



# *Sinn Féin*

## INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN

November 2019



Delegation with Fernando Gonzalez - President of ICAP outside their head office in Havana

# Sinn Féin activists solidarity tour of Cuba

IN October this year, a delegation of Sinn Féin activists travelled to Cuba for a 15 day tour of the country, where we were hosted by agencies of the Cuban government and community organisations. The purpose of this trip was to build on existing relationships and to extend solidarity in this the 60th anniversary of the triumph of the revolution. The trip was organised in conjunction with the Cuban Government, the 'Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples' (ICAP) and Cuban Ambassador to Ireland, Hugo Ramos. Our party has had a long fraternal relationship with the Cuban

people and continues to support their right to self-determination, an end to foreign intervention and demands the US lift their illegal trade blockade. There were many unforgettable experiences during the political journey across the island from meeting and receiving briefings from some of Cuba's national heroes, members of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party and the National Assembly to visiting sites synonymous with the revolutionary war. We paid tribute and laid lilies at the final resting places of Ernesto Ché Guevara in

Santa Clara & Fidel Castro in Santiago de Cuba as well as laying a wreath at the monument in Havana dedicated to some of our own heroes, the ten H-Block hunger strikers. We also met with trade unions, educationalists, community groups and many of the local Committees for Defence of the Revolution in their respective areas where we also updated them on the situation in Ireland at present, outlining the potential challenges of Brexit for the Irish people and Sinn Féin's push to secure a referendum on Irish Unity.

## Visiting the Arturo Monterey school

DURING the tour we visited the Arturo Monterey school in Havana where we gave the children stationary and other materials. We were met by the principal and senior teaching staff as well as a guard of honour of the pupils bearing hand drawn Irish

tricolours. When we entered the classroom adorned with two huge portraits of Cuban writer and national hero José Martí & Commandante Ernesto Che Guevara, we were met by children from different age groups, who gave us a well-

researched presentation on the histories of the flags of Cuba and Ireland.

We spoke at length with the principal on the benefits of the education system in Cuba which was totally transformed after the revolution. The curriculum

and system in general delivers excellent results in terms of academic achievement (thousands of internationalist doctors have been trained) but they struggle to obtain certain materials like computers and laptops which many of us take for granted.



Children of the Arturo Monterey school welcome our activists



The delegation with the principal and teaching staff

## Meeting the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party

ON our second day in Havana, we met Elena Fernandes at the offices of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party (CCPCC). Elena warmly welcomed us into the main board room, a fitting place to hear about the process and results of the 2011 review and update of the Cuban economic system.

In 2019 the results of the review and subsequent Economic Plan are being implemented. The unemployment rate is only 3% and economic and social guidelines have been put in place, where private business can co-exist with state owned and managed sectors.

Seventy-six sectors have been created for self-employment in areas such as tourism, agriculture and technology.

More than 500,000 Cuban workers are currently registered as self-employed. Graduates can carry out internships with private businesses after college (which is



Delegation with Elena Fernandes at the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party (CCPCC)

fully owned and paid for by the State).

Cuba's world renowned educational social system ensures state-sponsored universal access to education and health.

This has helped Cuba to achieve universal literacy, provide access to safe drinking water and basic public sanitation. Their average life

expectancy is 77 years for males and 81 for females (higher than that of the US). It is these legacies of the revolution that the Central Committee of the Communist Party want to uphold and continue to provide for all its Citizens.

In recent years however, Cuba's economy has been in recession, culminating in shortages of goods

in shops and resources to keep the country running. In 2016 after a promising start when Obama's government eased some of the restrictions of the blockade, Cuba's economy began to grow to 6% with record numbers of 4.2 million tourists visiting the country. However, with the stepping up of the Helms-Burton Act II and III, international tourist providers are prohibited from entering the US if they bring tourists to Cuba.

This means that tour operators have to choose between Cuba and the U.S. which is a much larger market. The U.S. has also capped remittances at \$1,000 per three months for those who wish to send money back home to their families in Cuba.

Nonetheless there is a resilience, practicality and warmth within the Cuban people to deal with whatever challenges they may have to face.



## Meeting Ramon Labañino - ANEC Vice President and one of the Cuban 5

THE delegation also met with the National Association of Economists and Accountants of Cuba (ANEC) where we were given an extensive briefing and presentation by the vice president of the ANEC, Ramon Labañino. Ramon, who was another of the Cuban 5, sentenced to life imprisonment plus 18 years after he and his comrades were captured in Miami operating as intelligence officers, infiltrating and uncovering terrorist plots by counter revolutionaries backed by the US.

These groups had carried out numerous attacks on civilian and government targets in Cuba aimed at terrorising the people and subverting the revolution.

He was released by Obama's administration in 2014 after serving over 15 years in US jails. In 2001, the Cuban Parliament in a special session, granted Ramon and his four comrades the honorary title of 'Hero of the Republic of Cuba'.

On his release from prison in the US and return to Cuba in 2014, Ramon, who had previously studied economics at the university in Havana, took up a post with the ANEC.

During the two hour meeting we discussed the economic situation in Cuba and Ramon gave a lengthy and detailed power-point presentation on their projections and plans for the future. He also outlined the serious difficulties the blockade creates and highlighted how that situation has become significantly worse under the Trump administration. He explained the impact this has had on ordinary Cuban's daily lives from lack of transport due to fuel shortages, to homes and community facilities having to limit their electricity use.

Ramon indicated, how in April this year, the US government announced it would allow a private right of action, created under Title 3 of the Helms-Burton Act. The allowance of this private civil claim means all companies, individuals and governments with business ties to Cuba are potentially at risk of HelmsBurton lawsuits. The threat of US legal action is undeniably a big deterrent to international companies from doing business in Cuba.

Despite this, they remain determined as ever and confident the revolution will prevail but asked that we as Irish republicans continue to highlight the



**Ramon giving a presentation on the Cuban economy and discussing the impact of the blockade and how Irish Republicans can continue to show solidarity in opposing it**

injustices forced on the Cuban people by US imperialism.

The meeting ended with Ramon being presented with a copy of the proclamation

and he in turn presented the delegation with several copies of his new book detailing his experiences as a political prisoner.



# Remembering Che



Sinn Féin activists marking Che's 52nd anniversary

ONE of the highlights of the trip was when we visited the final resting place of Comandante Ernesto Che Guevara in Santa Clara and held a small commemoration to mark the 52nd anniversary of his execution by CIA backed counter revolutionaries in Bolivia.

It was extremely poignant for us to be in Cuba to mark the occasion and commemorate this great international revolutionary who continues to inspire us in our own activism today. Che epitomised everything a revolutionary should be; he was courageous, selfless, determined and totally committed to achieving his goals.

He travelled to where he was needed, organising and taking up arms against those responsible for injustice and exploitation. He led from the front, practised equality amongst his comrades and had a highly active mind always reading, writing and developing new ideas to drive the struggle forward. He is still held in the highest regard even by generations of Cubans born after his death and remains a constant symbol of resistance against oppression and injustice inspiring millions of anti-imperialist revolutionaries here in Ireland and across the world.



The delegation attending the mausoleum of Ernesto Che Guevara



## Visiting the H-Block Hunger Strikers Monument



A WREATH was laid by the delegation at the monument to the ten H-Block martyrs in Victor Hugo Park in Havana. The memorial which was unveiled on the 20th anniversary of the hunger strikes by our then party president Gerry Adams bears the names of our fallen comrades alongside a quote from Fidel Castro: "Let tyrants tremble before men who are capable of dying for their ideals, after 60 days on hunger strike!"



Our activists meeting Gilda Chacón Brava, the European Coordinator for the Cuban Trade Union Central in their head office in Havana.

## Meeting with Cuban Trade Union Central

THE delegation met with Gilda Chacón Brava, the European Coordinator for the Cuban Trade Union Central (CTC).

Gilda explained how the Cuban trade union movement, now 80 years old, is currently undergoing change. 95% of the 3.5 million Cuban workers are members and they join unions in three ways; there are state workers, self-employed

workers and retired people. In Cuba, trade unions are organised through workplaces and sectors; e.g. there is only one union for all education workers, one union for health workers etc and members contribute 1% of their monthly salary.

There are 19 national trade union branches whose leaders are elected from

the grassroots by their members and they have the right to attend management meetings at every level. While salaries of state employees have increased, Gilda said a salary reform still needs to be implemented and there is always a need to keep improving workers' conditions. She explained that although there are some difficulties

there is little conflict with state sector workers and their employers, however, there is a need to build trade union participation among self-employed workers of whom only 60/70% are currently members. As a result of the decreasing birth rate in Cuba by 2030 there will be three retired workers to one working person.



# Meeting Fernando González, President of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP)

WHILE in Havana the delegation met with Fernando González, president of ICAP in their head office.

Fernando was one of the Cuban 5 released from prison in 2014, after more than fifteen years of imprisonment. He stressed how he was buoyed, while in prison, by the massive support from Ireland and much impressed by the similarities between Cuban and Irish people. He visited Ireland for the first time last year and spent time meeting Sinn Féin activists and elected reps in Dublin and Belfast.

ICAP is a social organisation which was set up in 1960 as an organisation committed to the revolutionary process and building international solidarity between Cuba and other countries. Fernando outlined some of the work they are involved in and spoke of their links with 168 countries, friendships with political, social and trade union movements. While there is now a new generation in leadership roles, their vision continues to be guided by the ideals and path laid out by Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and the leaders of the revolution.



Meeting Fernando González in ICAP headquarters

## Visiting the grave of Fidel Castro

THE group visited and paid tribute at the grave of Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro in Santa Ifigenia Cemetery in Santiago de Cuba, where Cuban national hero José Martí is also buried. Each of the delegation laid a rose and an Easter lily at Fidel's final resting place as a mark of respect from Sinn Féin to the great revolutionary hero.



Paying our respects at the grave of Cuban leader Fidel Castro