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Former Cuban Five prisoner seeks friendship with U.S.

By John Bachtell

A delegation from the Communist Party USA recently visited Cuba. We stopped by the Institute for the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP) to discuss building friendship, cooperation and people to people exchanges in light of the Dec. 17 announcement to reestablish diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba.

Among those who warmly greeted us was Fernando Gonzalez, one of the Cuban 5 who was imprisoned in the U.S. in 1998 as part of a mission to monitor right-wing Cuban terrorist activities in Miami being directed against Cuba. Gonzalez was convicted of spying and began serving a sentence in 2001. He was released Feb. 27, 2014 and returned home to Cuba the next day.

The rest of the Cuban 5 were released on Dec. 17 (Rene Gonzalez was released in 2011) as part of the agreement between the two countries. During a national ceremony, the Cuban 5 were honored as Heroes of the Republic and received the Order of Playa Giron, the Cuban name for the Bay of Pigs invasion, in which Cuba defeated a CIA backed effort by Cuban exiles to overthrow the new revolutionary government in 1961.

It would be understandable if Gonzalez were bitter about his years of imprisonment and didn't want to have anything to do with the US. But Gon-



zalez asked to work with ICAP and now serves as a vice president of the group.

We found Gonzalez warm, gracious and eager to speak about exploring ways to build friendship with the U.S. people. He also shared stories about his time in U.S. prisons, the people he met and the extraordinary solidarity he and the Cuban 5 received over the years.

Gonzalez was imprisoned in federal penitentiaries in Terre Haute, Ind. and Oxford, Wis.

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While at Terre Haute, Gonzalez met Oscar Lopez, a Puerto Rican political prisoner incarcerated since 1982. Gonzalez is part of the growing worldwide campaign for Lopez's freedom. Cuba has a special historical connection with Puerto Rico and supports the right of the Puerto Rican people to

The CPUSA visited Cuba to discuss building friendship, cooperation, and people to people exchanges to reestablish diplomatic relations between U.S and Cuba.

determine their own path.

Here are a few of Fernando Gonzalez's remarks to us:

"The most important thing to say, to express on my behalf, my family and relatives, is my deep gratitude to the CPUSA because of the years of participation in the struggle, the solidarity you accorded us during the time we were in prison and for our liberation.

"You were side by side with us. Even when things look dark, there's always a bright side. No one wants that experience (of imprisonment). It gave us the chance to experience the best of the U.S. people and those we worked with for many years, side by side in that fight."

"Your participation during the campaign for our release, the information you shared, your ideological guidance and understanding of the reality in Cuba and social conflict in the U.S., what is really happening - that is why we are so appreciative.

"The beginning of negotiations with the U.S. to have regular links between our countries, is a testament to the strength and resolve of our peo-

ple who been fighting for more than 50 years.

"During the second round of negotiations between the U.S. and Cuba we haven't made any concessions. And with the return of all the Cuban Five it was a great victory for the Cuban people and all friends in the U.S. who have participated in struggle and for friendship between our countries.

"The struggle for the freedom of the Cuban 5 occupied a big part of the solidarity campaign. The reality is the economic blockade still exists and the U.S. government still plans to subvert the revolutionary process here. President Obama said the goal is right, but the U.S. needs to change how it achieves the goal. It's important for people to be clear about what is happening.

"Keep the solidarity movement going in the fight to lift the blockade. Please extend our deepest gratitude to all."



John Bachtell is National Chairman of CPUSA.

Chicago community fights petcoke, pile by pile

By Blake Deppe

For one community, the Windy City has been blowing something other than a healthy breeze. The black dust known as petroleum coke (petcoke), a byproduct of oil refinery process has been piling up on the city's southeast side and drifting into various neighborhoods, endangering people's health - and trying their patience. A small, but determined coalition of residents have now stepped forward to fight back.

An area on the banks of the Calumet River, which was once home to steel plants (and jobs), are now the site of the petcoke piles, most of which reach about five to six feet in height. These belong to KCBX Terminals, owned by the right-wing billionaire Koch Brothers. In early February, one of KCBX's customers, the notorious BP, announced it would stop sending its own petcoke shipments to this site (where this material will end up instead is not yet known). While this was a mild victory, environmental activists are careful to point out that the real battle - removing petcoke

in its entirety - remains to be fought.

Tom Shepherd, president of the Southeast Environmental Task Force (SETA), spoke with the People's World about the issue, noting that the scope of the problem goes beyond just one neighborhood. "People are not aware enough in the city [at large]," he remarked. "This is a regional problem, because the petcoke becomes airborne. That makes it a public health problem. More people will require medical attention."

His concerns are entirely supported by the EPA, which warns that significant quantities of petcoke dust can easily pass through the nose and throat and enter the lungs. Speaking of illness, perhaps no group sees it more clearly than the NNU. Sheilah Garland, an organizer with the union, said, "Nurses take this from a very personal perspective. We deal with patients one on one, we see it in our hospital beds, in our clinics. When young people are dying of pulmonary issues, this is very real to us."

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Selma tribute a testimonial to victory of struggle



By Stewart Acuff

Watching America's first black President accompanied by the single living American who did the most for us to be able to have a black President (after all, it was Congressman John Lewis who organized and led the first march and almost died from the beating) together in Selma was a testament to the honor and ultimate victory of struggle.

Seeing Congressman John Lewis introduce Barack Obama on the Edmund Pettus bridge was the vindication of what Isaiah said, is this not the fast that I have chosen to loose the bonds or as Jeremiah said Render justice every morning and deliver those who are oppressed from the power of their oppressor.

Congressman Lewis said: "Push and pull till we redeem the soul of America. Build on the legacy of Selma. Don't give up. Don't get lost in a sea of despair. We are one people."

President Obama asked a question that every person in America needs to hear right now: "What greater form of patriotism is this - that it is in our power to remake this nation according to our highest ideals?"

"America is not finished. Loving this country requires the occasional disruption, to speak up. Our work is never done. Pursuit of justice requires neither complacency nor despair."

In President Obama's litany of struggles for justice won throughout American history and struggles yet to be won and the courage of millions of Americans, he left out the ongoing struggle for economic justice, the chains of Wall St. yet to be loosened and broken, the pain of losing your home, of the treadmill of two poverty level jobs, the injustice of punishing workers who risk all they have for a voice at work and to give their kids a better life.

But today the struggle of the working class is as important as ever because democracy cannot survive the decimation of worker organizing and vibrant, strong worker organization.

The President was right when he said: "Americans who crossed that bridge gave courage to thousands. Right now there are laws designed to keep people from voting.

"Honor the bridge by restoring the Voting Rights Act."

In our fight to defeat the radical right, save democracy, and win more economic justice I will remember what President Obama said:

"What a glorious task we are given. We know the march is not yet over, the race not yet won. Change depends on what we do."

What greater form of patriotism is this - that it is in our power to remake this nation according to our highest ideals?

The steal of the century: ending wage theft in our time

By Rev. Jim Conn

It may not be the hottest topic on every activist's to-do list, but the problem is as old as, well, the oldest profession. I'm talking about wage theft, and it happens to about 80 percent of the low-wage workers in Los Angeles.

Wage theft means that people work but don't get the pay or the benefits they have earned. They could be paid less than the minimum wage. They could work overtime, but not get paid for it. They could be workers forced to work "off the clock" or not given their final paycheck. They could be tipped workers whose employer pockets the tips or they could be victims of payroll fraud - even forced to sign a statement saying they worked a 40-hour week when they worked much more, in order to get any check at all.

With 58 percent of its single parents working in poverty jobs and with 810,000 low-wage residents, Los Angeles has the highest poverty rate among major metropolitan areas in the country. That's more people than in the entire city of Seattle. Some 40 percent of Latinos earn less than the minimum wage, and nearly 40,000 African American workers make less than a living wage. Worker advocates are pushing for better protections on the local level.

Yes, this is an old problem. Yes, it is so old that we could think of it as part of the human condition, as old as greed itself. But that does not mean we should ignore it. Sacred texts as old as the Torah declare, "You shall not withhold the wages of the poor and needy laborers," whether these are people like you or "aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns."

Las "razones" de Obama

Pedro Pablo Gómez

Tiempos atrás la Agencia Central de Inteligencia -CIA- de los Estados Unidos de América tuvo dentro de sus tareas las llamadas operaciones encubiertas, las que eran realizadas por sus operativos en los países con el objeto de lograr sus intereses de dominación, ya fuera de encumbrar un candidato para triunfar en el medio electoral, o para derrocar y cambiar un gobierno o un sistema no afín a sus deseos del control.

Con el paso del tiempo, después de una larga cadena de intervenciones en numerosos países realizando estas tareas, una veces con éxitos y otras con grandes catástrofes políticas, el Imperio se ha visto obligado a modificar sus métodos y trata de hacer ver al resto del mundo que lo que hace es, desde su punto de vista, totalmente legal. De acuerdo con ello modificó las estructuras dentro de su gobierno cuando creó la llamada Comunidad de Inteligencia, que contiene la mayor parte de los departamentos que constituyen el ámbito de este dominio gubernamental.

Dentro de esta estructura, en el Departamento de Estado de los EE.UU., aparecieron algunas direcciones con el lineamiento de tratar de imponer el sistema capitalista y su concepción de la llamada democracia. Así se sustentan a través de la United States Agency for International Development -USAID- y la National Endowment for Democracy -NED- las cuales actúan en el supuesto legal de imponer el criterio que desea el gobierno norteamericano a los países, que ellos consideren se salen de su esfera de dominio y tratan de crear

las condiciones para derrocar o debilitar a líderes políticos que no se avengan a sus deseos.

No resulta casual el auge informativo con situaciones generadas en países con posiciones no obedientes a la política imperial, como los casos de Brasil, Argentina, Ecuador y en mayor grado en Venezuela, del que se ha llegado a afirmar por el propio presidente Barack Obama que es una amenaza a la Seguridad Nacional de los EE.UU. La cual hasta ha sido rechazado por muchos de sus satélites a escala internacional.

La única explicación posible para el dislate del presidente Obama es la de la situación que confronta dentro de la Cámara de Representantes y el Senado de su país con la mayoría del Partido Republicano. Con esta acción trataría de contentar a la bancada de este signo, para lograr llevar adelante otras reformas de su interés que están bloqueadas por sus oponentes políticos. Buscando benevolencia republicana queda como un payaso a escala internacional.

Creo que ni el propio Obama se cree sus afirmaciones sobre Venezuela, tampoco nadie con pensamiento propio se las va a creer.