

LGBTQ+ delegation meets with Federation of Cuban Women

written by Struggle - La Lucha
May 31, 2023



SLL photo

Havana — The LGBTQ+ delegation included multicultural, multi-generational, gay men, lesbians, bisexual, trans, and gender-nonconforming representatives from all

over the U.S. We visited so many organizations, but among the most inspiring for this writer was the visit to the Federation of Cuban Women.

It was inspiring because it provided a beacon of hope as to what is possible for women and gender-nonconforming people in a socialist society. The FCW has been the seat of power for Cuban women and their families for over 60 years.

The structure begins from the base in each neighborhood, municipality, and province. Most members are volunteers, but there are some paid positions, particularly in the municipalities. The FCW is the organization that takes care of all concerns women in Cuba may have.

There is a national mandate for the advancement of women, and the FCW carries this program into action.

The FCW was founded by Vilma Espín, who is honored as the eternal president. But also in the national leadership are the First and Second General Secretaries. The Congress of the Federation of Cuban Women meets every five years and will be held next year in 2024.

Health is a priority

The health of Cuban women and their families is a priority for the FCW and the Cuban government. Health activities are handled by the Hygiene Brigade, which works with the local doctors and nurses living in the communities they serve.

“We must erect a monument to the women in the Hygiene Brigade during the COVID-19 pandemic,” said the First Secretary of the FCW.

Regarding domestic violence, each ministry has created a program to address the victim and the aggressor. After the COVID-19 pandemic, a national leadership was organized to begin addressing and ending gender-based violence, another priority

for FCW.

The national leadership develops penal codes and new laws related to gender-based violence.

Violence against women and other oppressed genders is harshly punished. Someone who kills their current or former female partner receives life in prison automatically. Depending on other extenuating circumstances, they may also receive mental health or substance use services while incarcerated. But some rights afforded to other prisoners may not be granted, i.e., overnight stays in the community.

The principal violence against Cuban women and other gender-oppressed people continues to be the U.S. blockade. This has been made worse by including Cuba on the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism.

The gall of the worst state sponsor of terrorism in the history of the world, the United States of

Amerikkka, calling this small island a terrorist because they want to live in peace, without interference from any imperialist state. They want to care for their people, educate their children, provide health care from birth to old age, provide housing for all, and share with the rest of the world.

“We don’t give our leftovers we give what we have,” said the First Secretary of the FCW.



‘Cuban health assistance could make a huge difference in South Central and East LA’

written by Struggle - La Lucha
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Statement by Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice Coordinator John Parker at the Los Angeles City Council hearing on May 24.

Hello, my name is John Thompson Parker. I’m the coordinator of the Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice. I also ran for the U.S. Senate on the Peace & Freedom Party ticket in 2022, when I received 105,000 votes.

I was planning on running again for the U.S. Senate. Unfortunately, I may not be able to do that because a few weeks ago, I had a very dangerous stroke that required surgery to get a blood clot out of my brain. I temporarily lost the ability to move my right side. My communication ability is still challenged.

My surgeon said it would be important to be seen by a neurologist and a cardiologist, in addition to a speech therapist, as soon as possible. Unfortunately, my HMO medical plan made it impossible to schedule these specialists until more than a month after my stroke. This wait is a problem since a stroke is more likely to repeat within a month, which could create dire medical consequences or death.

People who look like me share that same situation of lack of health care. The Los Angeles Times quoted a report in the Journal of the American Medical Association this month that showed the higher mortality rate among African Americans, which resulted in 1.63 million excess deaths relative to white people in this country over more than two decades. These deaths are fueled by the higher rate of heart disease and the enormous number of Black people who died from COVID-19 in 2020.

But Cuba is making a difference for people who look like me in Latin America and on the African continent because they're getting health assistance from the Cuban government - especially during the COVID crisis. Vaccines and doctors and clinics. Cuba developed four new COVID vaccines along with a new diabetes drug that prevents amputations.

This makes a huge difference in the world, and it could make a difference in South Central and East LA, where your Black and Brown constituents reside. Cuba tried to show up for Black people here in the U.S. Remember Hurricane Katrina and the flooding in New Orleans. Cuba had hundreds of doctors and relief workers ready to help and could have prevented deaths, but then-President George W. Bush refused to allow that Cuban-provided aid.

We recently invited delegates of the Cuban Mission to the United Nations to talk, among other things, about the health care that could help your constituents. The mayor's office found out the Cuban diplomats were in LA, and the vice-mayor met with the Cuban delegates before our event at the Harriet Tubman Center.

Our meeting showed how our communities can benefit with more doctors and more clinics. Cuba can also provide urgently-needed diabetes drugs and preventive COVID medicine. Cuba even trains doctors for free – young constituents in your districts can go to Cuba, become doctors, and come back and serve in our oppressed communities debt free.

The meeting with the two Cuban diplomats occurred on April 19, one day before I almost died from a stroke on April 20. I now understand how Cuban-provided health care that prioritizes the most oppressed communities would help me. I continue to be in jeopardy, waiting to see specialists. That is the same situation of Black and Brown members of your constituency and my community.

One thing that is stopping Cuba from being able to help us is the designation of Cuba as a State Sponsor Of Terrorism (SSOT). President Obama took Cuba off the list. The Trump administration put Cuba back on that list, and unfortunately, President Biden has continued that policy. We are here today to ask you to join with others to call on President Biden to help Cuba and help us.

I have a long list of 100 or so city councils, labor unions, and community organizations – including the city council of Washington, D.C., the capital of this country – that have passed resolutions that call on President Biden to take Cuba off of the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism and lift the U.S. blockade of Cuba, policies that deeply harm the ability of the Cuban government and its people to carry on with the basic functions of life.

This request for the Los Angeles City Council to pass the resolution to take Cuba off the SSOT list and end the U.S. blockade is supported by many groups and individuals, including the Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice; the Black Alliance For Peace; Unión del Barrio; Pastor William Smart Jr., president of the Southern California Southern Christian Leadership Congress; and Code Pink.

Hopefully, this wish won't be a dying request as I wait for the time when I can finally see the brain and heart specialists in June. Hopefully, my experience will help you see that passing this resolution will benefit your constituents in our oppressed communities, who also suffer from the same life-threatening lack of health care. Take this resolution seriously.

Resolution Urging that Cuba Be Removed from the U.S. List of State Sponsors of Terrorism

Presented to the Los Angeles City Council on May 24, 2023

WHEREAS: President Biden has the authority to remove Cuba from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list by executive order, and to recommit to the normalization of relations with Cuba begun by the Obama-Biden administration; and

WHEREAS: For the past 62 years, the United States has imposed an economic, commercial and financial embargo on Cuba that prevents most engagement and trade with the United States, and punishes other countries that engage with Cuba; and

WHEREAS: Los Angeles would benefit from the economic and health care exchanges – due to the lack of health care suffered by Black and Brown communities, with especially higher deaths from COVID and heart disease; and

WHEREAS: Cuba can also provide urgently-needed diabetes drugs and preventive COVID medicine, provide doctors and clinics in the City of Los Angeles, and whereas Cuba has programs so that Los Angeles residents go to Cuba, train to become doctors and come back and serve in our oppressed communities debt free; and

WHEREAS: The only thing stopping Cuba from being able to provide these essential health care needs to Los Angeles is the designation of Cuba as a State Sponsor Of Terrorism (SSOT) and the U.S. embargo; and

WHEREAS: The consequences of this embargo continue to inflict daily hardships and deprivations on the Cuban people, creating shortages of basic necessities like food and medicine, and severely restricting international financial and trade opportunities; prevents Cuba from obtaining vital medical equipment and supplies, and even impedes humanitarian aid responses to catastrophic events like Hurricane Ian which devastated both Florida and Cuba, thus harming the Cuban people who President Biden's administration claims to support; and

WHEREAS: The United Nations in 2017 estimated that this embargo had cost the Cuban economy \$130 billion, averaging more than \$2 billion each year; and

WHEREAS: The United Nations General Assembly voted to condemn the U.S. embargo against Cuba for the 30th time on Nov. 3, 2022, with 185 of 193 nations decisively voting in favor, and only the United States and Israel opposed; and

WHEREAS: The Trump administration imposed 243 new sanctions on Cuba, including restrictions on Cuban Americans who send remittances to families and businesses in Cuba. These sanctions contribute to a mass migration of Cubans, creating U.S. border security concerns; and

WHEREAS: Former President Trump arbitrarily reinstated Cuba's designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism less than a week after the Jan. 6, 2021, attempted coup, reversing the Obama-Biden administration's 2015 decision to remove this status after an exhaustive review by the U.S. State Department, although Cuba does not satisfy any criteria for inclusion on this list; and

WHEREAS: Cuba's arbitrary designation has subjected it to further sanctions and international financial restrictions that limit the nation's ability to carry out critical financial transactions, including those needed to advance efforts to combat the COVID pandemic and improve its economy; and

WHEREAS: In 2021, 117 members of the U.S. Congress called for the removal of Cuba from this list, noting in a letter, “a policy of engagement with Cuba serves U.S. interests and those of the Cuban people”;

Therefore:

Be it RESOLVED that _____ strongly urges President Biden and Congress, each federal representative in its jurisdiction, to call on the federal government to remove Cuba from the United States list of State Sponsors of Terrorism; and

Be It Further RESOLVED that _____ urges our congressional delegation to pass legislation that will eliminate those aspects of the embargo that have been codified into law; and remove all sanctions against Cuba by the United States. Allow the peoples of the United States and Cuba to travel and trade freely between the countries; and

Be It Further RESOLVED that _____ issues a press release regarding the details of this resolution to its media contacts within its jurisdiction.



‘Socialismo sí, homofobia/transfobia no!’ Cuba’s Conga celebrates advances in LGBTQ+ rights

written by Struggle - La Lucha
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Conga, the traditional music and dance ensemble of Cuban carnival, with its pounding percussion, colorful costumes, and swirling dance, is beloved throughout the Caribbean and around the world.

A very special Conga took place in Havana on May 13 - the Conga Against Homophobia and Transphobia. Much like Pride Month celebrations in the U.S., Conga is both a proclamation and celebration of Cuba’s LGBTQ+ community.

This year was the first in-person Conga held since the beginning of the COVID-19

pandemic. With 95% of Cuba's population vaccinated with the country's excellent locally developed vaccines, the event was able to go full-steam ahead.

The sweltering heat and threatening clouds of previous days had relented, and there was much to celebrate. Last autumn, Cubans overwhelmingly approved a national referendum on a new Families Code – one that vastly expands the legal rights of queer families and all families.

That victory was encapsulated in the theme of this year's Conga, “Por todas las familias, el amor es ley”: For all families, love is the law.

Congas in Havana and Sancti Spíritus are highlights of the annual Cuban Days against Homophobia and Transphobia, marked this year from May 3-20. A visiting delegation of LGBTQ+ activists from the U.S., organized by Women in Struggle-Mujeres en Lucha, joined the Havana march.

As a crowd gathered near the Malecon in the late afternoon, friends old and new embraced, groups held aloft banners and flags, and activists posed for photos. A huge orange truck festooned with blue, white, and pink Trans Pride flags rounded the corner, carrying loudspeakers and drag performers, waved in by Malú Cano Valladares, coordinator of the Transcuba Nacional network.

Conga musicians and dancers took their places and warmed up while dozens of hands took hold of the massive rainbow flag brought by Cenesex – Cuba's National Center for Sex Education.

At the front of the march, holding a long banner nearly the width of the street, an array of activists from Cenesex, Transcuba, HSH gay men's network, and the Network of Lesbian and Bisexual Women, were joined by international guests, including Puerto Rican trans matriarch Dianne Trinidad and Deirdre Deans, a Black lesbian member of the U.S. delegation.

They marched alongside Cuban First Lady Lis Cuesta Peraza, Cenesex director Mariela Castro Espín, Vice Minister of Public Health Carilda Peña, and Jorge Luís Broche, head of the Department of Attention to the Social Sector of the Communist Party of Cuba.

As the march stepped off, families, neighbors, and coworkers gathered on sidewalks and leaned out of windows to watch and cheer on the Conga. Some brought signs and banners of support. Parents hoisted children on their shoulders to watch. No hate groups were jeering or protesting from the sidelines – only solidarity and joy.

The day's most popular chant was "Socialismo sí, homofobia/transfobia, no!" – yes to socialism, no to homophobia and transphobia. Other chants celebrated the Families Code and denounced the U.S. blockade that causes grave harm to Cuba's queer community and all Cuban people.

As the march concluded, the thousands of participants joined a festival prepared in their honor. People ate, danced, talked, and flirted long into the night. Tomorrow, the work continues to educate and enact "the most advanced family code in the world," in the words of Cenesex's Castro Espín.



Amazon Labor Union statement on Cuba: End the Blockade!

written by Struggle - La Lucha

May 31, 2023

From Chris Smalls, Amazon Labor Union president.

May 22, 2023

“On May Day, I joined a delegation of organizers on a trip to Cuba to show solidarity with the Cuban people and call out the injustice that is an economic blockade designed to harm workers and the people on the island.

Let’s make one thing very clear: The blockade isn’t designed to hurt the political leaders in Cuba or whatever nonsense people say to defend a Cold War-era policy. The blockade is designed to hurt the people – full stop.

Our group had to fill our suitcases with medical supplies like syringes and antibiotics because hospitals literally cannot access even basic life-saving instruments. Just imagine losing a friend or a family member just because American politicians are

still so stuck in the past. They are willing to let folks die.

Enough. Show solidarity with the workers of Cuba and all of the people who have suffered for literally no reason, and join us in demanding an end to the blockade.

Nearly every country in the United Nations has called out the United States for its brutal economic sanctions on Cuba, all because they want to propagate the lies spread by massive corporations about the island. Massive companies are actually that threatened by even just a small society that dares to exist without their profiteering.

Throughout its history, Cuba has been a bastion of workers' rights. And that's exactly why the rich and powerful are so dedicated to keeping the people there down.

But worker solidarity doesn't stop at the border – or any border. After decades of completely avoidable economic struggle, it's time for the United States to listen to the rest of the world and end this pointless blockade. Sign your name to show your solidarity.

In solidarity,

Chris Smalls
President
Amazon Labor Union

Emotional morning yesterday with US union, youth, community and political leaders who traveled to [#Cuba](#) to celebrate May Day. The affection and solidarity shown to [@DiazCanelB](#) for continue the struggle vs the blockade was exciting and energizing. [#CubaIsNotAlone](#) pic.twitter.com/P08Y6JVCNM

— Sandra Yisel Ramírez (@carantosan) [May 2, 2023](#)

Spanish version

Pronunciamiento Sindicato Amazónico Sobre Cuba: ¡Terminen El Bloqueo!

De Chris Smalls, presidente del Sindicato de Trabajadores de Amazon... [Del sitio web de ALU.]

POR FAVOR COMPARTE AMPLIAMENTE.

“El Primero de Mayo, me uní a una delegación de organizadores en un viaje a Cuba para mostrar solidaridad con el pueblo cubano y denunciar la injusticia que es un bloqueo económico diseñado para dañar a los trabajadores y al pueblo de la isla.

Dejemos una cosa muy clara: el bloqueo no está diseñado para dañar a los líderes políticos en Cuba o cualquier tontería que diga la gente para defender una política de la Guerra Fría. El bloqueo está diseñado para lastimar a la gente, punto final.

Nuestro grupo tuvo que llenar nuestras maletas con suministros médicos como jeringas y antibióticos porque los hospitales literalmente no pueden acceder ni siquiera a los instrumentos básicos para salvar vidas. Imagínese perder a un amigo o familiar solo porque los políticos estadounidenses todavía están tan atrapados en el pasado. Están dispuestos a dejar morir a la gente.

Suficiente. Muestre solidaridad con los trabajadores de Cuba y todas las personas que han sufrido literalmente sin razón, y únase a nosotros para exigir el fin del bloqueo >>

Casi todos los países de las Naciones Unidas han criticado a Estados Unidos por sus brutales sanciones económicas contra Cuba, todo porque quieren propagar las mentiras difundidas por las corporaciones masivas sobre la isla. Las empresas

masivas en realidad están tan amenazadas incluso por una pequeña sociedad que se atreve a existir sin su especulación.

A lo largo de su historia, Cuba ha sido un bastión de los derechos de los trabajadores. Y es exactamente por eso que los ricos y poderosos están tan dedicados a mantener a la gente ahí abajo.

Pero la solidaridad de los trabajadores no se detiene en la frontera, ni en ninguna frontera. Después de décadas de lucha económica completamente evitable, es hora de que Estados Unidos escuche al resto del mundo y ponga fin a este bloqueo sin sentido. Firma con tu nombre para mostrar tu solidaridad.

En solidaridad,

Chris Smalls-Presidente sindicato amazónico (Amazon Labor Union)



In Cuba, National Assembly of

People's Power truly represents the people

written by Struggle - La Lucha
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Havana – The first thing you notice coming from the U.S. to the beautiful island of Cuba is how chill the people are. They hang out late into the night, chatting, playing dominoes, listening to music, or just watching the sights.

The second thing you notice is that government officials do not fear the people they represent. It is truly a government by the people and for the people.

Unlike U.S. government officials who do not mix among the people, Lis Cuesta Peraza, wife of Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, and National Assembly Deputy Mariela Castro Espín marched among the people in the Conga Against Homophobia and Transphobia without any security detail.

When we visited the Capitol in Havana on May 12, there were no armed guards surrounding the building where the National Assembly of People's Power meets. At the entrance were two guards who waved our delegation of LGBTQ+ activists from the U.S. right in. We were escorted through the building by Sergio Martínez, a deputy of the assembly, who met with us and explained the Cuban political process.

The National Assembly has 470 elected deputies. They do not receive a salary for their service and are not allowed to get campaign funding. They are also subject to recall by the people of their districts at any time. Therefore they cannot be bought, and they cannot betray the districts they are there to represent.

Deputies must maintain their jobs in their chosen professions. What a contrast with

U.S. Congress members and other elected officials who are owned and controlled by corporate lobbyists and dark money!

At the Capitol, the president, vice president, and secretary of the assembly, the presidents of the commissions, and their staff work throughout the year. But most elected deputies work in their communities and meet in Havana two times per year. If needed, the president can call a special meeting to discuss urgent matters.

At the end of May 2023, a special session will be held to discuss and approve the Social Communications legislation, to protect the Cuban people from the constant misinformation war waged by the United States.

The U.S. government hopes this misinformation war may work on Cuban youth because they know it hasn't worked on older Cubans, who remember what the country was like under Washington's thumb before the revolution - where children died of hunger and other curable diseases, people lived in shacks, and the majority of the population was illiterate.

But even the Cuban youth, especially those in the Union of Communist Youth and Federation of University Students, continue to defend their revolution and their homeland. "Although we are grateful for the solidarity the world has shown us, we can't wait for anyone to defend our revolution; we have to continue to build our revolution and a better Cuba today," asserted a young woman leader of the federation.

Elections in Cuba

When it comes to the electoral process in Cuba, you immediately notice that lies and misinformation are also propagandized to the people in the U.S. regarding "corrupt" elections in Cuba.

There is only one political party, the Communist Party of Cuba. But anyone can run

for office. Candidates are selected by the community they live and work in. Each neighborhood gives from 2-8 nominations for delegates that are well-known and respected by their community, so capitalist-style campaigns are not allowed or necessary. They represent their neighborhoods in the Municipal Assembly.

From these, the candidates for the National Assembly are selected. Fifty percent of the candidates go through this process. The other 50% of the nominated candidates come from the mass organizations of civil society, where one will find the Federation of Cuban Women, Committees for Defense of the Revolution, Cuban Workers' Central, and others.

All the nominations then go to the National Candidacy Commission, where they are thoroughly vetted. There is no requirement that a candidate be a member of the Communist Party, although many are. This totally debunks the U.S. government's assertion that Cuba's Communist Party selects the legislature.

U.S. capitalist politicians can never understand integrity, honesty, or service to the people because they are put into power to serve the needs and wants of the ruling class.

The National Candidacy Commission proposes a final list of candidates, which go back to the Municipal Assemblies for approval, and finally to the general elections. Anywhere in this process, Cubans can reject a candidate but must provide evidence as to why they believe the candidate is unable to serve.

Currently, 55% of the National Assembly delegates are women. Some 73% of people voted in the last election. Compare that to the U.S., where just over half of the voting population participated in the 2020 general election.

After the National Assembly is seated, the deputies elect the president, vice president, and secretary of the parliament, and also the president and vice president

of the Republic and members of the Council of State.

By law, a member of parliament carries the vote and the issues from their community, meeting with their constituency once a month. The work of a member of the National Assembly is one of service with no pay. They live in their communities and may be called upon to respond to a neighbor constituent in the middle of the night after a long day at their job. They are required by law and by duty to respond promptly. The people have the right to request the removal of any elected official.

The role of the Communist Party is to develop the guidelines for the development of a socialist society. The Party's mandate is to meet the needs of the majority of Cubans, to have social justice for all, and to ensure that every Cuban can express and participate in the development of the type of society Cubans want.

Contrary to the stated role of "representatives" in the U.S., the reality for people here is no social justice, homelessness, no medical care, hunger, and state-sanctioned violence.

Legislative process

For legislation to become law, it must be approved by the National Assembly. In the case of laws that affect the entire population, the people must vote for them.

The Council of State meets between the two annual sessions. Twenty-one deputies are elected by the National Assembly to serve on the council. Their charge is to serve the legislature by organizing and gathering information on issues brought by their constituents or mass organizations.

Legislation is prepared by a group of experts who develop a draft proposal. Then it goes to the respective sectors for input - for instance, farmers will have input in any legislation that affects farmers. Anyone who has an interest in the topic can request inclusion in the discussion and development.

After the National Assembly approves major new legislation, it may go to a referendum for the people to vote yes or no. Such was the case of the Families Code, passed in Cuba last year, a law that is far ahead of any country, especially the United States, as it relates to families and the LGBTQ+ community. (A future article on the Families Code will explore this further.)

The interest of the Cuban people is paramount for the National Assembly. Imagine if we in the U.S. could truly have leaders that make our interests more important than the interests of Big Oil, Big Pharma, or Big Banks. Imagine our representatives working towards the development of a better life for all people in the U.S.

These scoundrels, our so-called “representatives,” know nothing about sacrifice, service, or commitment. They will never willingly give up their millionaire donors, their mansions, and their paid expensive vacations.

Only a socialist revolution in the U.S. will wrench power from them and give it back to the people where it belongs.

Impact of U.S. economic blockade

Deputy Sergio Martínez ended our meeting as most of the people we met ended their meetings – with a discussion on how the longest sanctions imposed on any country have impacted and continue to impact the people of Cuba. He spoke of its impact on energy production, agriculture, and medicine.

“The Biden administration has not been friendly and in fact has been more harmful with misinformation, the blockade, and now putting Cuba on the list of state sponsors of terrorism,” Martínez explained.

When we visited the Denunciation Memorial in Havana, I was disgusted by the gall of the U.S. imperialist government in having a list of so-called “state sponsors of terrorism.” This same U.S. government has rained torture, rape, and murder on

Cuba, all over the world, and upon its own citizens. Calling anyone else a terrorist is simply hypocrisy at the greatest level.

A recent meeting of Latin American countries voted against the exclusion of Cuba and demanded an end to the blockade, as well as taking Cuba off the terrorist list.

“We cannot wait for the U.S. to end the blockade. We have to develop our country with it still in place. Sovereignty is a right we will not renounce no matter what or at any cost,” the humble, revolutionary servant of the Cuban people stated.



Cuban socialism advances biotechnology

written by Struggle - La Lucha
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Twentieth anniversary of the Human Genome Project

April was the 20th anniversary of the official completion of the Human Genome

Project (HGP). This was an international collaboration to identify all the DNA sequences comprising the human genome.

Planning for this colossal effort began as far back as 1984. The execution took 13 years, from 1990 to 2003. In actuality, the identification of nucleotide base pairs making up the genome was only 92% complete in 2003, when the project was declared completed. It was not until 2021 that the genome was sequenced, with only 0.3% of base pairs remaining undetermined.

The achievement by 2003 was astonishing. Countless hours of human labor combined with advances in computing power resulted in a nearly complete picture of the human genome only 50 years after the DNA structure was determined. The project was driven primarily by public collaboration – not market forces – with a relatively free exchange of information. Researchers worked in some 20 institutions in six countries, including China.

Since 2003, major milestones have been reached. For example, as of March this year, a Mississippi woman named Victoria Gray is experiencing a complete cessation of all symptoms of sickle cell anemia, a painful disease mainly affecting Black people. She began receiving experimental gene therapy using CRISPR technology in 2019. This would not have been possible without the HGP and other recent advances in genetics.

Advances hampered by the profit motive

The full potential of these and other scientific advances is hampered by the profit motive inherent in the capitalist mode of production. Consider that recombinant human insulin has been on the market since 1982, yet 1.3 million diabetic people in the U.S. rationed insulin in 2021; the Biden administration has moved to bring down prices, but, again, this is 41 years after the product became available.

In a period marked by anti-intellectualism, academic and even journalistic information remains behind paywalls. On the other hand, disinformation – as with the far right’s anti-vaccine propaganda – is often free.

And on top of the more “normal” limitations placed upon scientific development are imperialist blockades and sanctions. The anti-imperialist movement should be clear that sanctions are war by other means. The blockade of Cuba is designed to put maximum pressure on the population to force regime change, benefitting foreign capitalists. It is designed to hurt common people, especially children and older people. The Cuban government estimates that as of spring 2022, they have lost more than \$150 billion because of the blockade. That is \$150 billion that could have gone toward health care, housing, or combatting climate change. It could have gone toward improving infrastructure to withstand the frequent hurricanes that batter the island.

Cuba develops biotechnology industry

Cuba is known around the world for its medical professionals. Cuban nurses and doctors go where there is need, to any country where they can travel. But Cuba is also distinguishing itself with world-class biotechnology research and manufacturing.

In Havana, our delegation visited the Centro de Ingeniería Genética y Biotecnología de Cuba – in English, the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology in Cuba, established in 1986. Multiple staff were gracious enough to take a couple of hours out of their workday to explain the history of this industry in Cuba, detailing achievements made despite seemingly impossible conditions imposed by the blockade. This demonstrates how seriously they take internationalist solidarity. As with everywhere else we went, the staff emphasized the importance they give to interchange with people from the U.S.

This institution had humble beginnings when, in 1980, Fidel Castro met with U.S. oncologist Dr. Randolph Lee Clark and others to discuss the promise of interferons and other cutting-edge medicines. Fidel had a grand vision for this industry in Cuba. He understood how it could improve people's lives, developing alongside the free, comprehensive health care system.

Today, this sector can manufacture over 70% of the medicines used on the island. This strengthens the resilience and sovereignty of the national economy and assures access for the population. Since 2012, the biotechnology industry has been grouped principally under the state-owned BioCubaFarma, uniting multiple pre-existing entities. According to the presentation we saw, BioCubaFarma has 996 products on the national market, with 76% relating to public health.

By prioritizing this sector and integrating it with on-the-ground health care through socialist planning, Cuba has radically decreased the incidence of infectious diseases. The entire population up to 40 years old has been immunized against Hepatitis B, which kills up to 1 million people worldwide each year. As of 2021, Cuba has fewer than 100 cases of acute Hepatitis B. No cases have been reported for people 15 years old and younger.

This is just one example. Cuba is also on track to eliminate meningitis.

BioCubaFarma has produced a recombinant human epidermal growth factor – a drug called Heberprot-P – which improves healing of advanced diabetic foot ulcers. Around the world, patients with diabetic foot ulcers have a mortality rate of almost 50% within five years, making this condition a significant public health concern, including in the U.S.

To date, this industry has produced five vaccines against COVID-19, with Cuba's Abdala being the first COVID-19 vaccine developed in Latin America. Abdala has a 92.28% efficacy at three doses. Importantly, these vaccines do not require special

refrigeration, making them suitable for wide distribution in the developing world.

In all, the presenter explained the development and impact of around 13 different biotechnology products. All of these are the result of heroic efforts in the face of the blockade. He was clear that the full development of the sector is impossible so long as the blockade is in place. As a worker in a U.S. molecular biology lab, this writer knows that all of the materials and equipment needed to carry out even the most basic research in these areas are expensive. It is difficult for laboratories in Cuba to replace non-functioning equipment or to obtain chemical reagents. He described these difficulties as “a continual nightmare.”

For these reasons, biotechnology development is held back. This harms the Cuban people, who are deprived of income and more rapid scientific development. But it also harms people worldwide who could benefit from access to Cuba’s products. That includes people in the U.S., especially the working class and oppressed.

For the free exchange of information

The Human Genome Project showed that great advances in knowledge and technical ability are possible with international collaboration and a free exchange of information. That project itself was nearly thwarted by forces representing a different vision – one which saw genetic therapies and even genes as exploitable for profit. This is emblematic of science under capitalism. Fortunately, the public project won out. But in general, the existence of capitalism and imperialism thwart the full flowering of human potential, including scientific advancement.

Cuba’s scientific achievements under present circumstances are enormous. BioCubaFarma does have collaborative projects in some countries, including China and Spain. But without the blockade, much more would be possible. Imagine if researchers from Cuba and the United States could work together without this interference. Imagine how much poor and oppressed people in the U.S. would

benefit from Cuban medicines and aid from their incredible medical professionals. Imagine the benefit to Cuba if its products were widely available in the U.S.

The working class in the U.S. has no interest in continuing the blockade. For us – as for the working class in Cuba – it is a detriment. What will benefit us, again, is the free exchange of knowledge and expertise. What will benefit us is internationalist collaboration.



A drag show In Havana

written by Struggle - La Lucha
May 31, 2023

May 13, Havana — Almost the moment we arrived at the corner next to the state-owned club, Cabaret Las Vegas, a car with one of our friends from the National Center for Sex Education (Cenesex) stopped by. She called us over to say hello before going on her way; she had just returned from airing a television roundtable with Mariela Castro Espín and others.

The place was nearly empty because we arrived too early, at 11:00 p.m. But by 1:00

a.m. and the start of the drag show, it was absolutely packed.

I was moved to see community members as well as foreign guests enjoying themselves. We experienced a brief blackout earlier in the night, reminding us of the blockade.

(The electricity came back online quickly, though; this is the only one we have witnessed since being here.)

There was a wide age range represented, from very young to elders. In the crowd, we saw another friend from Cenesex — a trans woman whom we happen to know is 74 years old! Congratulations to her for being a model of strength and determination, as well as grace.

With all the people gathered at tables sharing drinks, there was little room for dancing, though some did. People sat talking and laughing with their arms wrapped around one another. Some kissed.

The drag performers regaled the people not only with style but affection. Throughout their performances, people got up on stage to give them money, hugs, and kisses.

The patrons were relatively mixed. There were masculine-presenting people as well as feminine ones throughout the bar.

Overall there was a strong impression of affection and community.



‘First on the Fifth’: Marching with Cuba’s Cenesex on a historic May Day

written by Struggle - La Lucha
May 31, 2023

Havana — May Day in Cuba. Nothing quite like it – even if it takes place a little later than expected.

Havana is renowned for its huge, colorful, and powerful marches every May 1, International Workers’ Day. This year was already planned to be different. Because of severe fuel shortages caused by the U.S. blockade, it was decided to focus on local marches in Cuba’s provinces and the various municipalities that make up Havana.

Then severe weather struck. Havana’s May 1 celebrations had to be postponed. Instead, it was “the First on the Fifth” — the great workers’ action was held on Friday, May 5, the 205th birthday of Karl Marx, the founder of scientific socialism.

Another difference: in an additional move to conserve fuel for urgent people’s needs, the usual march through the Plaza of the Revolution was changed to a mass rally along the Malecón, Havana’s famous sea wall.

I arrived in Cuba from New York City on May 3 to attend the VII International Colloquium on Trans Identities, Gender, and Culture, hosted by the National Center for Sex Education (Cenesex), together with Serena Sojic-Borne, a comrade from the New Orleans chapter of Freedom Road Socialist Organization.

Comrade Mariela Castro Espin, director of Cenesex, invited the international delegates from Mexico, Italy, the United States, and other countries to join the center's delegation in the May Day action, a proposal we gladly accepted.

Queer youth for socialism

In the U.S., it's impossible to imagine a city full of workers rising well before dawn to defend the system they live under. U.S. workers are exploited by their bosses, lied to by politicians, overworked and underpaid, without universal health care or the right to housing.

How different is Cuba! In Havana, workers from every sector, along with students and other organized groups, began gathering by 4 a.m. As the international delegates walked by the University of Havana, contingents of young people were already starting to arrive, chanting, singing, and drumming.

Across the wide boulevard, workers representing Radio Rebelde (founded by Che Guevara) and other media outlets were gathering around their banners.

As we reached the intersection where Cenesex was gathering, outside a movie theater, comrade Mariela Castro was among the first to arrive — greeting people, keeping the group motivated and excited. Organizers from TransCuba Nacional, the national network of trans women, distributed trans flags to the many young queer people as they arrived and kept folx from wandering too far afield.

At the intersection where we gathered, we witnessed young people organized by the Committees in Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) blocking streets and directing traffic away from the marchers. A CDR leader took time to snap some group photos of our contingent for Mariela.

'Love is the law'

The dozens of queer youth who gathered with Cenesex, a majority of them Black Cubans, carried an enormous rainbow flag and a lead banner that read, “Por todas las familias, el amor es ley” — “For all Cuban families, love is the law.”

This refers to the revolutionary new Families Code approved last year, which expands the rights of all families, including LGBTQ+ families and chosen families. May is also the International Month Against Homophobia and Transphobia and is celebrated in Cuba much like Pride Month is in the U.S.

For Cenesex and the networks of trans, gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, this is a key time to educate the queer community and the broader Cuban public about the provisions of the new code.

As we marched down the wide, dark street toward the Malecón, more people streamed into the contingent at each intersection. We took our place among the tens of thousands already gathered beside the sea, while revolutionary songs played over gigantic speakers that reached everyone in the rally.

Dozens of hands of all colors and gender expressions took hold of the massive Pride flag and shook it in time to beat. Beside the Cenesex group were health care workers’ unions, unions of the economic ministry, parents holding small children on their shoulders, and portraits of Marti, Fidel, and Che, all awaiting the inspiring words of Ulises Guilarte, general secretary of the Cuban Workers Federation (CTC).

The beautiful sunrise over the sea slowly spread across the massive demonstration — a beautiful symbolic moment.

Together we sang, chanted, and celebrated the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, the achievements of socialism despite the punishing and illegal U.S. blockade, and the continuing struggles of the world’s workers and oppressed.

Viva Cuba! El amor es ley!



LGBTIQ activists from Cuba and U.S. exchange on struggles and challenges

written by Struggle - La Lucha
May 31, 2023

Defending their rights and denouncing religious and political fundamentalisms are common goals shared by LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer) activists from Cuba and the United States.

Representatives of the TransCuba Network, the Network of Lesbian and Bisexual Women, HSH (men who have sex with other men) and LGBTIQ activists from the United States exchanged about the approval of the Families Code in the Caribbean nation, the forms of organization of activism, and homo-lesbo-transphobic violence.

The meeting was held on May 8 at the National Center for Sexual Education (Cenesex), as part of the 16 Cuban Days against Homophobia and Transphobia, which are held until May 20 in Havana and Santi Spíritus.

Melinda Butterfield, trans activist from the U.S. organization Women in Struggle, recalled her previous visit to the country, since she has been a member of the solidarity movement with Cuba for 30 years.

“I came before and after I transitioned. Now we have been motivated by the victory of the Families Code and we want to bring people from our communities to learn about this law and, when they return, they can educate about the need to end the blockade on Cuba,” said Butterfield.

The group of activists visiting Cuba was interested in the process of approving the Families Code and how it attracted the support of the Cuban government.

“In the United States the government is against us; in various states, laws are being passed that seek to annihilate and eliminate us. That’s why we’re here, to learn how you have accomplished all of this,” said lesbian activist Elizabeth Toledo of the Socialist Unity Party.

Gustavo Alberto Pi, a specialist from Cenesex, highlighted the support of the Cuban state as a crucial element in the process of approving the code. A struggle that was not easy, he said.

“The approval of the Families Code is the result of political will and decades of education and awareness by institutions such as Cenesex and civil society,” he explained.

“From a legal point of view, it’s a precious document. It is not only a code that recognizes the right to marriage and adoption by LGBTIQ people. It is a law that protects the rights of all people in society, particularly the most vulnerable, and settles a historical debt with gay and trans people,” added Alberto Pi.

The group of visitors was also interested in the functions and agenda of the existing collectives in Cuba, spaces for socialization and challenges that still persist.

Representatives of the TransCuba Network, the Network of Lesbian and Bisexual Women and HSH pointed out some of the issues they work on and the forms of organization of their networks, present in all the country's provinces and in most of its municipalities.

At the meeting, it emerged that, unlike TransCuba and HSH, the Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Network faces the challenge of not having its own budget.

"Since they are not considered a population at risk for HIV and sexually transmitted infections, lesbians cannot access international financing dedicated to the prevention of the HIV epidemic," explained Alberto Pi.

Other challenges shared by activists from both countries were violence and religious fundamentalisms, which in the case of the United States have seeped into politics and the media, increasing hate speech.

"There are many differences between the various states in the U.S. In some the rights of LGBTIQ people are being taken away and they are making it illegal to exist in public. In a few states we maintain our rights, but there is no national protection policy and the national government refuses to intervene," said Melinda Butterfield.

"Now there is a lot of hate in the media and that means more violence everywhere. New York, where I live, is considered a safe city, but fascists are coming into our spaces and as a community we have to stand up to them. In Florida and Texas, it's worse," added the trans activist.

"Here we are also victims, especially trans people. We suffer police harassment, family abandonment and social discrimination. That often forces us to drop out of school, turn to sex work as a way to survive, and many live with HIV," said Alexandra Hernández Naranjo, coordinator of TransCuba in the Habana del Este municipality.

For her part, Teresa de Jesús Fernández, national coordinator of the Network of Lesbian and Bisexual Women, shared some of the points on the agenda developed by the network, among them: the approach to sexist violence, internalized lesbophobia, the recognition of lesbian parental families, the exercise of reproductive rights of lesbian women, the visibility and reality of their rights, bullying at school, work and in the community.

“Our fundamental objective is to contribute to the transformation of society and to dismantle patriarchy,” the activist concluded.

Source: [SEMLac Cuba](#)



U.S. LGBTQ+ delegation travels to Cuba to learn about new Families Code

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On May 8, the U.S. Friends Against Homophobia and Transphobia delegation, led by Women in Struggle - Mujeres en Lucha, met with Cuban activists at the National Center for Sex Education (CENESEX) headquarters in Havana. These activists represent multiple LGBTQ+ organizations, including TransCuba, La Red HSH (the Network of Men Who Have Sex with Men), and the Network of Lesbian and Bisexual Women in Cuba. These are autonomous organizations of people from these communities that work closely with CENESEX, which is under the Ministry of Health.

Before departing for Cuba, our delegation began learning about Cuba's revolutionary new Families Code. But it was incredible to be among these activists — to hear about their work, life experiences, and analysis of the ongoing revolutionary process in Cuba. These activists vividly conveyed how far Cuba has come, rising from a legacy of colonialism and patriarchal values, even while impeded by Washington's criminal blockade.

They were completely candid about problems of homophobia and transphobia in Cuba, with resistance to progressive change coming especially from the U.S.-funded evangelical movement. An activist with the Network of Lesbian and Bisexual Women in Cuba explained the problems with these reactionary forces, putting them in historical context. Nevertheless, these problems of backward mentalities in some people are not comparable to the neo-fascist attacks in the United States on LGBTQ+ people, women, people of color, and the working class more broadly. There is a stark difference between the social systems in the two countries, and this accounts for the difference in the political situation.

In the U.S., there is an imperialist capitalist class that can exist only so long as the people are divided. This tiny class of exploiters has a material interest in spreading division and alienation. For them, it is a necessity. They accomplish this task not just through rhetoric — that is, by talking about divisive issues in the misnamed “culture

war” — but by materially carrying out attacks that cost lives. For example, now, the billionaire-funded fascist politicians are cruelly blocking access to gender-affirming care for children, youth, and adults, when this is shown to reduce suicide; these politicians know very well that their policies are a form of violence against some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

By contrast, in Cuba, the working class is in power. There, the government uses all available science to develop its stance toward LGBTQ+ people, as with other social questions. We learned from doctors when visiting a Cuban polyclinic later in the day that CENESEX’s work is integrated across all health institutions as part of the Ministry of Health. The Communist Party, the mass organizations of the Cuban people, the autonomous networks, etc., work together to transform society in a progressive way. This is demonstrated by the way that the new Families Code was developed through countless hours of outreach, with people meeting in every part of the island to discuss this important step not only for the Cuban people but for the social evolution of humanity.

A continuation of the Cuban Revolution

One activist emphasized that this process can’t be exported. That is because this is a continuation of the Cuban Revolution, which has stood against imperialist aggression since 1959. In the United States, there is no close connection between the government and the people. We do not have progressive mass organizations that can develop, through ongoing conversation, a shared vision for moving forward as a society. On the contrary, we have a growing crisis of legitimacy in all existing institutions and not just the strictly political ones.

A legal advisor for CENESEX, Sonia Zaldivar, explained to us that this Families Code “was conceived and resulted from many years of fighting and the study of science. ... By combining every type of knowledge – from the streets, from the academy, from other countries – [a Families Code was crafted] that stayed true to our conception of

life. After 26-27 versions of the document, which changed with discussions across society, the Code went into effect with over 60% approval.”

While U.S. lawmakers are attempting to prevent discussion of LGBTQ+ life in schools, Cuba is ensuring that schools include lessons about sexual orientation and gender identity in the curriculum. The law affirms that parents have a responsibility to teach their children about these things and to respect their children’s identities.

Cuba has redefined marriage and the family structure to include all types of actually existing families, from those with LGBTQ+ parents to households led by grandparents. The patriarchal nuclear family does not capture the reality on the ground, and in Cuba, it is no longer privileged in the legal framework. The new Code even gives more rights to step-parents (including step-fathers or step-grandparents) who have dedicated themselves to the care of a child.

Even though this process cannot be exported, we can learn from the tremendous experience of the Cuban people about how to make a revolution for a humane society. We have to make our own revolution. And we should understand that the blockade is not only an economic one targeting the Cuban people and causing them to suffer. It is also a blockade of knowledge, with people in the U.S. being denied information about Cuba’s achievements – not to mention solidarity and material benefit, for example, if U.S. people could access Cuba’s lung cancer vaccine.

In the U.S., there is a near-total media blackout on the new Families Code, as with other matters. The imperialists do not want us to know about this achievement. But, as the Biblical saying goes, “you cannot light a candle and hide it under a bushel.” This Families Code is a light, and it is vital that people in the U.S. and other countries learn what is possible in this time when the bourgeoisie and their fascist shock troops attempt to roll back every right we have gained. The Cuban experience teaches us the necessity of struggle. We must and will struggle.

End the blockade! Build solidarity between people in the U.S. and Cuba!

