

The Clarion Choir meets every Sunday at The Place, Melrose St., Sherwood at 7.30 p.m.

Organic Gardeners meet monthly every second Tuesday at Hotel Deux Clumber Avenue, Sherwood Rise

Exhibition of Words and Pictures celebrating the 2500 British and Irish who defended democracy in 1930s Spain. Council House from July 14 to August 3.

CUBA SOLIDARITY is a voluntary self supporting organisation devoted to gaining respect for Cuba's sovereignty and independence and an end both to the economic blockade and to interference in Cuba's affairs by foreign governments. The Nottingham branch consists of two elements. First, a small group of enthusiasts who organise and promote events to encourage an interest in Cuba and Cuba Solidarity and to raise funds mainly to provide educational and medical materials denied to Cuba by the US blockade. (Anyone wishing to join this group should contact Barrie Ward). Secondly, a much larger group who receive this newsletter with details of forthcoming events which we hope you will continue to support and enjoy. To receive a copy regularly, please contact George Drury.

CONTACTS

National Cuba Solidarity. For individual membership and to receive copies of 'Cuba Si' - CSC, c/o UNITE Woodberry, 218Green Lanes, London N4 2HB
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For contributions, letters, criticisms concerning this newsletter - George Drury 157 Heage Road Ripley DE5 3GG Tel: 01773 748264 gdrury@mailcity.com

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

11 June at The Place, Melrose St., Sherwood at 7.30 p.m. Meet two representatives from the Federation of Cuban Women.

4 July (12-4pm) Annual Cuba Organic Garden Party at 10 Denmark Grove, off Woodborough Road Coming to the Garden Party? Why not come by bus? Park and Ride Tram to City Centre. Bus no.45 from Queen Street to Woodborough Road, Dagmar Grove stop. Cross the road and the next road on the left, a few steps down the hill, is Denmark Grove.

NOTTINGHAM CSC NEWSLETTER

Summer 2010

Omar Puente Entertains Nottingham



YOUR ATTENTION, PLEASE - AN INVITATION

There are two primary reasons for this Newsletter. The first is to encourage an interest in Cuba and the second is to keep you informed of events we organise in the hope that you will maintain your support. In the first case, we try hard only to include items with a special Nottingham perspective. In the past, for example, there was an article on the now defunct Cigar Factory at Canning Circus and another article on the Cuban Archive kept at Nottingham University which is certainly the best in the country and arguably the best outside Cuba - or perhaps even better than that! However, what we want most of all is material about contemporary Cuba from our readers. To be more specific, we don't really want to hear tourist appreciation of the landscape and

the buildings - travel guides provide all that. We do want to hear about something enlightening, surprising, perhaps just an incident, which helps us to understand Cuban society.

Whenever we hear that someone intends to visit, we try to persuade them to write about it on their return, especially if they have some particular professional expertise or experience here to draw on. There are two examples in this issue. **Dr. Chris Udenze**, who has worked as a GP in St. Anns for the last 15 years, wanted to follow up his first visit last year when he found himself so excited and impressed by the way health care is practised in Cuba. He grasped the chance to attend a workshop there on Child Health and agreed to write a report for us. **Janet Amoah** went to Havana to improve her Spanish and we managed to squeeze an account from her. That is a point. You may imagine that writing something is either difficult or of little interest or both. The fact is that, in our experience, once a reluctant contributor gets down to writing, the result is well worth the effort. It doesn't have to be lengthy either, sometimes a paragraph would be enough.

However, you don't have to go to Cuba to qualify as a contributor. **Roger Jeffries** felt strongly about the British government's ambiguous stand on Cuba which appears to be that, while it is uncomfortable about the blockade, the last thing it wants to do is offend the US. In this situation even an official ministerial visit becomes too risky and Roger wrote from Nottingham to challenge Glenys Kinnock to explain why. You can read about the results inside.

When you write, we do want you to be honest about your impressions and opinions and we will print them. There may be areas you feel uncomfortable about and perhaps critical. The following piece by **Barrie Ward** may give you some idea of the stance we adopt and it also discusses what is probably the most contentious issue of all, the so-called 'Dissidents'.

THE CUBAN EXPERIENCE

Most people come back from a visit to Cuba profoundly moved by the experience. There's no doubt it's an extraordinary attempt to create a society, the values of which are in ever starker contrast to those prevalent in the capitalist world outside. Even the briefest visit is likely to suggest that a society is being created based on humanistic values, one of the most literate on earth, which above all cherishes the education, health and care of its people. All this is in the face of an unwearying and vicious trade blockade by the US (which includes active interference in Cuban commercial contracts

with third parties) and a huge US budget devoted to promoting internal subversion. Such is the power of the ideas which Cuba presents!

One thing we have found is that Cubans at all levels reject the notion that their society is some sort of socialist paradise. It is work in progress and going in the right direction. Meanwhile, there are many difficult problems to resolve: the dual currency is divisive yet there's no sign that it can be dispensed with in the short term: there are problems with absenteeism and poor management at work (recently the head of the sugar industry has been sacked): the economy, of course, is not immune to the global economy.

And then, there is the problem of the so-called 'Dissidents'. Recently the UK Director of Amnesty International, Kate Allen, claimed that Orlando Tamayo, who died on hunger strike in a Cuban jail, was not, as Cuba claims, a common criminal but a prisoner of conscience and that "there are at least 55 individuals who continue to be held for the expression of their political views". Is she right or are they, as Cuba maintains, individuals who have been suborned by the US Interests Section in Havana to engage in hostile acts against the state? It is, of course, no answer to say that human rights abuses are commonplace in the US and those European countries who are Cuba's accusers. For the very reason that we take our stand for Cuba, our expectation is that such abuses do not and cannot occur in Cuba. We are taking this up with Amnesty but, meanwhile, do please let us have your views.

THE CUBAN APPROACH TO CHILD HEALTH

You can never quite tell what will result from a casual meeting. Last year both Professor Imti Choonara and I were in the audience to hear Dr. Aleida Guevara speak in Derby where Imti works as a paediatrician. I was delighted when he invited me to attend the International Workshop on Child Health at Camaguey this March, since I had visited Cuba twice before and witnessed the incredible achievements of their Health Care system. The opportunity was doubly attractive because my family could have a holiday at the same time.

Imti opened the workshop with a review of the achievements over the last 50 years which have brought Cuba out of a near feudal economy run by the Mafia and 'Sugar Barons' with infant mortality of 120 per 1000 up to a system rated by the WHO as one of the best in the world. Infant and under 5 year old mortality is comparable or even lower than figures for the UK.

The Director of the Camaguey Paediatric Hospital gave a presentation on the



Medical School, Havana University

roles of the family practitioner and polyclinics, explaining that family doctors have only about 120 (yes, 120) families on their list and treat not just the individual but the family as a whole. They see themselves as part of the community - living in their 'consultorio' - but also central to public health initiatives in that community such as the Aedes Aegypti Mosquito Eradication Programme, which involves schoolchildren going house to house to advise residents. The red T-shirted teenage girls who came to our Casa Particular (bed and breakfast) sure distracted my son from his homework.

Public Health training is a valuable asset for all doctors. The Director is a paediatrician. In Cuba doctors occupy posts from hospital managers to the Minister of Health (Dr. Balaguer). The Chief Executive of a Nottingham hospital, with whom I have crossed swords in the past, is a doctor but a Ph.D. He has helped pioneer 'private sector financial turnaround methods' and promotes foundation status so that his hospital can 'spend financial surpluses and borrow on the open market'. One of us is missing something.

It seems that Cuban paediatricians can get a child psychiatry appointment

within a week, here it can take 3 to 6 months. However, some provisions are absent. Oddly, there are no midwives, as antenatal care is very heavily hospital or maternity unit based, with about six scans routinely given and home births very strongly discouraged. There are no Specialist Substance Misuse Midwives (as have been appointed in Nottingham) - it is considered that the heavy police pressure and control at borders prevent any significant Class A drug use and even cannabis is very restricted. However, there is a big alcohol problem and I did encounter an elderly petrol sniffer. For those with problematic dependence, whether Cuban or foreigners, there are some therapy centres which I hope to have a look at next year.

The workshop had speakers from Italy, Canada and Germany as well as from Cuba and the UK and covered a wide range of specialist subjects from the highly academic to essentially practical treatments. A major theme was communication with children - or rather children communicating with doctors - and the subsequent difficulties in assessing such matters as the adverse effects of drugs and the accuracy of histories. One item was the role of NECOBELAC (Network of Collaboration Between European and Latin American Caribbean countries) of which Nottingham University is a partner.

My feelings on the final day were that Cuba is the most amazing country I have ever been to and its health statistics are not just the result of determined dedication but also through a political structure that enables a focused approach without the financial interests of the commercial medical companies draining resources. The 'magic factor', however, is the ubiquitous loving and caring attitude of Cubans in general which is reflected in the work of the clinicians.

This was my general overwhelming impression but I should add that one or two aspects disappointed me. The punitive US sanctions have not helped, but there is racism and sexism. Many beautiful, well dressed black women, like my wife, are assumed to be 'jineteras' (husslers) which really began to irritate her. There is variation between rural and urban health statistics and between ethnic groups in the UK but this is much more polarised in Cuba with the rural population having a higher percentage of black people who are socially and economically disadvantaged. While there are many black doctors, racism still persists but, of course, it does here too. Once a midwife called the police when I was in my Health Centre at a weekend because she found it inconceivable that I could be a doctor. Statistically she's right - young British born black men are more likely to be in prison than attend a university and more likely to be murdered than become doctors.

Our family did have a great holiday as well. I was uplifted when I got back and not entirely deflated by my colleagues who were convinced that I'd only gone for a holiday. However, Imti will organise another workshop in March 2011 which I recommend to any paediatrician, any GP or anyone who is interested in child health and who wants to see that 'a better world is possible'. I intend to organise a trip to coincide with the workshop for anyone who does want to attend it (or indeed doesn't!) and would like to play a bit of golf, do some wind-surfing, bring the children along, knock back some Mojitos, shake a leg, cycle from Havana to Camaguey, take some second-hand bikes and wheelchairs with NPAC and maybe challenge a few inequalities.

Contact Imti on imti.choonara@nottingham.ac.uk or me on christopher.udenze@gp-c84706.nhs.uk

WHAT YOU CAN LEARN IN CUBA

Copelia, of course, is famous throughout Cuba for its ice cream and deserves to be world famous. It's cheap and delicious; famously they sell 30,000 scoops a day! I can see why. Three young men showed me how to do it. They ordered and then rapidly consumed five bowls of ice cream and cake each. This visit was during a bit of time off from my Spanish course at Havana University.

Before I left the UK I did my best to get a student visa but despite emails, phone calls, you name it, there was no response. So, armed with a tourist visa, I presented myself to the University language department and, in particular, to Maria. She was to be our Spanish teacher and source of much enjoyment. Our class included people from Japan, Australia, Indonesia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and elsewhere. Maria was good fun, flamboyant and liked to tease the guys - particularly to make them blush. In this first of a three week course I gained enough confidence to even talk to people in the street.

Some of the people I spoke to expressed discontents. They wanted to be able to travel. They also felt cut off from information about the outside world and there was a wish that they could talk to foreigners freely without feeling that they were being observed. In a way I was lucky because, for the most part, people were surprised to learn that I wasn't Cuban - so long as I didn't speak.

Mobile phones were more widely used than I'd expected. My Casa Particular host, the person at the café I regularly visited and Maria all had them. Of course, they all in their different ways have access to tourists.

Have you bought a pizza in Cuba? In Havana it's quite simple. Join the Cubans, stand in the Calle San Rafael, look skywards and you will see a man on a third floor balcony. Call out your order, then wait, and, along with everyone else, wait some more. The man will re-appear and point to the lucky customers. Your pizzas will be lowered to the ground at speed in a white plastic shopping basket. Exchange pizzas for money and back goes the basket heavenwards.

I stayed in a Casa Particular in Vedado, leafy and pleasant but some distance from Havana Vieja so not ideal for going out and about in the evenings. This meant that I had time to watch a bit of Cuban TV. At about 8 p.m., a cartoon is shown indicating that it's the end of children's programmes and time for bed. A setting sun yawns in confirmation. It's followed by a short advice that children have rights, the right to be loved and to be cared for.

By contrast, the evenings in Vinales and Trinidad involved joining the night-life. In Trinidad, listening to Rumba rhythms and watching the dancers really got inside me and I could see how people go into a trance-like state, especially on a warm Cuban evening.

I had been in Trinidad for less than two hours when a good-looking tour bus driver proposed that we should marry and I could go to live with him in Matanzas. All this was in Spanish and took less than fifteen minutes (could I have misunderstood?). Good to know that if I get fed up with the capitalist system, I do have an alternative.

Janet Amoah

USEFUL TIP: A Casa Particular is a Cuban bed and breakfast accommodation in the homes of Cuban families. It is easily arranged, good value and, if you are touring, your host can arrange another at your next destination. It is recommended if you want to meet Cubans and are not visiting solely to enjoy luxury hotels.

ASK A SIMPLE QUESTION AND YOU GET A SILLY ANSWER

Riddled as they are with logical inconsistencies, the mysteries of British foreign policy with respect to Cuba are difficult to deconstruct. Until, that is, one remembers that politics are rarely about reason and moral justification and are much more about convenience and pragmatic advantage.

My exchange of letters, earlier this year, with Glenys Kinnock, at that time British minister with responsibility for relations with Cuba, is a glowing

example of a British bureaucrat effectively losing sight of moral example and immersing herself in the convenience of political principle.

My initial question was a simple one: when was there likely to be a British ministerial visit to the heroic island and, if no visit was likely, why not? The reply was such a model of doublethink that it would have had George Orwell swelling with admiration.

The usual arguments, predictable and hackneyed, were dragged out of the Foreign Office locker: the difficulties of meeting opposition politicians on the island, human rights, lack of effective representation etc. with the additional caveat, in response to my observation about the setting up of the American torture camp in Guantanamo, that this was not a matter for international opinion.

Suspecting Baroness Kinnock of a degree either of hypocrisy or shallow thinking, I tried again, this time exploring the apparent contradictions of her argument. If, for example, the British government considered representative democracy important in its allies and friends, why was there no such condemnation of countries like Oman, where a British military presence is maintained ostensibly for training purposes? Where, for example, is the political plurality in Saudi Arabia? Why are so called rights considerations not a factor in the UK's exceptionally robust relationship with China? If Cuba was the only country in the world to refuse British diplomats a facility to meet dissident politicians, this could only be because Cuba was the only country in the world to have been asked to provide such a facility.

It became clear, after Baroness Kinnock's second reply, that her position was principled rather than considered. I found it difficult to believe that she could possibly be swayed by her own arguments. Until, that is, I realised that her arguments were not, actually, her arguments but merely Foreign Office templates to be offered as standard responses to arguments like mine. In reply to her particular observation - yes, indeed, I was accusing the British government of imposing conditions on Cuba for a ministerial visit.

It was tricky to make sense out of the intellectual distortions presented by the Baroness in this particular hall of mirrors, but there were some positive elements. It seems from the correspondence that it is at least possible that there will be a high level diplomatic British visit to the island at some time in the not too distant future, particularly if Labour wins the upcoming election. (Roger . At least one hopeful anticipation too many. Editor) An Early Day motion calling for such a visit had upwards of 245 signatories. British business

leaders have, rightly, been ordered to ignore the illegal American blockade of the island and Cuban tourism is encouraged.

On the negative side of the account, the UK has chosen to align itself in several important respects with US and, surely, the experience of American military intervention around the world in recent years is a glowing example of the principle that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. The US is in clear contravention of a raft of United Nations resolutions ordering them to end their blockade. The US is maintaining the blockade, offering protection to self-proclaimed terrorists and continuing to hold in American jails the five Cuban patriots whose only crime was to protect their country from terrorist attacks.

In so far as it fails to condemn these outrages, the UK government is complicit in them. There is much more at stake here than a mere ministerial visit to a heroic Caribbean island that is determined to defend its sovereign independence. In agreeing to recognise the legitimacy of Cuban independence by making such a visit, the UK will demonstrate more forcibly its faith in its own freedom rhetoric. Many other countries, including Australia recently, have sent envoys to the island. Come on UK, free yourself from pretentious and dishonest principles and join them.

Roger Jefferies

As you will have gathered, Roger wrote this during the curious final days of the Labour government. It will be interesting to see whether the Coalition is any more receptive - or at least straight forward.

A MASSIVE ORGANIC PROJECT FOR CAMAGUEY

Cuba has launched a 5 year plan to set up 4 mile wide rings around 150 towns and cities (except Havana) where fruit and vegetables are grown and livestock raised. This is of particular interest to the Nottingham group with our special links with Camaguey. The city has been selected for the pilot programme and the scale envisaged is truly ambitious. There will eventually be 1400 small farms covering 128,490 acres, all produce will be organic and is expected to meet 75% of the food required by the 320,000 population. Most of the farms will be in private hands but there will be some cooperatives and state owned enterprises. Large state owned farms will meet the rest of the demand. In recent years, throughout Cuba, fallow land has been leased out mainly to private farmers, allowing them to sell part of their crops directly to the people instead of to the state.

By general consent, the Omar Puente evening last November was our most successful promotion so far, even taking into account the Garden Parties. Next day, when we asked Ross Bradshaw to let us know what he thought about it, we didn't think that we had given him a tiny dose of nostalgia.

AN EVENING WITH OMAR

I thought the editor of this newsletter was joking when he asked me to submit a review of the Nottingham CSC Omar Puente gig in November. Did he know that I'm not a really big fan of Cuban music and that, bearing in mind this was a dance band, I have not graced a dance floor since 1979? I would have said that is because I have the feet of a violinist (whose was that film quote?) but, given that Omar Puente is a violinist and he was dancing, an alternative is needed. I have the feet of a retired solicitor.



Cuban music? Chachacha, salsa, son...they don't do it for me, but the attraction here was a good night out and to see what Puente could do with his violin, given his predilection for jazz and classical interludes. He did not disappoint on that front and when he broke away from the basics, I was sold.

And it was a good night out too. I was reminded of those Anti-Apartheid benefits at the Italian (now closed) of thirty years ago - not least because many of the people from then were at this CSC gig. I must be hanging around with an older crowd these days. But there were young people (even if a minority) and it was great multicultural and generally mixed crowd.

Puente got most people up on the dance floor at some stage, particularly in the second half as he played into the night. He is very charismatic and it was clear that the whole band was enjoying themselves thoroughly. You never felt for a moment that "it was Saturday, so it must be Nottingham" for any of these musicians. Puente, born in Santiago de Cuba but now living in Sheffield, is a great supporter of CSC and CSC is a great supporter of Puente.

This was very much a political gig. A celebration of culture and the culture of resistance. There was a bookstall with books about Cuba (at Nottingham CSC there always is) and it was not ignored. The Autumn Cuba Si magazine has a long interview with Puente, which is well worth reading.

The Polish Club is a great venue, with good sight lines, comfortable seating and a side area away from the main arena. Maybe next time it will be Havana Club rum on sale at the bar, though, not Bacardi!

Ross Bradshaw

HOW WE SPENT YOUR MONEY

Congratulations once more on your splendid generosity at last year's Garden Party. We hope you enjoyed it and are excitedly awaiting July 4 this year. You contributed £1740. The costs of the Garden Party and the publicity for the Omar Puente concert came to £300. We donated £1000 to the Cuban Medical Teams already working in Haiti. The remainder is held to cover the cost of material for the stall we run at various events and advance outlay for this year's Garden Party. You might be interested to know how Omar Puente finances his concerts, such as ours, and his other charitable events. He pays a standard rate to his musicians and he covers any deficit himself if this is not met by the organisers of the events. When we realised this, we decided to meet all his expenses this time. Because our entrance fee was very modest but the attendance high, we made just over £100 after all the costs of the evening were paid out.

Want To Learn Spanish?

Language Café, Central Library, Nottingham
Saturdays 1 to 3 p.m. Teachers and Learners Welcome. Free.