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Former Cuban Five prisoners teach about solidarity and Cuba



By W. T. Whitney, Jr

Gerardo Hernández was late in returning a call. This time he did reach Carlos Alberto Cremata in Cuba. He's the director of La Colmenita, a well-traveled children's theater group. Carlos Alberto in April 2012 had called Gerardo in prison in California to relay a message from the children, who were viewing Niagara Falls. "Gerardo, you'll be coming home soon," they said. This was no small prediction in view of Gerardo's two life sentences.

When arrested in Florida in 1998, Hernández and four other Cuban agents were working precisely to prevent such terrorist attacks. The Cuban Five, as they became known, went free on December 17, 2014. Now they are touring in order to express thanks for worldwide solidarity on their behalf and to talk about what the Cuban Revolution means today in a crisis-filled world.

While Hernández was in Canada, his other Cuban Five comrades were also traveling; Ramón Labañino was in Uruguay and Argentina; and Antonio Guerrero was in Venezuela. Hernández gave presentations in Montreal, Niagara Falls, Fort Erie, Ottawa, Toronto, and Vancouver.

The United Steelworkers Union (USW) sponsored his Canadian tour; he attended their national convention in Montreal.

Hernández told 200 listeners in Toronto that,

"Ideas from abroad try to make capitalism before the 1959 revolution look like a paradise of sea and beaches, [but] this is not true. It was a system that killed and tortured its own people." He recalled former U.S. insistence that negotiations with Cuba were impossible. Nevertheless, he noted, negotiations took place, and "Cuba hasn't renounced one single principle ... This is a huge victory for our leaders and people."

T H I S W E E K :

- **Former Cuban Five teach about solidarity and Cuba**
- **Muslim Americans have right to freedom of religion**
- **Verizon giveback demands force 39,000 out on strike**
- **Qué es lo que hacen los sindicatos**
- **French right-wing party in hot water over papers**

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Ramón Labañino attended a regional solidarity conference in Buenos Aires on April 9. Referring to political changes in Latin America, he noted that, "We live in a complicated time. There is a strong attack against popular and progressive projects coming from soft blows." He called for

The Cuban revolutionaries are now carrying their teaching to the far corners of the world.

unity “of the various left forces and social and people’s movements in standing against that rightwing offensive supported by the North American government, [sic].”

Ramon Labañino’s wife Elizabeth Palmeiro, accompanying him in Argentina, told members of Argentina’s Communist Party about her husband’s distress at being separated from his daughters. “But with the support of the people and leaders of Cuba and their backing we could get up each day and keep on moving ahead,” she declared.

In Uruguay, Ramon Labañino and Elizabeth Palmeiro visited with former Uruguayan President Jose Mujica in his home and attended other meetings. Now a senator, Mujica had repeatedly called upon the U. S. government to release the Cuban Five.

Meanwhile, Antonio Guerrero was in Venezuela attending the International Meeting of the “Artists’ and Intellectuals’ Network in Defense of Humanity.” On April 9 he warned against new communication systems operated “by the empire” and mass media that “destroy

history and destroy young people’s power of analysis.” He called for “maintaining peace [and] stability [and protecting] the Bolivarian revolution, a peaceful revolution.”

Fernando González and René González, other former Cuban Five prisoners, are also reaching out to the worldwide movement that supported them as prisoners (and that backs Cuba now). Fernando serves as vice president of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples. And since being released from prison in 2011, René has traveled the world on behalf of Cuba and peace.

In view of such efforts, attentive prison authorities might have observed that the Cuban Five, imprisoned, converted confinement into schools. With words, poetry, art, and their example, the Five in prison were teaching solidarity to the world. Prison experience became fodder for these Cuban revolutionaries now to be carrying their teaching to the far corners of the world.



W. T. Whitney, Jr. writes for Peoplesworld.

Does freedom of religion not apply to Muslim Americans?

By Chauncey K. Robinson

Freedom of religion is considered by many people and nations to be a fundamental human right. It is the practice that supports the freedom of an individual or community, in public or private, to practice their religion without persecution.

In the United States, freedom of religion is a constitutionally protected right provided in the religion clauses of the First Amendment. The First Amendment prohibits the federal government from making a law “respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

Along with this, The Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution also guarantees religious civil rights. It prohibits discrimination, including on the basis of religion, by securing “the equal protection of the laws” for every person.”

Yet, the issue of freedom of religion has become a hot button topic as the 2016 presidential election has candidates addressing whom exactly this freedom of religion should apply to. Or, rather if

certain people should be subjected to specific laws and restrictions because of their chosen religion.

This is aimed particularly at those who practice Islam, as anti-Muslim rhetoric has taken center stage when addressing the so-called “war on terror.”

Since the Paris attacks by ISIS- a group that proclaims itself to be Islamic- there have been at least 42 violent attacks, threats, assaults, protests, and instances of vandalism against Muslims in America. There has also been a rise in anti-Muslim rhetoric within the Republican party as top presidential candidates debate temporarily banning Muslims from entering the country.

Leading GOP candidate, Donald Trump, went on record calling for “a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States.”

President Obama, in a speech given at the Islamic Society of Baltimore in February spoke out against anti-Muslim rhetoric, stating, “We can’t be bystanders to bigotry. Together, we’ve got to show that America truly protects all faiths.”

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Verizon giveback demands force 39,000 on East Coast out on strike



By Mark Gruenberg

Ten months of Verizon stonewalling and giveback demands, lasting through dozens of bargaining sessions, forced the 39,000 Communications Workers and Electrical Workers toiling for the telecom giant from Maine through Virginia to go out on strike at 6 a.m.

“Verizon made \$39 billion in profits over the last three years -- and \$1.8 billion a month in profits over the first three months of 2016 -- but the company is still insisting on givebacks that would devastate our jobs,” the two unions said in a statement.

Their bargainers, responding to Verizon complaints about rising health care costs, offered alternatives to save the firm hundreds of millions of dollars yearly. They were met by Verizon’s “arrogant disrespect” in the talks.

Key issues that forced the workers to strike after weeks of talks and dozens of protests -- including one that Democratic presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders joined in early April in Philadelphia -- include an end to no-layoff protections for workers hired before 2003, a freeze on pensions after 30 years of service and elimination of profit-sharing with workers.

Sanders spoke at a Verizon workers’ Philadelphia rally where he told them they had the support of 20 U.S. senators. They wrote Verizon’s CEO, Lowell

McAdam, last month, urging him to bargain in good faith. “We want to be sure Verizon preserves good family-supporting jobs in our region,” said the solons. Nineteen Democrats and Sanders signed the letter.

Verizon must make changes to account for declining landline use. Verizon should “negotiate a new contract...to provide improvement in wages, healthcare, retirement security and work rules for the wireless retail workers and technicians” whose performance led to the high Verizon profits.

“The company’s greed is disgusting,” the unions said in announcing the strike. “McAdam made \$18 million last year. Verizon’s top five executives made \$233 million over the last five years. Last year alone, Verizon paid out \$13.5 billion in dividends and stock buybacks to shareholders. But they claim they can’t afford a fair contract.

“And it’s not just workers who are getting screwed. Verizon has \$35 billion to invest in the failing internet company, Yahoo, but refuses to maintain its copper network” for telephone landlines, “let alone build FiOS in underserved communities across the region.

“It’s time for Verizon to acknowledge that working families also have a right to do well in America. It’s time for a contract that’s fair to Verizon’s working people and the customers we serve.”

They have the support of 20 U.S. senators.

French right-wing party in hot water over Panama Papers

By Patrick J. Foote

On April 4, the neo-fascist Front National party of France, released a blistering critique of the state of global capitalism (although I doubt they'd characterize it as such). "The control-free movement of men, goods and capital, coupled with high finance's stranglehold on all levels of the economy, can only produce global fraudulent and money-laundering systems," read the statement. Not wrong, though history shows that their right-wing solution amounts to little more than the anti-immigrant scapegoating we've seen from the American right.

What spurred the comment was the now infamous "Panama Papers": a data leak from Mossack-Fonseca, a Panamanian law firm that specializes in concealing the money of the rich from government scrutiny. And then Tuesday rolled around.

Thanks to the reporting of Le Monde we now know that two "allies" of Front National's leader Marine Le Pen, have been named in the Papers. What's worse, those two allies, Frédéric Chatillon and Nicolas Crochet, were previously charged with fraud and illegal financing of the party.

Le Monde reports that money from Chatillon's public relations company changed hands four separate times using intermediaries in the British Virgin Islands and Singapore.

Not surprisingly, the FN has released a statement saying, "We will not tolerate [allegations which] damage the honor and reputation of its leaders, its members and its constituents, and accordingly will not hesitate to take legal action against all those who [defame us]."

Qué es lo que hacen los sindicatos

AFL-CIO Latino

Un sindicato es una organización democrática de empleados en un lugar de trabajo, que eligen unirse para alcanzar objetivos comunes.

Por medio de la formación de sindicatos, los empleados pueden trabajar colectivamente a fin de mejorar las condiciones laborales, incluyendo salarios, beneficios, horarios y la seguridad laboral, así como también resolver desacuerdos laborales y encontrar la mejor manera de que se realice un trabajo.

Los sindicatos también representan a sus miembros y a todas las personas que trabajan ejerciendo la defensa de leyes y políticas favorables que son favorables para las familias trabajadoras a través de la acción legislativa y política. La mayoría de la gente que trabaja en este país tiene el derecho de formar sindicatos y de unirse a ellos de acuerdo con la Ley Nacional de Relaciones Laborales (NLRA, por sus siglas en inglés) de 1935, la cual alienta la formación de sindicatos.

Aun así, millones de trabajadores, incluidos trabajadores agrícolas, personal doméstico y administradores domésticos, no están cubiertos por la NLRA. Sin embargo, muchos de ellos se están organizando y estableciendo alianzas con la AFL-CIO para ganar derechos en su lugar de trabajo.

Los sindicatos tienen que ver con el respeto.

La capacitación. La comunidad. La colaboración. Una voz en el trabajo. Permiten que los trabajadores se unan y, a través del proceso de negociación colectiva, negocien por salarios más justos.

Los miembros de sindicatos ganan cerca de un 28% más que los que no pertenecen a un sindicato.

Este beneficio es mayor para la gente de color y para las mujeres. Los trabajadores latinos sindicalizados ganan cerca de un 51% más que sus contrapartes no sindicalizadas. Las mujeres sindicalizadas ganan alrededor de un 34% más que aquéllas que no lo están, y los afroamericanos miembros de sindicatos ganan un 31% más. Los trabajadores blancos sindicalizados obtienen aproximadamente un 21% más que los no sindicalizados, y los asiático-americanos un 1% más.

Los miembros de los sindicatos tienen también más probabilidades de contar con beneficios como cobertura médica y planes de jubilación a través de sus empleos.

La Federación Estadounidense del Trabajo y Congreso de Organizaciones Industriales (AFL-CIO, por sus siglas en inglés) trabaja día tras día para mejorar la vida de los trabajadores. El movimiento laboral trabaja para mejorar las vidas de todos los trabajadores, no sólo la de aquéllos que cuentan con los beneficios de la afiliación sindical. La AFL-CIO ha formado alianzas con grupos de trabajadores que no tienen el derecho legal de la negociación colectiva.

AFL-CIO compromiso en materia de justicia social y económica es el de mejorar las condiciones de trabajo y de vida de todos los trabajadores.

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