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Report from Havana: Despite U.S. blockade, Cuba has 90% vaccinated, opens to world visitors

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Struggle-La-Lucha reporters Sharon Black, Russell McClain and Lars Bertling in Havana. SLL photos.

Lars Bertling, Russell McClain and Sharon Black, three reporters for Struggle-La Lucha, members of the Socialist Unity Party, and representatives of the Baltimore Peoples Power Assembly are participating in the 31st U.S.-Cuba IFCO-Pastors for Peace Friendshipment Caravan..

Havana, Nov. 16 — It was an all day ordeal on Monday, Nov. 15, on the U.S. side. We waited in grueling airport security lines and spent hours checking in. Two of our representatives barely got their passports. We had to get up at 5 a.m. and drive to the passport office in Miami and keep our fingers crossed.

But when we got to Cuba it was all worth it.

On landing our spirits soared and our energy returned. Cuban people and their leaders were waiting at the airport, along with a bevy of news media. Our group was literally the first delegation to travel to the newly opened Cuba, which had been closed to international visitors because of the pandemic. Nov. 15 was the opening of schools and services in Cuba and is also a day celebrating the anniversary of Havana.

When we got to the Cuban Martin Luther King Center (yes, there is such a thing) young Cuban singers and musicians greeted us along with local Marianao community and political leaders and representatives of the MLK Center .

Today, Tuesday, was our first whole day of learning and visiting. Our entire group was large, over 70 people, so we split up.



Russell McClain and Gail Walker discuss the display of the CIA biological war on Cuba.

Memorial de la Denuncia

Most people living in the U.S. only equate terrorism with the 9/11 attacks. It's a sad hypocrisy. Far more Cuban people, many who are young children, have died in terrorist attacks. Only, these attacks were perpetrated by the Pentagon, CIA, the right wing, and U.S. imperialism.

This state-of-the art, modern museum documents those countless attacks.

The entrance has a revolving, updated count of the number of people who have lost

their lives to terrorism. This does not cover those impacted by the blockade but strictly through bombings and violent acts of terrorism. Today the count is 3,476.

There were 637 (known) attempts to assassinate Fidel; 21 CIA air raids; 11 CIA bombings; and 581 terrorist attacks aimed at Cuban missions overseas.

A special film documents the March 4, 1960, bombing of the French freighter La Coubre in the Havana port and the loss of 110 lives. Fidel and Che lead the massive street marches to honor those who lost their lives and to defy U.S. imperialism. The families of the victims still mourn their loss.

Terrorist and CIA agent Luis Posada and his accomplices, who were all sheltered in the U.S., bragged of the cowardly bombing of Cubana Flight 455 on Oct. 6, 1976, killing all 73 passengers, many Cuban children and all 24 members of a youth sports team that had just won every gold medal in the Central American and Caribbean Championships.

There seemed to be no end to the U.S. war on Cuba: from Operation Peter Pan that kidnapped 14,000 Cuban children over a two-year span from 1960 to 1963 and later in 2000, the kidnapping of Elián González. The U.S. also carried out biological warfare against Cuba, including the destruction of the pig industry and the sabotage of agricultural crops.

These are just a few examples.

The Memorial will grip your heart and change your view on who the real terrorists are.



Cuban guides at the Memorial de la Denuncia discuss the museum that documents the 3,478 people who have died as a result of U.S. Pentagon, CIA and rightwing. The crosses in the background of this modern Memorial represent lost lives.

Finlay Vaccine Institute

Our next stop was the Vaccine Institute which helped produce three Cuban COVID-19 vaccines: Soberana, Soberana 2 and Soberana Plus.

So many things stood out in the discussion and presentation by the representatives of the institute.

Under the most difficult conditions due to the blockade, Cuba was able to produce

these three highly effective vaccines, rivaling the effectiveness of U.S. vaccines. The blockade had prevented Cuba from importing the reagents necessary for the production of the vaccine. And international patent restrictions blocked Cuban scientists from sharing important information.

In addition, it was nearly the first time that Cuba had to produce a vaccine aimed at a virus (not a bacterial infection) and they were able to do it in a very short time. So you might consider it a miracle.

So how did they do it?

One of the major reasons given was the cooperation between Cuban organizations, the lack of competition and personal profit. In fact, these were some of the same reasons, along with a few others, for the high vaccination rate in Cuba that has now reached an astounding 90% of the population.

At this moment children under 2 years of age are not being vaccinated, so given that 90% includes all the population, the percentage of vaccinations among those who are eligible is even higher.

The people of Cuba trust the vaccines because the country has a long history of preventative health care that is steeped in education and community implementation. There is no profit requirement to block health care in Cuba.

