

THE CUBA SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA: ITS ACTIVITIES AND OBJECTIVES, 1991-PRESENT

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This work is part of a broader, ongoing study of the history and culture of the San Francisco Bay Area's (Bay Area) Cuba solidarity movement that I began over two years ago. The original project is interdisciplinary in scope and delves into the Castro Revolution's history of international solidarity as well as attempts to understand the movement's culture from within by using, among other social science tools, reflexivity, ethnography, and participant observation. With this paper I hope to demonstrate that even though many of the organizations are staffed by a handful of members, or fewer, and the monetary value of their assistance to the Castro regime seems inconsequential, their contributions are salient in many other ways. The very fact that these groups are slowly but surely proliferating, and that their opinion that the U.S. government's economic sanctions against Cuba are unfair and should end, are being voiced by increasingly larger numbers of important individuals and institutions, seems to me to be proof that these groups are very efficient at attaining their goals, even though on a very small scale and gradually. When examined individually, their efforts appear insignificant, but when seen as a whole—which the Cuba solidarity movement is—the movement's every aspect takes on a new significance.

Though there has been a great deal of foreign interest in the Castro Revolution, the year 1991 saw a change in the forms of solidarity provided by many, from

purely moral outpourings to more "concrete forms."¹ This work will first present an explanation of the term "social movement," which will clarify why the Cuba solidarity efforts put forth by several Bay Area organizations and individuals can be so categorized. Then there will be a brief survey of the sources used. That will be followed by a chronology detailing the various evolving and burgeoning gestures of support from abroad for the Castro regime, beginning in 1991.

It is my intent to demonstrate that it is imperative to include the Bay Area and U.S. Cuba solidarity movement's efforts and contributions in favor of the Castro regime in academic studies of the present Cuban economic and political situation because the movement is aimed, and I believe successfully, at turning public opinion in favor of the Castro regime, therefore compelling the U.S. government to end its decades long embargo. It contributes to the Cuban government not only supplies, but also funds by championing and engendering travel to Cuba. Perhaps most significantly, the Bay Area Cuba solidarity movement consistently validates the Castro government before the eyes of the U.S. public by presenting the Cubans' acceptance and adaptation to the economic problems of the island as evidence of their fealty to Castro while at the same time legitimizing the Castro government before the Cuban population by demonstrating that many U.S. citizens are willing to

1. Concepción, Elson. "Interview with a French Senator: Here is a People Very Dedicated to Struggling with Dignity." *Granma International English Edition* (April 21, 1991), 15.

defy U.S. restrictions. For the sake of space, many facts regarding the Cuban economy and the political aspects of the Castro regime's two-score history that are already well known to Cuban academicians have been overlooked in this work.

DEFINING A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

According to Robert Goldberg, "a social movement is a formally organized group that acts consciously and with some continuity to promote or resist change through collective action."² He sees social movements as active proxies that reflect broader surges of dissatisfaction and desire for change. A social movement has a shared conviction that guides its plan for reform, and helps the group identify status quo targets, such as past events, present conditions, and individuals who perpetrate and perpetuate the negative conditions which the movement has opted to renounce. Most salient, a social movement needs to champion its own cause "by appealing to its culture's sacred articles and persons."³

SOURCES

A prominent source of information for this essay was the *Granma International English Edition*. Using *Granma* as a source was necessary for several reasons. For one, it was important for me to become acquainted with the Cuban government's perspective on the economic calamity it has had to deal with since the loss of resources formerly provided by the now-defunct Soviet Union. Second, mainstream U.S. media all but ignores the Cuba solidarity efforts. Finally, it was imperative that I gain insight into the Cuban government's perspective regarding the endeavors by foreigners to advocate the Cuban cause. Reading through *Granma* provided information on how the Castro regime not only welcomes the external support, but magnifies and propagates the facts about the Cuba solidarity movement in a positive light, attempting to generate greater involvement by

the global community in the flourishing movement as well as reinforcing Castro's standing and credibility before his people.

The printed page offers a wealth of primary data about the pro-Cuba cause, yet the facts are not found in traditional, mainstream media. For this study, the printed page category included more advanced, electronically published web sites as well as Cuba solidarity organizations' flyers and pamphlets. From the organizations themselves there is a great deal of rhetoric to be sifted through. The literature (when available) is mostly pamphlets meant to inspire action and fire members' and outsiders' conviction to unite in the anti-embargo struggle. Flyers, pamphlets, and Web sites provide plenty of insight into the motivation of the groups, but accurate facts and figures are in short supply.

Another prominent source for this work was members of the movement itself. They provided plenty of insight into the activities and objectives of the Cuba solidarity movement either through conversations, interviews, or "public utterances at public gatherings."⁴ A video produced by one of the Bay Area Cuba solidarity movement's notable members was also useful.

CHRONOLOGY

There has been a great deal of interest among the populist groups and the intelligentsia of the world, the United States and the Bay Area about Cuba since the beginning of the Castro Revolution. Many individuals and several organizations have been involved in supporting the Castro regime prior to the rise of the new wave of solidarity. Probably the most prominent Bay Area Cuba supporter is author and poet Alice Walker, who demonstrated as a member of the "Hands Off Cuba" group against President Kennedy's Cuba policy in 1962 and who is still active today as a supporter of Cuban sovereignty.⁵ One

2. Goldberg, Robert A. *Grassroots Resistance: Social Movements in Twentieth Century America*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1991, 2-3.

3. Goldberg, *Grassroots Resistance*, 2-3.

4. Bailis, Stanley. Social Science Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Seminar, Spring, 1999.

5. Walker, Alice. "An Open Letter to President Clinton. <http://www.igc.apc.org/cubasoli/awalker.html>

of the groups that was established prior to the collapse of the Soviet Bloc is the *Venceremos* Brigade, which is headquartered in the Bay Area city of Oakland.⁶ The group's first contingent went to Cuba in December 1969.⁷ Yet as the end of the Soviet Union loomed nearer, there was an increased commitment to the Cuban cause. By the time the Russian Federation drastically curtailed its favorable economic policy towards Cuba, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that had been active in Central America and had been vital participants in the settlement of that region's major conflicts saw their next crusade in Cuba.⁸ The new area in urgent need of moral and monetary assistance, the new catastrophe, was Cuba, which was losing its major source of income and goods with the disintegration of the Soviet Bloc and was increasingly besieged by U.S. trade sanctions.⁹

As early as August, 1990,¹⁰ Castro had proclaimed an austere Special Period in Peacetime (the Special Period) due to the hardships incurred by the reduction of Soviet financial support and trade. As 1991 was a watershed year for the Russian Federation, it was also a very important turning point for the Cuban economy. That year, Cuba lost its Soviet aid transfers, which were estimated to have comprised a fourth of the island's GDP.¹¹ There was also a cutback of Soviet crude from 13 million tons a year before 1989 to less than 10 million.¹² The over \$5 billion imports from the Soviet Union dropped to \$1.74 billion by 1991. The passage of the late 1991, post-Russian coup laws discontinuing Russian aid to its former

confederates eviscerated the Cuban economy. The projected figures for Russian imports in 1992 and beyond forecast a steady decline of commerce for Cuba with its former mentor and patron nation. The result was that at the October 1991 Fourth Congress of the Cuban Communist Party, Fidel Castro once again entrenched his position as the supreme leader of the island nation, and also celebrated his ideal of sacrifice as the purifier of all the revolutionary Cuban masses. The nation's struggle for sovereignty and its complete disengagement from the global economy, as dictated by Castro, followed not so much Marxist theory but that of Stalin. There was much discussion at the time of Castro's using his Option Zero, a deurbanization of the island following the Cambodian model of "ruralization of the proletariat."¹³ The Cuban people would have to face greater shortages, under the guise of heroism.¹⁴ That heroism would soon become a marketable commodity.

During the same period that saw the ruination of the Cuban economy, the exiled Cuban anti-Castro forces stepped up their efforts to have the U.S. government choke the debilitated Castro regime, forcing the overthrow of Castro and the democratization of their homeland. The major player in the wooing of top government officials was the Cuban-American National Foundation (CANF), spearheaded by Jorge Mas Canosa. Over the years, the exiled Cuban community was able to influence the U.S. government's Cuba policy, in at times unexpected ways. Through effective lobbying, CANF was influential in the 1992 introduction of the Cuban Democracy Act by New

6. <http://www.emf.net/~cheetham/gvesde-1.html>

7. "Peace for Cuba, 1996" calendar. IPCA, December page; "resource material" taken from *The Cuban Revolution and the United States: A Chronological History* by Jane Franklin. Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1992.

8. Smillie, Ian. *The Alms Bazaar: Altruism Under Fire—Non-Profit Organizations and International Development*. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1995, 121-2.

9. Gómez, Andrés. Conversation with the author, Berkeley, April 20, 1998.

10. Pérez-Stable, Marifeli. *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, 176.

11. Jorge, Antonio. "Narrowing Economic Options for the Castro Regime." In *Cuba: What Next?* Coral Gables: Research Institute for Cuban Studies, 1992, 17.

12. Blasier, Cole. "The Impact of Changes in the Soviet Union on Cuba." In *Cuba: What Next?*, 2.

13. Horowitz, Irving Louis. "The Changed Role of Cuba in the International System." In *Cuba: What Next?*, 19-21.

14. Pérez-Stable, 90.

Jersey Representative Robert Torricelli, which would place further restrictions on U.S. commerce with Cuba.¹⁵ It was signed into law by President George Bush in October 1992.¹⁶ The next change in the U.S. governments trade sanctions against Cuba was precipitated by downing of two “Brothers to the Rescue” small planes that were allegedly flying over international waters in the Florida Straits in search of rafters attempting to escape Cuba on February 24, 1996.¹⁷ The ensuing outcry from the Cuban exile community for harsher sanctions against the Castro regime and a great deal of political pressure from the Cuban-American political lobbies and the powerful GOP Congress forced the signature into law by President Clinton of the Helms-Burton Act on March 12, 1996.¹⁸

The Helms-Burton Act had two provisions which proved to be very controversial. Title III allowed U.S. companies and Cuban exiles whose properties had been appropriated by the Castro regime to file federal suits against foreign firms who were profiting from the use of the confiscated lands and/or assets. Title IV provided for the denial of U.S. entry visas to executives of foreign companies who were using the confiscated property in Cuba to earn a profit. Family members of those foreign executives would also be denied entry into the United States. The backlash from the U.S. neighbors, Canada and Mexico, and from Europe, which all had dealings with Castro that totaled over \$1 billion, caused Clinton to use a waiver clause in the Helms-Burton Act; beginning in July 1996, he has invoked his power to delay any Title III lawsuits from being filed. To this day, there is a tenuous truce between the United States and its major Western trading partners, maintained by the declawing of the Helms-Burton Act.¹⁹

Since the signing into law of the Torricelli Act, and of the more constricting Helms-Burton Act, the general public has voiced ever louder criticism of the policies enacted by the U.S. government. This is true both for the global community and for U.S. public opinion. In the late 1980s, before the end of favorable Soviet commerce agreements with Cuba and the passage of the new, tighter U.S. trade restrictions, anti-U.S. embargo groups commissioned a poll of the American public. They found that “Americans didn’t give a damn about Cuba; many people didn’t even know there was an embargo.”²⁰ Only a few groups, such as the Arca Foundation were active in promoting a dialogue with Castro and the lifting of the embargo prior to the Soviet Union’s termination of favorable trade with Cuba in 1991. Since the late 1980s, the Arca Foundation has spent over \$1 million to pursue its pro-Cuba goals.²¹ It can be said that the Torricelli and the Helms-Burton Acts fired up many human rights activists that had ignored the U.S. trade blockade of Cuba for decades. Throughout the United States and the world, NGOs set up programs and new groups were formed to counteract the attempts by the United States and exiled Cubans to oust Castro by tightening the decades-old embargo.

Just as 1991 was a year that affected Cuba’s economy, it was also the year when other countries’ groups and citizens determined to shore up the island nation’s economy to assure the Castro Revolution’s survival. For example, Hans Werner Richert, a prominent member of the Germany-Cuba Friendship Association, visited the island in 1991 to assess the effects of the economic crisis. At that time, Richert, who had first traveled to Cuba in 1977 as part of the *Jose Martí* Brigade, was prominently quoted in

15. Kiger, Patrick J. *Squeeze Play: The United States, Cuba, and the Helms-Burton Act*. Washington: The Center for Public Integrity, 1996, 27-34.

16. Pérez-Stable, 90.

17. Kiger, *Squeeze Play*, 5-8.

18. Kiger, *Squeeze Play*, 11-13.

19. Kiger, *Squeeze Play*, 1-2.

20. Kiger, *Squeeze Play*, 38.

21. Kiger, *Squeeze Play*, 3.

Granma, affirming that, “we will not abandon solidarity with Cuba.”²² Richter assured that his group would be promoting the Cuban situation with flyers, and by forming more volunteer work brigades and travel groups. As he said, “we are trying to find new paths” of solidarity work.²³

On the same issue of *Granma* as the Richter interview, one of the “new paths” to assist the ailing Cuban economy was discussed by Marianela Martínez Espinosa, an “Ecuadorian intellectual...member of the secretariat of the Continental Women’s Front, which is based in Cuba,...[who] also heads the National Committee for Solidarity with Cuba” in Quito.²⁴ The article averred that the Ecuadorian solidarity organization

is now taking up a public collection to send a shipload of petroleum to the island. The first financial contribution to this campaign was made by a peasant community, which put in all the money that its members earned in one working day.²⁵

Indeed, the movement to provide assistance, especially much needed petroleum, to ease Cuba’s economic crisis was very popular throughout Latin America. In Mexico, a grassroots movement had begun to band together to assist the Cubans. A professional wrestler and social crusader, *Superbarrio*, who used his popularity as a wrestler to bring attention and relief to the marginalized urban dwellers of his native land, used his substantial celebrity status during a performance by a Cuban singer to promote a campaign for a collection of jewelry and cosmetics for Cuba; one promoter of the campaign referred to it as “a non-ideological gift from the Mexican people to the women of Cuba, who can’t get such things due

to the U.S. trade embargo.”²⁶ Also in Mexico, an entity called *Va por Cuba* (It’s for Cuba), comprised of university students, labor unions, and three leftist political parties, inaugurated a campaign in October 1991 to raise money to ship petroleum to Cuba by selling vouchers valued at \$1, \$4, \$8, and \$16. The funds raised were used to buy 5,500 barrels of Mexican crude, to be shipped to Cuba by the end of the year. The organizers were able to collect \$2,600 even before they began selling vouchers. The rush of altruism was a pleasant surprise to the fund raisers who had encountered difficulty in acquiring funds for similar campaigns for Nicaragua and El Salvador in previous years. *Va por Cuba* also organized fund-raising concerts and art exhibitions, with the support of Mexican musicians, artists, and well-known actors. Aside from the crude for Cuba campaign, other groups were raising money for medical and school supplies. An oil for Cuba campaign was under way in Chile contemporaneously with the Mexican *Va por Cuba* campaign and Colombians also became involved in sending Cuba humanitarian support.²⁷

A little over a month after the Richter and Espinosa interviews appeared in *Granma*, French Senator Jean Garcia, who visited Cuba along with other French senators, was interviewed about his perceptions of Cuba’s economic and political situation and of its people. Senator Garcia stated that what he and his fellow French officials had seen was a “people very dedicated to struggling with dignity...fighting to solve their problems.”²⁸ He further stated that as part of the French Communist Party’s solidarity with Cuba, there was an initiative to “fill an oil tanker and send it” to the island. Further, the French Communists and others, including the senators who had vis-

22. Rodríguez, Arsenio. “We will not abandon solidarity with Cuba” says Hans Werner Richert, Head of Germany-Cuba Friendship Association.” *Granma International English Edition* (March 3, 1991), 4.

23. Rodríguez, “We will not abandon solidarity with Cuba.”

24. Rodríguez, Raimundo. “Dialogue with an Ecuadoran Intellectual: Nela Martínez Says a Shipload of Petroleum Will be Sent to Cuba.” *Granma International English Edition* (March 3, 1991), 4.

25. Rodríguez, “Dialogue with an Ecuadoran Intellectual.”

26. Scott, David Clark. “Sympathy for Cuba Grows in Latin America.” <http://plweb.csmonitor.com>.

27. Scott, “Sympathy for Cuba Grows in Latin America.”

28. Concepción, “Interview with a French Senator.”

ited Cuba, would “influence the development of public opinion in [France]...and in that way contribute to beating the blockade.”²⁹

In 1991, while the rest of the world was rallying to fortify the Castro regime during dire times, solidarity efforts from the U.S. were still timorous and tenuous, as was much of *Granma*'s reporting of American supporters' travel to the island. Several groups from the United States visited Cuba, among them the Wisconsin Committee for Peace and Justice, a group which denounced its own country's sanctions against Cuba, stating that “the U.S. ban on travel to Cuba violates human rights,” a statement printed in *Granma* as the headline of the of the article that related the story of their visit.³⁰ Subsequently, *Granma* reported that a group of U.S. university students

denounced their government's policy against Cuba...in statements to *Juventud Rebelde*. The young people explained that they had come to visit Cuba to get some genuine information on the country's situation because “the news we receive from the U.S. government is a total lie.”³¹

A contingent of U.S. Baptist leaders also traveled to the island; one member of the group said that although their visit was brief, the visitors fell “in love with your people and your land.”³² From the Bay Area, according to *Granma*, Medea Benjamin accompanied by a “group of 24 doctors, health technicians and university professors” traveled to Cuba.³³ Begin-

ning what was to become a popular trend for U.S. pro-Cuba groups, they delivered “a donation of medicines worth \$2,000 to the vice president of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP).”³⁴ Benjamin also “revealed that the organization Global Exchange [had] begun a campaign to abolish that country's [the U.S.] economic blockade against Cuba.”³⁵ Benjamin personally denounced the U.S. embargo.³⁶

Also during 1991, two U.S. NGOs which later became involved in supplying aid and solidarity to the Castro regime went on fact finding missions. Both are based in New York City, but have ties with the Bay Area. International Action Center (IAC), a fledgling multi-issue organization founded earlier that same year “to oppose U.S. aggression in Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East” as a reaction to the “U.S. bombing of innocent Iraqi civilians and the massive destruction of the Iraqi infrastructure.”³⁷ IAC had begun looking into the U.S. trade embargo's effects on the economy and stability of Castro's government; the next year, IAC's plans would take shape and a new Cuba solidarity group would see the light.³⁸

The Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO), established in 1967,³⁹ and its adjunct project Pastors for Peace, founded in 1988,⁴⁰ have been active in programs such as sending aid to Central America since 1983, as well as supporting Puerto Rican self-determination and anti-Ku Klux

29. Concepción, “Interview with a French Senator.”

30. Rodríguez, Raimundo. “The US Ban on Travel to Cuba Violates Human Rights' says Group of Americans Belonging to Wisconsin Committee for Peace and Justice at a Press Conference in Havana.” *Granma International English Edition* (March 10, 1991) 9.

31. “U.S. Students in Cuba.” *Granma International English Edition* (April 21, 1991), 4.

32. García, Pedro Antonio. “U.S. Baptists Visit Havana: Blockade Described as Contrary to U.S. Interests.” *Granma International English Edition* (May 12, 1991), 4.

33. “Against the Blockade.” *Granma International English Edition* (July 21, 1991), 3.

34. “Against the Blockade.”

35. “Against the Blockade.”

36. “Against the Blockade.”

37. International Peace for Cuba Appeal Update, 4.

38. International Peace for Cuba Appeal Update, 4.

39. “IFCO's Rich History.” <http://www.ifconews.org/fuhis.html>

40. “What is IFCO?” <http://www.ifconews.org/ifcobre.html>

Klan movements. A panel of IFCO members first traveled to Cuba in 1991. It was a fact-finding delegation, taking stock of the detrimental effects of the “U.S. economic blockade after the fall of the Soviet Bloc.”⁴¹ The focus of the initial contact was “the role of the church” in the form of a dialogue between the IFCO contingent and official Cuban religious leaders. It resulted in the “the development of a historic campaign of solidarity with Cuba.”⁴²

In 1992, with the aid of Bay Area activists, IFCO/Pastors for Peace, began challenging the brutal and immoral 37-year US economic blockade of Cuba. Participants in the first US/Cuba Friendshipment Caravan risked fines and imprisonment to deliver 15 tons of humanitarian aid—Bibles, bicycles, medicines, school supplies, and powdered milk—to Cuban churches.⁴³

Thus began their US/Cuba Friendshipment Caravans, which have encountered resistance from not only the U.S. government—because the group refuses to apply for a license from the U.S. Treasury Department as a form of protest—but also from exiled Cuban anti-Castro groups that have, at times, attempted to sabotage the ventures. To date the Caravans have made 8 successful journeys, delivering “over 1,500 tons of unlicensed aid to Cuba.”⁴⁴ The 9th US/Cuba Friendshipment was scheduled to “travel along U.S. routes for educational events,” crossing the U.S.-Mexico border on June 15, 1999, and then staying on the island for “Programs in Cuba” from June 18 through the 26.⁴⁵

As part of their expanding services to Cuba, IFCO/Pastors for Peace offered “delegations to Cuba” from

August 1997 to March 1998. Although they offer tours to other locations, Cuba was slated for 12 out of 17 planned trips sponsored by the organization, with different theme journeys, including “Latin Jazz Festival/Latin Film Festival Delegation,” “Educators Delegation,” and “Rotary Club Delegation.”⁴⁶ Another powerful aspect of IFCO/Pastors for Peace’s efforts is their use of the world wide web. The organization’s Web pages are filled with links to many other activist groups, as well as to their own programs, and to links for the latest updates on Cuba legislation in the U.S. Congress.⁴⁷

A very active Bay Area Cuba solidarity group is International Peace for Cuba Appeal (IPCA), a bi-coastal endeavor that was initiated by IAC.⁴⁸ IPCA, with a branch in New York City and one in San Francisco, was founded in 1992 to demand that “the United States reverse its repressive policies regarding Cuba.” Since its inauguration in early 1992, numerous activities have kept the “many members” of IPCA engaged. Since then, they have been involved in demonstrations; canvassed for support through phone calls and mailings of pamphlets for upcoming events, which always include an envelope for donations to assist in the cause; organized special events and coordinated the logistics for their events, which can be complicated because often they are efforts by coalitions of Bay Area pro-Cuba groups; and planned and executed trips to Cuba in which they have delivered needed supplies. Later, during the same year IPCA was founded, as part of their humanitarian assistance program, members of the newly formed group were a

41. “IFCO’s Rich History.”

42. “IFCO’s Rich History.”

43. “What is IFCO?”

44. “Dedicated to the Doctors & Nurses of Cuba: For Health and Healing in Cuba and the World.” IFCO/Pastors for Peace Flyer, San Francisco (April 1999).

45. “Dedicated to the Doctors & Nurses of Cuba.”

46. “Travel to Central America or the Caribbean with IFCO: IFCO’s 1997-98 Delegation Schedule.” <http://www.ifconews.org/9798del.html>

47. Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization. <http://www.ifconews.org/>

48. International Peace for Cuba Appeal Update, 4.

part of the first Friendship Caravan, sponsored by IFCO/Pastors for Peace in November of 1992.⁴⁹ Another group from the Bay Area, Queers for Cuba, was invited to visit Cuba in 1992 in recognition of the work that the organization was doing to promote solidarity with and educating about Cuba, its gay and lesbian population, and people with HIV or AIDS.⁵⁰

IPCA has gone on several journeys to Cuba under its own auspices. The first was in May 1993, when it delivered \$75,000 worth of medical goods. Eleven members of IPCA, from both the New York City and San Francisco chapters comprised the delegation. IAC founder and former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark represented the New York City IPCA branch, while the San Francisco delegation included Gloria La Riva, head of the San Francisco branch and author Alice Walker. In 1994, IPCA organized the School Supplies for Cuban Children Campaign. According to IPCA sources, it was “launched by youths across the United States” to collect needed basic education materials (such as pencils and paper) for Cuban students. Equally important to those that organized the School Supplies Campaign was the need “to spread awareness of the US blockade...against the whole people of Cuba.”⁵¹ As part of the campaign, members of IPCA sold calendars for \$8, made phone calls soliciting contributions, placed tables in busy sidewalks to hawk their calendars and appeal for funds, appeared in radio interviews, and handed out flyers. Much of that work, as well as putting stamps on envelopes to be sent out announcing the campaign as well as requesting funds, was done by children and young adults. One IPCA member, as part of a closing narrative for a video for the 1994 School Supplies campaign, stated the following:

The impression most people in the States have of Cuban people is that they are unhappy or oppressed. Americans visualize a military presence in the streets when they think of Cuba, but it's not like that at all....there's hardships the Cubans are enduring, but with such spirit. The blockade will end some day, and in the meantime it hasn't kept the Cuban people, and government, from celebrating life.⁵²

In 1994, IPCA was in Cuba for two other deliveries of much-needed medical supplies. Up to 1997, they were the only US-Cuba solidarity group to take contemporary medical journals to the island. IPCA members collected “medical journals from doctors and health care providers all over the Bay Area. Members took journals and processed them, stacked and boxed them, preparing them for shipment. The journals were to be shipped as part of an IFCO/Pastors for Peace “Friendshipment.” Later, in December 1994, IPCA was instrumental in delivering two million dollars worth of insulin to Cuba.⁵³

As part of IPCA's ongoing campaign to disseminate information about the Castro regime, co-founder Gloria La Riva orates on the Castro regime's history and its tempestuous relations with the United States not only at workshops offered by her organization, but by other pro-Cuba groups as well. Among others, IPCA presented the “Truth about Cuba” meeting, a small, informal gathering for students at San Francisco State University (SFSU) on February 26, 1997. It was announced with flyers posted throughout the SFSU campus. During the presentation La Riva emphasized that travel to Cuba was the best way to learn about the island's realities.⁵⁴ The “Education and Action Conference on Cuba” held on April 5, 1997, was produced by a coalition of various Bay Area pro-

49. La Riva, Gloria. Interview with the author, San Francisco (October 13, 1997).

50. “Gay Cuba: Gays for Cuba—Purposes and Goals.” <http://www.utexas.edu/students/alliance/gaycuba.html>.

51. *The School Supplies for Cuban Children Campaign*, video. Produced by Gloria La Riva, San Francisco, 1994.

52. *The School Supplies for Cuban Children Campaign*.

53. La Riva interview.

54. “Truth About Cuba Workshop,” San Francisco State University (February 26, 1997).

Cuba groups. Among the sponsoring organizations was IPCA, which had a table set up with books, videos, and other materials for sale. La Riva, along with Félix Wilson, Deputy Chief of the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, D.C.,⁵⁵ presented a workshop titled “Human Rights in Cuba..” At one point during the presentation, La Riva assured the members of the audience that even though it was important to go to Cuba to experience the truth first hand, it was not necessary. All that was needed was knowledge regarding the ongoing Cuban revolution. She stated that those who did not go to Cuba should feel no less secure in their knowledge and in their ability to defend the Castro regime with the facts.⁵⁶

La Riva has also produced several videos as part of IPCA’s education campaign to enlighten the American public regarding the U.S. government’s embargo against Cuba and about the true nature of the island and its people. IPCA sells the videos at their office, by mail order, and at Bay Area Cuba solidarity functions. The titles include “School Supplies for Cuba,” 13.5 min;⁵⁷ “Workers Democracy in Cuba,” 28.5 min.; and “Cuba against the Odds,” 25 min.⁵⁸ They also sell a variety of books that cover the full anti-U.S. imperialism spectrum, as well as sundry souvenirs, such as a handful of Che t-shirts brought from Cuba, and calendars that feature photographs of the island and its people.

Global Exchange (GX) is a Bay Area organization founded in 1988 to promote travel as well as “goods and services that promote understanding and concern for social justice.”⁵⁹ As part of their agenda, GX

has been coordinating Reality Tours to developing countries to give Americans a chance to “meet the grassroots people who are changing the world.”⁶⁰ GX will also “custom design tours for organizations that wish to travel as a unit.” For 1998, GX planned one trip each to Haiti, Brazil, Palestine and Israel, and Guatemala, as well as two to South Africa. Yet GX scheduled 31 tours to Cuba, each categorized and titled. For example, the “Dancing in Cuba” series of 8 “exciting 2-week dance programs” set up “in collaboration with the National Folkloric Dance Company of Cuba.”⁶¹ GX also has the “Learn Spanish in Cuba” series, 8 tours for either 2 or 4 week courses, with travel packages that include education and “additional weekend tours to...rural areas, beaches, and salsa dancing.”⁶² The other 11 trips include “New Year’s in Havana,” “Cuba and Chiapas: Revolutionary Cultures,” “Jammin’ in Havana (Youth Delegation),” “Following in the Footsteps of Che,” and “Cuban Culture: African Roots, Rhythm and Religion.”⁶³

A salient part of GX’s solidarity agenda is what they call among the Bay Area movement “report backs.”⁶⁴ For example, as part of GX’s application for travel, they include the following question: “How will you share your learning experience once you return home?”⁶⁵

Probably one of the most salient report backs is that of Dr. Patch Adams, who was the subject of the 1998 Robin Williams hit film. He went to Cuba as part of a GX Cuba tour through arrangements made by a contact in Wisconsin. Upon his return he endeavored to get funding for a documentary on the Cuban

55. “Education and Action Conference on Cuba” flyer, San Francisco (1997).

56. “Education and Action Conference on Cuba.” San Francisco (April 5, 1997).

57. In the author’s personal collection.

58. “Int’l Peace for Cuba Appeal Videos and Books” pamphlet, San Francisco.

59. Benjamin, Medea and Danaher, Kevin. “GX Celebrates 10th Anniversary.” *Global Exchange*, Issue #34 (Spring 1998), 1.

60. “Reality Tours: Meet the Grassroots People That Are Changing the World.” *Global Exchange*, Issue #34 (Spring 1998), 8.

61. “Cuba Tours,” *Global Exchange*, Issue #34 (Spring 1998), 10.

62. “Learn Spanish in Cuba,” *Global Exchange*, Issue #34 (Spring 1998), 11

63. “Cuba Tours,” 10.

64. Montanaro, Pam. Interview with the author. San Francisco (April 26, 1999).

65. “Global Exchange Reality Tour Application.” San Francisco (July 1999).

medical programs but to no avail.⁶⁶ “Now Patch Adams has become a friend of Cuba”⁶⁷ and GX is feverishly promoting his newfound friendship with a special tour in December 1999.⁶⁸ The letter GX mailed out announcing the Patch Adams Cuba trip also included an action alert letter regarding the Cuba Food and Medicine Security Act of 1999, with a sample letter printed in the back.⁶⁹ Because of a “report back” success story like Adams’, it is with great certainty that GX’s Web page asserts that a result of the post-Cuba Reality Tour activity is the creation of other pro-Cuba projects, including Project InfoMed USA, the Cuban-American Alliance Education Fund, and Send a Piana to Havana.⁷⁰

When Benjamin Treuhaft first traveled to Cuba in 1994, on a trip sponsored by GX, he was appalled by the deterioration of the island’s pianos, and he felt he must do something to help.⁷¹ Treuhaft conceived a venture for alleviating the Castro Revolution’s hardships by putting his talents as a piano tuner to work; he started the “Send a Piana to Havana” campaign in 1995.⁷² It was conceived as a one man operation, with Treuhaft canvassing for donations of funds, parts and old pianos as well soliciting the labor of other piano tuners from the Bay Area, the United States at large, Canada, and Great Britain; a second person joined him in the effort in 1997. Treuhaft delivered his first shipment of goods to the Havana Superior Art Institute on December 20, 1995. The shipment was comprised of “22 pianos, a \$15,000

record collection, 1,000 pounds of piano parts, and a pump organ.”⁷³ He followed the proper U.S. bureaucratic channels, which was a time consuming task. But as Treuhaft has averred, “I’m the only businessman able to break the blockade—but only with piano parts.”⁷⁴

Recently, Treuhaft and Send a Piana to Havana became the subject of an hour long documentary. It was filmed in Havana and Berkeley and “was shown on prime-time in England last summer to unanimous rave reviews in the London Press.”⁷⁵ Although it was originally produced for English television, it aired in the United States on the Ovation Arts Network, in cities including Boston, New York, Berkeley, and Santa Cruz.⁷⁶

1995 saw the creation of InfoMed-USA, based in Santa Clara, California, and active in the nearby Bay Area. It is a coordinated effort “dedicated to the support of public health development in the third world and the Republic of Cuba in particular through the Cuban medical information network (InfoMed).”⁷⁷ InfoMed-USA works in conjunction with the Cuban Ministry of Public Health to furnish “computers and materials” for the Cuban InfoMed. By early 1998, with the assistance of IFCO/Pastors for Peace Friendshipments, “a total of 800 computers...all donated by individuals and institutions” had been delivered to Cuba.⁷⁸ In 1999, national and well recognized medical institution expressed interest in

66. Montanaro interview.

67. Montanaro, Pam. “Spring 1999 Global Exchange Announcement.” Letter, San Francisco (1999).

68. “Join the Real Patch Adams” flyer, Global Exchange, San Francisco (July 1999).

69. “Cuba Food and Medicine Security Act of 1999.” Letter from Global Exchange, San Francisco (July 1999).

70. “Projects Created as a Result of Global Exchange Reality Tours to Cuba” <http://www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/cuba/projects.html>

71. Treuhaft, Benjamin. Interview with the author, Berkeley (1998).

72. Erlich, Reese. “Crack in the Cuban Embargo is Wide Enough for Pianos.” *The Christian Science Monitor* (January 9, 1996), 1.

73. Erlich, “Crack in the Cuban Embargo.”

74. Erlich, “Crack in the Cuban Embargo.”

75. “Tuning with the Enemy,” announcement. New York (June 1999).

76. “Tuning with the Enemy.”

77. “InfoMed-USA/Cuba: Who Are We?” <http://www.igc.apc.org/cub>

78. “InfoMed-USA/Cuba: Who Are We?”

donating to Cuba's hospitals and clinics many first generation Pentium computers which are being replaced by more state of the art computers. This generous offer prompted USA/Cuba InfoMed to initiate the request of a license to send these Pentium computers, given that the license USA/Cuba InfoMed has does not include Pentium computers.⁷⁹

Also as part of their program, USA/Cuba InfoMed has a very effective Web page, with plentiful global Cuba solidarity links. At the top of their home page's many listings are links under the heading *Featured Solidarity Issues*, among them:

- Change US Policy Toward Cuba in 1999!
- Cuba Specific Bills Introduced in the 106th US Congress
- Urgent Action Needed
- Click here to write to Key Senators.⁸⁰

Elsewhere on their home page can be found links to *Alice Walker's Letter to President Clinton* and to the *Letter from former Congressman Esteban Torres to the Editor of the Washington Post*. Toward the end of the US/Cuba InfoMed home page there are links to GX, as well as to travel agencies Taino Tours, Amistur S.A., Friendship Tours, Marazul Tours, and the Cancun Havana-Connection. A curious link is the one to the Suites Olympia Web site, which promotes what appears to be a private home "managed by the lovely Perez family"; it features a photograph of a beautiful infant with the caption "Come and stay at my grandfather's."⁸¹

CONCLUSION

After all is said and done, as has oft times been the case for over two score, the last word belongs to Fidel

Castro. The inspiration he and his Revolution inspires in many members of the global community, as well as the consuming hatred he and his enterprises fire in many exiled Cubans and some U.S. citizens, have caused innumerable individuals worldwide to dedicate much of their time to following his every move. They have done so to either adulate and emulate him or to exenterate him and bring an end to his rule, and at times, even to his life.

As this research has shown, many individuals and groups in the Bay Area, and elsewhere, are successful at working in unison as part of the Cuba solidarity movement. They are successful at giving Castro what he needs to keep his administration afloat.

The Cuba solidarity groups aspire to educate the U.S. public about what they perceive is the true nature of Castro's government and its achievements; they send humanitarian assistance to the "Cuban people"; and they organize trips to Cuba, devising new strategies and agendas to attract new and return visitors to the idolized island. More visitors, just as Castro requested late in 1993, when he met with a group of 174 U.S. visitors who chose to stand in solidarity with the "Cuban people," thereby showing the world and the Cubans on the island that supporting the Castro regime was worth risking the wrath of the United States. The American visitors risked arrest and heavy fines for challenging the U.S. travel restrictions to Cuba by traveling without official permission as a form of civil disobedience. "At the close of the encounter with Castro, one of the group leaders promised to be back soon with more people. Castro responded, 'Send a million before Christmas, please.'"⁸²

79. "1999 US/Cuba InfoMed Update." <http://www.igc.apc.org/cubasoli/A1999up.html>

80. "Welcome to the Cuba Solidarity Web Page." <http://www.igc.apc.org/cubasoli/>

81. "Looking for a Place to Stay in Havana?" <http://www.igc.apc.org/cubasoli/perez.html>

82. Scott, David Clark "Challenging the Cuba Ban: Visiting Americans Talk With Fidel and Cubans Wishing They Had the Guts to Test Their Government." <http://plweb.csmonitor.com>.