

Department of Foreign Affairs challenged on Cuba policy

In response to a letter from the Cuba Support Group in early December 2007 regarding the Miami Five, the Department of Foreign Affairs replied enclosing a reply from the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dermot Ahern, to a question asked by Finian McGrath TD on the same subject in Dáil Éireann on 18 December.

Apart from the fact that the minister failed to address the issues raised in our letter, it soon became clear that the reply to Deputy McGrath's question in the Dáil was factually wrong. These errors were brought to the minister's attention in a further letter dated 2 January 2008.



● The public face of Irish - US relations

For instance, the minister said: "The case to which the deputy refers relates to five Cuban citizens who were convicted in the US in 2001 on charges ranging from espionage to first-degree murder." We pointed out that "none of the five were convicted of espionage. None were convicted of murder in the first, second or any other degree. There was no evidence entered into court to support either charge. In fact, three of the men were convicted of conspiracy to commit espionage and one of conspiracy to commit murder in the first degree . . ." These are important distinctions.

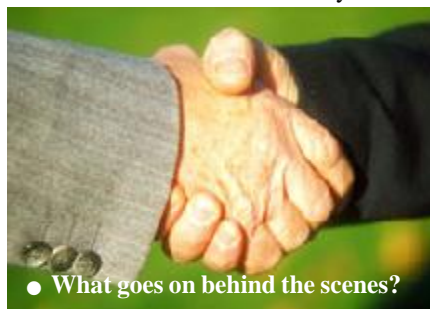
On the next line the minister erred again. "A panel of three judges from the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in

Atlanta overturned the 2001 convictions on 9th August 2005 and ordered a retrial based on new evidence." We pointed out that "no new evidence relating to any of the convictions was considered by the Court of Appeal. The convictions were overturned solely on the basis that the selection of the trial venue, Miami, was unfair to the defendants . . ."

Whatever about these and other factual errors (despite numerous briefing papers having been sent to the department by the Cuba Support Group and the Free the Miami Five Campaign since 2002), it is the slavish determination on the part of the minister to avoiding any conflict with the US authorities that stands out.

In relation to making representations to the US authorities or the United Nations to try to secure visas for the wives of two of the imprisoned men, the minister replied that "visas had not been granted to the wives of two of the convicted men on the stated grounds of US national security" and "again, I do not believe that this is a matter on which I have any standing and I do not intend, therefore, to raise it with the US authorities or at UN level."

In fact the Irish Government has consistently refused to examine the case of the Miami Five, or the rights of their families, repeatedly stating that the Government "has no standing" on a trial taking place in the United States. However, while unable to comment on a single trial in the United States, Irish Governments have no such coyness with trials in Cuba, allowing themselves the luxury of commenting on seventy-five trials in a single Dáil statement: "Following the summary trial and lengthy prison sentences imposed . . . on seventy-five dissidents . . ." (Brian Cowen, 19 May 2004). We repeat our assertion that the Department of Foreign Affairs is no more than a sub-office of the US State Department.



● What goes on behind the scenes?

Surprising results in Cuban elections

The Cuban electorate has elected 614 candidates to the National Assembly of People's Power and 1,201 candidates to provincial assemblies.

In the parliamentary elections



● Raúl Castro Elected president of Cuba Page 3

for 614 seats, only 224 members (36 per cent) of the outgoing parliament were returned. New members account for 391 (64 per cent) of the seats in the new parliament. More than 95 per cent of the electorate voted in the final process of the electoral system, in which everyone over the age of sixteen is eligible to vote. Voting is not compulsory. The candidates received 91 per cent support. Spoiled ballot papers accounted for a little more than 1 per cent of the votes cast, while blank papers accounted for 3.7 per cent. Voting is secret, and blank ballots are generally acknowledged as a vote against the candidate.

Philip Agee presents!

Statement by Cuba Support Group, Ireland

The members of Cuba Support Group, Ireland, have been deeply saddened by the news of Philip Agee's passing in Havana this week.

Philip had planned to visit Ireland in 2007 to speak about his inspiring life story, which was captured so well in Bernie Dwyer and Roberto Ruiz's film *One Man's Story: Philip Agee, Cuba, and the CIA*. The excitement and interest generated by his visit was testament to his internationally renowned reputation as a man of integrity and his great personal courage in lifting the lid on US human rights abuses and US-sponsored terrorism in Latin America and elsewhere.

We were hugely disappointed that he was unable to travel to Ireland due to ill-health in April, and again in November, but we have the legacy of his life work as a dissident of great intellect and moral purpose who sacrificed his own career and personal safety to raise international awareness of covert and destabilising US actions in Cuba and other parts of the world.

Philip will always be remembered as a strong and supportive friend of Cuba, and the members of Cuba Support Group, Ireland, send their deepest sympathies to Philip's wife and family. He will be remembered by all of our members, who mourn his passing.

His last known media interview was with Alan Tourney of RTE Radio 1, a one-hour interview recorded in October that has yet to be broadcast. It would be a fitting memorial to his courage for it to be broadcast in full.

Stephen McCloskey, Cuba Support Group, Ireland



Miami Five lawyer visits Ireland

The Cuba Support Group and the Miami Five Campaign jointly hosted a visit to Ireland by the American defence lawyer Leonard Weinglass in December 2007. He is the appellate attorney of the Miami Five and a veteran of many famous politically motivated cases in the American justice system. He joined the defence team without taking a fee. Weinglass was here to raise public awareness of the case, with a view to putting pressure on the US authorities to cease their interference in the legal process.



The trip was a great success. The live interview on the radio programme "Today" with Pat Kenny on 6 December was as good a presentation of the facts as even seasoned campaigners had ever heard. For Weinglass it was a luxury to have twenty minutes to present the case. As he had earlier explained at a meeting with Dublin city councillors hosted by the lord mayor, "Twenty

minutes is a luxury. The US appeal court only gave me fifteen minutes three minutes per defendant."

Weinglass also addressed a very well-attended meeting in Dáil Éireann hosted by Finian McGrath TD, which attracted TDs from all the major parties. Deputies were free to ask questions, and did so, with obvious interest and a clear desire to test the scarcely believable facts presented. None present were left with any illusion but with the knowledge that a gross miscarriage of justice has been perpetrated against the five Cubans and that a gross infringement of their human rights is being enforced by the continuing denial of permits for family visits.

It is hoped that this new level of understanding within the Oireachtas will prevent the minister from misleading the Dáil in future and will expose his failure to condemn the continuing arbitrary detention of the Miami Five.

The campaign hopes to bring Len Weinglass back to Ireland in 2008 to build on the success of this first visit.

New website: www.cubasupport.com



ICAP delegation tours local groups

The European director of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP), Holmedo Peres, and his Ireland co-ordinator, Gladys Allyón, toured several local Cuba Support Groups in December and established contacts that they hope to develop over time. Projects were initiated that will become a focus for local solidarity activities and exchanges, with Irish groups adopting Cuban communities and channelling funds to them for specific projects in the areas of health care, the arts, and education.

Already a fund-raising dinner held by one group in Limerick has resulted in a Cuban community in the Quattro Camions district of Havana being able to begin the renovation of a derelict theatre for use as a community arts centre and creche. The Limerick co-ordinator, Nina Blodou, handed over the €2,150 raised to the Quattro Camions community leaders, who had already established a project budget and agreed labour and materials supplies and are now ready to start work. She also visited a school badly damaged by a hurricane, which she supported last year with funds raised by a sponsored cycle.

"It's hard to believe how much can be achieved in Cuba with such little money. The roof was replaced, fans installed; they even bought calculators and hole punches," she said. "The whole place was transformed."

Other projects are at the planning stage. Look out for local events in your area over the coming months that will be seeking your support for practical solidarity exchanges directly with communities in Cuba. This is your chance to make a real difference in the lives of identifiable Cuban communities. The more active the local solidarity efforts are, the greater will be the impact.

50-50 CLUB

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Ann Murray - Belfast

Inside Cuba...Inside Cuba...Inside Cuba...

Raúl Castro Elected President of Cuba

Raúl Castro was elected president of Cuba by the National Assembly of People's Power (parliament) in the inaugural session of its 7th Legislature. Jose Ramon Machado Ventura was elected first vice president of the Council of State and Juan Almeida Bosque, Julio Casas Regueiro, Juan Esteban Lazo, Carlos Lage Davila and Abelardo Colome Ibarra as the other five vice presidents. The legislators also elected Jose Miguel Miyar Barrueco as secretary of the Council of State and the remaining 23 members. Fidel Castro cast his vote by sealed envelope sent to the parliament.

In his address to the parliament Raúl Castro stated that "the Communist Party, a sure guarantee of the unity of the Cuban nation, is the sole worthy heir to our people's confidence in its leader. It is the top leading force of our State and society as provided in Article 5 of our Constitution approved by referendum by exactly 97.7% of the voters."

He also said that if the people are firmly united behind a single party "this must be more democratic than any other, and so must be the entire society. This society, of course, can be improved, as any other human work, but it is undoubtedly full of justice and everybody in it has the opportunity to express their views and, better still, to work for the materialisation of whatever we all agree."

He went to say the "there is no reason to fear discrepancies in a society such as ours, where its very nature precludes the existence of antagonistic contradictions, since the social classes that make it up are not antagonistic themselves. The best solutions can come from a profound exchange of differing opinions, if such an exchange is guided by sensible purposes and the views are uttered with responsibility."

In his letter of resignation Fidel Castro said: "I strongly believe that the answers to the current problems facing Cuban society, which has, as an average, a twelfth grade of education, almost a million university graduates, and a real possibility for all its citizens to become educated without their being in any way discriminated against, require more variables for each concrete problem than those contained in a chess game. We cannot ignore one single detail; this is not an easy path to take, if

the intelligence of a human being in a revolutionary society is to prevail over instinct. He concluded by saying that his "elemental duty is not to cling to positions, much less to stand in the way of younger persons, but rather to contribute my own experience and ideas whose modest value comes from the exceptional era that I had the privilege of living in. This is not my farewell to you. My only wish is to fight as a soldier in the battle of ideas. I shall continue to write under the heading of 'Reflections by comrade Fidel.' It will be just another weapon you can count on. Perhaps my voice will be heard. I shall be careful."

The Cuba Support Group sent letters of best wishes to Fidel Castro and of congratulation to Raúl Castro on his election as president through the Cuban Ambassador to Ireland, Noel Carrillo.



Oil production increased in 2007

Cuba produced the equivalent of 4 million tons of oil in 2007, according to the Vice-President of Cuba, Carlos Lage. During a ceremony to congratulate oil workers Lage said that the figure—which had not been achieved since 2003—includes 2.9 million tonnes of crude oil and 1.2 billion cubic metres of gas.

In his speech Lage stressed the importance of the levels of production of this hydrocarbon and the exploitation of 97 per cent of the accompanying gas in the wells, as well as its use in the production of low-cost electricity.

He noted that if Cuba had imported fuel oil to generate the electricity produced with the accompanying gas it would have cost Cuba between \$400 and 500 million, which is twice the country's income from the sale of cigars and tobacco in the international market.

In 2007, he added, new seismic studies were conducted and thirty-two new wells were drilled, which was facilitated by the purchase of ten drilling machines.

Registration in Cuban universities growing

Registration in Cuban universities for 2007/08 went up to more than 700,000 students, slightly higher than last year, according to the Minister of Higher Education, Juan Vela.



● Havana University

Together with providing better conditions for the new academic year in teaching and guaranteeing the material base for studies and life in university residences, it is planned to provide university education at the municipal level, whereby any citizen who so wishes will have access to higher education in university institutions in their locality.

Bank of the South launched

The President of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, and five other South American leaders met in Argentina on 10 December 2007 to officially launch the regional development bank Banco del Sur (Bank of the South). Chávez emphasised that the new bank will permit the member-countries to use their reserves for development and investment in the region and that it marks the beginning of true union among the nations of South America.

The founding act of the new financial entity was signed before a packed audience at Casa Rosada, the presidential palace in Buenos Aires. Presidents Nestor Kirchner



● Hugo Chavez and Ignacio "Lula" da Silva

of Argentina, Evo Morales of Bolivia, Ignacio "Lula" da Silva of Brazil, Rafael Correa of Ecuador, Nicanor Duarte of Paraguay and Hugo Chávez of Venezuela were all present for the signing, as well as a government representative from Uruguay.

"The Bank of the South opens the possibility of bringing investment and the South American nations' reserves to our continent in order to convert them into development," said Hugo Chávez.

President Chávez, who first put forward the idea in 2006, explained that the countries of the region have traditionally deposited their reserves in banks in North America and Europe, a circumstance that results in a transfer of wealth from the poor countries to the wealthy countries. He emphasised the necessity for the countries of the region to keep their financial resources in the region. "Hundreds of billions of dollars in treasury bonds in the United States, in euros, in goods: the time has come to bring those resources back," he said.

President Evo Morales of Bolivia said the bank is the first step towards a common currency among the South American countries and would allow them to resist the pressures of international lending institutions that have demanded the privatisation of state-owned companies. President Rafael Correa of Ecuador explained that the development of a joint fund as the central axis of the region's central banks would allow for the development of a common currency among all the South American countries. He stressed that it required only the political will of the region's leaders. "Nothing is preventing us from setting up the creation of a common currency," he declared.

President Lula da Silva of Brazil called it a "decisive step" in South America's integration and agreed that the institution would give the South American countries greater independence and allow them to "defeat South American dependence on the international system. This will be the first international bank truly controlled by the nations of our continent," he said. The bank was officially launched in January and will be based in Caracas, with regional offices in Buenos Aires and La Paz.

Chávez calls for a battle of ideas to combat US interference in Latin America

The President of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, has called for increased Latin American integration and a "battle of ideas" in order to combat US interference in the region. The United States has launched a colossal media war against the peoples and governments of Latin America, Chávez said, because "we have left behind being the US's back yard; this is why they attack us so much.

"They bombard us without clemency, the minds of children, young people, men and women, to try to convert us into human beings without a past, disconnected from reality, and into people without a future." However, he argued, "we have the right to a future, to have a homeland, to create the great homeland. I believe that the next five hundred years will depend on what happens in these years."

Reaffirming his commitment to socialism as "the only path that will permit us to save the world, because capitalism is the path of the destruction of life and the human species," Chávez stated that "only the conscious peoples, in organisation and in motion, can make history; therefore the consciousness of our peoples, of our nations, is essential. This is precisely why North American imperialism attacks and bombards us, using their 'cultural artillery'—to placate and divide the peoples," Chávez argued.

Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

After a decades-long struggle, the United Nations General Assembly approved the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Among other points, the non-binding declaration states that indigenous peoples have the right to maintain their culture and remain on their land.

Bolivia's first indigenous president, Evo Morales, said he welcomed the vote. "These standards will help ensure that



everyone has the same rights, and that we will stop being marginalised."

Only four countries in the General Assembly—the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—voted against the declaration. All four countries are founded on the historic and continuing dispossession of their indigenous peoples. Indigenous populations in those countries are the most impoverished segments of the population and are in the poorest health.

Columbus Day renamed in Latin America

While 12 October is celebrated in the United States as Columbus Day, many countries in Latin America have renamed it Indigenous Peoples Day. They regard Columbus Day as a hideous celebration of genocide and colonisation.

The emergence of progressive governments in Latin America has paved the way for the success of a campaign that began thirty years ago when indigenous peoples formed an international movement, demanding one thing: that 12 October be commemorated as an international day of mourning for the indigenous peoples of the Americas.



Bush allocates \$44 billion for espionage

The United States allocated close to \$44 billion to its principal intelligence agencies in the

fiscal year 2007 (up to 30 September), according to Mike McConnell, National Director of Intelligence. Since George Bush came to power in January 2001, this is the first time that the exact amount allocated to the espionage apparatus has been made public.

This multi-million-dollar budget includes funds for the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the National Security Council, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and other Pentagon services.

According to the the *Washington Post*, the amount quoted by McConnell is approximately 80 per cent of the total the United States spends on secret operations. The other 20 per cent is used by the armed forces to carry out "intelligence" operations.



Agencies and individuals fined for booking US-Cuba trips

In a first for an on-line travel company, Travelocity has been fined by US federal regulators for booking trips between the United States and Cuba in violation of a 45-year-old blockade.

Travelocity paid a fine of \$182,750 to settle a complaint brought by the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, which said the company violated the prohibitions. The Treasury's complaint stated that Travelocity "provided travel-related services in which Cuba or Cuban nationals had an interest by arranging air travel and hotel reservations to, from, with or within Cuba without an OFAC license."

A spokesperson for Travelocity, Joel Frey, stated that the company had not applied for a licence, and did not intend to. "The trips to Cuba were unintentionally permitted to be booked by consumers on line because of some technical failures several years ago, and it's just now being finally settled with OFAC."

A spokesperson for the Treasury Department, Molly Millerwise, said that any individual or business that violates the Cuban sanctions can face civil or criminal penalties. A Mexican subsidiary of American Express, Travel-Related Services Company Inc., also agreed to pay \$16,625 to settle allegations by OFAC of Cuba-related violations. In December 2002 and October 2003 the company had made sales of group travel packages to Cuba, according to the government. American Express voluntarily disclosed the information to OFAC, according to the enforcement action.

Elsewhere, OFAC fined one unnamed individual \$999.45 and another person \$510 for buying Cuban cigars for sale on the internet.

Cuba has estimated that about 37,000 Americans not of Cuban origin entered Cuba in 2006—a reduction from more than 84,500 in 2003, before the latest restrictions were enforced by the US authorities. The American Society of Travel Agents recently estimated that nearly 1.8 million Americans would visit in the first three years following an ending of the travel ban.

But what about the terrorists?

Efforts to catch Americans who sneak into Cuba without US permission, or those who bring back cigars, rum and other souvenirs on legal trips, could be distracting the authorities from stopping terrorists and drug smugglers, according to a recent US government audit.

The ninety-page study by the US Government Accountability Office in Washington said that nowhere is the US "embargo" on Cuba more enforced than at Miami International Airport, where charter flights carry authorised passengers to and from the country. Customs and Border Protection officials in Miami conduct extra inspections on 20 per cent of passengers arriving from Cuba, compared with 3 per cent of passengers landing from other countries, the report said.

"Customs and Border Protection officers suggest that the high rate of secondary inspections of arrivals from Cuba and the numerous resulting seizures (mostly small amounts of Cuban tobacco, alcohol, and pharmaceuticals) occupy a majority of the agency's inspection facilities and resources at Miami's airport," the report concluded. It said the extra searches strain efforts to "inspect other travelers according to its mission of keeping terrorists, criminals and inadmissible aliens out of the country."

Those arriving on charter flights have permission from the United States to travel to Cuba and are usually American citizens or residents visiting relatives there. But bringing back Cuban goods is prohibited, and Customs and Border Protection officials at Miami Airport make an average of eleven seizures per day of Cuban contraband, the report said, with each seizure taking from forty-five minutes to three hours.

Most Americans who visit Cuba do so illegally, heading first to Canada, Mexico, the Bahamas, or Jamaica. If caught they can face civil fines of up to \$55,000, though many settle for smaller amounts. Between 2000 and 2006 suspected violations of the embargo constituted 61 per cent of the investigative cases taken by the Office of Foreign Assets Control. While 10,823 investigations were opened into possible violations involving Cuba, such as unlicensed travel or the purchase of cigars on the internet, there were 6,791 investigations into suspected violations of all other US sanctions on foreign countries.

During the same period the Treasury Department collected fines totalling about \$8.1 million for 8,170 violations of the Cuban embargo between 2000 and 2006, according to an analysis of the agency's data included in the report.

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Cuba to sign international human rights agreements

Cuba will shortly sign two important human rights agreements—the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights—the Minister for Foreign Relations, Felipe Pérez Roque, announced during a press conference commemorating International Human Rights Day on 10 December 2007.

These instruments are fully protected by the Cuban judicial code and particularly by the work and trajectory of the Cuban Revolution, he stated.

This political decision will be effected in a few months and is an expression of Cuba's commitment to maintaining close co-operation with the United Nations, based on respect for Cuba's rights and sovereignty.

Pérez Roque noted that while manipulation of the issue against Cuba was continuing, and the United States had turned the UN commission into an inquisition against those countries opposed to its imperial domination and used the issue of human rights to justify its blockade of Cuba, the minimum conditions necessary for Cuba to consider new agreements in this area did not exist.

He explained that the conditions have now changed, with the establishing of the Human Rights Council, to which Cuba was elected as a founding member with the support of two-thirds of the international community's member-countries, and because, as is well known, the spurious mandates that the United States imposed against Cuba in that body have been discontinued.

He clarified that this will to co-operate will be maintained as long as the principle is upheld of no singling out, no selectivity or discriminatory use of the human rights issue to damage countries that do not submit to the dictates of US imperialism.

As long as the new situation is maintained, Cuba is willing to move forward along this path; but if the issue should unfortunately become politicised again, if it should become strained, Cuba will take up the struggle once more. Cuba will not act, and has never acted, under pressure, Pérez Roque emphasised.

Infant mortality success maintained

For the second consecutive year Cuba has achieved an infant mortality rate of 5.3 for every 1,000 live births. Together with Canada, Cuba has attained a lower figure than those registered by other countries in the Americas. The global rate stands at 52 per 1,000 and in Latin America at 26. The rate for west Africa is 108, according to statistics gathered for *The State of the World's Children*, published by UNICEF.



Human rights in action

Celebrating International Human Rights Day, the Cuban Minister for Foreign Relations, Felipe Pérez Roque, announced that the Guatemalan National Prize for Human Rights had been awarded to the Cuban medical brigade working in that country. The volunteers have provided 22 million consultations and assisted 55,000 births.

He went on to state that 37,000 Cubans, including 18,000 doctors, are at present working in 79 countries in the area of public health, and that the number of patients who have had their sight restored through Operation Miracle Mission in thirty-two countries is fast approaching a million.

As part of Cuba's contribution to helping students with few resources, Pérez Roque said that there are now 30,000 scholarship students from 121 countries in Cuba, while 45,000 from the Third World have already graduated. He also stated that Cuba's support for world literacy efforts with the "Yes, I can do it" method had facilitated 2.7 million people in 22 countries in learning to read and write.

For these reasons, and for other human rights enjoyed, "Cubans can celebrate this day with their heads held high," he declared.

UN praises Cuba's ability to feed people Jean Ziegler, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, has stated that the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States on Cuba particularly affects the Cuban people's right to food. Ziegler spent eleven days in Cuba on a fact-finding mission, meeting senior officials, farmers, state managers and Cubans waiting in queues for food allotted by ration cards.

"We haven't seen even one



● Felipe Pérez Roque Cuban Minister for Foreign Relations

malnourished person"—a rare feat in much of poverty-stricken Latin America—Ziegler said. "The right to be fed is the priority, without a doubt."

Cuba is one of thirty-two countries that include the "right to food" in their constitutions, and fewer still meet pledges to actually provide food to all their citizens. Despite a 46-year blockade by the United States, Cuba has always found ways to ensure that its population does not go hungry. "Cuba always invents an answer," he remarked.

Ziegler said that the coercive US measure determines that Cuba's development takes place in a context, like no other country, of very difficult conditions for affirming its independence and sovereignty and protecting all its citizens. He also said that the actual provision of food to the entire population was an expression of Cuba's adherence to the universal mechanisms of non-discriminatory and non-selective human rights, and an example of its willingness to co-operate with the new Human Rights Council, to which Cuba was elected with more than two-thirds of the vote.

The Cuban Minister for Foreign Relations, Felipe Pérez Roque, said that Cuba was disposed to receiving other UN special rapporteurs as long as it continued to receive "equal and respectful treatment."

The Propaganda War

American newspapers call for end to “embargo,” but . . .

Increasing numbers of American newspapers are now calling for an end to the “embargo” against Cuba; but there’s a catch. They are not calling for an end to the blockade because it is wrong: they are calling for an end to the blockade because it has “not worked.” By “not working” they mean that the “embargo” has not brought about the collapse of the Cuban government.



There is never a mention of the damage the blockade causes to Cuba: no mention of the human rights infringements that the blockade causes; no mention of the hardships caused to the Cuban people; and no mention of the infringements of international law involved. The only regret expressed is that any or all of these methods have not worked.

Once in a while the Associated Press makes reference to the UN General Assembly vote against the US blockade, and the story is then published in major

American newspapers. However, again they whinge that no other countries support the “embargo” because it does not work or is regarded as an outdated Cold War mechanism. There is no appreciation or understanding that perhaps other countries do not support the “embargo” because it is wrong. The *Dallas Morning News*, for instance, thinks that the way to do it is to kill the Cubans with kindness, “by flooding it with American goods and dollars.” Free trade—that’s the way to go! “Instead of inspiring Cubans to rise up,” the *Dallas Morning News* proclaims, “unilateral sanctions have made them weak, hungry and miserable.”

How those weak, hungry and miserable Cubans have stood up to and survived the unwanted and unwarranted attentions of their powerful neighbour is not explained. In any event, the way to sort out these stubborn, weak, hungry and miserable Cubans is to “flood Cubans with free trade.” This assertion is backed up by evidence: Mexico.

According to the *Dallas Morning News* and Associated Press, “Mexico is a good example of the effect such an approach can have. Until the mid-1990s, Mexico was nicknamed the ‘perfect dictatorship.’ For seven decades, one party, the PRI, monopolized control of all levels of government, labor unions and nationalized industries. Corruption abounded. In 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement forced Mexico to open its economy. American goods flooded in, industry privatized and democracy flourished. Within three years, the PRI lost control of Congress. In 2000, it lost the presidency.”

There you have it: the North American Free Trade Agreement will save the day, and all will be well. You would think it was the Lone Ranger they were writing about. Somebody should tell the *Dallas Morning News* and Associated Press that the North American Free Trade Agreement is dead. It has been rejected all over Latin America; and one of the reasons for its demise is precisely because of what happened in Mexico.

Asylum from asylum

As part of the continuing propaganda campaign against Cuba, the United States arranged to send some Cuban “refugees” to a client state, the Czech Republic, where they would receive “political asylum.”

Ten Cubans from three families were allocated three apartments in Prague, and it was intended that they would be pawns in the propaganda game. However, they would speak to journalists only by telephone and declined to discuss the cause of their request for “political asylum.”

The propaganda exercise then took a turn for the worse. Vladislav Dykast from the City Hall in Prague was left to explain what happened next. “The Cubans did not stay in Prague for long. Two families disappeared after three weeks, the third family after a month.” He concluded that “they may have viewed the Czech Republic as a transit country for reaching any of the western European states.” Game over.

Anyone watching?

Scott MacFarlane, reporting for Channel 6 News in Washington, was shocked to discover that while the US government is slashing health and welfare budgets, tens of millions of tax dollars are being spent each year on putting on a television programme.

“On a back road, which doesn’t appear on maps, Channel 6 News found a stark-looking fortress. A chain-link fence surrounds the outside. The windows are covered. The US government is putting on a TV show—one that not everyone likes. Its called *TV Martí*. There’s also *Radio Martí*. Taxpayers are paying for funded broadcasts in Cuba. They are paying for the lights, the cameras and the action.”

MacFarlane went on to expose the fact that “they work with state-of-the-art equipment and in some cases brand-new digital radio and TV equipment. It costs about \$27 million a year to operate TV and Radio Martí.

“But there’s one big catch: they’re not



sure anyone’s watching.”

There are two major problems: the Cuban government jams the illegal broadcasts; and even when the signals manage to get through, nobody is paying any attention.

“It has a declining audience . . .” said Larry Birns of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, “and it just doesn’t work. It’s such blatant propaganda that people understand that this just isn’t reality.”

Adding an unintentional touch of humour to the report, Alberto Mascaro of the Office of Cuba Broadcasting said that “they [the Cuban authorities] are truly scared of what we do.”

In case you’re confused, the “Office of Cuba Broadcasting” operates from a stark-looking fortress behind a chain-link fence on an unmarked road somewhere . . . in the United States of America.

A world of solidarity

There are almost two thousand organisations in solidarity with Cuba around the world, according to Pedro Olmedo, head of the Europe Department at the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP). He was speaking during a farewell ceremony for the members of the 48th contingent of the Northern European Work and Solidarity Brigade, comprising 150 people from eleven European countries (including Ireland), who spent three weeks in Cuba.

Olmedo noted that since its very creation in 1970 this brigade has supported the



Cuban Revolution and has accompanied Cuba in its struggle against the US economic blockade. Referring to the worldwide solidarity movement, Olmedo said that one of the main tasks of these groups is to fight for the release of the five Cuban anti-terrorist fighters who remain unjustly imprisoned in the United States. In this regard, brigade members agreed to send letters of support to Fernando González, René González, Antonio Guerrero, Gerardo Hernández, and Ramón Labañino—internationally known as the Cuban Five—who were arrested more than nine years ago for infiltrating anti-Cuba terrorist organisations in Florida. Brigadistas will also write to the US government denouncing this injustice and demanding the release of the Cuban Five.

Record vote condemns blockade

In October 2007 the United Nations General Assembly again expressed its opposition to the blockade maintained against Cuba for almost half a century by the United States. A resolution calling for the end of the economic, commercial and financial blockade was supported by 184 countries, gaining one more vote over the previous year (Nicaragua). The only votes against the resolution came from the United States, Israel, Palau, and the Marshall Islands. There was one abstention.

Cuba condemns Israeli aggression against Palestine
Cuba has condemned the increasing Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and has called for the immediate end to its blockade of the Gaza Strip.

The Cuban Ministry of Foreign Relations described Israel's actions as inadmissible, criminal and inhumane and called on the international community to urge Israel to respect the Palestinians' inalienable rights. The statement asked for international support in establishing an independent and sovereign state, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the return of all Arab territories that have been illegally occupied for more than forty years. "This is the only way to attain just and lasting peace among the peoples of the region," the statement said.

Cutting off the electricity supply and food to 1½ million Palestinians, and other hostile measures taken by Israel, are flagrant violations of international law and of the Geneva Convention of 1949. Such actions seek to bring down the Palestinians by hunger and thirst, the statement declared.

The Non-Aligned Movement condemned Israel's aggressions at an extraordinary meeting of the UN Security Council summoned by the Non-Aligned Movement, the League of Arab States, and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

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WHO SAID THAT?

● "Both of them feel the sacred duty of demanding 'a democratic government in Cuba.'"

Fidel Castro, on the positions of Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama

● "Sovereignty is non-negotiable."

Fidel Castro, addressing George W. Bush

● "Cubans can celebrate this day with their heads held high."

Felipe Pérez Roque, Cuban Minister of Foreign Relations, on International Human Rights Day

● "Latin America is waking up, and no one can stop it."

Hugo Chávez, President of Venezuela

● "Yes, like it or not, the George W. Bush government has won itself without a doubt the dirty name of torturer."

Cuban News Agency (AIN)

● "It may not be a shock to find that the Illinois senator, who vows to change the way Washington works, plans no such change in how Washington works on Cuba."

Steve Chapman, syndicated columnist in the *Washington Times*, on Barack Obama

● "To decide whether to pump food by-products into the fuel tanks of 800,000 US automobiles or to make them more accessible to over three billion human stomachs constitutes a problem that many governments are not analysing seriously or rationally."

Cuban News Agency (AIN)

● "Separated, we remain divided and condemned to misery, backwardness, colonialism, and dependence."

Hugo Chávez, calling for unity between the countries of Latin America.

● "To my dearest compatriots, who have recently honored me so much by electing me a member of the Parliament where so many agreements should be adopted of utmost importance to the destiny of our Revolution, I am saying that I will neither aspire to nor accept, I repeat, I will neither aspire to nor accept the positions of President of the State Council and Commander in Chief. My elemental duty is not to hold on to positions and less to obstruct the path of younger people."

Fidel Castro in a statement published in *Granma*.

● "This is not my farewell to you."

Fidel Castro declaring that he will continue his revolutionary work.