

Cuba and the Miami Five Injustice

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The annual candlelit vigil last week on December 3 outside the US embassy in Grosvenor Square, central London, to protest against the imprisonment of five Cuban citizens was a symbolic act of solidarity with those individuals who were accused of spying in Miami by the US administration in 1998. Two of the original five have recently been released but three remain incarcerated — Ramon Salazar, Antonio Guerrero and Gerardo Hernandez.

Similar vigils took place around the world to demonstrate solidarity with the innocent Cuban men falsely incarcerated as spies.

In the 1960s and '70s attacks against Cuba by US-based counter-revolutionary exile groups such as Co-ordination of Revolutionary Organisations (CORU), and sinister shadowy outfits such as Alpha 66 and Omega 7, had succeeded in causing significant damage.

In a 2001 report to the United Nations, the Cuban government catalogued 3,478 deaths as a result of terrorism, "aggression," acts of piracy and other actions instigated by the US.

The events cited span the course of four decades and included attacks such as the bombing of Cubana Flight 455 by men trained by the Central Intelligence Agency, the CIA-supported Bay of Pigs invasion, and the "war against the bandits" between the government and anti-communist rebels in the Escambray Mountains.

As a result the Cuban government had long sought to combat these groups and in 2001 Havana admitted the five were intelligence operatives trying to gather details of counter-revolutionary activists and plans.

But the charges against them wrongly implied that they were themselves plotting terrorist actions against US targets.

This has all been detailed in an International Commission of Inquiry, published in September by three respected

senior judges who provide compelling arguments for the men's release.

US president Jimmy Carter's national security adviser for Latin America Robert Pastor is on record as stating: "Holding a trial for five Cuban intelligence agents in Miami is about as fair as a trial for an Israeli intelligence agent in Tehran.

"You'd need a lot more than a good lawyer to be taken seriously."

In London, the inquiry report was published at the House of Commons by Jeremy Corbyn MP and Baroness Angela Smith, attracting supporters from the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, foreign diplomats, parliamentarians, celebrities and lawyers.

A special United Nations human rights working group in 2005 noted the circumstances in which the trial took place and, from the nature of the charges and the harsh sentences handed down to the accused, the trial did not take place in the climate of objectivity and impartiality that is required in order to conform to the standards of a fair trial as defined in Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which the US is a party.

Last week the United Nations general assembly completed yet another annual ritual when it declared that the US-imposed economic embargo against Cuba should be removed. The general assembly has condemned the embargo as a violation of international law every year since 1992.

Israel is the only country that routinely joins the US in voting against the annual resolution to remove the embargo as a violation of international law.

It is not very hard to understand why successive US administrations have maintained such a hostile political and economic stance towards Cuba.

After the Cuban revolution in 1959 US economic assets were nationalised and brought under democratic control for the wellbeing of Cuban citizens rather than to export goods and money to US companies.

The humiliation of the Bay of Pigs fiasco in 1962 when CIA-trained counter-revolutionaries invaded Cuba but were heavily defeated harmed Washington's collective ego and embarrassed the Kennedy government, already faced with defeat in Vietnam by communist military success.

The Cuban missile crisis in 1963 further hardened US opinion against Cuba's revolutionary government, strenuously avoiding charges of hypocrisy when it was revealed that the US had previously stationed nuclear weapons right next to the Soviet Union in western Europe and the Pacific.

In June 2011, former Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern spoke out against the embargo before visiting Cuba, saying: "It's a stupid policy. There's no reason why we can't be friends with the Cubans, and vice-versa. A lot of them have relatives in the United States and some Americans have relatives in Cuba, so we should have freedom of travel ... We seem to think it's safe to open the door to a billion communists in China but for some reason we're scared to death of the Cubans."

Over the past 55 years the economic blockade against Cuba has been estimated to have cost over \$100 billion.

President Barack Obama recently extended the application of the Trading with the Enemy Act to Cuba. This law was enacted in 1917 as the US prepared to enter World War I. It gives the US president authority to prohibit, limit or regulate trade with hostile countries in times of war.

It is the statutory foundation on which the entire range of US sanctions toward Cuba rests.

The blockade has held back the development of a tiny Caribbean country in terms of agriculture, industry, transport, exports and imports, forcing Cuba to trade via third party countries at punitive prices and enabling the US administration to impose huge fines on companies and international banks which facilitate trade with Cuba.

Yet despite all this pressure Cuba has an unparalleled record in leading pioneering advances in biotechnology, medicine, healthcare and education.

Cuba has an infant mortality rate lower than the US and higher levels of literacy.

Cuba has a proud history of supporting anti-capitalist struggles in Africa and Latin America with practical help.

Cuba recently was among the first countries to send doctors to west Africa in response to the Ebola outbreak.

The initial US response was to send combat troops to secure US financial assets.

It is clear that successive US administrations are determined to try to thwart communist Cuba because it is a symbol of communist success, governing on behalf of the people rather than big business interests and investing in economic, health and social progress for the majority rather than the minority.

It is a dangerous example for the US neoliberal right, which is frightened that progressive ideas will threaten its ruling minority elite.

While the US punishes such egalitarian principles, it has happily traded with and armed Latin American military dictatorships, feudal monarchies in the Middle East, supported apartheid in South Africa, illegally invaded Iraq and has been defeated by the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Yet throughout the past 55 years of suffering economic hardship Cuba has remained true to Fidel Castro's revolutionary principles, maintained its sovereign integrity and served as an example of humanitarian action, dispatching medical teams to developed and developing countries struck by catastrophe caused by natural disasters such as epidemics, earthquakes, flooding or extreme weather.
