

Building Relations with Cuban Labor: 'Take Cuba off terrorism list'

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SOLIDARIDAD ENTRE LOS TRABAJADORES

Building Relations with Cuban Labor (BRCL) group and others gather for photos after the Havana May Day rally. Collage made from photos by Jason Newman, LRCT

On the eve of May Day 2024, a group of union members, their union officers, and supporters, mainly from the West Coast of the U.S., participated in a trip aptly named Building Relations with Cuban Labor (BRCL). The visit was planned to provide support for Cuban workers and to experience the wide spectrum of developments they have accomplished.

As everyone in the group got to know each other, they discussed their goals, such as reporting back to their organizations about the horrific impact of the U.S. blockade of Cuba and the urgent need to demand that Cuba be taken off the Trump (then Biden) list of “State Sponsors of Terrorism.”

On May 15, the Biden administration, facing upcoming elections, made news by announcing it was removing Cuba from a short list of countries that they allege are “not fully cooperating against terrorism.” That was not the same as removing Cuba from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list, according to a U.S. State Department official. They did not remove Cuba from that list, which has served to tighten the 62-year-long U.S. blockade of Cuba, contributing to a severe economic crisis on the island and to shortages of food, fuel, and medicine.

U.S. union members learn about Cuba

The BRCL group was composed of union representatives and labor coalitions, community groups, women, lesbian, and socialist organizations, all of whose activities included support for Cuba. There were longshore workers from the ILWU Local 10 and Local 52, the A. Philip Randolph Institute, SEIU Local 73, and professors and teachers from the Federation of Teachers.

At a meeting in the offices of **Central de Trabajadores de Cuba** (CTC — the Cuban Workers Central union federation), Julio Morales Verea, the CTC’s secretary general, and Nancy Roman spoke before opening the floor for discussion.

Morales talked about the revolutionary [Cuban Labor Code](#), which legally establishes the rights of all unions and workers, ensuring they hold power.

- Unions have the right to participate in company management, receive management information, and use facilities for representatives.
- Union agreement is required for layoffs, changes in working hours, and access to the annual safety report.
- Workers have the legal right to participate in workplace assemblies to debate and approve the Collective Bargaining Agreement negotiated by the union. The contract covers local pay systems and the implementation of employment production plans.
- The union's contract protects worker rights, including a 40-44-hour week and 30 days paid annual leave in the state sector.
- Unions have the right to stop any work they consider dangerous as part of a comprehensive health and safety policy.
- Grievance and disciplinary complaints go before workplace boards called Organs of Labor Justice, the majority of whose members are elected by workers.

Some other highlights of the BRCL visit included:

- **ELAM, the Latin American School of Medicine**, has trained tens of thousands of physicians from low-income communities in Africa, Asia, and the Americas, as well as the U.S. New doctors from over 100 ethnic groups, half of whom are women, make a commitment to return to work in underserved areas after receiving a scholarship.

They study in a school that recognizes every patient's right to care and care that centers learning in the community, where health promotion is as important as disease management.

- Cuba's **Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology** conducts world-recognized research and development of biopharmaceuticals for the treatment and prevention of diseases. One of their successes was finding a treatment that prevents amputations for diabetics.

Speakers emphasized the need to provide medicine where it is most needed without the constriction of profit-driven competition. A current goal of their research is finding a cure for dementia, a disorder women suffer more than men.

- **FANJ**, the Foundation of Antonio Nunez Jimenez. Here, the BRCL delegation learned about Cuba's commitment to environmental sustainability under climate change. They are working on solutions to the rising ocean level and the threat of superstorms in the Caribbean basin.

There were many opportunities to visit local communities, see the restoration of Old Havana, and enjoy Cuba's vibrant culture at jazz clubs, dance concerts, and art centers.

Most thrilling was May Day in Havana where tens of thousands of Cuban workers greeted their guests representing labor unions from all around the world. Music and dances began as the sun rose over the Atlantic. Former Cuban President Raul Castro and President Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez spoke under a banner reading, "POR CUBA JUNTOS CREAMOS." (Together, we create for Cuba.)

On the following day, the BRCL delegation attended the **Conference of Labor Solidarity** with all the other international labor delegations at the Cuban Palacio de Convenciones.

Union leaders from many countries spoke. Before President Canales addressed the packed hall, a news video showing the horror of genocide in Gaza was broadcast.



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