

Book launch in Havana contrasts Cuban LGBTQI+ advances with U.S. anti-trans repression

written by Gregory E. Williams
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Havana, July 29 – Cuban and U.S. activists gather for launch of new book, “Love is the law: Cuba’s queer rights revolution.”

The following talk was presented on July 29 at the ICAP (Instituto Cubano de

Amistad con los Pueblos / Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples) House of Friendship, in Havana, Cuba, with the participation of the Venceremos Brigade and LGBTIQ+ activists from the United States, along with members of the community networks linked to Cenesex (Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual / National Center for Sex Education), among other invited individuals.

This event was the Cuban launch of the book published in the U.S. by Struggle-La Lucha, "[Love is the law: Cuba's queer rights revolution](#)." Gregory E. Williams is the book's editor.

July 26 set the stage

Thank you for having me here today. How auspicious that we're together in Havana when Cuba just celebrated the July 26 holiday. This is the date when, in 1953, the revolutionaries led by Fidel Castro attacked the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba, and Raúl Martínez Ararás led the attack on army barracks in Bayamo. This combined offensive set the stage for the defeat of the U.S.-backed Batista dictatorship in 1959.

Because of that victory, *today* Cuba is a sovereign state building socialism. And the institutions of socialist democracy – along with guaranteed access to housing, health care, and more – are the basis for Cuba's tremendous advance with the Families Code adopted in 2022. This comprehensive reform of the legal system expands the rights of women, children, LGBTIQ+ people, those with different abilities, elders, and ultimately *all* Cubans. It's about much more than same-sex marriage.

In addition, the very first all-LGBTIQ+ Venceremos Brigade is here with us today. Congratulations! That's an accomplishment, given the simultaneous tightening of Washington's blockade of Cuba and the increased repression against queer and trans people in the U.S.

Also, our host, ICAP – the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples – is celebrating 65 years of fostering the kinds of internationalist connections we’re making today. Congratulations to ICAP!

Today’s event is the Cuban launch of the book about the Families Code, “Love is the law: Cuba’s queer rights revolution,” released in the U.S. by Struggle-La Lucha, the publishing arm of the Struggle for Socialism Party. Our friend Paquito [Francisco Rodríguez Cruz] from Cenesex has [already explained](#) the significance of the book. Thank you Paquito! I agree with him that a Spanish translation is needed. Let’s talk more.

I’d like to recognize several contributors to the book who are present: Cheryl LaBash, co-chair of the National Network on Cuba in the U.S.; Mariela Castro Espín, director of Cuba’s National Center for Sex Education, or Cenesex, which contributed greatly to the development of this Code; also, the amazing initiator of this event, Aylene Lesmes Bonachea of ICAP; Alejandra Garcia of *Resumen Latinoamericano*; and [Verde Gil Jiménez](#) of the Grupo Trans Masculinos de Cuba. Verde helped me develop this presentation by asking questions about the trans struggle in the U.S. Thank you, everyone! If I’ve missed anyone, please let me know.



From left to right: Cheryl LaBash (National Network on Cuba co-chair); Gregory Williams (Struggle-La Lucha co-editor); Graciela Ramírez Cruz (Resumen Latinamericano correspondent); Mariela Castro Espín (Cenesex director); Gail Walker (IFCO-Pastors for Peace executive director); and Francisco Rodríguez Cruz (Cuban Union of Journalists vice president).

LGBTQI+ delegation learned from Cuba

Let me just emphasize that this book grew from the U.S. Friends Against Homophobia and Transphobia Delegation, which went to Cuba in May 2023 to learn about the Code. It was organized by ICAP and Women in Struggle / Mujeres en Lucha.

During that trip, we met with queer and trans organizers, delegates from neighborhood assemblies, and a deputy of the National Assembly of People's Power — the equivalent of the U.S. Congress. (But note that Cuba's representatives are

ordinary workers – medics, plumbers, teachers — not millionaire career politicians like in the U.S.). The testimonies from this delegation are a central part of the book. Hopefully, the book is just one more step in our continuing collaborations.

The true face of U.S. imperialism is revealed

The book has come out in a particular historical context that I've already alluded to. Allow me to say something about that. I am referring not only to Cuba-U.S. relations, but to the present state of the global capitalist (or imperialist) system led by the U.S. That should ground our discussion.

I believe that in this moment, the real face of U.S. imperialism is more fully revealed before the world. Because of Gaza. Because of the cruelty and vulgarity of Trump's regime. Of course, Trump is just a symptom. But in this moment, Washington's beautiful words about democracy and human rights – used to justify sanctions and war – don't have the power they once did. The naked brutality of imperialism is revealed.

The system is truly decayed, and it's because of this decadence that the imperialists are so dangerous. Their desperation causes them to lash out in all directions. They're burning children alive in Gaza. They're pushing for war with China.

And this terrorist government of the United States, which has killed many *millions* of people worldwide, is trying to destroy Cuba. They want to destroy the socialist system that made the Families Code possible. They want to impose a government that would let Wall Street plunder Cuba like in the '50s.

This decadence of the imperialist system is fueling resurgent fascism. Within its own borders, the Yankee government is furiously attacking workers and oppressed people, including the trans community. Like immigrants, trans people are scapegoats for this system's failures.

But they can't hide the fact that conditions inside the country are deteriorating. Homelessness increased 18% from 2023 to 2024. While austerity is imposed on the population, most of the state budget is given to the military and police, including ICE. They no longer make any pretense of improving the lives of the people.

Anti-trans hysteria fuels violence

Trump's movement has escalated rhetoric against trans people and pushed through many anti-trans laws. Violence against trans people has risen dramatically. Murders of trans people almost doubled between 2017 and 2022.

In that time, 65% of trans women killed by guns were Black. One third were experiencing housing insecurity. Clearly, transphobia is bound up with racism and economic exploitation.

There was a horrific case at the beginning of this year: the murder of Sam Nordquist, a young multi-racial trans man from Minnesota. In late 2024, Sam went missing after going to rural New York to stay with a girlfriend he met online. This woman and *six other people* sexually abused and tortured Sam for over one month before killing him.

One of the most shocking aspects is that some of the perpetrators are themselves LGBTQI+. That's why prosecutors don't consider it a hate crime. But I think it demonstrates the deep rot of the social fabric and can't be separated from anti-trans hysteria.

Again, that happened in New York, a so-called "liberal" state. California is another. Yet this month, thousands of trans children and youth are losing access to gender-affirming care in Los Angeles, California. The L.A. Children's Hospital is ending trans services because Trump threatened their funding. People have been fighting back, rallying outside the hospital. Our comrade Onyinye will tell us more about the

fight in L.A.

No equivalent in U.S. to Cuba's popular democracy

Back to the Families code and why the U.S. and Cuban situations are so different. We must understand that because of their socialist system, Cuba has institutions of popular democracy that we don't have in the U.S.

In the U.S., just as there's no equivalent to this popular democracy, there's nothing comparable to the Families Code. Certainly, there are progressive laws (whether they're enforced or not), but each one is passed individually after a big struggle.

For example, some states began legalizing same-sex marriage starting in 2004, with federal recognition coming in 2013. That was a people's victory. But getting each of these laws passed was an uphill struggle because the capitalist state generally opposes progressive change.

But on top of the difficulty of getting any progressive law passed, rights won are later snatched away. That's part of the inevitable slide toward fascism as the imperialist system declines.

Queer and trans liberation part of anti-capitalist struggle

In the Struggle for Socialism Party, we affirm that the fight for queer and trans rights is part of the larger struggle against capitalism. The oppression of women and LGBTQI+ people is an outgrowth of class society - of premodern arrangements dividing those with wealth from those without it. Capitalism continues such oppressions in new forms.

So, when we talk about overcoming the capitalist mode of production, we are also talking about eliminating all forms of oppression, including gender and sexual

oppression. Conversely, we can't have queer and trans liberation without overcoming capitalism.

We shouldn't be confused when corporations seeking queer and trans customers co-opt the symbols of our struggles. Neither should we be confused when imperialist governments use claims about our rights to justify their actions.

When Washington plans to destroy a country, it talks about the rights of people there. They say they're going to liberate women and bring democracy. This never happens. They bring death while backing the most reactionary forces everywhere.

U.S. imperialism can be defeated

Yes, we're up against a tremendous monster, but it can be defeated. The heroic peoples of Palestine, Yemen, Lebanon, and Iran are striking real blows against this monster. It's not invincible. And Cuba has stood firm for 66 years.

The Cuban people and the working-class and oppressed majority in the U.S. have the same enemy. In the U.S., we're being crushed by a system that benefits a small ruling class. The forces of that same class are trying to destroy Cuba. We have to work together.

With political education, the U.S. masses can understand this. For our part, as queer and trans activists from the U.S., we must spread the word about Cuba's achievements. And we must keep up the pressure to end the blockade and take Cuba off the bogus State Sponsors of Terrorism list.

Cuba stands firm

Before I conclude, let me state that I know Cuba's institutions of socialist democracy aren't perfect. But consider this remark from President Diaz-Canal's [July 18 speech](#)

to the National Assembly:

“When we review all the periods of the 66 years of the Revolution in power, what we find, in addition to victories, are third world challenges, enemy obstacles and also our own mistakes and lessons learned, all fruits of the never abandoned eagerness to conquer and sustain social justice as a supreme aspiration, in a completely adverse world context, since the Soviet Union and the socialist camp ceased to exist.

“If, in spite of all that, the Cuban Revolution is standing and fighting for the possible prosperity, it is because of its authentic and genuine character. We are not an accident of history. We are the logical consequence of a history of resistance and rebellion against abuse and injustice that has very deep reasons to believe in its own strength.”

I want to emphasize this phrase, “*in a completely adverse world context*.” In the past 50 years, more or less – in the long phase of capitalism called “neoliberalism” – what we’ve seen is a global revolutionary retreat, with the imperialist bourgeoisie on the offensive. Most of the socialist camp was destroyed by imperialist-backed counterrevolution, resulting in a plunge in life expectancy in those countries. At the same time, the liberation struggles of Africa, Asia, and Latin America faced major setbacks following the high tide of the ‘60s and ‘70s.

In the imperialist center, even in Western Europe, social democracy is effectively dead. Unions have been beaten back. Almost everywhere, the gains of people’s struggles have been reversed. And as I’ve said, with this global system in crisis – economically, politically, and *ecologically* – the trend is toward fascism.

But in that *completely adverse world context*, Cuba has stood firm. The Families Code shows that this revolution is still alive. It is still possible to gather the people’s forces to advance that revolutionary process. That’s the task of the new revolutionary generations here.

We must make a revolution in the U.S.

The mere existence of this workers' state is a light for people struggling everywhere, including for us in the U.S., where we have to make our own revolution. That is essential for us, for Cuba, and for the survival of humanity and all the other species on this planet.

That's the flipside of the system's terminal decline. Even though this period is dangerous, opportunities are emerging. Formerly colonized countries of the Global South are finding new ways to maneuver against a system that cannot tolerate sovereign development benefiting the masses. That's why the imperialists are against China, and Trump is attacking BRICS. But we know that overcoming capitalism is a prerequisite for true multipolarity, where all can develop in peace.

Moreover, today, the working class truly is global, and not just in the sense of being present everywhere. Our class all over the world is *interconnected*. That is our strength, and it's why we're the class that can defeat the capitalists once and for all. But we have to organize for it.

That ends my presentation, thank you!

