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CUBA'S PRE-EXISTING CONDITION

José Azel

Last month, the Cuban government said it planned to fire 500,000 state employees, and perhaps over 1 million, saying “our state cannot and should not continue supporting... state entities with inflated payrolls, losses that damage the economy, are counterproductive, generate bad habits, and deform the workers’ conduct.”

Some heralded the announcement as a long-awaited sign that Havana under Gen. Raúl Castro is finally moving towards a market economy, others voiced substantial scepticism, and Marxists denounced it as a betrayal of communist orthodoxy. So, where is Cuba headed?

Most likely, nowhere fast. Far from being a hopeful indication that Raúl is serious about economic reform, the abrupt layoffs reveal a government that is simply desperate to make ends meet. And they offer yet more evidence that Cuba, one of the last countries in the world to cling to Joseph Stalin’s bankrupt ideology, is not interested in joining – or, to be charitable, does not know how to join – the globalized, 21st-century world.

Ironically, the official announcement of the firings was made by the Cuban Workers Union – the labor union controlled by the Communist

In Cuba, a state permit is required even to shine shoes – along with 178 other private economic activities that include mostly individual service activities from baby-sitting to washing clothes.

Party. Anywhere but in repressive totalitarian regimes, the dismissal of 10 percent of all government workers would have been met with massive protests. But this is Cuba, where even though about 85 percent of the workforce of 5 million

is employed by the state, there was nary a peep on the streets.

The announcement, couched in typical Orwellian doublespeak, raises more questions than it answers. “It is necessary to revitalize the socialist principle of distribution and pay to each according to the quantity and quality of their work,” it read, a blundering contradictory attempt to tie the layoffs to Karl Marx’s socialist maxim, “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.” The government also said it would grant permits for those fired to seek to make a living “outside the state sector” as if it is unspeakable to talk of a private sector.

In Cuba, a state permit is required even to shine shoes – along with 178 other private economic activities that include mostly individual service activities from baby-sitting to washing clothes. It is also unclear exactly how those selected for dismissal will be chosen; seniority, patronage, friendship, ideological purity, or some form of capitalist or socialist merit? Will race or gender play a role in these massive firings? Will the dismissals

EDITORIAL

It has been an eventful six months in Cuba. Hundreds of thousands of Cubans are facing the reality that their guaranteed lifetime employment is likely coming to an end if the planned economic reforms move forward. Tens of political prisoners, including the majority of the remaining “75” prisoners of conscience from the Black Spring, have been released – though almost all of them into exile. Yet, even with these major developments, Cuba must be seen for what it is – an authoritarian state desperately looking to jumpstart its failing economy.

In this issue, we have three essays looking at the challenges that the Castro regime and its Soviet style institutions are going to face before its economy can blossom. Jose Azel examines the ways in which Cubans gerontocracy has led it to a dead end by continuing to embrace a Stalinist political order. Oscar Espinosa Chepe take a look at the risks and opportunities that this massive overhaul of the Cuban economy represents, especially since the Cuban government has made promises – such as full employment – that it knows it can no longer keep and has demonized anything entrepreneurial for decades. Lastly, Carlos Alberto Montaner reminds us all that the motivations behind all of this is essentially more political than economic, since it is more designed to help prevent the collapse of the communist system rather than transition towards democracy.

The other major development has been the largest release of prisoners in decades, but like the raft of economic reforms this is hardly the first time that the Castro regime done this. The regime freed almost 4,000 political prisoners in 1978, an unknown number during the Mariel boat lift in 1980 and over 300 at the request of Pope John Paul II in 1998. In each case, the regime’s decisions were more driven by strategic reasons than pangs of conscience. The current releases, which were brokered by the Catholic Church, have more to do with the international condemnation that followed the death of Orlando Zapata Tamayo in February 2010 and the current need for direct foreign investment. However, it is also a result of Cuban dissidents keeping the regime’s feet to the fire by continuing to push for the immediate release of all political prisoners, democratic reforms and respect for basic human rights. One in particular, Guillermo Fariñas, who underwent a 134 day hunger strike that nearly killed him, was recognized by the European Parliament by being honored with the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in October. We are happy to publish an interview that with Fariñas gave days after he won this award with Reporters Without Borders.

In addition to these two major story lines, the latest issue looks at the current state of religious freedom on the island as reported by Christian Solidarity Worldwide. A pair of travel logs from recent travelers that went to Cuba to get an idea of how things really are on the ground. And People in Need’s latest semi-annual human rights report. Each article highlights ways in which Cuba still has a long way to go to improve its human rights record and to be genuinely considered to be on a new path.

On a personal note, I want to thank all of the people that I have worked with over the last three years as the editor of the Cuba Europe Dialogues, since this will be the last issue for me. I hope that the readers have learned as much as I have from the dissidents, independent journalists and analysts that have appeared in these pages. The experience has been a pleasure and I look forward to reading future issues that will continue to cover Cuba’s movement towards a freer and more democratic future.

Scott Hudson
Editor of Cuba – Europe Dialogues

disproportionately target those who receive remittances from abroad? Perhaps more important, how are those fired supposed to find jobs? In an economy with developed private competitive markets, employees dismissed from one firm have a fighting chance of securing employment in another. But in Cuba's economic system, the government controls most economic activity. There is no private sector to absorb the unemployed. Where will they find employment?

Perhaps most bizarre is that the dismissal measure seems to assume that everyone is temperamentally suited to be an entrepreneur and make a living in fields that might be far from his or her work experience and professional training. The Cuban government is betting on the resourcefulness and entrepreneurship of the Cuban people to somehow make up for the inefficiencies of the state sector and do so without access to cash, credit, raw materials, equipment, technology or any of the inputs necessary to produce goods and services. Ironically, the most likely source for these inputs will be the Cuban diaspora, which will be eager to help its unemployed relatives and friends. Manuel Orozco, a remittances expert at the Washington-based think tank Inter-American Dialogue, underlines that, telling *Reuters*, "Liberalizing the economy could lead to 10 percent of Cubans receiving remittances to invest in small businesses."

This could be a motivation for the Cuban government to disproportionately target remittance-receiving workers for dismissal. Cubans will somehow make do, but in terms of actual economic development, these measures will not work; they are not designed to. Allowing Cubans to babysit or make paper flowers for sale to tourists are not serious economic development measures. But just in case, hoping to capitalize on any addi-

tional economic production, the government is ready to collect onerous taxes of 25 percent for social security and up to 40 percent on income depending on the economic activity (e.g., food production will be taxed at 40 percent, artisans at 30 percent, etc.).

The government is projecting a 400 percent increase in tax revenues, presumably to be collected from the fired employees turned entrepreneurs. More likely, Cubans will find ways to avoid paying taxes by relying on the black market for these economic activities. Cuban economist and dissident Oscar Espinosa Chepe writes from Havana of the impact of Cuba's economic situation on civil society: Cuban children, he tells us, grow up witnessing how their parents, obligated by circumstances, live by theft and illegality.

Because Cubans cannot live by the results of their legitimate labors and work has ceased to be the principal source of one's livelihood, a survival ethic has evolved that justifies everything. One lesson to be learned from the transitions in the former Soviet bloc is that the success of reforms hinges on placing individual freedoms and empowerment front and center. In the decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the most successful transitioning countries were those that embraced political rights and civil liberties decisively: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland, Slovenia, East Germany, and Hungary. This is not where Cuba is headed with its "actualization of socialism."

The main reason is Cuba's Stalinist political order, which remains unchanged by this announcement. In a system that denies basic freedoms, society is debilitated and corrupted by a miasma of fear. For five decades, fear has been an integral part of the everyday Cuban existence. This fear must

be conquered if any national project of transition is to stand a chance of success.

The Cuban penal code that is used to suppress dissent defines disobedience, disrespect, illicit association, possession of enemy propaganda and socially dangerous, and more as "crimes against socialist morality." In Cuba, the crime of "social dangerousness" permits the government to imprison people for activities they may commit in the future. Until this totalitarian document is reformed or wiped away, expect little to change.

Yet, some Cuba observers characterize Raúl Castro as a more pragmatic leader than his older brother. And though this might be the case in some aspects of governance, it is not a pragmatism that will lead him to embrace policy changes that may jeopardize his hold on power. More likely, this pragmatism that will induce him to formulate policies designed to perpetuate power. When Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev visited Cuba in 1989, Fidel Castro reportedly warned him "if you open a window [to democracy] you will lose all power." Even after his brother's passing, Raúl is unlikely to open the window.

There is another model that Cuban leaders ought to know well: Spain's rapid transformation in the 1970s from a dictatorship led by another aging tyrant, Francisco Franco, to a vibrant democracy that has posted some of the most impressive growth numbers of the last few decades. The ideal Cuban transition would look a lot like Spain's, though Cuba most likely doesn't have a strong enough civil society to pull it off.

Another, less hopeful parallel is that Cuba goes the way of the Soviet gerontocracy epitomized by Leonid Brezhnev, who was barely functional before

his death in 1982. His successor Yuri Andropov, who was 68 years old, died two years later. He was, in turn, succeeded by the also elderly Konstantin Chernenko, who died a year after and was succeeded by Gorbachev. Compare this progression to Cuba: Fidel Castro is 84 years old and in poor health, Raúl is 79, and his supposed successor, José Ramón Machado Ventura, will turn 80 this month.

A new generation of Cuban leaders will eventually assume power. To be sure, they will likely favor continuity over radical change, but unlike the Castros, they might be receptive to democratic reform. These (likely military) officials will inherit not only a bankrupt economy, but also paralyzed, dysfunctional institutions, a discredited ideology, a disenchanting society, myriad social problems, and

more. Cuba will be close to meeting the technical definition of a failed state, one that can no longer reproduce the conditions necessary for its own existence.

The Castros' successors will become heirs to a dangerous, unstable situation. With questionable legitimacy and a repressive apparatus in disarray, they will have to confront significant internal and external opposition. Their options will be very limited.

They can stay the totalitarian course and face the potential unfolding of uncontrollable events, culminating in a Ceausescu-like bloodbath, as happened in Romania. Or they can choose to become leaders of a democratic political opening and confront more manageable political losses. It may take the death of both Castros for this to

pass, but they will likely conclude that, for them, the safer and more prosperous life is the latter.

For now, the firings only highlight the dismal state of the Cuban economic model, perhaps best depicted by the old Soviet joke: "We pretend to work and they pretend to pay us." The regime in Havana is peddling a similar story today: They will pretend to reform, expecting the world will pretend to believe it. Let us hope nobody in Washington is buying.

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Life on the Street

REORGANIZATION OF THE JOB SECTOR: OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS IN CUBA

Oscar Espinosa Chepe

With the dramatically worsening economic situation in Cuba and the accumulation of all types of problems accumulating, the Cuban government has felt obliged to undertake profound set of major transformations, which on the one hand present an opportunity to get out of the crisis, but on the other hand pose great risks in case the measures are not taken in a coherent and transparent manner.

The government has announced the laying off of 1.3 million employees in state-run organizations, which comes to around 25 percent of the active labor force. The process has begun with plans for 500 000 people to be dismissed by the end of the first trimester of 2011. At the same time, the government has announced the launching of a program which will provide jobs to the citizens who are "available for work". However, only partial information has been released so far. Thus, various job enhancing opportunities will be created such as the possibility of renting out of land in usufruct, forming cooperatives or opening one's own business – with the possibility to hire manual labor – which will do away with the

taboos and dogmas that have been obstructing the national development for decades.

This broad restructuring of the job sector has long been a critical necessity for the economy. It is impossible to organize job centers that are up to their eyes with office employees and are therefore nonproductive, inefficient, lacking discipline and whose workers are paid so little that they cannot make a living on it, as even Raúl Castro has admitted. These factors, together with an immense lack of control, could bring about corruption and crime.

The discharging of so many people, along with the feelings of insecurity this situation produces, will also have an impact on the families of affected persons, which will in turn lead to creating a very sensitive atmosphere in the whole society. Since the reorganization has already gone through its first stage, it can be foreseen that such steps will strongly, directly or indirectly, affect millions of Cuban citizens.

On the political level, this inevitable, though risky, step only underscores the unfeasibility of the system that

has been steering Cuba towards a disaster; and highlights the reality that has been repeatedly adverted to by peace-minded citizens, by those who were not listened to and instead were fiercely oppressed, labeled as foreign agents, put to prisons with subhuman conditions with sentences stretching over the whole decades.

At the same time, this situation, with so many workers being dismissed, only highlights the falsity of the government's propaganda boasting over the country's full employment and its supposedly paradise-like situation regarding the job market. This lie will prove to be even more unsustainable given the current heavy toll of the financial crisis.

Sadly, this process, painful for the whole society, has still numerous difficulties to confront. To start with, the president announced structural and conceptual changes on 26 July 2007. However, not much has happened since. In the same vein, no adequate preparative measures have been taken that would enable the citizens to affront radical lay-offs and that would, at the same time, give them a guarantee of certain securities.

For instance, since the system of economic institutions was destroyed in 1959 and up to this date, no legal body has been established that would be in charge of running the restructuring of the job sector. Institutional there should have been steps taken that expanded the decision powers of the lower-level administration and gradually reducing the still existing centralized system. The centralized bodies should have been reduced decidedly in size and should have transferred their prerogatives to regional bodies, municipalities and companies. Some ministries and public administration positions should have been abolished or merged long ago – a case in point is the ministry of sugar whose existence stopped making sense long ago – or concentrated into just one ministry, as would be the case of various people who are currently in charge of the country's economy, each of them holding one particular position whose responsibilities should be merged with the responsibilities of other positions. This would speed up processes of the country's administration and diminish both the operational costs and harm caused by bureaucratic procedures.

In the same vein, the market continues to be enormously fragmented. It is surprising to see various prices being charged for the same product and while the unfortunate double currency is still in use. In addition to these, the government has prepared no conditions to create the very much needed wholesale market to supply entrepreneurs, contractors and other people that have their own business; the result of which is that the economy continues to work largely under the centralized system, an exasperating burden of bureaucracy, which poses absurd setbacks and prohibitions. If this scenario continues to be in existence, the restructuring will be difficult to carry out.

At the same time, though, people are distrustful of the announced liberalization due to several terrible experiences they have been through. The Revolutionary Offensive in 1968 is still vivid in people's memories, as is the crushing of small private initiatives, which was triggered by Raúl Castro himself and which only ended in 1985 with the Politics of Rectification of Errors and Negative Tendencies. Other things that are hard for ordinary Cubans to forget are "those notions that condemned entrepreneurial work almost to extinction and stigmatized those who decided to legally start their own businesses in the 1990s", as the newspaper *Granma* edition highlighted on September 24th.

It cannot be concealed that over the last 50 years, the official propaganda, which has been steered by the most conservative sectors of the government, saved their worst insults at people with entrepreneurial interests by labeling them as ambitious and antisocial. Various humble steps of liberalization and opening of markets ended up being drastically repressed; a sad case in point is the Ministry of Interior's "Operación Pitirre en el Alambre (Operation Bird-on-a-Wire)".

Many Cubans are aware of the fact that people holding the most important positions within both the government and the Communist party are advocating for more and more changes and transformational processes. They do so, though, with incoherencies, vacillations and fears. However, it is also no secret that the conservative members of these authorities are unwilling to leave behind their old practices since they fear they might lose power and the privileges that they and their families have enjoyed for so long.

When speaking of production cooperatives and entities with renting rights, many people assume that what is being talked about are the Basic Units

of Cooperated Production and Cooperatives of Agricultural Production, which are, however, totally controlled by the state administration, have barely any decision making power, are complete disasters, are unproductive and are presently bottomless pits for the resources of the nation.

Another striking example is giving land in usufruct. After several years, only 46% out of the million of hectares of the land given in usufruct are yielding produce, a fact which can be attributed to a large extent to the excessive bureaucratic procedures whose aim is to maintain control over the farmers. If the new production methods are to work, they cannot be controlled from above. The cooperatives should be formed on a voluntary basis, without a "straight jacket", without restraints so that the cooperative members can perform their work relying on their own accomplishments and without having to deal with political interferences.

Also, what needs to be adjusted is the tax system so that it would not drown the new entrepreneurs. Professor Carmelo Mesa Lago has suggested that it would be necessary to start with lower taxes that could later on be adjusted. Cuba does not have a tax tradition since the government destroyed it and it needs to be brought back. On top of this, the new entrepreneurs will have to buy their supplies at high prices in retail markets or other sources. If the taxes are very high, a lot of people might feel discouraged or could go bankrupt very quickly. Unless there is a wholesale market and the tax system is well established, the above mentioned recommendation should be followed.

Besides, the authorities have not prepared a simple accounting system that would serve as a coordinating base for the tax system, although a need for this could have been foreseen. If this issue is not approached sensibly, there

is a danger that a good number of entrepreneurs will go for the option of doing business outside the tax system so that they do not feel asphyxiated by high retail prices and excessive taxes. The task to provide jobs to so many people will never be easy. This is even more underscored if we impose erroneous policies that can lead to higher rates of unemployment and inflation, aspects that under the Cuban conditions, already affected by a long period of abandonment and frustration felt by asphyxiated Cubans, could trigger a series of social upheavals with their unpleasant consequences.

What is also worrying is the question of how suitable the implemented measures are. In the tourist industry and in the area of hiring employees for work in foreign companies, the prerogative has continued to be subjugated by the state and the party. This practice should be banished completely and replaced by an emphasis on the capaci-

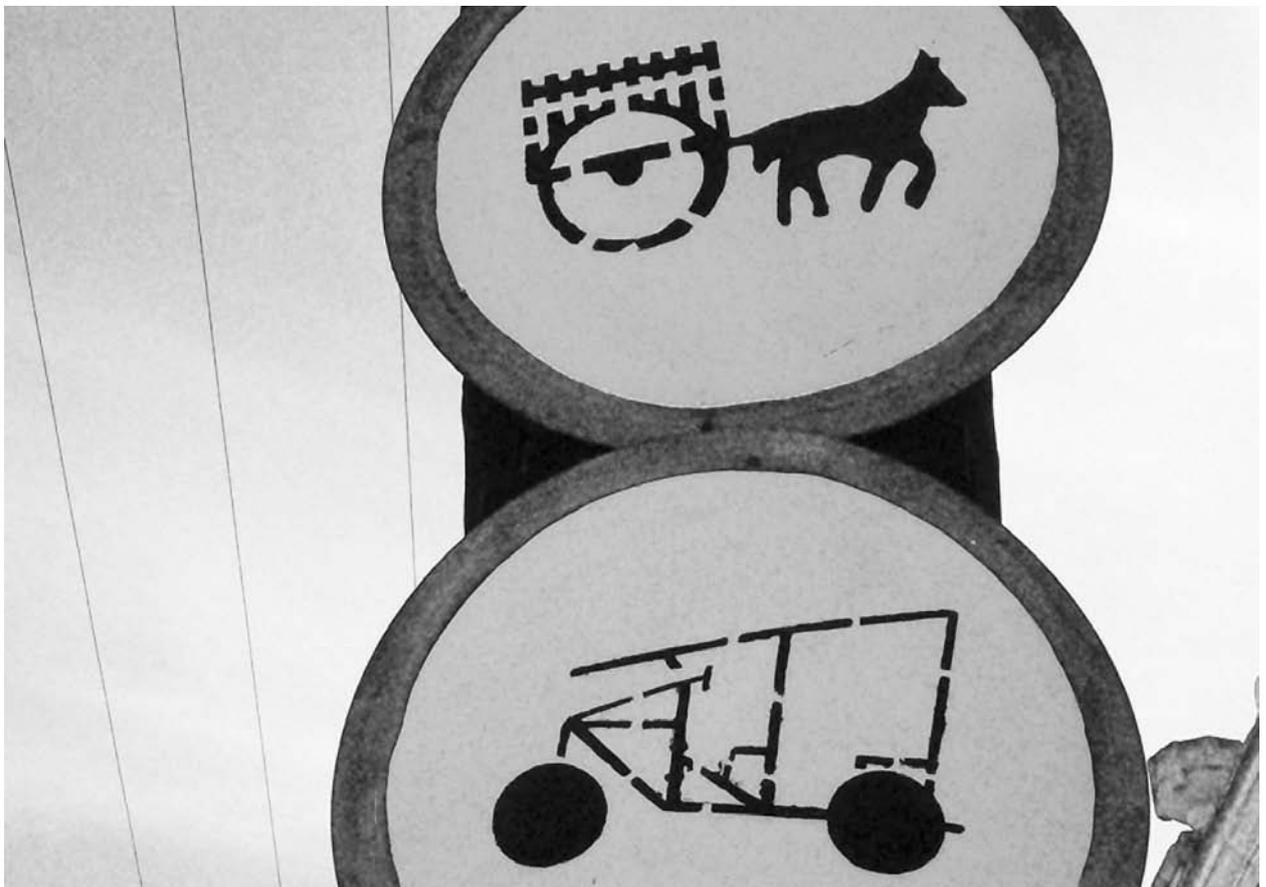
ties and productivity of each individual. It is no secret that unions are completely controlled by the government. Therefore, the workers should make an effort to make sure that the process is carried out as transparently and ethically as possible. If this is not the case, there is a danger that feelings of anger, which the massive lay-offs have already brought about, might grow.

This process is inevitable if the disorder in the labor sector is to end. It will always be very complex and painful. It is taking place during a time of massive economic difficulties; the state lacks even the financial capacity to return a part of funds that foreign companies have deposited in banks. There are also rumors that important business people were able to avoid paying insurance on credit and export. The direction the economy is taking is worrisome. Based on the Cuban National Statistics Office findings, investment in 2009 fell by 15% and in the first tri-

mester 2010 dropped still by 14%; such a situation deepens the de-capitalization process, that began in the early 1990s, and highlights its contribution when it comes to destroying jobs and the impossibility of creating new ones in the pace that would be necessary.

As a result of all this, what this serious situation asks for is a very responsible approach and, mainly, common sense so that the intention of restructuring of the labor sector does not fail. Tendencies to control for political purposes must be done away with. These days there is no longer any place to speak about improving an economic, political and social system that is completely dysfunctional. Now it is time to carry out a series of radical transformations and to recognize the big mistakes that our leaders have made while running this country for decades.

Oscar Espinosa Chepe is an economist and an independent journalist



Signs of an Aging Economy

RAÚL CASTRO AND THE GENIE FROM THE LAMP

Carlos Alberto Montaner

There is a story circulating in Havana. On a roof of the Central Committee building Raúl Castro came across an old lamp. He rubbed and polished it and the classic genie popped up. "You can ask me for two wishes", the creature told him. "Shouldn't I get to make three wishes?" asked Raúl a bit surprised. "The situation is very bad," the genie replied "and we have had to reduce the number". "All right then," said Raúl "turn the Hotel Nacional into a gold building. I'll sell it and we'll clear up all of our debts". "Don't be stupid, Raúl," said the genie "that would be a very bad idea – This is impossible. I am a genie, not a magician". And he added: "When have you seen a building turned into gold? Ask me for the second and last thing!" Raúl sighed, thought for a little while and then said: "What I want you to do something about Cuban Communism so that it would be an efficient and productive system and can overcome the crisis." The genie stared at him for a while and then said with resignation: "Ok, where is that building you want me to turn into gold?"

Raúl Castro is determined to turn Cuban Communism into an efficient and productive system. He does not share the genie's pessimism from the story. His reforms are not meant to introduce political and economic freedoms as the biggest dreamers hoped for, but to save and re-launch the centrally planned

economy. A system managed by the wise and well-intentioned Party officials and where the State predominantly owns the means of production, which are to be supplemented by cooperatives and a meager bunch of private business. These are, however, also subjected to general objectives defined by the State and fall under strict governmental control to make sure that the accumulation of the wealth is not excessive. In other words, it is the same monster, just imperceptibly mutated.

In order to achieve his plans, Raúl has issued a 32-page document called *Lineamientos de la política económica y social* (*Outline of the Economic and Social Politics*), which will be the focus of discussions until April 2011 when the 6th Congress of the Communist Party is to be held. Nothing looks at the underlying political system. There is a total lack of fundamental questioning of the dictatorial system that has been keeping Cubans in increasing misery for more than fifty years. The discussion is strictly limited to economy.

This was to be expected. Raúl is not an ideologue. Moreover, he does not view himself as a politician. He views himself as a manager, pragmatic, organized; someone who is capable of putting a work team together, assigning responsibilities, setting deadlines and uncompromisingly making sure tasks are tak-

en care of with a heavy hand. He has always considered his brother to be superior, a genius, who is more intelligent than himself, but chaotic, erratic, not very competent in selecting his subordinates and incapable of delineating long-term plans. He recognizes that if it had not been for Fidel there would never have been the revolution. However, he is also of the view, like many Cubans, that because of Fidel and his fits of anarchic insanities the revolution has been a disaster.

Raúl believes that he can sort out this disaster. He will be the great victor in the secret competition that he maintains with his brother. Throughout his life he has been the number two; enduring humiliations such as [his brother] being the Maximum Leader, while Raúl is sometimes quietly called the Minimal Leader, but this is his historic opportunity to win this intimate and painful battle and to show him that he is capable of winning exactly where the others failed stupendously. He aspires to ensure that the plain epitaphs of the media tomb where they surely will be buried one day will read: "Fidel Castro was the most intelligent and courageous one, who made the Communist Revolution possible. Raúl was the most sensible and organized one, who saved it and made it possible for it to remain after both of their deaths". This will be his victory.

Although the reform is to serve economic purposes, the mid and long-term objectives are of political nature. Raúl is aware of the fact that the governmental failure is of such a magnitude that the regime will struggle to survive when he and Fidel are not in charge. Already there is almost no one that believes in the system, since the system, as Fidel's slip hinted, "is not working". In order to be able to systematically transfer the authority within the party institutions and to avoid a post mortem collapse, it is necessary to legitimize the dominant class by making sure that people are provided with food, housing, drinkable water, infrastructure and a transportation system, electricity, clothes, health care, education and a little bit of entertainment.

Up until now, they have managed to survive thanks to the Soviet charity initially, and to Venezuelan support later on, but Hugo Chávez is unpredictable and could disappear tomorrow like the USSR did. The Cuban Commu-

nist system has to be self-sufficient, especially if the goal is to continue with the dynasty in power, leaving the leadership to Alejandro Castro Espín, the head of Cuban intelligence services, who is also the son and right hand man of Raúl.

Regardless, all this is just a fantasy. This reform of the productive apparatus is going to fail just like all of the other six reforms that preceded it and that the government has implemented over the course of more than fifty years. Raúl believes the system can be salvaged if only companies run by the State become efficient and productive. He is going to run them using Communist principles and evaluate them with capitalist principles. That is foolish. He wants the companies to always produce more while having less resources at their disposal, which is the essence of Capitalist production and which, over two years, will lead to a lay-off of a million three hundred thousand people, a quarter of the labor force. What he does not real-

ize, though, is that the original sin of the Communist model lies precisely in that the state ownership of the means of production and the existence of central planning power in hands of bureaucrats who make decisions, artificially set prices and quashed creativity and the entrepreneurial spirit of the society.

Raúl assumes that the Communist model is based on good ideas whose sad misfortune is that they just have been badly executed. He will die without being able to understand that the huge faults of the Communism in practice have been a natural consequence of the absurd ideas of Marx, Lenin and the like. He will be disappear without being able to understand the pessimism of the genie of the lamp.

Carlos Alberto Montaner is a journalist and writer, who has published more than 25 books on Cuba and democracy in Latin America. He helped to found the Cuban Liberal Union in 1990. This piece was originally published on his website www.firmaspress.com

GUILLERMO FARIÑAS: THE COUNTRY IS AT A CROSSROADS

Reporters Without Borders

Winner of the 2010 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, **Guillermo Fariñas** became a dissident in the 1990s and then an independent journalist. As such, he campaigned for Cubans to have unrestricted access to the Internet and went on a series of hunger strikes. The last of these, following fellow dissident Orlando Zapata Tamayo's death at the start of this

year, was to demand the release of all the ailing political prisoners.

As the victims of the Black Spring crackdown of March 2003 continue to be released from prison, Fariñas was interviewed by Reporters Without Borders about the prize and about what he thinks is going to happen in Cuba now.

What is your reaction to getting the Sakharov Prize?

I am committed to the cause of democracy in Cuba. I think I have an even greater commitment to my fellow independent journalists who are still in prison, my fellow independent journalists who are in exile, my fellow independent journalists who fight with me here on the streets of Cuba, and my fellow independent jour-

nalists who have died and who have not been able to see a democratic Cuba that tolerates an independent press.

I also have a commitment to all those men and women, wherever they are in the world, whose goodwill contributes in one way or another to Cuban democracy, thanks to their solidarity and their attention to what happens in Cuba.

I am proud because the first international prize I received was the Reporters Without Borders prize.

What is your analysis of the current situation in Cuba?

We are living through a very special moment in Cuba, but not a particularly special one for the Cuban government. A million people will soon be unemployed, out of four million workers. This is more than a quarter of the population, almost 30 per cent. There is a significant degree of discontent and anger among the Cuban population.

I have noticed for example that when I go to the hospital, people who never said hello to me out of fear now do say hello. Because they no longer have any work.

We think this is going to swell the ranks of the opposition despite the fact that the government is sending people to Europe in order to have fewer dissidents. As regards our work as journalists, we want to show this reality.

The government wants above all to make changes in the economic domain rather than at the political level. But there is such a degree of discontent about the government's mismanagement at the economic level and such a lack of credibility that there will be a social explosion if the government does not move towards a political relaxation.

Friends of mine I studied with who became doctors (while I became a psychologist), they used to limit them-

selves to greeting me when we were at the hospital. But now they all want to greet me. Everyone says hello to me in the street, even the president of the CDR [Committee for the Defense of the Revolution], a paramilitary organization.

There is real discontent about the massive unemployment that is coming in Cuba. The people have already been warned and know who is keeping their job and who is not. But nothing has been done yet.

But this is unquestionably a different historic and social moment which we journalists want to experience and show.

Currently there are nine of us and we all write articles. Now it is harder to get the information out because the political prisoners, who were our main sources of information, have gone to Spain and suddenly we are covering mainly social issues. As regards repression, there has not been so much of that as late. But yes, the economic situation is rather precarious. As for ourselves, we have not received any assistance for about five months. The economic situation is very tough.

How is your health after all the hunger strikes you have carried out?

I have two ailments troubling me at the same time. It is a situation that has accumulated.

I had gallstones during the hunger strike. From the moment the gall-bladder was affected, everything was paralyzed after 24 days and I had an emergency operation. They thought it was pancreatitis. They were a lot of hypotheses. It got worse. They had to do tests. I have been left with lasting effects. I have diarrhea whenever I eat. Automatically, every time I eat.

Fortunately, I recovered.

The other illness is there. It is a thrombosis that is a result of the hunger

strike. I have a thrombosis here and a thrombosis there.

The doctors say curing this should be done over a year and a half. You have to go slowly because if you do not, if it is done quickly – and there are drugs that can cure it more quickly – it could damage my heart and lungs, and that would not be helpful.

I was really very lucky because, for example, the doctor who looked after me during the hunger strike has been a family friend for years. He had gone to Venezuela but chance would have it that he came back then. And the doctor who operated on me had also by chance returned from Venezuela. We were friends. We had worked together, he, his brother and I, when I was working in public health. And State Security could not kill me or arrange to have me killed because the doctor on duty was a friend of mine.

Do you think independent journalists can have an influence on the situation in Cuba?

We have no Internet. We have no Internet connection. Most of the Cuban population does not have an Internet connection either.

But, for example, I have ten memory cards and everything we write, I give it to a university academic. And this academic circulates the memory cards throughout the university and people fill them up, they fill them up.

As a result, people are beginning to think, and that is important.

But thanks to universities that have Internet access, such as Havana University, when you travel by train or car or bus, suddenly people tell you, "I know you," or "I liked that article by you" or "I have it here." It is incredible.

Because technology undermines dictatorships.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN CUBA

Christian Solidarity Worldwide

In June 2010 it was made public that the Roman Catholic Church and the Cuban government had entered into a dialogue to free 52 political prisoners imprisoned during the Black Spring of 2003. While only 39 of the 52 have actually been released (and sent into forced exile) there has been a widespread perception outside of Cuba that this apparently improvement in the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Spanish government represents significant improvement in the area of religious liberty in Cuba. Despite the internationally covered establishment of a new seminary (erroneously reported in some news outlets as being the only seminary in Cuba) for Catholic priests in October, most religious leaders agree that religious freedom is at a twenty year low.

The Cuban government has always been a master of propaganda and the area of religion and religious freedom is no exception. Since the Revolution, the authorities have attempted, often successfully, to give the impression that privileges granted to one religious group, or even one particular part of a religious group, are indicative of widespread tolerance for religious activities. The last six months are no exception.

Repeated references to the Catholic Church in the international press as “The Cuban Church”, and the subsequent assumption that improvements for certain segments of the Catholic Church in Cuba are indicative of an improvement in the area of religious freedom as a whole are misleading and dangerous.

The Cuban government has always been a master of propaganda and the area of religion and religious freedom is no exception.

It is important to understand the complex religious panorama in Cuba. While it is often thought of as a “Catholic country”, the reality is far more complicated. According to the Catholic Church’s own figures, only 6% of the entire population is considered to be practicing Catholics. Around 11% of the population are practicing Protestants (the number groups together membership in both Cuban Council of Churches and non-CCC denominations

as well). In contrast around 80% of the population is thought to be involved to different degrees in Afro-Cuban religious practices.

Breaking down the numbers even further, it is also important to be aware that as is true in the worldwide Roman Catholic Church, the Cuban Catholic Church is also fragmented. Catholic leaders in Cuba have repeatedly emphasised to CSW that the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Cuban government is between the Church hierarchy, not the Catholic Church as a body, and the authorities. It is worthy reiterating that, without denigrating the progress that the hierarchy has achieved through this dialogue, they represent not only a small minority among religious believers within Cuba, but also just one segment of their own denomination.

Over the past six months, during this period of supposed improvement in religious liberty, culminating in the inauguration of the new Catholic Seminary, CSW has continued to receive consistent reports of serious religious liberty violations. In July religious leaders of various denominations told CSW that the situation had deteriorated dramatically over the past months and that levels of intimidation of reli-

gious leaders had not been so high in around twenty years. Pastor Omar Gude Perez, a leader in the Apostolic Movement, continues to serve a seven-year prison sentence on trumped up charges. Other leaders in the same religious group report consistent and serious violation of religious freedom including arbitrary detention, forced evictions and threatened church closures.

Seventy-year old Reverend Roberto Rodriguez, a respected inter-denominational Protestant leader, was taken from his home without warning in August by State Security agents and put on trial two days later, also on trumped up charges. While he was found not guilty, largely it is thought because of international attention on his case, he was still fined.

Reina Luisa Tamayo, the mother of Orlando Zapata Tamayo, was repeatedly blocked by government officials from attending Sunday morning Mass through the month of August.

A number of other human rights and democracy activists who also happen to be practicing Catholics, reported similar abuses.

Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet, one of the 52 prisoners supposed to be released as part of the agreement between the government and the Catholic Church, but who continues to languish in prison apparently because of his refusal to accept the condition of forced exile, put in a formal request in June for a religious visit by a leader of the Western Convention of Baptists. Despite widely reported announcements last year that the government would respect religious rights within the prisons, Dr. Biscet, and his Baptist pastor, have yet to receive any kind of response to his request for religious counsel.

Over the past six months, Pastor Mario Felix Leonart Barroso, a Baptist leader, has come under intense pressure from the authorities because he dared to give spiritual support to

Guillermo Farinas during his hunger strike earlier this year.

Over the past fifty years, the Cuban government has consistently attempted to manipulate religion and religious groups to promote an image abroad of religious freedom on the island. Because of the complexity and pluralistic religious panorama, the media and members of the international community have all too often accepted this propaganda at face value. Before any judgments are made as to whether or not religious freedom has improved on the island – the situation must be looked at carefully and closely. While people like Reverend Rodriguez, Dr. Biscet, Pastor Leonart Barroso, Reina Tamayo and Pastor Gude Perez continue to suffer grievous violations of their religious liberty, token gestures like the opening of a new seminary must not be interpreted as significant of any serious improvement in the government's attitude toward religious groups and individual believers.



Habana Libre 2010

WHAT DO THE MID-TERM ELECTION RESULTS MEAN FOR US CUBA POLICY?

Anya Landau French

Let's start with the obvious. With the Republican takeover of Congress, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen becomes the new Chairwoman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the authorizing committee with jurisdiction over most of Cuba-related legislation. This means not only that no engagement-oriented Cuba bills will move through that committee, and that very possibly, Ros-Lehtinen might well choose to move legislation through her committee that would tighten the embargo.

This doesn't mean Cuba reforms can't move in the House. Let's remember that Arizona Republican Congressman Jeff Flake was able to move various incremental reforms on appropriation bills under a Republican-controlled Congress, over the objections of the late Henry Hyde, a staunch embargo supporter who was Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in the early 2000's. He prevailed several times in earlier Congresses, but President Bush's repeated veto threats ensured the provisions disappeared in conference negotiations. Flake noted earlier this fall that he thinks many of the freshman conservatives who won their seats on a pro-freedom, anti-government platform will be hard pressed to vote against a measure that a) restores a basic freedom (travel) to

Americans, and b) eliminates needless government spending.

In the Senate, a staunchly pro-embargo Cuban American Republican, Marco Rubio of Florida, will join forces with his staunchly pro-embargo Cuban American Democratic colleague, Bob Menendez. The level of pro-embargo, anti-engagement speechifying, floor-side colleague arm-twisting and bipartisan sign-on letter-writing and hand-wringing will certainly amp up. And on the opposite side, it's still unclear who, if anyone, will fill the shoes of pro-reform and engagement Democrats Byron Dorgan and Chris Dodd, both of whom retire at the end of this session (not to mention Agriculture Committee Chair Blanche Lincoln, who just lost her reelection bid). Dorgan in particular is known to pursue amendments on the Senate floor when no one else will, and he's put considerable effort, alongside longtime allied Republican Mike Enzi, into their signature Freedom to Travel to Cuba bill, which boasts 40 Senate cosponsors and iffy prospects in the lame duck congressional work period ahead.

In the next Congress, there's certainly a chance that the vacuum will be filled by remaining and new leaders, like Finance Committee Chairman Max

Baucus, perhaps Democratic Whip Dick Durbin, and then of course incoming Republicans Jerry Moran and John Boozman, both of whom have fought for Cuba policy reforms in the House.

Vacuum or no vacuum in either chamber, Cuba policy isn't likely to be concretely different next year. Even if Ileana Ros-Lehtinen moves legislation through her committee and onto the floor (which has the same challenges that pro-reform Cuba bills face – who wants to use precious floor time up on a secondary foreign policy issue?) – it would still die in the Senate.

Today, there are more than 60 votes to move Cuba legislation through the Senate. The only thing standing in the way of a vote to dispense with a Menendez-driven filibuster of Cuba policy reforms has been a lack of will to run down the clock with bigger priorities always looming. Now that Byron Dorgan is retiring, he might just make a last effort on Cuba travel, in spite of the very substantial hurdles. Come January, my quick analysis of the votes – even without knowing where most of the incoming Members stand – is that there will still be more than fifty votes in favor of travel and agriculture trade reforms, far more than would be needed to stop any

effort to tighten the embargo. (Not to mention the obvious obstacle of moving such legislation through committees still controlled by various pro-engagement chairmen, or the usual hurdle of getting floor time for a 2nd tier foreign policy fight.)

So in legislative terms, not much really changes, other than that there is likely to be a discernable drop, at least initially, in pro-reform enthusiasm and momentum.

The real impact is in how the elections do or don't affect the administration's Cuba policy, or a push to finally craft and implement a coherent, deliverable-oriented policy that doesn't seem to exist today. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen can hold all the hearings and hissy fits she wants over the administration's policy, but the President still retains surpris-

ingly expansive authority to implement reforms if he commits to them. The question is whether he and his advisors are finally ready to commit, or whether the election results might have given them yet another case of cold feet. Do they really want to anger Ileana Ros-Lehtinen as she gets ready to take up the gavel? Would she make it harder for the administration to move the START treaty, manage an ever more difficult and politicized war in Afghanistan, and not to undermine the Middle East peace process?

The answers to these questions aren't so easy. Maybe the administration will look to outgoing House Foreign Affairs Committee Berman to throw himself on his sword over the Cuba travel ban before the end of the current Congress, so the White House can come in and produce a "compromise:"

the loosened travel regulations we all know are out there but inexplicably held up somewhere in the White House.

In the end, for this White House, it may just come down to whether you negotiate with foreign policy "hostage takers." One thing's certain: the longer you let a hostage situation fester, the harder it is to come out a winner.

Anya Landau French is director of the New America Foundation's US-Cuba Policy Initiative. She has traveled regularly to Cuba for research since 2000, and in 2009 published, "Options for Engagement: A Resource Guide for Reforming U.S. Policy Towards Cuba."

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CUBAN PSYCHO: BEHIND THE WALLS OF A HAVANA PSYCHIATRIC CLINIC

Magdalena Sodomkova

This is not a German concentration camp in Auschwitz, 1944. It's a psychiatric clinic in Cuba, 2010.

Fernando, a skinny Cuban journalist, jumps to an obsolete computer. "Will you take this to Europe," he asks me while opening brutal looking pictures taken in a Cuban morgue. "Oh, my God, what is it?"

"OK, you don't have to take it with you. At least look at it and then destroy it,"

Fernando urges me. "The people you see died in the Cuban psychiatric clinic of Mazorra in January 2010. They were tortured. They were exhausted. During a cold night in January 41 of them were killed."

Fernando says the photos were taken by the Police, which were supposed to quietly investigate the case and let it fade into oblivion. "There's a story to tell about each one of these people; each of them had a life and

got into Mazorra somehow. What you see is not a nameless corpse," says Fernando, handing me a silver CD.

For possessing these photos, Fidel Castro's regime might remind Fernando of something he remembers all too well to forget - jail. "We were locked in a dark cell, naked. But we could at least work. Not that we got any benefits for it, like more food, nothing like that. It was the only

way of getting some sunshine, even though we were in chains. Other prisoners would disdain those who chose to work. They'd say they yielded to the regime." That's how Fernando described his experience. And now he's standing here, in front of me, with his hand outstretched.

The shiny CD disappears into my bag.

Mazorra is located a short distance from the Jose Marti airport in Havana, where you can see tourists drinking their last Cuba Libre, with straw hats under their arms.

A little over ten hours later, my airplane lands heavily in Europe, which means that I can now freely read Fernando's documents at last and compare them with what has been written about the Cuban clinic here. The news on the mass death of patients in Mazorra started spread-

ing in Havana in mid-January thanks to the staff at the clinic. It soon found its way to the Western media. Yet, due to an avalanche of other events, little attention was paid to it. Some of these brutal photographs have already leaked from Cuba and are circulating on the Internet. The Cuban journalist wasn't able to verify this, though, since he can only gain access to the Internet no more than once a month. A single website often takes half an hour to load.

"There were 300 photos in the Mazorra file," writes Yoani Sanchez when reporting on the case. Apparently, this Cuban blogger has even more extensive documentation than Fernando. She mentions "26 dead, maybe more." Cuban authorities have admitted that there were seven of them. The photos, however, show dozens of skinny corpses with wounds on their heads and all over their bodies.

Who were these patients? There is a piece of paper laying on one body with the heading of the clinic. The text reads: "Carlos Manuel Ramos Hernandez, Room No. 12, 5.30pm, signed Zamorra." Another picture shows an autopsy report: "Born on April 12, 1977, Ramon Romay Valdez, 31 years old, male, white, brown hair, single." Full stop.

What must have happened for a thirty year old man to die, as the authorities stated: "of hypothermia due to a drop of temperature to three degrees Celsius?"

WITH A CAMERA IN HELL

Fernando has been imprisoned once and he can be brought back to jail any time. In spite of that, he took his camera and went to Mazorra to make some inquiries. Shooting through a window, he documented



skinny patients dressed in striped rags queuing for food, many of them barefoot.

“Patients have their coats and sweaters confiscated upon admission. They never get them back, even if it gets cold. What they do get, though, is cold water and electric shock torture,” says Fernando in the video accompanying his photos, where he tries to make several shaking men talk. Anyway, can you imagine an Auschwitz internee complaining of ill-treatment?

VOLLEYBALL WITHOUT A BALL

“The walls were white and innocent. When the foreign delegation arrived, several patients were playing volleyball in the yard. They had no ball. A while later, an old man threw them one. They played for a couple of minutes. Then the delegation left and they returned to their rooms. Game over.” That was in 1978. The very same psychiatric clinic in Havana with a capacity for over two thousand patients was shown off as the pride of the Cuban health care system. It wasn’t until a decade later when the evidence of what had really been happening there was published in *The Seattle Times* newspaper, which got the information from a Cuban dissident, Amaro Gomez Boix, who spent two weeks there in 1978.

In the 1990’s, another Cuban refugee, Eugenio de Sosa Chabau, went to a doctor in his new home in Hialeah in the United States. During the surgery he encountered a man in a white coat, whose face was familiar to him. El Enfermero. That’s how he was called – El Enfermero (“the nurse”).

“It was three in the morning when four men rushed into the room. They started shouting our names

and those who were not crazy, like me, immediately tried to escape. Someone threw a bucket of shit on the floor. The men got a hold of six patients and laid them on the ground, side by side. Right there they attached electrodes to their heads. I received electro-shocks fourteen times. Mostly on the genitals,” described de Sosa Chabau about the practices in the clinic of Mazorra. He arrived there in 1977 after seventeen years of jail. That’s where he also met El Enfermero – Heriberto Mederos, who immigrated to the United States in a boat during the eighties as he himself did.

However, the case sparked a lengthy judicial process, which wasn’t brought to an end during the lifetime of neither de Sosa Chabau nor the accused Mederos, whom the media nicknamed Cuban Mengele for his forty years of activity in Mazorra, even though there was no evidence of murders. Within a year, Charles J. Brown and Armando M. Lago published a book, which was made up of testimonies from 37 patients who survived the “therapy” of the Havana butchers and nights full of screaming or situations when they woke up after an electro-shock therapy with broken teeth.

Five of them got into the insane asylum for trying to contact foreign journalists, while others were there due to their participation in dissent activities. A sixteen-year-old teenager Belkis Ferrro was brought there from a labour camp, where she was accused of pulling out tobacco plants instead of cleaning them off, thus destroying national crop.

How did Fidel react? “It’s just some more tricks by the desperate mother fuckers. They would have to send about 10 atomic bombs here to shake the Cuban Revolution,” Reu-

ters quoted Fidel’s message to the United States.

And what’s happening this year? Six months after the death of these tortured patients and after the world saw the first pictures taken during the autopsy, Fidel’s brother Raul dismissed the 78-year-old Health Minister, Jose Ramon Balaguer.

But as Fernando says, “The names of the deceased have still not been disclosed to anyone and their families can only speculate...” Direct evidence is still being confined in Mazorra.

Could the evidence from January 2010 be substantially different from that of 1991 or 1978? Psychiatrist Vladimir Bukowski, who spent twelve years in Soviet camps and asylums, comments on the testimonies made twenty and thirty years ago with the following words: “Those who have experience with communist regimes may feel disgusted and humiliated on reading the documents and testimonies from the Cuban psychiatric clinic. Yet, they won’t be surprised.”

Magdalena Sodomkova is a reporter from the Czech weekly magazine Reflex

The name of the Cuban journalist has been changed to protect his safety. However, the identity is known to the author of the article.

FROM AN ECONOMIC AND HUMAN PERSPECTIVE, CUBA IS LOSING. WHAT WILL COME NEXT?

Peter Randák

Taking my second trip to Cuba, I was quite amazed to realize how easily one could classify most Cubans into three categories of people who disagree with the still surviving Communist regime. It became clear to me that the problem of the Cuban communism goes beyond the violation of political prisoners' human rights, regardless of the fact that this is exactly the kind of impression the Cuban president Raúl Castro is trying to put forward on the outside.

The first group consists of ordinary people who are not in favor of the political system since the system is not able to guarantee them with a satisfactory quality of life. Earlier in November 2010, the Cuban government ended up laying off half of a million of state workers, a number which, according to the prestigious British weekly *The Economist*, over the next two or three years, is yet to increase by another million of Cubans. And this is happening in a country where the Cuban revolutionary constitution guarantees all citizens the right to

work and where people were previously promised to be able to use telephones and the public transport free of charge.

The people who their lost jobs get by thanks to an intricate network of family relations, the black market, subsidized housing (which is in a state of disarray), and modest social benefits which, similarly to job positions, are supposed to undergo major cuts in the future. With no social benefits, the jobless will then take to the streets in protests and the Communist regime will have no shame depicting them as the "the unemployed class" claiming that the other, ordinary, Cubans have to carry the burden of sustaining them, a reason why the country is not doing well. The government will then call on citizens to protect their "hard-won accomplishments" from social upheavals. The Cuban society will be divided between the ones with jobs and the ones without them, "the others". The ones with jobs will unite around the government that will guarantee them their humble securities, which will

enable the regime, on behalf of these citizens and together with the army, to consolidate its' power. Cuban soldiers will be thankful for their jobs and privileges. After all, Raúl Castro has been nominating well-proven army officers to top managerial positions in state companies already, drawing upon his time when he was the head of the ministry of defense. Consequently, the legitimacy of the regime, based on suppression of social upheavals, will be used to justify a nomination of the Castro brothers' successor and the preservation of the system as a whole.

The second group is made up of people who made "personal" enemies and were subsequently punished. The dictatorship tends to be the most brutal on the lowest possible level, where the browbeating of every small neighborhood is essential to maintaining the whole political system. I was told a hard-to-believe story of a police officer who started meeting up romantically with a married woman. They both tried to work out a plan of how to get rid

of her husband. They came up with a concept of “the assassination on the phone”. In short, while talking on their land line, the woman spoke about her husband’s anti-regime stands. Her husband was then arrested by the police officer. The man ended up in prison for spreading “the enemy propaganda” and the police man was free to move in with the woman.

Nevertheless, the worst conditions I witnessed in the psychiatric hospital *Mazorra* and other institutions for the mentally handicapped where, in addition to the hospitals lacking state funds, the patients live through cold, hunger and cold water and the torture of electrical shocks. The only thing that the miserable patients did against the regime, was simply to be born handicapped, and

as being such they were not entitled, in the Cuban system of “shared properties”, to any other place.

The third group is made up of adamant dissidents who stand with determination against the regime, a fact that requires both physical and mainly mental courage. Every encounter with them was an incredibly powerful experience for me. It is in the Cuban government’s interest to make sure that opposition activists live in extremely poor living conditions and the rest of the society look at them, at the back of their minds, with pity rather than respect and admiration. People unfortunately tend to pay less attention to somebody who is always hungry and lives in a run-down shack. Many of the activists get arrested and imprisoned for

what they are doing. And on top of this, most are forced to deal with the conditions in Cuban prisons that are appalling. Earlier this year when renowned dissident *Orlando Zapata Tamayo* went on strike exactly because of the conditions of these corrective institutions, built on “the island of freedom”, in which political prisoners are held. His personal courage to stand up to the regime was so strong that he was not afraid to die and thus to demonstrate the determination of the third group to fight the Cuban regime to the full extent, putting in danger the only thing that left for them “in the socialistic paradise”: their own lives.



Delusions of grandeur

SEMI-ANNUAL HUMAN RIGHTS IN CUBA REPORT

May 2010 through October 2010

INTRODUCTION:

The conceptual and structural management of political detainees remains unchanged, despite the promises made by the Cuban government. If the totalitarian mentality continues to prevail, the human rights situation in Cuba will not improve. Fear remains one of the primary tactics utilized against human rights as a means to retain power. Requests by both NGOs and various other organizations to release dissidents go unanswered and/or are merely ignored by the Cuban government. Ex-president of Costa Rica and Nobel Peace prize winner, Oscar Arias, stated, "In no democracy can there be political prisoners." While this past year bore witness to the release of dissidents, said releases have been predominantly dissidents who have either completed their sentence or were only a couple months away from doing so. As a means to prevent reoccurring acts against the Cuban government by released dissidents, an ultimatum was given in exchange for freedom; freedom in exchange for being exiled. Humanity plays no role, as dissidents continue to be imprisoned for hours or days to prevent manifestations or organized meetings, going against their freedom of speech. Moreover, within the prison walls, mistreatments, suicides and lack of medical care prevail.

Ironically, the situation has been considered "low intensity", as dissidents are only being arrested for a couple hours and for the short-term. However, this is a ploy to deceive people into believing Cuba is on the right path. The Cuban government realized that in very much the same way they instill fear with long-term arrests, they could accomplish

the same with short-term arrests, as they are working from an already strong foundation of fear. Moreover, while the numbers appear to be lower, they remain inaccurate, telling only a part of the reality that is still Cuba, as Cuba continues to have the greatest number of prisoners of adopted ideologies in the world in both absolute and relative figures.

GENERAL INFORMATION:

In 1989, Fidel Castro reportedly warned Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, "If you open a window [to democracy] you will lose all power." For the Cuban government to permit for modernized reform to take place would mean placing itself on an even greater platform of external criticism than its already on, unraveling history and ultimately all its atrocities committed against humanity.

Individuals, such as Guillermo Farinas, continue to show their unwavering commitment to denouncing the Castro regime, exemplified by their unwillingness to end their hunger strikes, as they are ready to die if necessary. He has subsequently been awarded the 2010 Sakharov Prize "for freedom of thought". His 23rd hunger strike, Farinas stopped eating on February 24th, following the death of Orlando Zapata Tamayo, who died after an 85-day hunger strike. Farinas was demanding the release of 26 political prisoners who were said to be living in poor health conditions in the Cuban prisons. On the 8th of July 2010, after a 135-day hunger strike, Farinas ended it following the Cuban government's announcement of the release of 53 political prisoners.

I. DETENTIONS:

The Cuban government has been relentless in its prevention of dissident activities. Political repression was at its highest in October, as 310 dissidents were arrested. A large majority of those detained belong to recognized organizations, such as *Cuba Independiente y Democrática* and *Partido Social Demócrata*, among many others. On the 31st of October, dozens of dissidents were brutally struck by the regime, as they were headed to the tomb of recently deceased political prisoner, Orlando Tamay, and arrested preemptively. Arrests continue to be made on the grounds of preventing individuals or groups from attending meetings or political rallies, or under the pretext that a crime will be committed. In other words they can assume anything and arrest anyone.

- Yordi Garcia Fournier, member of *Foro Juvenil Cubano*, was detained during 14 hours in a police station for having asked about Nestor Rodriguez Lobaina (detained that morning).
- Ricardo Medina Salabarría, member of *Partido Cuba Independiente y Democrática*, was detained at 11:00am and abandoned 4 hours later, hundreds of kilometers from the city, in a desolate place, after having been stripped of personal objects.
- Damas de Blanco, including Reina Tamayo Danger, were blocked off by 200-300 policemen preventing them from attending church and the local ceremonies.
- Omar Suarez Garcia, member of the *Partido Solidaridad Democrática*, remained detained by the political police for 10 hours without being given a reason for his arrest.

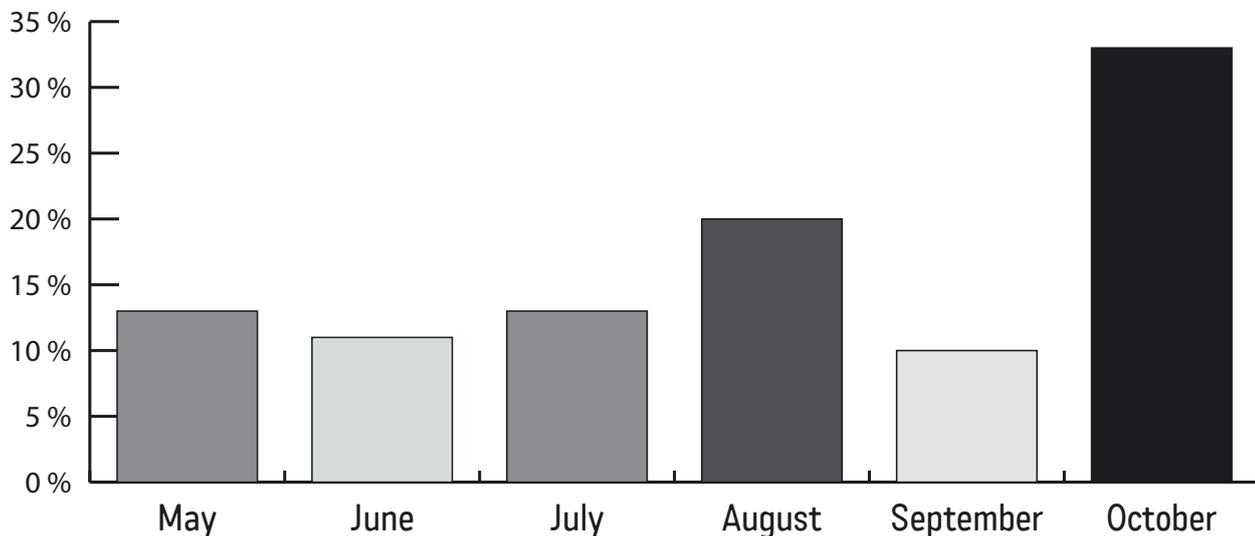
- Rafael Leyva Leyva, Jose Ferra Gomez, Arisbel Rodriguez Guerra, Manuel Martinez Ledo, Juan Rodriguez Avila and Josue Peña Batista, members of *Alianza Democrática Oriental*, were detained in the middle of the afternoon and remained under arrest until 8:30pm. At which point, they were released under the condition that they would not travel to Banes to participate in the acts of remembrance of Orlando Zapata Tamayo.

II. FREEDOM FOR COMPLETION OF SENTENCE AND CONDITIONAL RELEASES:

A group of 75 prisoners (inclusive of the aforementioned 53 prisoners) that were arrested in 2003, were designated as “political” by Amnesty International. Said group is composed of Lawyers, Journalists and political prisoners alike and were offered an ultimatum: a catch twenty-two; the opportunity to choose between remaining in prison or being exiled to an EU country. Of the 75 dissidents, 12 remain imprisoned, unwilling to accept the offer and leave the only home they have known, ultimately preferring to live out their sentence of anywhere from 6 years to life in prison. The 623 political prisoners detained over the previous 5 months, are only a percentage of the actual number of individuals incarcerated.

- Enyor Diaz Allen, member of *Movimiento Cubano de Jóvenes por la Democracia*, was released May 3rd after completing his 1-year sentence.
- Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta, member of *Movimiento Cubano de Jóvenes por la Democracia*, was released on August 18th and exiled to Spain after completing 7 years of his 20-year sentence.

DOCUMENTED HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES



- Miguel Galban Gutierrez, Independent reporter, was released on September 23rd and exiled to Spain after completing 7 years of his 26-year sentence.

III. IMPRISONED:

The mistreatment of prisoners, whether done physically, medically or psychologically, continues to take place within the Cuban prison walls, through physical abuse, such as beatings, threats, or the lack of and denegation of medical care, ultimately driving dissidents to their deathbeds. Moreover, at least one Cuban and two Salvadoranians have remained on death row for the past 15 years. Raul Cruz Leon (arrested in 1997), Otto Rodriguez Llerena (arrested in 1998) and Humberto Real Suarez (arrested in 1994), were accused of crimes that included the use of arms and explosives. The charges included terrorism, murder and other acts against the security of the State. None have been informed of their sentence date and are segregated from the rest

of the prison population. Other political prisoners have been arrested with no promise of there being a trial to plead their case, meaning many innocent people remain imprisoned.

- Angel Moya Acosta – The authorities interrupt his sleep and he tends to be handcuffed and threatened by having pepper gas sprayed in his face.
- Noel Roque Rodriguez – Requested medical assistance, but was brutally struck by the military Ernesto and Cardenas, who left various lesions on his face, in the hand and on the left shoulder.
- Yunier Perez Otay – died due to a heart attack, as the authorities took too long to provide him with the correct medical assistance. Perez was only 27 years old.
- Reinier Hernandez Sifontes – Committed suicide by hanging, due to the mistreatments. Sifontes was 32-years old.



The simplicity and glory of the past

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TRANSITION
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