

U.S. Trade Union Delegation to Cuba & The Struggle to Uphold Cuba's Right of National Sovereignty

Contributed by Bill Preston and Carl Gentile

Bill Preston and Carl Gentile organized a U.S. Trade Union Research Delegation that will visit Cuba on January 10-17, 2010. The Delegation's research on trade unions in Cuba will be facilitated by the Central de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC), the Workers' Central Union of Cuba, the country's national labor federation. Bill and Carl organized a diverse group of full-time labor activists who are elected officials and staffers with AFL-CIO and Change to Win affiliated unions. They built unity among Left and Center forces around demands to end the U.S. ban on travel to Cuba, end the U.S. economic embargo against Cuba, and establish normal diplomatic and trade relations with Cuba. Bill and Carl are now working to develop the Delegation's awareness of the importance and urgency of the additional demand to free the Cuban Five.

On December 9, 2009, the Delegation received word through a third party that "former AFL-CIO president Thomas Donahue" wished to meet with the Delegation. Thomas Donahue is not a legitimate labor leader, for reasons Bill and Carl explain below. Their document describes Donahue's deep, long-term involvement with counter-revolutionary activities promoted by the CIA and neoconservatives. It also explains why the so-called "dissident trade unionists" in Cuba promoted by Donahue here in the U.S. are not even in fact trade unionists in any real sense of the concept. This document communicates a debate challenge to Thomas Donahue from Chris Townsend of the United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America (UE). Donahue so far has failed to reply at all to this debate challenge, which the authors forwarded on Dec. 21, 2009 along with this document to a person able to contact Donahue.

The authors wish to thank Chris Townsend for assisting with research and sharing his insights on the right wing in and around the labor movement here in the Washington, DC area.

Provocations by the Empire:

Former Lane Kirkland Associate, Friend of Big Business and Imperial Designs Thomas Donahue Promotes Bogus, CIA-Front "Dissident Trade Unions" in Cuba

The delegation of U.S. trade unionists who will visit Cuba publicly supports demands that the United States end its ban on travel to Cuba by U.S. citizens and residents, stop its economic embargo against the island, and establish diplomatic and trade relations with our neighbor. We especially support the bipartisan Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act. Representatives and Senators from progressive Democrats to libertarian Republicans currently co-sponsor this bill, which continues to gather support in both houses of Congress. Unfortunately, some Democrats won't support our right to travel to Cuba. They insist Cuba first change to fit their *idée fixe* of what this independent, sovereign, foreign country ought to be like before we can travel to it unrestricted by the U.S. government. They go along with the notion that the U.S., which flatters itself the world's greatest champion of liberty, may deny to its own citizens and residents this right to travel somewhere they wish to visit. They don't get it and never will.

We received word that Thomas Donahue, "former president" of the AFL-CIO, desires to meet with the delegation. Who is Thomas Donahue? For those who have forgotten or never knew, a quick search of the web suffices to answer the question. To those of us Donahue and his friends have tried to crush for decades, he is a well-known quantity. Born in 1928, Donahue has long associated with the right wing of the labor movement—people like AFT misleader Albert Shanker,

his sponsor at the 1995 AFL-CIO convention. Shanker bitterly opposed affirmative action for decades, led a 1968 white teacher's strike against African-American community self-determination in the New York City public schools, and once infamously declared, "When schoolchildren start paying union dues, that's when I'll start representing the interests of schoolchildren" (thereby boasting about his own trade unionism as devoid of any concept of social justice). Donahue served as acting president of the AFL-CIO from August to October 1995, when he was defeated by the "New Voice" slate's John Sweeney, Richard Trumka, and Linda Chavez-Thompson in the first contested election in the AFL's history in a hundred years.

Donahue's predecessor, Lane Kirkland, had appointed Donahue to dash hopes within the labor movement for a turn away from class collaboration, hopes dramatically symbolized at the time by the inspiring organizing struggles of Justice for Janitors. Donahue argued in vain before the AFL-CIO's convention that workers should not envision their unions as part of a labor movement—one that might, for example, engage in community organizing with immigrant workers or forge other broader alliances, such as clergy-labor alliances for social justice. He tried to convince convention delegates that workers ought instead to confine themselves to the narrower trade unionism of the sort typified by the quote above from Albert Shanker. Donahue decried the un-permitted demonstrations and civil disobedience valiantly conducted by the struggling janitors.

After his failed attempt to be elected president of the AFL-CIO, Donahue, now styled "President Emeritus" of the AFL-CIO, turned his attention back to what he really enjoys: working within the U.S. foreign policy establishment to promote U.S. domination over all of humanity. Donahue is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and formerly served on the Board of Directors of the so-called "National Endowment for Democracy" (NED), which he played a key role in establishing in 1983. Donahue consolidated his ideological position during the first two decades of the Cold War: His official biography at the AFL-CIO website reports that from 1957 to 1960 he worked as European labor program coordinator for "Radio Free Europe" and for something called "the Free Europe Committee" in Paris. Other reports indicate that in the 1980s, Donahue, by now secretary-treasurer under Lane Kirkland, played a leading role in enlisting the AFL-CIO in the U.S. and global ideological exploitation of the widespread strikes of workers in Poland. The strike at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk that led to the creation of Solidarność crystallized for Donahue the model of a "dissident trade union" in a socialist country. Never mind that the efforts Donahue supported led to a regime change that privatized the very same shipyard, and that the birthplace of Solidarność is shutting down and almost all of the workers have lost their jobs.

One of Donahue's most intriguing activities in the past decade centers on his involvement with something innocently called "The American Committee for Peace in Chechnya" (ACPC). Donahue belonged to this Committee, which formed in 1999. An examination of the membership roster of ACPC reveals that this was a most unusual "peace group": Morton Abramowitz, Elliott Abrams, Kenneth Adelman, Richard V. Allen, Eliot Cohen, Midge Decter, Larry Diamond, Frank Gaffney, Bruce Jackson, Robert Kagan, Max Kampelman, William Kristol, Michael Ledeen, Joshua Muravchik, Richard Perle, Richard Pipes, Norman Podhoretz, Gary Schmitt, George Weigel, and James Woolsey. Thomas Donahue, in other words, affiliated with yet another "letterhead group" of self-described "distinguished Americans" that included many of the same neoconservatives who screamed the loudest for the invasion and occupation of Iraq—a war of aggression that continues to this day and so far has resulted (according to reliable estimates) in the deaths of over one million people due to gunshot wound, car bomb, other explosion/ordnance, air strike, increased lawlessness, degraded infrastructure, or poorer healthcare.

What were they advocating in Chechnya? The American Committee for Peace in Chechnya served as the principal U.S. apologist for the Chechen secessionist "movement"—armed gangs that kidnap, rape, and murder civilians in Chechnya and other areas of Russia in a manner reminiscent of the apartheid South African regime's Renamo campaigns against the peoples of Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Chechen terrorists often try to justify their crimes with reference to a Saudi-inspired extremist, Wahhabist interpretation of Islam. Their financing by Osama bin Laden is actually well-documented, unlike the non-existent al-Qaeda connections of the overthrown government of Iraq falsely alleged by the Bush Administration. The American Committee for Peace in Chechnya, whose neoconservatives fancy themselves the intellectual vanguard of Good in an existential struggle against pure Evil, objectively supported al-Qaeda in Russia because there the terrorists, of course, conveniently slaughtered citizens of a country that neoconservatives deem to be an enemy. This is the same logic by which the U.S. in the 1980s supported terrorists in Afghanistan, including bin Laden and what later became the Taliban—the catastrophic results of which remain and will endure for the foreseeable future.

The American Committee for Peace in Chechnya, never fazed by its own hypocrisy, urged Russia to enter into discussions with the Chechen terrorists in order ostensibly to find a “political solution.” ACPC called for Russia to negotiate with the leaders of bin Laden-connected terrorists who, in the Beslan school massacre of over 300 people, took almost 800 children hostage; who also killed nearly 300 in a bombing campaign against several cities including Moscow in which, among other things, terrorists rented apartments in large residential buildings, packed them with explosives, and blew them up. This from a Committee whose neoconservatives on numerous other occasions swore allegiance to an endless “War on Terror,” agitated for the unprovoked war on Iraq on account of fabricated—and conclusively refuted—claims of al-Qaeda ties and possession of weapons of mass destruction, and continue to insist that the U.S. “must never negotiate with terrorists.”

What was the whole point of this misnamed “American Committee for Peace in Chechnya”? Why do otherwise cold-blooded publicists for the war industry bother to pose as supporters of peace in the Caucasus? A look at one Glen Howard, who served as the Committee’s executive director, is instructive on this question. According to his official biography at the website of the anti-Russian propaganda outfit, the Jamestown Foundation, where he currently is president, Glen Howard “has served as a consultant to private sector and governmental agencies, including the U.S. Department of Defense, the National Intelligence Council and major oil companies operating in Central Asia and the Middle East (emphasis added).” The Caucasus are rich in energy and mineral resources: Alunite, gold, chromium, copper, iron ore, mercury, manganese, molybdenum, lead, tungsten, uranium, zinc, natural gas, coal (both hard and brown), and, of course, oil. The Chechens are but pawns in a struggle for oil, gas, and hard minerals. Ultimate objectives for imperialism entail the dismemberment of both Russia and China (through armed secessionism by Chechens, Tibetans, Uyghurs, and any others who might serve as tools)—and the destruction of all obstacles to control over Central Asian oil and other natural resources by U.S. and Western corporations. The successful application of the Yugoslav model of secessionist destabilization to Central Asia would fulfill neoconservative ambitions for a “New American Century” in this strategic part of the world.

Donahue chaired the U.S. State Department’s Advisory Committee on Labor Diplomacy from 2000 to 2005. In the Executive Summary of the report to the Secretary of State and the President issued in December 2001, the Committee declared that its focus was “the role and importance of labor diplomacy in promoting U.S. national security and combating the global political, economic and social conditions that undermine our security interests.” Faithful servant and labor lieutenant of capital that he is, Donahue presided over a State Department unit that by its own admission strongly intimated an intelligence/counter-insurgency mission as the real point of its existence: “In the context of the war on terrorism, labor diplomacy helps to provide an assessment of the economic conditions faced by ordinary people and to identify factors that can contribute to the breeding grounds for terrorism. Labor diplomacy also provides a framework for developing tools to combat these problems.” “Labor diplomacy” has nothing to do with cross-border solidarity of workers in different countries uniting against the same transnational corporations and their right-wing allies confronting us in country after country.

We view it as an unpardonable sin for any union “leader” to work with the Bush Administration, which Thomas Donahue did. The fact cannot be contested, and the behavior cannot be tolerated. This State Department committee’s members included one Frank P. Doyle, retired Executive Vice President of the General Electric Company, and then Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao (ex officio).

How could any union “leader” possibly sit on any sort of committee with the likes of Frank Doyle/GE? GE is a company with a long and notorious anti-union history, including the fact that GE single-handedly revived the career of Ronald Reagan at the height of red-baiting. Just since 1980, GE has slashed its U.S. unionized workforce by 80%. This is a company that maintains a full-scale dedicated department called “Union Avoidance,” or UA for short. UA drops in at the first whiff of union talk to crush it by any means, both legal and illegal. UA runs seminars at GE’s Crotonville, New York training academy on union smashing, and invites other companies to come and learn the “craft.” GE is a company that in 1994 fired hundreds of workers in its Mexican plants, utilizing a union blacklist. GE then mobilized the maquiladora

owners association to urge all affiliate companies to fire what turned out to be several thousand workers, all at the same time, from the same union blacklist.

There could only be two possible answers to the question of why Donahue would chair a committee that included the likes of Doyle/GE. One would be that Donahue has no apparent indignation at the scale and magnitude of the anti-union crimes the company commits. Or, that Donahue is ignorant of any of these facts about GE. In either case, be it ambivalence or ignorance, Donahue is unfit to be classified as a labor "leader."

We cannot excuse people like Donahue who consort and frolic with politicians and employers who actively work to liquidate the labor movement here in the U.S. and in other countries.

Donahue also founded and chairs something called the "Committee for Free Trade Unionism" and in that capacity is the leading promoter of so-called Cuban "dissident trade unions" within the U.S. labor movement. It should be clear what Thomas Donahue is all about. Poland, Russia, Cuba—these countries and their peoples, much less their labor movements, don't really matter to him. George Curzon, 1st Marquess Curzon of Kendlestone, the imperial "Viceroy of India" and British Foreign Secretary, foretold the brutal essence of Donahue's political practice more boldly than Thomas Donahue himself likely ever would dare in public: "I confess," wrote Lord Curzon over a hundred years ago, "that countries are pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a great game for the domination of the world."

Cuba refuses to be a pawn in U.S. imperialism's "great" game for the domination of the world. We refuse this mission as well.

One of our brothers in the U.S. labor movement informs us of the following: Chris Townsend, Political Action Director and International Representative of the United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America (UE), wishes to debate Thomas Donahue over the issue of Donahue's collaboration with the Bush State Department. Donahue himself or his representatives may reply to Brother Townsend's challenge to a debate by contacting Bill Preston at preston.uspeacecouncil@gmail.com to make arrangements.

Below you will find our reply to a prospective applicant to the U.S. Trade Union Delegation to Cuba who expressed the view that our delegation ought to meet with "members of dissident trade unions in Cuba." We explain why the so-called "dissident trade unions" in Cuba ("free trade unions" of the sort promoted by Thomas Donahue) are neither free nor even really trade unions in any legitimate sense of the word.

Professor -----,

We are delighted to say that a politically diverse delegation of full-time professional U.S. labor movement people who replied in a timely and complete manner to Bill's information request will be visiting Cuba in January 2010.

The U.S. blockade against Cuba makes travel from the U.S. to the island nearly impossible. You emailed Bill your question about a week ago while he was in the middle of gathering passport and other necessary information from members of the delegation. We put off responding to your inquiry right away because we did not wish to be distracted from that more urgent work. At the same time, your question is symptomatic of a still widely shared misconception in the U.S. labor movement, and for that reason alone it merits an answer.

You stated in your email, whose subject line was “question about the Cuba delegation”:

“Hi Bill

I've been talking with a lot of people and doing a lot of thinking. A key question for me: Are there going to be any meetings or discussions with members of dissident trade unions in Cuba? I think that would be really important in getting a full picture of the labor movement in Cuba.

Thanks for your help.

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Our answer is “no.”

Step outside your USA mindset for a while, to really try to see things from the point of view of people under attack by your own country's government. We promise: You won't have to stay out here. You'll always be able to go back inside where it's warm and cozy—and where you'll be reassured by comforting prejudices.

The following two reports from the National Lawyers Guild would begin to acquaint you with a better understanding of trade unions in Cuba:

http://nlg.org/resources/delegations/cuba_report_2001.pdf

http://nlg.org/resources/delegations/cuba_report_2002.pdf

The first link goes to the “Report of the United States Delegation to the 2001 Meeting of Cuban and American Trade Union Lawyers,” which was sponsored by the National Lawyers Guild Labor and Employment Committee and the U.S.

Health Care Trade Union Committee.

The second link goes to “Workers’ Rights in Cuba: Report of the United States Delegation to the 2002 Exchange Between U.S. and Cuban Labor and Employment Lawyers, Neutrals and Trade Unionists.”

We are U.S. trade unionists who seek to learn about trade unionism in Cuba. To this end, our professional research and the research of our colleagues on the delegation will be facilitated by the Central de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC), the Workers’ Central Union of Cuba, the country’s national labor federation, which is arranging meetings for us with Cuban trade unionists. We will meet with trade unionists from many different economic sectors who actually have been elected by the workers they represent.

#1. The Central de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC) is Fully Representative of the Cuban Working Class

A single national trade union federation organizes workers in Cuba: The Workers’ Central Union of Cuba (CTC). CTC membership encompasses about 98% of the work force. Approximately four million people belong to a total of 19 CTC-affiliated unions. All workers in Cuba enjoy the right to join a union or to refrain from doing so. Dues deductions amount to one percent of each member’s earnings, collected per month, and form the sole source of funds for Cuban labor unions. Workers elect their local union officials by secret ballot every two and a half years. All union officials, including the CTC’s General Secretary, receive their mandates from election by secret ballot.

Each worker gets the benefits of union representation whether he or she belongs to the union or not. Grievance procedures include arbitration panels with one representative each from management, the union, and the workers—who thereby choose two-thirds of the voting membership of all labor-management grievance arbitration panels in Cuba. Workers also elect the chair of each arbitration panel.

The right to strike exists in Cuba, and indeed is unregulated by law.

#2. The CTC is Highly Effective in Furthering the Immediate as well as Long-Term Interests of the Cuban Working Class

Evidence indicates that the CTC, far from being a tool of the state as the U.S. government alleges, in fact reflects the immediate, spontaneously articulated will of the working class within the state, and does so exceptionally well. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and most socialist countries, the CTC defeated proposals to tolerate high unemployment, tax employment income, and shut enterprises deemed commercially unprofitable. The CTC also pressured the National Assembly to drop a provision in the 1995 Foreign Investment Law that would have allowed foreign enterprises and joint ventures to hire Cuban workers directly. The CTC in effect compelled the foreign enterprises and joint ventures to continue obtaining employees only through the state’s labor agencies. That sheltered the employment conditions and compensation of all Cuban workers from the chaos and immiseration that otherwise would have accompanied the introduction of such foreign capital.

CTC pressure also forced suspension of implementation of provisions in a 1994 tax law mandating that workers contribute to the social security system. (Imagine such a generous social security system, where workers personally pay little or nothing.) In late 2006, the CTC also blocked implementation of new regulations disciplining workers for reporting to work late. (Again, the relative absence until then of much discipline for tardiness showed the liberty long enjoyed by the Cuban working class in socialist society, which was and is comparatively greater in its all-sided respects than that afforded workers in the U.S.) The CTC argued that mass transit problems and the fact that stores were open for business only at the same time most people worked made the proposed regulations unreasonable. The government, pressed by the CTC, delayed implementation of the regulations for three months to resolve the difficulties (in the case of store hours, this necessitated a separate set of labor-management negotiations to change working hours).

#3. The Cuban Labor Movement Continues to Expand Into New Economic Sectors with the Development of the Cuban Economy

Today, the Cuban labor movement continues to develop and grow along with the Cuban economy. The newest union to be started in Cuba represents workers in scientific areas. You may or may not know that Cuba is the largest exporter of medicines in Latin America and has become an invention powerhouse in biotechnology. Cuba's biotech sector serves humanity by developing tropical disease vaccines, AIDS medicines, and cancer treatments, unlike U.S. pharmaceutical companies that focus mainly on such big profit-makers as cures for wrinkles, impotence, or baldness. Cuba also pioneers in the development of import-independent and sustainable agriculture with the production of biopesticides and biofertilizers—Cuban-made microbial pesticides and fertilizers that are non-toxic to humans. The Cuban labor movement anticipates vigorously representing the interests of workers associated with scientific laboratory and related production work.

#4. No Legal Obstacle Exists to the Formation of a National Labor Federation Separate from the CTC

The CTC does an outstanding job of representing Cuban workers and advocating for their immediate economic demands and ultimate political interests within the state. No good reason exists that would justify efforts to create a wholly separate, new national labor federation parallel to and competing with the CTC. No law or regulation or other obstacle, however, prevents the creation of such an alternative trade union center, were people so inclined. Nor may workers in Cuba be fired from their jobs on account of union or political affiliation—unlike in the U.S.

#5. So-Called "Dissident Trade Unions" in Cuba Have No Measurable Relationship with the Cuban Working Class

As for the members of "dissident trade unions" in Cuba—there are no dissident trade unions in Cuba. Instead, persons exist whom the U.S. Interests Section in Havana proclaims to be dissident trade unionists: Their total numbers fluctuate over time; estimates have ranged from a high of 75 at one time to 20 at present. And that small number must include the patriotic Cubans who join the "dissidents" in order to monitor them. In sum, a handful of groups, each composed of two to five members, call themselves dissident trade unions. No single workplace in Cuba looks to these "dissidents" for union representation or leadership in any workers' struggle. No workers have ever selected the "dissident trade unionists" to represent them in any capacity. Additionally, records show that not one "dissident" has ever paid union dues to any branch of the CTC. In other words, these "dissidents" have never been part of the Cuban labor movement. In fact, they do not even belong to any branch of Cuban industry or the Cuban work force.

#6. Members of "Dissident Trade Unions" in Cuba are Paid Accomplices of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana

Who are the "dissident trade unionists," then? Members of "dissident trade unions" are assorted demoralized Cubans who gravitate to the U.S. Interests Section in Havana in order to receive in exchange large amounts of cash money, electronics (radios and computers), and emigration visas. "Dissidents" never discuss any trade union issues at their meetings, according to testimony from Cuban monitors. However, they do get training, which is conducted by personnel from the U.S. Interests Section. This training, not surprisingly, revolves around the idea of preparing for a "civil society" and for something presumptuously called "the Transition Period." Training by the U.S. Interests Section includes discussion of the anticipated use of violence by these proponents of "civil society." Testimony by Cuban monitors corroborates suspicions that all "dissident trade unionists" are in the pay of the U.S. Interests Section. It also confirms the leading role and indeed total control of U.S. Interests Section personnel over these so-called trade unionists.

The above six points cover the already well-established facts relevant to the struggles and achievements of the real Cuban labor movement for purposes of contrast with the hyped and bogus "dissident trade unionists."

The labor movement uses the term "company union" to describe a so-called union that actually is controlled by the bosses. The International Labor Organization defines a company union as "a union limited to a single company which dominates or strongly influences it, thereby limiting its influence." The "dissident trade unions" in Cuba are nothing but company unions run by U.S. bosses—in this case, officials of the U.S. government. They give further ironic confirmation of what Philip Agree described in his book, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary*.

For a prospective member of this delegation to suggest that we, who are citizens of the U.S. of all places, meet with these "dissidents" as a precondition to considering possibly joining our delegation is not acceptable.

We gather from your email plus your reference to martial law in Poland during a telephone conversation with Bill that you draw a mechanical analogy between the current situation in Cuba and what you believe took place in the former socialist countries of Europe decades ago. Specifically, you appear to be influenced by the idea that trade unions in socialist countries are either "official" and "state-sponsored" or independent and dissident. Whether you fully subscribe to the maximum program or not, you thereby lend support to the very same regime-change paradigm that anchors the U.S.'s belligerent posture towards Cuba.

The paradigm entails the following assumptions: If unions in a country the U.S. labels its enemy oppose regime change in their own country, such unions a priori are automatically illegitimate—independently of any experience confirming their unrepresentative and ineffective nature. However, if a handful of persons no worker ever elected to anything declare themselves to be trade unionists, such persons a priori are "dissidents" (i.e., good; worthy, for example, of celebration by the likes of Timothy Garton Ash in the pages of *The New York Review of Books*)—for so long, to be sure, as U.S. foreign policy looks upon them with favor.

The regime-change paradigm insists on preconditions for any normalization of relations with the U.S. Preconditions include the strengthening of a country's advocates of "civil society," which of course means the "dissidents." A "transition" to "democracy and a market economy" is supposed to ensue, ideally effected by a "color revolution" on the model of the so-called Velvet Revolution in Prague in 1989. The former enemy country is recuperated for neo-colonialism. Recast as an "emerging democracy," it introduces neo-liberal policies of "flexibility" and de-regulation. It invites the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, who now dictate the nation's economic policies. All of this accelerates and

consolidates a process of privatization. Foreign capital freely seizes the country's raw material and other exploitable resources, making liberal use, among other things, of its labor power to create wealth for the imperialist countries and local elites in the oppressed nation. Unemployment soars, as does precarious work—street vending and domestic labor, for example. Unions wither under government attack. The former “dissident trade unionists,” having fulfilled their CIA assignment, realize their ultimate significance when they are tossed aside like so much trash.

Your question about “dissident trade unions” in Cuba seems innocent but in fact really is naïve. We recall the remark by Simon Bolivar that “the United States appear to be destined by Providence to plague America with misery in the name of liberty.” It will now come as no surprise to you, Professor -----, that we are not in the slightest interested in helping spread this “Made in USA” misery in the name of liberty to Cuba.

The members of the U.S. trade union delegation to Cuba publicly associate with the following demands upon the U.S. Congress and the Obama Administration:

- End U.S. travel restrictions on U.S. citizens and residents seeking to visit Cuba;
- End the U.S. economic embargo against Cuba;
- Establish diplomatic and trade relations with Cuba.

That's it.

We of course hope that all members of the delegation will grow to recognize and be educated by Cuba's many accomplishments in eliminating hunger, joblessness, and illiteracy, making free quality healthcare and education available to all its people, and creating a society that puts people before profits—where, for example, very few or no people die during the severe hurricanes that routinely hit the island because Cuba's government makes sure no human being is left behind (compared to which Hurricane Katrina revealed the deadly consequences of the profound inequality here in the U.S.).

That notwithstanding, regardless of how much or even whether each delegation member develops this higher level of solidarity, we believe that unity exists now over a firm, unwavering opposition to current U.S. policy toward the island. We support The Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act, pending legislation in both houses of Congress whose supporters range from libertarian Republicans to progressive Democrats.

Cuba has suffered enough at the hands of all eleven U.S. Administrations since 1959. Invasion; biological and chemical warfare; assassinations; terrorist attacks—including the bombing on October 6, 1976 of Cubana Flight 455 while at an altitude of 18,000 feet, which killed 73 people (at the time, the worst terrorist attack on a civilian passenger airliner in the Americas); sabotage; the trade ban; the travel ban; bombings and terrorist commando attacks on hotels that have killed many tourists; and carte blanche to Cuban ultra-right forces in south Florida who perpetuate much of this terrorism.

For all the aforementioned reasons, we refuse to endorse any attempt to negotiate the sovereign right of this neighbor of

the U.S. to determine its own destiny independently. Nor do we accept qualifying the struggle to end the criminal and inhuman embargo against Cuba, a unilateral economic embargo that is the harshest the U.S. maintains against any country in the world. More than 150 nations reject the 1996 Helms-Burton Act call for a "mandatory international embargo" of Cuba and have diplomatic relations with the island. They reject a policy of preconditions for trade or diplomacy. The U.S. labor movement, likewise, should apply no preconditions to contacts with the Cuban labor movement.

Our delegation will visit Cuba in the spirit of friendship and solidarity. We will not help you or anyone else import the concept that it would be best if this island's future conformed to notions of U.S.-sponsored "dissident trade unions," color revolutions, and regime-change based, civil society transition programs. We get the premium you put on your idealization of "dissident trade unions." Here, though, is a parting tip you ought to consider before employing the template of Solidarno[as a convex lens for your academic magnifying glass: When seeking fault, better to use a mirror than a microscope.

Bill Preston and Carl Gentile

Delegation Co-Chairs

Posted by Baltimore-Washington Area Peace Council

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<http://bwpeacecouncil.blogspot.com/>