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How the U.S. gov't framed the Cuban 5

First of a series

BY MARTÍN KOPPEL

In the early morning hours of Saturday, Sept. 12, 1998, FBI agents raided homes across Miami and the surrounding area. They arrested 10 people, ransacking their apartments and seizing personal belongings. With much fanfare, officials of the Clinton administration's Justice and State departments announced they had discovered a "Cuban spy network" in Florida.

The big-business media reported that those arrested were accused of trying to "penetrate" the Pentagon's Southern Command, pass U.S. military secrets to the Cuban government, "infiltrate anti-Castro groups," and "manipulate U.S. media and political organizations."

They had sought "to strike at the very heart of our national security system and our very democratic process," U.S. attorney Thomas Scott alleged at a highly publicized press conference at FBI headquarters.

Federal prosecutors singled out five of those arrested as their main targets. They were Gerardo Hernández, 33; Ramón Labañino, 35; Antonio Guerrero, 39; Fernando González, 35; and René González, 42. The government announced that they faced espionage charges carrying sentences of up to life in prison.

The truth is that the Cuban Five, as their case has become known internationally, were framed up by the U.S. government.

What was their "crime"? The five Cubans explained—proudly—that they had accepted assignments to keep the government of Cuba informed about counterrevolutionary groups based in South Florida that have a long record of carrying out attacks on Cuba from U.S. soil, such as a string of bombings of hotels in Havana in 1997. Not only has Washington not prevented such

attacks—it has given these groups a green light through five decades of U.S. economic and military aggression against the Cuban Revolution.

In 2001 the five were convicted after an unfair trial marked by violations of elementary rights, and despite the fact that the prosecution admitted they had never handled any classified information. Hernández was sentenced to a double life term, Labañino and Guerrero to life in prison, René González to 15 years, and Fernando González to 19 years.

Purpose of frame-up

The railroading of the Cuban Five had a double purpose.

It was one more attempt by the U.S. billionaire class to punish revolutionary Cuba for having the audacity to make a socialist revolution and set an example for working people worldwide fighting against exploitation and oppression.

It was also aimed against workers and farmers here in the United States. The message was: think twice before standing up to the employers and their government.

The U.S. rulers thought they would get away with this frame-up. However, they underestimated the resistance by these five working-class fighters and how the case would strike a chord among increasing numbers of people.

For the past 10 years the Cuban Five have been on the front lines of those fighting against government and employer assaults on the rights and living conditions of working people. Not only have they stood up to harsh treatment by their jailers—including long stints in solitary confinement and the restriction or outright denial of visas for their loved ones to visit them—they have reached out in solidarity to many others fighting for justice, both inside and outside prison walls, in the United States and abroad.

This record is consistent with the exemplary role they played in Cuba, whether as student leaders or as internationalist combatants among the thousands of Cuban volunteers who helped defeat the racist government of South Africa when it invaded Angola.

Over the past decade, the unfair trial, frame-up, and arbitrary treatment of the Cuban Five by U.S. authorities have led growing

numbers to demand their release. They have become an example to others fighting for justice, from meat packers jailed for working without proper papers to those opposing the execution of Troy Davis, a Black man in Georgia framed up by police.

The five are well aware that their battle for freedom is a long-term one. Because of their refusal to give up, however, the frame-up has suffered some cracks in the legal arena.

In 2005 a federal appeals court panel overturned their convictions on the basis that they received an unfair trial. A year later, after the U.S. government challenged the ruling, the full court restored the convictions. Then in June 2008 a third appeals court decision, while upholding the convictions, threw out the sentences against three of the five—including two life sentences—as being excessive even by U.S. legal standards. These cases now go back to the original trial judge for resentencing.

Today, the fact that the five have remained locked up for 10 years leads many people, as they learn the facts, to say: Enough is enough—elementary justice demands that they be freed!

This article is the beginning of a series the Militant will publish on the facts of case to get out the truth as broadly as possible.

Refuse to 'cooperate' with gov't

In September 1998, a few days after their arrests, Hernández, Labañino, Guerrero, René González, and Fernando González were dragged before federal magistrate Barry Garber, who ordered them held without bail at Miami's Federal Detention Center (FDC). "Each represents a danger to the community," he stated, agreeing with the prosecutors. They were assigned public attorneys.

"The goal now for prosecutors is to persuade the alleged agents to cooperate," the Miami Herald reported September 16, citing unnamed government sources.

Ramón Labañino described what happened to him: "Everything started on Sept. 12, 1998, at about 5:30 a.m. at home, when we were detained and taken to FBI headquarters in Miami for a 'persuasive' interview, where they asked us to collaborate and betray our country with promises offered in return. Obviously I had nothing to say, and after they were sure they were getting nowhere, they put

us in a car and took us to the Federal Detention Center in downtown Miami, where we've been all this time."

Labañino wrote these lines to his wife, Elizabeth Palmeiro, in January 2001, as his trial was under way.

Under pressure, five of the 10 detainees soon pleaded guilty on lesser charges—acting as an unregistered agent of a foreign government—and agreed to testify against the others. Among them were two married couples with children who were warned they faced long prison terms and might lose paternal authority over their children if they did not "cooperate." In early 2000 they were sentenced to jail terms of between three and a half and seven years, with promises of early release and federal witness protection.

Meanwhile, the Cuban Five were kept in solitary confinement. They were confined to cramped, damp, moldy cells 23 hours a day, with only an hour of "recreation" to stretch their legs. They would stay in "the hole" for 17 consecutive months.

A federal grand jury brought a 26-count indictment. The five pleaded not guilty to all the charges, which included the following:

Each was accused of "acting as an agent of the Republic of Cuba without registering with the Attorney General," and of "conspiring" to do so.

Guerrero, Hernández, and Labañino were charged with "conspiracy to commit espionage."

Hernández was charged with "conspiracy to commit murder."

Each was accused of various minor charges such as possession of false identification documents.

The initial indictment was brought in early October 1998. The charge against Hernández of "conspiracy to commit murder," however, was added in May 1999, after it became clear the government had failed to break the defendants' spirits despite eight months of solitary confinement.

In an unprecedented legal move, U.S. officials charged Hernández as responsible for an action by a sovereign government—Cuba's 1996 shutdown of two planes flown over its territory by Brothers to the Rescue, a right-wing outfit that had

repeatedly violated Cuban airspace despite widely publicized warnings.

Cops jail, deport Olga Salanueva

Federal officials tried other ways to break the five Cubans, but failed. One particularly crude method was their arrest and deportation of Olga Salanueva as a club against her husband, René González.

Salanueva wrote an account of what happened in *Letters of Love and Hope: The Story of the Cuban Five*, a collection of correspondence between the Cuban Five and their families. González, a U.S. citizen who grew up in Cuba, moved to Florida in 1990, and Salanueva joined him six years later, becoming a U.S. permanent resident. They have two daughters, Irma, born in Cuba, and Ivette, born in the United States.

On Aug. 16, 2000, FBI and Immigration and Naturalization Service cops arrested Salanueva. They confiscated her green card. “They told me that I knew about my husband’s activities and that, as a result, my residency was invalid,” she wrote. “I was taken to the state prison in Fort Lauderdale.”

She explained, “The real objective of my detention was to pressure Rene into signing a confession prepared by the Southern Florida District Attorney in which he would declare himself guilty and testify against the other defendants.” The federal officials warned him that Salanueva, as a permanent resident, could also be charged. González refused to sign the confession and she was arrested three days later.

On the way to jail, the cops took Salanueva, dressed in an orange prison suit, to see González at FDC. “They wanted to show him that they had made good on their threat and that our daughters and I were at their mercy. He looked at me and said, ‘Orange looks good on you!’ Even in front of the guards, he hadn’t lost his sense of humor.” That was the last time she saw him.

“I didn’t cry that day,” Salanueva added. “When you’re among friends you cry—but not before your enemies. Dignity gives you strength and hardens you.”

During the three months Salanueva was jailed, González was not given her letters. “It was clearly an effort to try to destabilize him

emotionally since he did not know anything about me directly and the beginning of the trial was near," she noted.

They were barred from speaking to each other by phone. In a gesture of solidarity, a Peruvian-born coworker at Salanueva's telemarketing job helped them get around that obstacle. Olga explained that "I called her and she recorded my message for Rene. He did the same. He called her, listened to my recording and then recorded" a message for his wife.

On Nov. 21, 2000, six days before the trial of the five began, Olga Salanueva was deported. For the past eight years the U.S. government has repeatedly denied her a visa to see her husband. She, along with other relatives of the five, has never stopped speaking out for their release.



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Cuban Five frame-up: part of wider assault on workers rights

Second in a series

BY MARTÍN KOPPEL

The frame-up and imprisonment of five Cuban revolutionaries by the U.S. government for the past 10 years is not an isolated incident. It is part of the broader assault by the wealthy U.S. rulers on the rights and living standards of working people, which has escalated over the past decade and a half, under both the Clinton and Bush administrations.

An article last week, the first in a series highlighting key aspects of this case, described how the Cuban Five, as they have become known, were arrested by federal cops on Sept. 12, 1998.

In June 2001 Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Fernando González, Antonio Guerrero, and René González were convicted in a federal court on 26 counts. These false charges included “conspiracy to commit espionage,” acting as unregistered agents of a foreign government, and, in the case of Hernández, “conspiracy to commit murder.”

In reality, the five men had been keeping the Cuban government informed of the activities of Florida-based counterrevolutionary groups that have a record of planting bombs and carrying out other deadly attacks on Cuba from U.S. territory—assaults that are part of Washington’s nearly 50 years of hostile actions against the Cuban Revolution.

From the arrests to the trial and imprisonment of the five men—two U.S.-born citizens and three Cuban-born immigrants—every aspect of this case has been a travesty of justice, one that threatens the constitutional rights of all.

FBI wiretapping and break-ins

The U.S. government used the case to justify violations of the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution, which bars unreasonable search and seizure. FBI cops acknowledged that over three years starting in 1995, they spied on and repeatedly broke into the south Florida homes of all five men. Under the cover of a federal warrant, they conducted electronic surveillance on their apartments, secretly recorded their phone conversations, copied computer diskettes, and seized family photos, personal correspondence, and other belongings, government officials told the press.

“FBI agents ransacked the \$850-a-month, one-bedroom apartment” of Gerardo Hernández, Reuters news agency reported Sept. 16, 1998. “They took everything,” his building manager said.

“They have three years of wiretaps, room bugs, even surreptitious entries—burglaries—and they don’t have any specifics,” said Jack Blumenfeld, an attorney for Antonio Guerrero, according to the Oct. 6, 1998, Miami Herald. He spoke at the time a federal grand jury brought indictments against the five.

Blumenfeld noted that the FBI conducted these break-ins and snooping operations despite the fact that the indictments did not allege a single act of espionage against the U.S. government. None of the 1,400 pages presented as “evidence” at the trial showed that the defendants had handled any classified documents.

How the did the U.S. Justice Department get around this problem? By bringing charges of “conspiracy.”

“Conspiracy has always been the charge used by the prosecution in political cases,” defense attorney Leonard Weinglass explained in an interview quoted by the National Lawyers Guild in June 2008. Such a charge frees the government from having to prove an illegal action, only a vague “agreement” to commit such an action at some unspecified time in the future.

The trial jury “was asked to find that there was an agreement to commit espionage. The government never had to prove that espionage actually happened. It could not have proven that espionage occurred,” Weinglass noted.

Numerous violations of rights were committed during the trial against the five, from the use of secret evidence to the judge’s

refusal of defense motions to move the proceedings out of Miami because of the atmosphere of intimidation and bias there. A subsequent article will take up in more detail what happened at the trial.

Denied bail, months in ‘hole’

For 33 months, from their arrests through the end of the trial, the five were held without bail at the Federal Detention Center in Miami. In addition, for 17 months before the trial they were kept in solitary confinement—the notorious “hole,” isolating them from contact with their families and limiting contact with their lawyers.

After they were convicted on frame-up charges, while the judge went on vacation before proceeding to the sentencing, the five were returned to the hole for another 48 days. They were moved out of the isolation cells only after repeated efforts by their attorneys.

And in March 2003 the men, now locked up in five prisons across the country, were placed in solitary once again—this time, under even more restrictive conditions known as the “box”—a hole within the “hole.” They were denied communication with their attorneys by telephone or letter, and all their writing materials were confiscated. The Justice Department said only that this action was for unspecified “national security” reasons.

Weinglass, who gained admission to visit Hernández once during that time, wrote, “He is confined in a very small cell barely three paces wide, with no windows and only a slot in the metal door through which food is passed. His clothes were taken from him and he is allowed to wear only underpants and a T-shirt, but no shoes. He cannot tell if it is day or night. His is the only cell where the lights are on 24 hours a day.”

It was only after an international campaign of public protests that U.S. authorities returned them to the general prison population.

Over the past decade the five have been put in the hole for shorter periods as well. On several occasions they have also been subjected to prison lockdowns by the authorities.

On top of the long sentences and harsh treatment—unsuccessful attempts to break the five revolutionaries—they have been denied the normal right to receive visits from their loved ones. Their wives, mothers, and children, who live in Cuba, have been able to visit only

once a year on average because of the long delays in obtaining visas. And U.S. authorities have outright denied all visa requests by Adriana Pérez and Olga Salanueva to visit their husbands, Gerardo Hernández and René González, respectively.

Stepped-up attacks on workers rights

The frame-up of the Cuban Five—beginning with the 1995-98 FBI operation that led to their arrest—was carried out by the Clinton administration and its Justice Department, headed by Attorney General Janet Reno, at a time when the U.S. capitalist rulers were stepping up their assaults on workers rights as well as on the wages and social gains of working people. U.S. district judge Joan Lenard, who presided over the November 2000-June 2001 trial, is herself a Clinton appointee.

In 1994 the government enacted the Crime Bill, which undermined Fourth Amendment protections against arbitrary search and seizure in private homes, allowing prosecutors to use illegally obtained evidence in court. It allocated funds to put 100,000 more cops on the streets.

The 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act expanded the immigration cops' powers to seize and deport undocumented workers without the right to judicial review or appeal. The migra was expanded to become the largest federal police agency.

The 1996 Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act allowed immigration police to jail immigrants using secret evidence. It broadened government powers to use wiretaps and hold an accused person without bail in preventive detention.

The government further restricted prisoners' appeal and parole rights. Mandatory minimum sentences and longer terms became more common, including life without parole.

The government expanded to about 60 the number of federal offenses punishable by death, and executions accelerated after the adoption of the 1994 Federal Death Penalty Act. The Comprehensive Terrorism Protection Act of 1995 denied the right of death row prisoners to submit more than one habeas corpus petition for federal court review of their cases.

Under the Clinton presidency, between 1993 and 2001, the number of people behind bars jumped by 42 percent. Lockdowns and solitary confinement increasingly became the norm. Today 2.3 million people in the United States are behind bars.

In 1999 the U.S. government framed up Taiwanese-born scientist Wen Ho Lee, who was accused of stealing nuclear secrets for China. While the government could not prove a case of espionage, it denied him bail and kept him in solitary confinement for nine months, using the case to strengthen its arbitrary powers in the name of “national security.”

In April 2000, heavily armed commandos of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) carried out a raid to take six-year-old Elián González from a home in Miami. The White House exploited its half-year-long refusal to return the child to his father in Cuba in order to burnish the image of the INS, reinforce the agency’s powers that are exempt from judicial review, and deal a blow to the right to be safe from unreasonable searches and seizures. The Miami raid was conducted in the months before the trial against the Cuban Five opened.

The Bush administration, inaugurated in January 2001, extended its predecessors’ encroachments on political rights. It seized on the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks to win passage of the Patriot Act and other laws to authorize expanded police wiretapping of phones, interception of e-mail, and spying on political groups and individuals. The sentences against the Cuban Five—with terms of up to a double life sentence—were issued in December 2001, as Washington escalated its “antiterror” campaign.

Under the banner of “homeland security,” the government has sought to legitimize the use of “preventive detention” with no charges, secret courts, and even torture. It is moving to try Guantánamo prisoners in military tribunals where they would be denied elementary rights.

Meanwhile, immigration cops have stepped up their raids of factories and working-class neighborhoods, increasing deportations and bringing criminal charges against foreign-born workers.

Because of the experiences by millions of workers and farmers with these assaults on their rights and conditions of life—and the

growing resistance to them—the case of the Cuban Five strikes a chord among many. Working people engaged in protests against immigration raids, police frame-ups, and other class injustices are the most responsive to appeals to support the campaign to free them. By standing up, fighting, and extending their solidarity to others, these five working-class fighters have themselves been in the front ranks of the class struggle in the United States.

The next article will take up the stories of each of the five men and their years-long records of struggle on behalf of working people—in Cuba, the United States, and internationally.



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Cuban Five defended revolution against U.S.-backed attacks

Third of a series

BY MARTÍN KOPPEL

Ten years ago last month, FBI agents arrested and framed up Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando González, and René González. In a case marked by violations of basic constitutional rights, the U.S. government obtained convictions against them on false charges ranging from “conspiracy to commit espionage” to “conspiracy to commit murder.”

The *Militant* is running a series of articles on the growing international campaign to win the release of these five working-class fighters, known as the Cuban Five. The previous article, in the July 14 issue, explained how their frame-up and imprisonment is part of the broader assault by the U.S. capitalist rulers on the rights and living standards of working people in the United States over the past decade and a half.

The “crime” for which the five men were imprisoned was that they kept the Cuban government informed about the activities of U.S.-based counterrevolutionary groups that have a long record of launching attacks on Cuba.

The violent actions of those outfits are part of the nearly 50 years of economic and military aggression, under 10 Democratic and Republican administrations, through which the U.S. government has sought to overthrow the Cuban Revolution and reimpose capitalist rule.

Washington’s hostile policies against Cuba are neither irrational nor dictated by short-term goals. The billionaire families that rule the United States aim to punish workers and farmers in Cuba for having the audacity to take state power and make a socialist revolution. What they hate and fear above all is the political example this

revolution sets for working people around the world, including right here in the United States.

“What is it that is hidden behind the Yankees’ hatred of the Cuban Revolution?” asked the Second Declaration of Havana, a manifesto adopted in February 1962 by a million-strong assembly of the Cuban people.

“What unifies them and incites them is fear,” was the answer. “Not fear of the Cuban Revolution, but fear of the Latin American revolution... . Fear that the plundered people of the continent will seize the arms from their oppressors and, like Cuba, declare themselves free peoples of the Americas.”

Revolutionary measures

On Jan. 1, 1959, workers and farmers in Cuba, led by the Rebel Army and July 26 Movement, overthrew the U.S.-backed Fulgencio Batista dictatorship. The revolutionary government immediately began taking steps to meet the needs of the majority. Within months it approved laws that reduced rents by 30-50 percent and slashed the onerous electricity and telephone service rates charged by the U.S.-owned monopolies. Racist discrimination in employment and public facilities was outlawed. Steps were taken to integrate women into the workforce, the unions, and political activity. In May 1959 a sweeping agrarian reform expropriated the largest landed estates and gave land titles to 100,000 landless peasants.

Public education and health care were expanded to all social layers. In 1961 more than 100,000 young teachers mobilized throughout the country to teach 1 million workers and peasants to read and write, wiping out illiteracy.

Workers mobilized to combat economic disruption by the capitalists and, by the end of 1960, major U.S. companies and virtually all large-scale Cuban-owned industry was nationalized. These and other measures established the socialist character of the revolution.

Cuba’s revolutionary leadership also extended its solidarity to anti-imperialist struggles around the world. As early as 1963 Cuban volunteer troops went to Algeria to defend the newly independent government there against an imperialist-backed assault. This proletarian internationalist course continues to this day, with

thousands of Cuban volunteer medical personnel providing quality health care throughout Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

These deep-going measures infuriated the wealthy U.S. rulers and Cuban capitalists. Unlike other governments, Cuba's revolutionary leadership was not beholden to their interests. Most alarming to them, revolutionary Cuba was setting a dangerous example to millions around the world—that it was possible for working people to overturn capitalist rule and make a socialist revolution.

In July 1960 Washington cut off virtually all sugar imports from Cuba. In January 1961 it broke diplomatic relations with Cuba and restricted travel by U.S. citizens to the island. By February 1962 the John F. Kennedy administration ordered a total embargo on U.S. trade with Cuba. In April 1961, the U.S. government launched a mercenary invasion of Cuba, which workers and farmers, organized through their popular militias, Revolutionary Armed Forces, and revolutionary police defeated at the Bay of Pigs. In October 1962 Kennedy ordered a naval blockade of the island and brought the world to the brink of a nuclear holocaust after Cuba accepted missiles from the Soviet Union in face of Washington's preparations to invade Cuba.

U.S.-organized terror campaign

Between 1959 and 1965, nearly 4,000 counterrevolutionary bandits—armed, trained, and financed by the U.S. government—waged a campaign of sabotage and terror in Cuba, especially in the Escambray mountains. They tortured and killed hundreds of people, including literacy volunteers and peasants benefiting from the land reform. Cuban working people organized to defeat the bandits, succeeding by the mid-1960s.

Over the years U.S.-backed counterrevolutionaries burned sugarcane fields, bombed Havana department stores, and carried out hundreds of attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro. Cuban authorities have offered evidence that Washington has carried out biological warfare against the Caribbean nation, including outbreaks of African swine fever in 1971 and hemorrhagic dengue fever in 1981.

The U.S. government has tightened its economic embargo against Cuba, including through the 1992 Torricelli Act and the 1996 Helms-Burton Act, which among other things penalize companies abroad that do business with Cuba.

CIA-trained counterrevolutionaries also carried out murderous attacks on U.S. soil and in the U.S. colony of Puerto Rico. Eulalio Negrín, a Cuban American businessman who favored moves to normalize U.S.-Cuban relations, was killed on Nov. 25, 1979, in Union City, New Jersey. Félix García Rodríguez, a diplomat at the Cuban mission to the United Nations, was killed on a New York street on Sept. 11, 1980. Carlos Muñiz Varela, a leader of the Antonio Maceo Brigade, an organization of young Cuban supporters of the revolution, was killed in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on April 28, 1979.

In October 1976, CIA-trained counterrevolutionaries blew up a Cuban airliner over Barbados, killing all 73 people aboard, many of them teenage members of the Cuban fencing team. Among those implicated in the horrendous crime were Orlando Bosch and Luis Posada Carriles, who were arrested in Venezuela. Posada Carriles, formerly a mercenary at the Bay of Pigs, had worked as chief of operations for the Venezuelan secret police. Although convicted for the bombing of the airliner, he was allowed to escape from prison in 1985.

In a 1998 New York Times interview, Posada Carriles bragged about his involvement in a series of bombings of Havana hotels in 1997, including one that killed an Italian tourist, Fabio Di Celmo, at the Hotel Copacabana. Posada Carriles was also implicated in a November 2000 failed assassination attempt in Panama against Fidel Castro. Today both Posada Carriles and Bosch walk freely in the streets of Miami. Washington has refused the Venezuelan government's request for the extradition of Posada Carriles.

Brothers to the Rescue

One of the U.S.-based Cuban American counterrevolutionary groups is Brothers to the Rescue, an outfit that has falsely portrayed itself as a "humanitarian" group rescuing Cubans who leave the island on rafts. Its leader, José Basulto, is a CIA-trained Bay of Pigs invader with a history of armed attacks on Cuba.

Brothers to the Rescue repeatedly violated Cuba's airspace, provocatively sending small planes over the island and dropping flyers calling on the Cuban people to revolt against the government. Cuban authorities report that Brothers to the Rescue conducted 25 such illegal incursions between mid-1994 and February 1996, and on numerous occasions Havana filed protests over these provocations. The protests were ignored.

On Feb. 24, 1996, Basulto led three Cessna planes into Cuban airspace heading toward Havana. The pilots ignored unambiguous warnings by Cuban air traffic controllers to turn back. Cuban air force jets then shot down two of the planes with four Brothers to the Rescue members, while Basulto's plane got away. After that decisive action by Cuba to defend its sovereignty, all provocative flights from the United States stopped.

In response to the shutdown, the Clinton administration stepped up its hostile actions against the Cuban Revolution. That included passage of the Helms-Burton Act as well as the arrest and frame-up of the Cuban Five in 1998.

The U.S. government targeted one of the five, Gerardo Hernández, for particular retribution. Hernández was sentenced to a double life term on charges of "conspiracy to commit murder," on the outrageous claim that he was responsible for the shutdown of the Brothers to the Rescue planes.

In justifying their violent actions against Cuba, outfits like Brothers to the Rescue claim to speak for all Cuban Americans. But the Cuban population in the United States is class-divided. The right-wing groups represent only the interests of a small handful of wealthy businessmen, including the former capitalists and their henchmen who after 1959 were deprived of their ability to exploit the working people of Cuba.

The large majority of Cuban Americans are workers. Today, many if not most—especially among those who immigrated in recent decades, as well as the new generations born here—oppose the U.S. embargo and travel ban, especially the restrictions on the right to visit their families on the island.

Some Cuban American organizations, such as the Alianza Martiana in Miami, speak out against the embargo and in favor of the release of the Cuban Five.

The next article in this series will tell the stories of each of the five imprisoned Cubans and what they have accomplished.

Write the five Cuban revolutionaries:

Gerardo Hernández, #58739-004, U.S.P. Victorville, P.O. Box 5500, Adelanto, CA 92301

Antonio Guerrero, #58741-004, U.S.P. Florence, P.O. Box 7000, Florence, CO 81226

Luis Medina (Ramón Labañino), #58734-004, U.S.P. McCreary, P.O. Box 3000, Pine Knot, KY 42635

(NOTE: the envelope must be addressed to "Luis Medina," but address the letter inside to Ramón)

Rubén Campa (Fernando González), #58733-004, FCI Terre Haute, P.O. Box 33, Terre Haute, IN 47808

(NOTE: the envelope must be addressed to "Rubén Campa," but address the letter inside to Fernando)

René González, #58738-004, FCI Marianna, P.O. Box 7007, Marianna, FL 32447-7007



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Cuban Five are example for world working class

Fourth in a series

BY MARTÍN KOPPEL

Five Cuban revolutionaries—Gerardo Hernández, Antonio Guerrero, Ramón Labañino, René González, and Fernando González—are fighting for their release from U.S. jails, where they have been unjustly held for 10 years. They have defeated attempts by their jailers to break their spirit and have been telling the truth about their frame-up by the U.S. government. They continue to defend the Cuban Revolution and to champion other struggles for justice in the United States and worldwide.

The previous article in this series described Washington's 50-year-long record of aggression against the Cuban Revolution, from military assaults to an ongoing trade embargo (see October 20 *Militant*). It was in face of this unrelenting U.S. hostility that these five men accepted assignments to keep the Cuban government informed about plans of counterrevolutionary groups in the United States that have carried out attacks on Cuba with Washington's backing.

For this they were arrested by the FBI and convicted on false charges, ranging from "conspiracy to commit espionage" to "conspiracy to commit murder." They were given long sentences and sent to federal prisons across the country, far from friends and family.

In Cuba the five are widely regarded as heroes for carrying out this volunteer mission and for continuing today to act as revolutionaries from behind U.S. prison walls.

In the United States, growing numbers of working people and youth are finding out about the Cuban Five, and many see them as an example for all working-class fighters.

Who are these men and what have they accomplished?

All five are exemplary products of Cuba's socialist revolution. Here they have remained true to their records, serving on the front lines of the class struggle in the United States.

Growing up in Cuba they became active as student leaders and revolutionary cadres. Three of them volunteered as internationalist combatants in Angola in the 1970s or '80s—along with hundreds of thousands of other Cubans—helping the Angolan people defeat invasions by the South African apartheid regime. The five took on their assignments in the United States knowing it would mean separation from their loved ones and the risk of victimization by the U.S. government. Today they remain politically active behind bars.

Gerardo Hernández Nordelo

Hernández, 43, was born in Havana on June 4, 1965. As a teenager he became a leader of the Federation of High School Students, joining the Union of Young Communists in the 11th grade. In 1989 he graduated from the Higher Institute of International Relations, where he had been active in the Federation of University Students. While in college he married Adriana Pérez O'Connor, who worked at the Food Industry Research Institute.

In 1989 Hernández volunteered to serve in Angola, departing Cuba the day before his first wedding anniversary. A lieutenant, he headed a scouting platoon in a tank brigade that helped defend Cabinda, a strategically important oil-rich region, from counterrevolutionary assaults. He distinguished himself in 54 combat missions, and was awarded medals of honor for his outstanding role. In 1993 he was admitted into the ranks of the Cuban Communist Party.

In a 2002 interview in the Cuban paper *Juventud Rebelde*, Urbano Bouza Suriz, who fought in Angola under Hernández's command, described his leadership qualities. "Twelve Cubans slept [in a small bivouac], and the fact that he, as an officer, shared both the good and the bad with his subordinates won him respect," Bouza noted. "We would scout almost every day. Sometimes at night we took part in ambushes around our unit." In his spare moments "he read a lot, especially books by Che [Guevara]."

Hernández, Bouza said, “was prepared from a political, human, and psychological point of view” for the U.S. mission he subsequently undertook in the mid-1990s. “A scout must be an excellent observer, show confidence in face of danger, be discreet, courageous. I can see those qualities in Nordelo,” as Hernández was called by his fellow combatants. When he read in the press about Hernández’s arrest and frame-up trial, Bouza said he told his neighbors with pride, “That was my leader in Cabinda!”

Hernández is an accomplished cartoonist. His humorous drawings have been published since 1982, and in 2002 a book of his work was published in Cuba, *El amor y el humor todo lo pueden* (Love and humor can achieve anything).

Hernández is serving a double life sentence plus 15 years at the Victorville federal prison, located in the Mojave Desert in southern California. The U.S. government has repeatedly denied his wife Adriana Pérez a visa to visit him.

Antonio Guerrero Rodríguez

Guerrero, 50, was born into a working-class family in Miami on Oct. 16, 1958. His father, who moved to the United States seeking work as a professional baseball player, helped raise funds in Miami for the July 26 Movement and Rebel Army during the revolutionary struggle to overthrow the Batista regime. The family returned to Cuba for a visit in November 1958, and decided to stay after the revolutionary victory in January 1959.

In a July 2004 interview, Guerrero’s sister María Eugenia said that, influenced by the example of their parents, “my brother and I had an active life in the student organizations. Early on in school we became leaders of the Pioneers, the FEEM, and the UJC,” referring to the José Martí Pioneers Organization of children, the Federation of High School Students, and the Union of Young Communists.

After finishing high school Guerrero—known better as Tony—won a scholarship to study at the University of Kiev in Ukraine. He graduated there with top honors in civil engineering in 1983. On his return he worked on a major project to expand the runway at the Antonio Maceo International Airport in Santiago de Cuba.

In 1989 Guerrero gained membership in the Cuban Communist Party. He worked for the national airline, Cubana de Aviación, as an airport construction specialist. He married a Panamanian citizen and lived in that country for a few years. Later he moved to Miami, working maintenance jobs at the Boca Chica naval air base in Key West.

Guerrero has two sons, 23-year-old Antonio and Gabriel, 16.

An artist and a poet, Guerrero has penned numerous poems in prison, a selection of which was published in English and Spanish under the title *From My Altitude*.

He is serving a life sentence plus 10 years at the “supermax” federal penitentiary in Florence, Colorado.

Guerrero told the federal courtroom at his sentencing in December 2001, “If I were asked once again to cooperate in this task, I would again do it with honor.”

In an interview published in the September 2 issue of the Cuban magazine *Bohemia*, Guerrero said the Cuban Five should not be “viewed in a different dimension from millions of compatriots who each day give everything for the Revolution and who could have been in our place and would have acted in exactly the same way. We are nothing more than Cubans of these times, revolutionaries of these times.”

To be continued.



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Behind prison bars, Cuban 5 proud of defending revolution

Fifth in a series

BY MARTÍN KOPPEL

An article in last week's issue gave biographical sketches of Gerardo Hernández and Antonio Guerrero, two of the five Cuban revolutionaries who for 10 years have been unjustly held in U.S. jails. The five men, arrested by the FBI in 1998 and convicted on frame-up charges ranging from "conspiracy to commit espionage" to "conspiracy to commit murder," are currently serving long sentences in five different federal prisons. The following outlines the story of who the other three working-class fighters are and what they have accomplished.

Ramón Labañino Salazar

Labañino, 45, was born into a peasant family in Marianao, Havana Province, on June 9, 1963. His mother Nereida was involved in support activities for the Rebel Army in the eastern province of Oriente during the revolutionary war.

A student leader in high school, he studied at the University of Havana, graduating as an economist. He also studied at the university's military school. In 1987 Labañino joined the Union of Young Communists. The next year he took up duties as an officer of the Ministry of the Interior. In 1991 he joined the Cuban Communist Party, in which he held leadership responsibilities.

A sports enthusiast, he practices karate and as a student took part in the All-Caribbean Games. He is married to Elizabeth Palmeiro, and has three daughters: Ailí, 20; Laura, 16; and Lizbeth, 12.

As with his four imprisoned comrades, when Labañino moved to the United States in the early 1990s, he could not tell close family

members about his assignment, not even when in 1998 he visited his critically ill mother, knowing he wouldn't see her again. His father, Holmes Labañino, said, "I never knew of the work he was doing. He never talked to me about it and I never asked. Since he was very young he has always known what to do and has always done the right thing."

Labañino told the courtroom on the day of his sentencing, "I will wear the prison uniform with the same honor and pride with which a soldier wears his most prized insignia. This has been a political trial; therefore, we are political prisoners."

Labañino is serving a sentence of life plus 18 years. Jailed for many years in Beaumont, Texas, he is now locked up at the McCreary federal prison in Pine Knot, Kentucky.

Fernando González Llort

González, 45, was born in Havana on Aug. 18, 1963. He was a student leader in high school and college, as well as in the Union of Young Communists. He graduated with honors from the Raúl Roa García Higher Institute of International Relations.

González volunteered as a combatant in Angola from 1987 to 1989. He was part of a tank battalion when Cuban and Angolan troops defeated the South African apartheid regime's invading forces at the battle of Cuito Cuanavale. For his role in combat he was awarded the medals "Internationalist Combatant" and "For the Victory of Cuba—People's Republic of Angola." In 1988, during his tour of duty in Angola, he was taken into membership in the Cuban Communist Party.

González has been with his companion Rosa Aurora Freijanes since 1990. He then undertook his special assignment in the United States. "We had to go through endless red tape to marry in prison," said Freijanes in *Letters of Love and Hope*, a book of correspondence between the Cuban Five and their families.

In the United States, González's main task was to keep CIA-trained counterrevolutionary Orlando Bosch under surveillance. Bosch, who still walks free in the streets of Miami, was implicated in the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner over Barbados that killed all 73 passengers and crew members.

González's mother Magali Llord, who is also active as a revolutionary in Cuba, describes her son as "a typical Cuban." She says he is "a man with ideas that have made him consistent, and with a loyalty to his country for which I think we should always be thankful."

In the statement he read before the U.S. court just before being sentenced in December 2001, he accused the U.S. government of backing counterrevolutionary murderers who attack Cuba. "As long as the situation remains as I have described it, Cuba has a moral right to defend itself in the way that my comrades and I have done," he stated.

"I honestly was not surprised to see [Fernando's] attitude" on learning about his dignified conduct during the frame-up trial, said Bladimir La Rosa Vega, one of his fellow Angola combatants, in an interview in the Cuban press.

González is serving a 19-year sentence. He is currently locked up in the federal prison in Terre Haute, Indiana.

René González Schwerert

René González, 52, was born in Chicago on Aug. 13, 1956. Like Antonio Guerrero, he is a U.S. citizen. His parents, Cándido González, a union steelworker, and his mother Irma Schwerert were active in the July 26 Movement among Cuban immigrant workers. After the 1959 revolutionary victory they remained in the United States to carry out work in defense of the revolution. In 1961 the family returned to Cuba, where René's parents became union leaders.

From an early age René González had wanted to become a pilot, but had to put off fulfilling his aspiration more than once when the call of duty intervened. After graduating from high school, as a cadre of the Union of Young Communists, he volunteered to work as a teacher in the countryside. As a U.S. citizen he was not required to enlist in the armed forces, but in 1974 he volunteered for military service. He completed it with high grades as a tank driver.

In 1977, on his way to flight school, he learned that his former tank unit was going to Angola to join the internationalist mission there. González decided to join them.

Speaking at a 2003 meeting with youth from the United States, his mother Irma reported that at first René “was turned down because he had just completed his military service. He said, ‘I have to go to Angola.’ So he hopped on his bike on a Friday afternoon, pedaled several kilometers to find the two officials who could give him the necessary forms and signatures. He got the signatures. And early on Monday he left for Angola.” A gunner in a tank brigade, he served in Angola until 1979, and was decorated for bravery.

One of his fellow Angola combatants, Luis Nieves Otaño, later recounted that during their tour of duty, “the Cuban government publicly released the identities of several [Cuban state] security agents who had infiltrated the mafia-like groups based in the United States. After reading about it in a newspaper, we commented on the courage of those comrades, and I told René, ‘You have the traits and the conditions to carry out such a mission.’ He immediately replied, ‘I hope so.’”

After his return from Angola, he finally completed his training as a pilot. He worked as a flight instructor until 1985, when he was designated squadron chief at the air base in San Nicolás de Bari. In 1990 he was accepted into membership in the Cuban Communist Party. That same year he accepted his next mission in defense of the revolution—this time in the United States.

In his statement to the U.S. court on his sentencing, he explained what the five were doing in Florida. “This issue of Cuban agents has a very simple solution: Leave Cuba alone. Do your job. Respect the sovereignty of the Cuban people,” he said. “I would gladly say good-bye to every last spy who returns to the island. We have better things to do there, all of them a lot more constructive than watching the criminals who freely walk the streets of Miami.”

René González is serving a 15-year sentence at the U.S. prison in Marianna, northern Florida.

René and his wife Olga Salanueva have two daughters, Irma, 24, and Ivette, 10. Salanueva, who was living with him in Miami at the time of his arrest in 1998, was deported to Cuba in 2000, her U.S. residency revoked. Since then she has been denied a U.S. visa to visit her husband.

(To be continued)