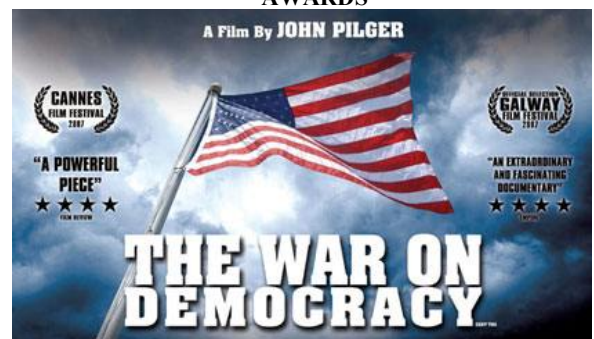
Antonio Guerrero Rodríguez (life imprisonment plus 10 years): For two periods of over 17 months, he has not received visits from his relatives because of the delay in the granting of visas to his mother, Mirtha Rodríguez, and his son, Antonio Guerrero.

- In December 2003, after obtaining the pertinent visas and travelling to the United States, his mother, Mirtha Rodríguez, and son, Antonio Guerrero, were unable to visit him as planned because Antonio had been unexpectedly transferred to a different prison. It was not until April 2005 that they received a new visa to visit him.

- His mother, Mirtha Rodríguez, presented her visa request on April 16, 2007 and obtained the visa on February 5, 2008, **10 months after having requested it.**

- His son, Antonio Guerrero Cabrera, presented his visa request on March 8, 2007, and obtained the visa on February 5, 2008, **11 months after having requested it.**

‘THE WAR ON DEMOCRACY’ WINS BEST DOCUMENTARY AT THE 2008 ONE WORLD AWARDS



'The War on Democracy', directed by John Pilger & Chris Martin, won Best Documentary at the prestigious [One World Media Awards](#) in London on 12 June 2008. It beat a field that included the documentary Oscar winner, 'Taxi to the Dark Side'.

The citation read: "There are six criteria the judges are asked to use to select the winner of this award: the film's impact on public opinion, its appeal to a wide audience, its inclusion of voices from the developing world, its high journalistic or production standards, its success in conveying the impact of the actions of the world's rich on the lives of the poor and the extent to which it draws attention to possible solutions. One film met every one of these. It was the winner of the award: John Pilger's 'The War on Democracy'."

Why contract work makes us sick

Poorer health, lower commitment and greater likelihood of depression - these are some of the toxic effects of contract employment. Researcher Mathew Boelsen reviews the academic studies.

A COMPREHENSIVE review of research on the effects of contract work supports what has been suspected for years: contract teachers are worse off than their permanently employed colleagues.

Studies have found that workers from many different professions who do not have job security are more likely to be negatively affected in the areas of health, commitment and job satisfaction.

This won't come as a surprise to many teachers, least of all to those on contract, who have for years argued that their work is impeded by not having the same financial security and emotional connection to their school as other teachers.

Because the rate of contract teaching overseas has so far only rarely reached the high levels that we have here in Victoria, there is a lack of research dealing directly with a effects of the contract system on teachers.

However, with the global rise in temporary employment across all professions has come a growing interest in research dealing with the effects of job insecurity.

Poorer health

One of the most shocking findings of the review was the strong relationship between a worker's employment status and their health.

Many studies have looked at this phenomenon in recent times, as it has long been thought that the added stresses associated with having no long-term financial security have an impact on a worker's mental and physical health.

A 2004 study of more than 1000 professional workers by the Australian National University found that people who had little job security, such as contract teachers, were not only nearly four times more likely to negatively rate their own health as those in secure employment, but they were also nearly four times more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety, as well as being more than twice as likely to be in a poor state of physical health.

These results, which are consistent with other studies in the field, paint a dark but realistic picture of the conditions that contract teachers face. Teaching is stressful enough without the added pressure of having to find a new job or not knowing whether you will be paid during the holidays.

Lower commitment

Being on contract has long been assumed to have a negative effect on a teacher's commitment to their institution. Teachers who know that their connection with their students and school is unlikely to last beyond the length of their contract have a clear obstacle in terms of their level of commitment.

Research has also supported this theory. An Israeli study - published in the Journal of Organisational Behaviour in 1996 - of teachers both on contract and in ongoing positions looked at how this divide affected their commitment. It found that teachers who had a secure, ongoing position were far more committed to their work than teachers employed fixed-term. Similar results have been found in studies around the world.

This must be a concern for educators, as commitment in the teaching profession is vital for the achievement of positive educational outcomes.

Less job satisfaction

The global shift towards temporary work in recent years has resulted in a wave of studies examining how employment status affects job satisfaction. Time and again, these studies have found that workers on fixed-term contracts are less satisfied with their job than permanent workers.

The most comprehensive of these studies - published in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health in 2000 - looked at almost 16,000 workers across Europe, and found that those who were not employed ongoing were twice as likely to be dissatisfied with their job as permanent workers. Further research has also shown that once contract workers are made ongoing, their job satisfaction improves.

While the satisfaction of staff should be of importance to any principal, these studies have broader implications for the teaching profession. Nearly 80 per cent of beginning teachers are given fixed-term contracts, and experts say that about a third of these will leave the profession within their first two years of teaching.

With studies now indicating that the cost to taxpayers of teacher turnover is almost \$10,000 per departing teacher, not including the tens of thousands spent on educating new teachers in universities, public policy should be based around attracting and retaining teachers rather than discouraging them.

Mathew Boelsen is studying for a Bachelor of Arts a, RMIT. He conducted his review as part of a six-month placement with the AEU



The Australia Cuba Friendship Society

Invite you to see the recently released film by Dr Tim Anderson

DOCTORS of TOMORROW

A fundraiser for our Cyclones Gustav & Ike Appeal
that did severe damage to Cuba.

Tim Anderson's new documentary *The Doctors of Tomorrow*
tells of the East Timor-Cuba health co-operation program.



Where: The **CEPU** Office - 139 Queensbury St. Carlton,
[adjacent to the old ETU building, cnr of Swanston St]

When: Monday, 6th October, **Meeting** from 7:30pm with the
Film showing at 8pm

Donation: \$10, including a delicious supper.

**Come and join us for a great evening
to help Cuba.**

Inquiries: call Joan 9857 9249