

Los Angeles rally against the US blockade of Cuba *By Mark Friedman, LA Hands Off Cuba Committee*

"This is the largest coordinated effort ever on an international scale. And we know Cuba needs it- needs to get the boot of the US government off their necks," said Diana Cervantes, leader of the LA Hands Off Cuba Committee who chaired the rally with Angelica Cardona San Diego Cuba Committee leader (*We Are One*).

The protest of 125, the largest ever in LA against the US blockade of Cuba coincided with scores of protests in the US, Canada and world-wide was at the US federal building (Westwood), Saturday, October 29. Opening the rally, the crowd was entertained by Afro-Cuban musician on conga drums, Juan Carlos Blanco.

Link to photos and videos of major speakers. <https://photos.app.goo.gl/8LneKxvcTsyWhFaf6>

"We have achieved a unity never before in LA with 45 sponsoring groups and prominent individuals organizing and supporting today's protest against the blockade. We have scored big advances...with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union's Union (ILWU), the Inland Boatman's Union (ILWU Marine division) and the International Association of Machinists represented here today. **This is not the end**...we want to continue this united effort till we end the blockade, bringing in more and more groups and especially unions."

"The Los Angeles Hands-off Cuba Committee has been organizing caravans, public meetings with Carlos Lazo of **Puentes de Amor** and collecting money for medical Aid and food for Cuba," added Linh Co, a young Vietnamese committee activist. "We have to survive here every day, paying outrageous rents, but the people of Cuba need our continued efforts to end the blockade, force the US to remove Cuba from the list of nations supporting terrorism, and end the 243 Trump/Biden sanctions."

Floyd Bryan, representing the Southern CA District of the ILWU reported that "We passed a resolution against the blockade and gave \$10,000 for medical aid to Cuba. Recently we hosted a meeting for Cuban Ambassador to the US Lianys Torres. Cuba needs to be off the state terrorism list...they never were terrorists and won't ever be."

A substantial delegation from the Palestinian Youth Movement joined the event, and Amir spoke on their behalf. "We understand that the US war on Cuba is to undermine their socialism and national liberation. Cuba has supported international resolutions defining Zionism as a form of racism. There are Palestinians studying medicine in Cuba at the Latin American School of medicine (ELAM)."

James Lafferty, President Emeritus of the LA National Lawyers Guild and a longtime supporter of Cuba told the crowd "The US has caused the loss of billions of dollars for the Cuban people with the blockade and sanctions. Corporate media is the foot soldier for US imperialism. They have paid journalists not to tell the truth about Cuba. The demonstrations in Cuba have been out of frustration and because of US sanctions. The US is the major terrorist in the world. I am not pessimistic, but the Cuban revolution will succeed and win the war against the US."

The ILWU delegation included Mike Vera, business agent of their marine division.

"Along with you my brothers and sisters, the inland boatmen's union stands firm in its conviction to support the people of Cuba and denounce the United States policies that bring such devastating harm to the Cuban people. Recently our Regional Executive Committee passed a couple resolutions to this effect. This resolution addresses the US erroneous complaint that the country of Cuba is the sponsor of terrorism.

The Inlandboatmen's Union of the Pacific, Southern California Region, strongly urges President Biden and Congress, each federal representative in its jurisdiction, to call on the federal government to remove Cuba from the United States list of state sponsors of terrorism; and urges our congressional delegation to pass legislation that will eliminate those aspects of the embargo that have been codified into law; and remove all sanctions against Cuba by the United States. Allow the peoples of the United States and Cuba to travel and trade freely between the countries. We call on the Biden administration to end all US anti-Cuba economic, trade and travel sanctions and to end the US blockade against Cuba."

Recent ELAM graduate Steve Singh explained to the crowd how, "I studied medicine in Cuba for 7 years in part because of Cuba's reputation for some of the best doctors in the world...and they produce health outcomes as good or better than the US. My teachers told us about their international missions and service in Angola and elsewhere. In the US amputations due

to diabetes, especially amongst Black and Brown people are rampant, but Cuba has medicine and techniques to prevent them. This is denied entry due to the blockade. Not being able to import these and other medicines is a social justice issue.”

"The Black Alliance for Peace along with this coalition calls for the immediate end of the blockade, but further than that, calls for the demilitarization of the whole hemisphere," said Sirah. "We call for the end to [United States Southern Command]. We call for the end of militarization. We call for the end of the constant meddling in the affairs of Latin America, the Caribbean—and Haiti." so spoke Carlos Sirah, a Black Iraqi war veteran and LA leader. "Imagine the United States putting someone on the terrorist list—the biggest terrorist in the Western Hemisphere, the biggest terrorist in the world—has put Cuba on the [terror list], which has effectively and materially put a burden on Cuba in terms of limiting the amount of resources it can bring in," he added. "Who has Cuba invaded or bombed compared to the US?"

"We build our committee thru participating in women's, Palestinian, Iranian, anti-police brutality marches, and labor events explaining how Cuba is different and how the blockade hurts Cuban and US working people....this is what has made our committee so extensive, all-inclusive of scores of individuals and groups and democratically run. Despite the harassment of a LA Cuba Committee leader by the FBI, and FBI intimidation of Puerto Rican Cuba solidarity activists ...we shall stand tall and proud in defending Cuba's right to exist and to fight till Cuba is off the US "terrorist List" and we have ended the blockade. ...we shall not be intimidated," so said Johanna Cervantes, a founder of the LA committee and participant in Cuba's 2022 May Day march

Former leader of the LA Hands Off Cuba Committee, Cuban-American Cassio Mendoza, now the National Communications Director of the Amazon Labor Union, saluted the crowd and the committee for its efforts and the united protest. "I, ALU president Chris Smalls and other ALU leaders have spoken at rallies like this around the country...and we shall continue to do so. I appreciate the ILWU being here, and all trade unionist need to push their unions to take a stand against the illegal actions against Cuba." He ended by leading the crowd in chanting "Cuba Si, Bloqueo No!"

One aspect of the rally was to raise money for Global Health Partner's medical aid for Cuba. Giving a rousing fund pitch, raising several hundred dollars, was Codepink LA leader Ysabel Gonzalez "Cuba has a national healthcare system, which is free of charge, focused on prevention, and fully accessible to the population. Cuba has also developed and produced its own medicines and highly effective vaccines. They have immunized over 90% of the population against COVID-19.

During the pandemic we helped raise \$650,000 to send 6 million syringes to Cuba. They had their own vaccines but no way to inoculate people. Thus collectively, nationally and internationally, we showed our gratitude to Cuba for the help and solidarity they have given to so many people in so many places worldwide. We recently raised \$1,000 for anesthesia machines for the Calixto Garcia trauma hospital in Havana.

Cuba recently suffered a fire at the Matanzas fuel depot, impacting electricity production and causing blackouts. Help came immediately from Nicaragua, Venezuela, Mexico and Turkey. The US promised help but gave nothing. Then Hurricane Ian hit, destroying 14,000 homes...but causing only a handful of deaths while when IAN hit Florida, there were scores of casualties. It is our turn to stand up and help Cuba as they have helped the world."

Other speakers included Mark Gaynor (Democratic Socialists of America), Michael Novick (National Boricua Human Rights Committee), Nancy Lawrence (Peace and Freedom party), Ellie Garcia (Socialist Workers Party), John Parker (Socialist Unity Party). A large delegation of youth from LAMAS (LA Movement for the Advancement of Socialism) was present, actively leading the event.

The rally ended with a spirited march thru Westwood/UCLA area.

<https://twitter.com/kawsachunews/status/1586690108455112704?s=46&t=xOW1QAWHacH1XhSi2Jf90A>

Plans were announced for an early December tour of Helen Yaffe, UK professor/environmental leader and producer of the documentary "Tarea Vida" on Cuba's fight against global climate change. JOIN US: <http://ushandsoffcubacommittee.com/>