



CUBA60 – CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF THE CUBAN REVOLUTION AND BUILDING TRADE UNION SOLIDARITY IN BRITAIN

Next year, 2019, marks two significant dates in Cuba's political calendar – the 80th anniversary of the Central de Trabajadores de Cuba (Cuba's equivalent to the TUC) and the 60th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. The year provides opportunities to celebrate Cuba's many social advances in health, education and international humanitarianism and increase awareness and campaigning on the ongoing illegal blockade of Cuba and its extraterritorial impact in the UK.

Under the banner 'Cuba60' CSC will organise trade union focussed activities leading up to during this anniversary year to strengthen existing ties and build new links with sister unions in Cuba, as well as increase awareness of the achievements and struggles of Cuban workers, and the importance of international solidarity.

KEY ACTIVITIES

Young Cuban trade unionists tour – March 2019

The year is not solely about looking back, but also looking forward and activities will kick off with a nationwide tour by young trade unionists from Cuba. This will build on the links with the more than 300 young members who have taken part in May Day solidarity brigades to Cuba during the last ten years.

Cuba 60 touring exhibition – throughout 2019

CSC will produce a Cuba60 touring exhibition to highlight Cuba's social achievements in health, education and humanitarian internationalism, the impact of the blockade and the solidarity between Cuban and British workers. The touring exhibition will be available for use at national and regional union events and conferences and can be customised to reflect individual union links with Cuba.

CTC presence at the TUC Congress

CSC hopes that the TUC will extend an invitation to CTC General Secretary, Ulises Guilarte de Nacimiento, to attend Congress in September 2019 to mark the anniversary year. The CTC's last invitation to TUC Congress was in 2009 when the previous General Secretary Salvador Valdes attended to mark the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution.

Unions for Cuba Conference - November 2019

CSC will organise a Unions for Cuba Conference in November 2019. As with the 2004 Unions for Cuba Conference, the aim will be for unions, both at a national and regional level, to invite their sister unions to attend both the one day conference, and also a programme of meetings with lay and union officials in their workplaces. These regional programmes will allow time for the Cuban guests to meet more members and engage in more productive exchanges and in depth discussion than usual. The one day Unions for Cuba conference itself will focus on the achievements of Cuban workers in the last 60 years, and the future challenges they face including: resisting the ongoing US blockade; impact of aggressive new policies from the Trump administration; and the challenges of a changing economy and there rise of foreign companies operating in the country.

BACKGROUND

2019 marks the 80TH anniversary of the formation of the Central de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC). The Central de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC- Cuban Workers Central) has been the unified union federation in Cuba since 1939, uniting the country's 17 sectoral unions which organise in more than 81,000 workplace branches.

The CTC's first general secretary, Lázaro Peña, went into exile under Batista, during which time many prominent trade union leaders were assassinated. Peña returned to lead the organisation again after the Revolution, and trade union membership now stands at three million strong. As well as representing members in workplace disputes and ensuring health and safety and labour rights, Cuban trade unions have the right to be consulted on and propose laws, participate in company management and nominate trade union representatives to parliament.

2019 also marks the 60th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution which ousted the brutal US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista and put an end to the death squads, mafia rule, rampant inequality and racial segregation which characterised his regime. Nationalisation and redistribution of previously owned US land, homes and businesses returned much of the wealth and property in the country to the Cuban people and state.

Cuba's achievements in health and education since this time have been well documented by international bodies with the country achieving some of the best indicators in the Americas (including North America). The country's free and universal health system champions preventative healthcare, including regular contact with a family – resulting in one of the highest life expectancy rates in all of the Americas and one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the world. The 1961, 100,000 volunteers in the Cuban Literacy Campaign helped eradicate illiteracy, within a year. Now, the country spends 13 per cent of GDP on education - by far the highest ratio of any country in the world.

Social advances are accompanied by a commitment to international solidarity, development and humanitarian assistance. Since the Revolution, Cuban medics and teachers have worked in all corners of the world, from the Kashmir to Haiti. There are currently over 65,000 Cuban health and education workers in 89 countries - more than the WHO and MSF combined. The Operation Miracle programme has restored the eyesight of over 4 million people and the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) has trained tens of thousands of doctors from working class backgrounds from all over the developing world since 1999.

Gender equality was seen as an integral part of the Revolution which guaranteed rights resulting in high levels of political, economic and social participation by women in society. Cuba has the second highest percentage of women MPs in the world at 53% following the March 2018 general elections.

The impact of the US blockade and Cuba and at home

The US began sanctions in 1960 and a total blockade of the island from 1962, with the objective “to create hunger, desperation and the overthrowing of the Cuban government,” according to the US State Department. It has since cost the Cuban economy more than \$831 billion in damages and causes shortages in Cuban hospitals, schools and all aspects of Cuban life. The United Nations General Assembly has condemned the blockade in an annual vote for 26 consecutive years, voting against it by 191-2 countries in November 2017.

The US Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) fines both US and foreign companies for trading with Cuba. 49 fines totalling over \$14.4 billion were carried out under President Obama’s eight years in office alone. The extraterritorial nature of the blockade has had a detrimental impact on UK-Cuba relations and on British organisations ability to trade with Cuba. British banks have paid multi million pound fines and Cuba Solidarity Campaign had its Co-Operative Bank accounts closed down in 2015 due to the “risk” of OFAC fines. In 2017, Cuban students were barred from enrolling at the Open University, (a ban only overturned after a CSC led campaign).

Changes to US Cuba policy under Obama and Trump

On 17 December 2014 both countries announced their intention to re-establish diplomatic relations for the first time in five decades. Embassies reopened and bilateral talks and memorandums of cooperation were signed. The US government permitted their citizens to travel to the island under special license and limited trade was allowed. However the blockade remained firmly in place. With the election of Donald Trump even these limited openings have been rolled back. Taking advice from hard line pro-blockade Cuban-American politicians in Miami Trump’s new policy has once again tightened the blockade, reduced travel and cultural exchanges and regressed to aggressive ‘Cold War’ rhetoric when discussing relations with the island. Secretary of State Tillerson has also slashed the numbers of US diplomats in Havana.

The role of international solidarity

The US blockade was created to isolate Cuba, but international solidarity ensured that Cuba was never alone. International solidarity played a crucial role in winning the freedom of the Miami Five in December 2014, and in light of the increased threats posed by Trump’s administration, international solidarity with Cuba is now more important than ever.

80th anniversary of the CTC

The Central de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC- Cuban Workers Central) has been the unified union federation in Cuba since 1939, uniting the country’s 17 sectoral unions which organise in more than 81,000 workplace branches.

Formed in 1939, the CTC celebrates its 80th anniversary in 2019. Its first general secretary, Lázaro Peña, went into exile under Batista, during which time many prominent trade union leaders were assassinated. Peña returned to lead the organisation again after the Revolution, and trade union membership now stands at three million strong.

As well as representing members in workplace disputes and ensuring health and safety and labour rights, Cuban trade unions have the right to be consulted on and propose laws, participate in company management and nominate trade union representatives to parliament.

AIMS

- Increase, revive and strengthen links between British and Cuban workers through their trade unions.
- Focus political pressure on the UK government to stand up to the US's extraterritorial blockade legislation and enforce British sovereign laws to prevent future cases such as the Open University ban on Cuban students.
- Raise awareness of Cuba's social achievements in health and education and the role played by the Cuban public service unions, especially health workers to deliver these at home and abroad.
- Publicise Cuba's international solidarity and support for international humanitarian and development work in poor countries.