

1199SEIU retiree says Cuban travel restrictions will reverse progress

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On May Day, as many as 1 million people celebrated International Workers' Day in

the Havana parade along with millions more in other cities. Shown here is part of the contingent of many thousands of Cuban health workers who led the parade. Photo: Hillel Cohen

A letter to the 1199 Magazine, 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers, from an 1199 retiree. It was printed in the July/August issue, which goes out to about 400,000 members and retirees.

Working people all over the country are demanding healthcare for all. But the Trump Administration is trying to cut back health care for workers. At the same time, Trump is trying to economically strangle the people of a small country who years ago actually achieved free, universal healthcare.

I recently had the opportunity to visit Cuba as part of a people-to-people delegation representing more than 30 countries. We learned much on the trip, including that over the years, the Cuban government has implemented very successful universal free education and healthcare programs. Cuba has also sent thousands of doctors and other health workers and educators to many poor countries to provide services for the under-served. Students from many countries, including the U.S., who want to become doctors but can't afford medical school can go to Cuba to receive a free medical education. In return, Cuba asks these new doctors to commit to providing healthcare to under-served communities in their home countries.

If a small, poor country like Cuba can do these things, why can't we do them here?

These programs are enormously popular in Cuba and among poor and working people all over the world, but not with billionaires and their allies. When we demand free universal healthcare and free universal education here they tell us these are too expensive. After seeing America's Cuba policy fail for decades, the Obama administration eased some of the worst restrictions on travel and trade. The Cuban people I met on my trip were very concerned that Trump's re-enforcement of the

blockade will hurt them and their children. Yet, many people also insisted that the economic hardships imposed by the blockade will never force them to give up the healthcare, education, women's rights and ban on institutional racism that they have fought so hard to win.

Trump and his billionaire buddies are making travel harder again because they want to keep people here misinformed about life in Cuba and keep people from the U.S. from seeing what workers can really achieve. I encourage 1199ers to tell their elected representatives to restore our rights to freedom of travel. The U.S. needs to stop punishing Cuba and countries like it for defying the billionaires.

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