

Cuban Five

By Terry Burke

According to a recent BBC poll, 96 percent of Americans have never heard of the Cuban Five. In contrast, the five Cuban men imprisoned for 12 years for conspiracy have garnered tremendous international support, with 10 Nobel laureates, hundreds of parliamentarians, and numerous U.S. and foreign bar associations and human rights organizations signing 12 amicus briefs for the U.S. Supreme Court.

The briefs asked the Supreme Court to review the fairness of trying the men in Miami, a city with a history of intimidation of supporters of the Cuban government. In June 2009, the Supreme Court rejected their request and refused to hear their appeal.

Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labanino, Rene Gonzalez, Antonio Guerrero, and Fernando Gonzalez have been in U.S. federal prisons since 1998, in solitary confinement for the first 17 months. After a spate of bombings in the tourist area in Cuba, they came to the U.S. to infiltrate the anti-Castro groups in Florida to investigate their role in the violence.

The evidence they gathered was given to the FBI in meetings in Havana in June 1998. In an Orwellian twist, the FBI arrested the men who had gathered evidence of terrorism and indicted them on the nebulous charge of conspiracy to commit espionage.

Michael Ratner of the Center for Constitutional Rights has said that the trial is a national and international embarrassment. It is the only trial in the U.S. ever condemned by the U.N. Human Rights Commission.

The lengthy imprisonment of the Five has become a rallying point for the Cuban people. It highlights the hypocrisy of the U.S. government in calling for democratic reform in Cuba, while the U.S. has given lengthy prison sentences to men who were trying to prevent further violent acts against Cuba.

The U.S. government has also severely limited the families' rights to visit the men – two wives have not been able to see their husbands for 10 years. An Amnesty International spokesperson said that “denying the men visits from their wives...is unnecessarily punitive and contrary to standards for humane treatment of prisoners.”

The U.S. corporate media's lack of coverage of this story is consistent with their coverage of Cuba since the 1959 revolution. The accomplishments in education, the arts, health care, bio-medicine, and international medical aid are largely ignored, while reporting focuses on problems and criticisms of Cuba. The effects of the

embargo and the attacks on Cuba by the Florida groups – part of what Noam Chomsky calls “50 years of terrorism” – are also overlooked by the U.S. media.

For more information and to help end the unjust imprisonment of the Cuban Five, contact the Minnesota Cuba Committee at www.minnesotacubacommittee.org

Terry Burke was active for many years in opposing the U.S.-funded contra war on Nicaragua, serving as director of the Nicaragua Solidarity Committee, and traveling to Nicaragua. She went to Cuba this summer as part of the 40th Venceremos Brigade.