

Cuban Futures 2015



CONFERENCE REPORT

**TUC Congress House,
London, UK
3 October 2015**



Keynote speakers and panellists

FROM CUBA

Dr Carlos Alzugaray Former Cuban diplomat, internationally recognised political analyst, university lecturer and author of more than 30 publications on Cuban international relations.

Dr Rafael Hernández Author and editor of *Temas*, the leading Cuban magazine in the social sciences and humanities, senior research fellow at the Centro de Investigación de la Cultura Cubana Juan Marinello.

Arleen Rodríguez Prominent Cuban journalist, former MP, and Director of *Mesa Redonda* (Round Table), Cuba's most important television discussion programme for analysis of national and international debates.



CUBAN AND LATIN AMERICAN DIPLOMATS

Her Excellency Rocio Maniero Venezuelan ambassador.

Her Excellency Guisell Morales Nicaraguan ambassador.

His Excellency Roberto Calzadilla Ecuadorean ambassador.

Jorge Luis García, Political Counsellor, Cuban Embassy.

FROM CANADA

Keith Bolender: Lecturer in journalism and award winning author of two books on Cuba.

FROM BRITAIN

Victoria Brittain Former associate editor of the *Guardian* and foreign correspondent.

Professor Imti Choonara Leading paediatric clinical pharmacologist with interest in Cuban healthcare.

Lauren Collins PhD candidate at the University of Nottingham and member of the Cuban Research Forum.

Dr Francisco Dominguez Senior Lecturer and Head of the Latin American Studies Research Group, Middlesex University.

Professor Antoni Kapcia Prof. in Latin American History and Director of the Centre for Research on Cuba, University of Nottingham.

Dr Emily Kirk Lecturer in US-Cuba relations and Cuban history at Nottingham University.

Dr Steve Ludlam Senior Lecturer in Politics, University of Sheffield and specialist in Cuban employment law.

Rob Miller Director of CSC.

Linda Perks London Regional Secretary, Unison, and Vice President, SERTUC.

Bernard Regan National Secretary of CSC and former executive member of the NUT.

Rt. Hon. Brian Wilson Former Energy Minister and Labour MP. Chair of Havana Energy.

SEMINAR AND PLENARY CHAIRS

Jayne Fisher, Sue Michie, Carole Regan, Adrian Weir, Dodie Wepler.

Rod Leon Conference photography



Background

THIS IS A REPORT FROM CUBAN FUTURES, a day long conference on the future of Cuba-US relations which took place at Congress House, London on Saturday 3 October 2015.

The conference was organised by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign and SERTUC International Committee. It brought together renowned personalities from Cuba and British and international experts with backgrounds in research, politics, journalism and campaigns to discuss topics including Cuban foreign relations and investment, economy, health, internationalism, trade unions and democratic participation.

Following the thaw in relations between Cuba and the US, the conference aimed to examine the major threats and challenges facing Cuban society and the Cuban Revolution today and the role of the international solidarity movement in this rapidly changing environment.

PLENARY AND SEMINAR SESSIONS

The key themes and discussions were divided between two plenaries, a round table question and answer session and six smaller seminars.

Plenaries:

- **17 December and Beyond**
- **What next for Cuba? What next for international solidarity?**

Round table Q & As:

- **Cuban perspectives on the Cuba-US relationship**

Seminars:

- **Influencing Power – Cuban democracy**
- **Economic challenges**
- **Defending the gains of the Revolution – What the US can learn from Cuba**
- **The blockade – where it's at and how to end it**
- **Cuban perspectives on the Cuba-US relationship**
- **US intervention – is it business as usual for US 'regime change' advocates?**
- **Cuba, ALBA US influence and intervention in the new Latin America**

This report aims to convey the major themes and debates from the conference, highlight selected quotes, and summarise the conference's key outcomes and messages. For a more detailed report, including speakers' notes, papers, PowerPoint presentations and films of several contributions, please see the Cuban Futures conference web page at www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk.

17 December: a Cuban perspective

WEDNESDAY 17 DECEMBER 2014, or 17D as it is known in Cuba, marked a momentous date in the history of Cuba-US relations.

The beginning of a détente between the two countries, 55 years after diplomatic relations had broken down and the US had imposed the blockade. An associated prisoner swap saw the return home of the final members of the Miami Five, after serving 16 years of unjust imprisonment in US jails.

Cuban Futures took place ten months after diplomacy had resumed, and the Cuban speakers were asked to reflect on 17D and what it meant to Cuba.



ARLEEN RODRIGUEZ

"It was the happiest day of my life – nothing to do with the relations between the US and Cuba, but because the Five returned home."

"There is a sense of victory because they've had to recognise a government that they weren't prepared to recognise for over 50 years. Obama didn't negotiate with a new generation, he negotiated with the historic leaders of the Revolution."

"Another sense of victory is that throughout this long struggle, Cuba was accompanied. Latin America said, 'You either sit down and negotiate with Cuba or we won't sit down and negotiate with you.'"

CARLOS ALZUGARAY

"My basic argument: if we can get to a point where the US accept certain basic rules with their relationship with Cuba then we can start talking about normalisation."

"That doesn't mean that conflicts are going to disappear. There is an old conflict in the history of US-Cuba relations – a conflict between the ambition of United States' hegemonic ambitions and Cuban will for independence and self-determination. That is an irreconcilable contradiction. But we can handle it. We have showed that we can resist it."

"We wouldn't be doing what we are doing if we didn't have the conviction that right is on our side. Might may be on their side but right is on our side."

DR RAFAEL HERNÁNDEZ

"What I think is important is that for the first time in history the United States is not looking down on Cuba as a subordinate or an enemy, but is treating Cuba as an equal. This is what they are doing – not what they are thinking."

On the question whether the US had really changed its policy of regime change in Cuba, or whether the new relationship was just a change of tactics?

"I call it the Roberta Flack strategy; killing me softly with your song. But we have to be very careful not to let us go with the song" **Carlos Alzugaray**

"The United States still intends to bring us to our knees. Before it was by aggression and now it is by seduction" **Arleen Rodriguez**



Challenges ahead

The difference between diplomatic and 'normal' relations

EMBASSIES MAY BE OPEN, and diplomatic relations and talks progressing, but there are five core issues that will need to be resolved before relations between the two countries can be considered normal.

CARLOS ALZUGARAY

1. *The blockade must be ended*
2. *The US must stop funding illegal, subversive policies against Cuba, including TV and Radio Martí propaganda broadcasts*
3. *Cuba must be compensated for damages caused by the blockade*
4. *The illegally occupied territory of Guantánamo Bay must be returned*
5. *The Cuban Adjustment Act, which stimulates brain drain and encourages economic migration, must be ended*

They all depend on unilateral actions by the US.

The western media says 'Cuba has to do something'. No. We don't have to do anything.

We are not going to make any concessions."

Ending the blockade

CUBA ESTIMATES that the blockade has cost the country over \$833 billion dollars since its introduction in 1962.

Almost 77% of Cubans have been born under the blockade. The United Nations General Assembly has condemned the policy in 24 consecutive annual votes.

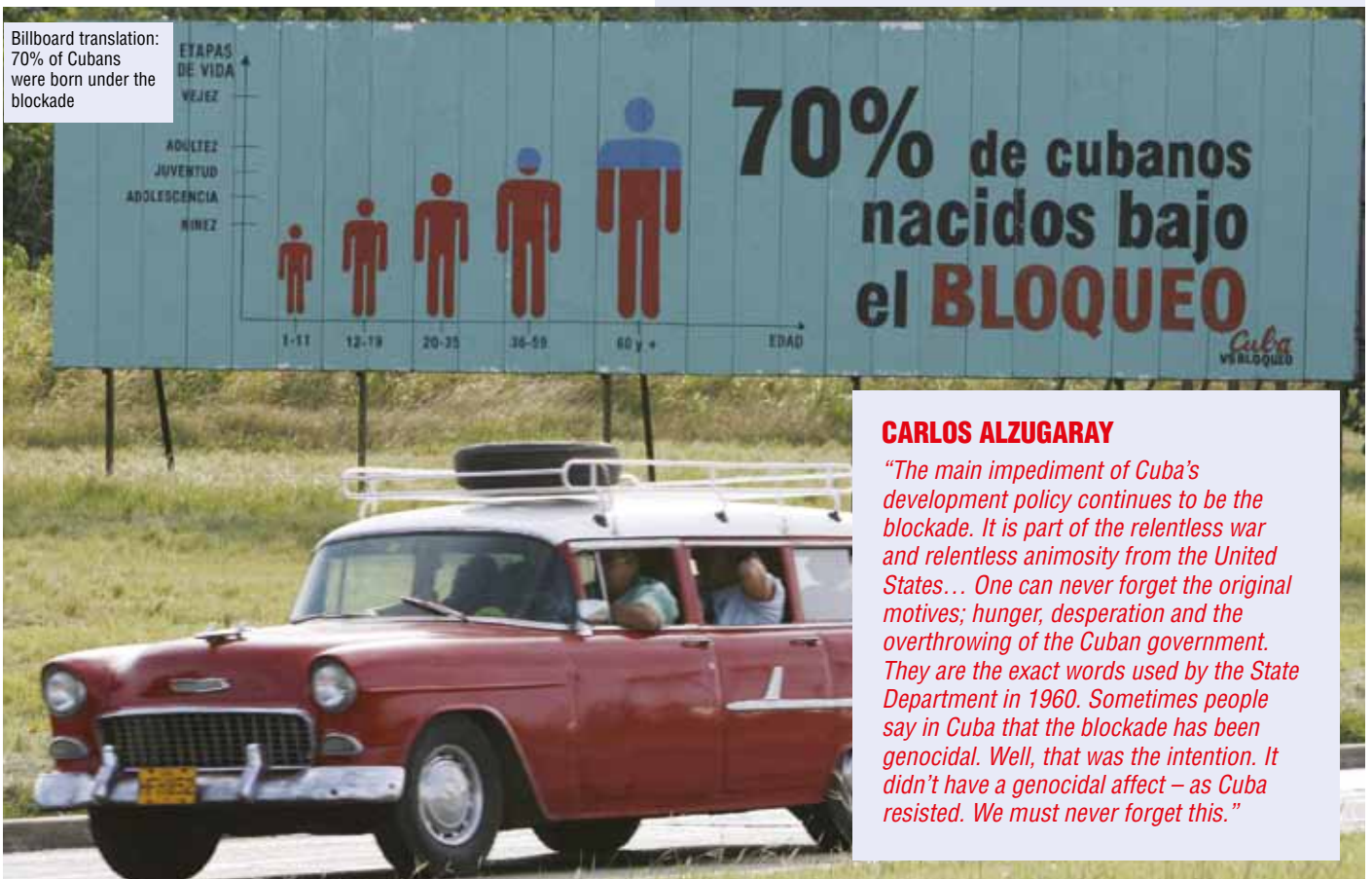
All three Cuban speakers at Cuban Futures said ending the blockade was the biggest challenge to Cuba and to normalising relations with the US.

RT. HON. BRIAN WILSON

"Let nobody tell you that the blockade is over... everywhere you turn there are obstructions. The British government has been complicit in that and continues to be complicit, not necessarily pro-actively, but reactively, in refusing to do anything that cuts across American foreign policy and American objectives. No British bank will go near Cuba as they are in fear of American sanctions."

"The closer the perception in the US that the blockade is going to be lifted, then the greater the vested interests of American business are that nothing should happen, in case by the time they get there others will have entered the field and will have closed down the options for them. So you have the paradox of the impression being that all this is changing, but actually there is logic in the fact that the blockade is in many ways just as tight as it ever was."

Billboard translation:
70% of Cubans
were born under the
blockade



CARLOS ALZUGARAY

"The main impediment of Cuba's development policy continues to be the blockade. It is part of the relentless war and relentless animosity from the United States... One can never forget the original motives; hunger, desperation and the overthrowing of the Cuban government. They are the exact words used by the State Department in 1960. Sometimes people say in Cuba that the blockade has been genocidal. Well, that was the intention. It didn't have a genocidal affect – as Cuba resisted. We must never forget this."

Guantánamo – End the occupation

THE TERRITORY of Guantánamo Bay has been occupied by a United States naval base for over a century.

It is the only US military base in the world that is not wanted by the host government. Roberta Jackson, lead negotiator for the US in diplomatic talks, has said that the return of Guantánamo is not on the agenda.



Rt Hon Brian Wilson



Carlos Alzugaray



RAFAEL HERNANDEZ

“Guantánamo is the second largest bay in Cuba, but it can’t be used or developed because of the US naval base. It is the least developed province of Cuba and the bay is the most important natural resource of the area. The bay dominates the Caribbean range and is going to be much more important when the Panama Canal expands in 2016 as traffic through the Florida straits will increase. To have a bay with the natural conditions that this bay has, is something very important in terms of our national economic interest. Guantánamo’s economic interests are closed until we have the bay back and the military base is eliminated.”

End subversive regime change programmes

US CONGRESS has approved more than \$700 million dollars of taxpayers’ money on broadcasting propaganda to Cuba through Radio and TV Martí in the last 25 years.

A further \$30 million has been allocated since 17 December 2014 for regime change activities. In October 2015, the government department USAID advertised jobs with six figure salaries for Washington-based ‘Cuba Programme Managers’ to organise civil society, youth and community groups in Cuba. US subversive activities in Cuba clearly represent a huge barrier to normalising relations.

Cuban Futures selected quotes

On Economic Challenges

RT. HON. BRIAN WILSON

"There is a huge need for investment in Cuba. There are huge commercial opportunities because of the consequences of this wicked, 60 year war of attrition against the Cuban people. If we had a 60 year blockade here, our agriculture and our industry would be in the same condition. Our housing would be in the same condition. The opportunities are there, the needs are there."

"More than any other country on earth, perhaps, the Cubans are aware that people coming in to Cuba for economic reasons may not be doing it in the interest of the Cuban people. They may be working against the interests of Cuba, or they may be indifferent to the interests of Cuba."



Dr Steve Ludlam

DR STEVE LUDLAM

"Unions and workers remain major and active participants in the management of the Cuban economy at all levels, but they now do so in a world of labour that exhibits more of the challenges associated with market forces, notably job security, diversified and market-influenced salary systems, taxation systems for the self-employed, and a rapidly-expanding sector of private employment and self-employment. Cuba's unions are well aware of these challenges and have conducted nationwide training programmes."



Photos: Rod Leon

On Defending the gains of the Revolution

DR IMTI CHOONARA

"If the US had the same infant mortality rates as Cuba, it would save thousands of US children's lives each year."

"In Cuba, the longest a child can wait to see a child psychologist is one week. In Derby it is nine months."



Dr Imti Choonara

DR EMILY KIRK

"Cuba was the first to show up – and sent the largest brigade – to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa."

"Revolutionary Cubans see that the essence of being human is solidarity."

On US intervention

DR FRANCISCO DOMINGUEZ

"It's difficult to fight against propaganda against Cuba when so many institutions, governments and think tanks around the world are producing it."

"From 1996-2012, there have been more than 1,400 programmes, and \$304 million spent on regime change activities in Cuba."

KEITH BOLENDER

"US tourists going to Cuba will be changed by Cuba more than Cubans will be changed by them."

Round Table



FORMER ASSOCIATE editor and foreign correspondent for the Guardian, Victoria Brittain, moderated a Round Table discussion based on Cuba's own 'Mesa Redonda' current affairs show.

Delegates were invited to submit questions in advance to the speakers which provoked a lively discussion. The full debate can be watched on the conference web page.

RAFAEL HERNÁNDEZ

"Are we expecting the United States to renounce their own nature as an imperial power, because they are negotiating with an island, the island of Cuba? Is it serious to have those expectations?"

Do you know the story of the scorpion and the frog?

The scorpion asked the frog, 'please take me to the other side of the river.'

The frog said, 'no, it is too risky, you may kill me.'

The scorpion said, 'but that is impossible, if I kill you, I will drown.'

So the frog took the scorpion, and half way across the river it stung the frog.

The frog said, 'you're crazy, what are doing?'

The scorpion replied, 'it is in my nature.'

Do you think the scorpion will stop being a scorpion? No, that is not serious, in terms of political analysis.

So they have not changed their objectives, only the means. I think that the means is everything in politics.

The way they are using the instruments to get their goals is the fundamental part of politics."



Rafael Hernández

Want to find out more? For detailed reports, including speakers' notes, papers, PowerPoint presentations and films of several contributions, please see the Cuban Futures conference web page at www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk

What next? Vigilance and continued campaigning – a strong message from Cuban Futures

THE IMPORTANCE of international solidarity, both in the lead-up to 17D and for the future, as Cuba negotiates the long path to “normal” relations with the US, emerged as a prime message of the conference.

Friends of Cuba and the solidarity movement need to redouble their efforts to end the blockade once and for all. Now the Miami Five are free, campaigning against continued funding for regime change activities and US occupation of Guantánamo will also become campaign priorities.



ARLEEN RODRIGUEZ

“Media spin makes the world think the blockade is over, don’t let this disarm the global solidarity movement.

“I believe that just as in the case of the Five, the blockade will only be defeated by Cuban resistance and global solidarity. The solidarity campaign must continue working. Be very, very alert to the manoeuvres which could be taken against Cuba. There are people in the United States who are not happy about what is happening.”

CARLOS ALZUGARAY

“It is important that solidarity campaigns emphasise the illegal and immoral character of the blockade.

“We might end up with the American electorate deciding to elect Marco Rubio, Jeb Bush, Donald Trump – nobody knows what the possibilities are ... We have to be aware, these processes are reversible. We haven’t reached the moment where these processes are irreversible yet.

“We will continue to need your support, your solidarity, and at the same time, I promise you, we will continue to build that prosperous, sustainable and fair society. We are not going to leave anyone behind in this struggle of the Cuban people.”

Find out more Cuban Futures papers, films, photo gallery, PowerPoint presentations and more can be accessed online at www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk

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Get involved

Join the Cuba Solidarity Campaign today and help end the US blockade; US interference in Cuba’s independence and sovereignty; and the illegal occupation of Guantánamo Bay.



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