

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

written by Struggle - La Lucha
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CENESEX headquarters in Havana. SLL photo

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.



Cuban and U.S. LGBTQ+ activists have discussion at CENESEX headquarters in

Havana. SLL photo

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!

