

This Week in Cuba September 16-22, 2019



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By Charles McKelvey

(1) The people respond to the call for energy savings

Cuba has reduced its consumption of energy in places of work and in homes, as the people are responding to the call of the government to save energy, in response to the energy situation created by U.S. threats against shipping and insurance companies and governments.

The biggest challenge to the people has been in transportation, especially in the urban areas. There are a multitude of examples of solidarity, as drivers of buses, vans, and cars provide transportation to the people in the street and waiting at bus stops. Observing the support of the people for the government's measures and in participating in the energy savings efforts at work and in residences, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel declared that "The people have given the best response," and that the unity and

solidarity of recent days in entirely contrary to the purposes of the U.S. administration.

Miguel Díaz-Canel and other members of the Council of State visited during the week various provinces of the country, where they received reports from the provincial authorities. The conversations were focused on analysis of the production and distribution of foods, the transportation of passengers and goods, and the services of education and health. The visits were extensively covered in the Cuban daily newspaper Granma.

(2) Candidacy Commission consults with National Assembly

Members of the National Candidacy Commission are consulting, from September 18 to September 22, with the deputies of the National Assembly throughout the country, in preparation for the next session of the Assembly. The purpose of the consultation is to know of the deputies' recommendations for the offices of President and Vice-President of the Republic, as well as for the offices of the President, Vice-President, Secretary and other members of the Council of State. The consultation is the basis for recommendations that the National Candidacy Commission will present to the National Assembly, for its consideration in the elections to said positions that will be held at the next session of the assembly. This according to a report by Enrique Moreno in the Cuban daily newspaper Granma on September 20.

The Cuban Constitution charges the National Assembly with the election of persons to said positions. The deputies of the National Assembly of Popular Power are nominated by the delegates of 169 municipal assemblies, and subsequently ratified by the people in a secret yes-or-no vote. These delegates of the 169 municipal assemblies were previously elected in more than 12,000 voting districts, in direct and secret voting by the people, in which the voters choose from two or more candidates, who are placed on the ballot following a series of neighborhood nomination assemblies. For its part, the National Candidacy Commission consists of representatives of the mass organizations of workers, neighborhoods, women, farmers, and students; all of the representatives on the Commission are designated by the mass organizations themselves, all of which are characterized by internal democratic structures.

Such structures of popular power were established by the Cuban Constitution of 1976, with amendments in the Constitutional Reform of 1992. The Constitution of 2019, overwhelmingly approved in popular referendum on February 24, preserves the previously established structures of popular power, but making some reforms in the administrative structure of the state.

(3) Trump extends 1917 Trading with the Enemy Act

President Donald Trump announced the extension of the Trading with the Enemy Act for one more year. According to an article published in the daily newspaper Granma on September 16, the Trading with the Enemy Act was approved by the U.S. Congress on October 6, 1917, in the context of the First World War. It grants the president the authority to restrict commerce with countries that are hostile to the United States, and it allows for the application of economic sanctions during a war or in any other situation of national emergency; and it prohibits commerce with the enemy or allies of the enemy during times of war.

In 1962, the Trading with the Enemy Act was the basis for the "embargo" of Cuba declared by President John F. Kennedy, and it was the basis for Regulations for the Control of Cuban Assets of 1963. In reality, the conditions anticipated in the 1917 law did not apply to Cuba in the early 1960s. Far from being hostile to the United States, when the Cuban Revolutionary Government nationalized U.S. properties, it proposed an increase in the U.S.-Cuba sugar trade, with the intention of utilizing additional funds from the sugar trade to finance compensation for the nationalized properties and also for investment in Cuban industrial development. Cuba sought to transform the U.S.-Cuba exploitative relation into a commercial relation of mutual benefit.

The Trading with the Enemy Act is one of several laws that now provide the framework for the economic, commercial, and financial blockade against Cuba. Cuba is the only country today against which the law is

applied. In the past, the law had been applied against China, the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea, and Vietnam.

(4) USA expels two Cuban UN diplomats

The United States has expelled two members of the Cuban diplomatic corps of the United Nations, with the pretext that they were carrying out activities prejudicial to the national security of the United States. Cuban foreign minister Bruno Rodríguez rejected the unjustified expulsion, describing as vulgar slander the imputation that they were carrying out any activities incompatible with their diplomatic status. Later in the week, at a press conference at the Ministry of Foreign Relations, Rodríguez characterized the expulsion of the two Cuban diplomats as a violation of the Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

(5) New evidence on alleged the sonic attacks

A new study maintains that “neurotoxic agents used in fumigation with pesticides may have been the cause of the health problems that Canadian diplomats in Cuba reported,” the Cuban daily newspaper *Juventud Rebelde* reported on Friday. The investigation was directed by Dr. Alon Friedman of the Department of Neuroscience and Pediatric Medicine of Dalhousie University in Canada. The study suggests that the symptoms of the Canadian diplomats may have been caused by intense fumigations to combat mosquitos in the residences of the diplomats, with a frequency that may have been up to five times what is normal. The intense fumigations were not carried out by the health brigades of the Cuban system of Public Health, which regularly conducts fumigations in Cuban residences, in accordance with established international protocols.

This is a new chapter in an absurd saga that began on September 29, 2017, when the U.S. Department of State reduced its diplomatic presence at its Embassy in Havana, ordering the departure of non-emergency U.S. staff; and it warned U.S. citizens that they should not travel to Cuba. The stated reason for these measures is a pattern of acoustic attacks directed against U.S. Embassy employees in Havana, which allegedly began in November 2016. At the beginning of the affair, Cuba denied any knowledge of the health incidents involving U.S. embassy staff, and it formed a committee of Cuban specialists and scientists to investigate the affair. The committee concluded that the accusations of acoustic attacks are nonsensical in technical terms, and that the affair is politically motivated, taking into account the unwillingness of the United States to provide specific information and in other ways to cooperate in the investigation. Meanwhile, the Cuban press has regularly cited international specialists who assert that a sophisticated “sonic weapon” would not produce the symptoms described; nor could it select some victims in a room, sparing others, as has been alleged.

Canada joined the saga in April 2018, when it withdrew the families of its diplomats in Cuba and subsequently reduced its staff, citing health problems.

(6) Bruno Rodríguez: “History will severely judge those responsible”

At a press conference for the national and international press, Bruno Rodríguez, Cuban Minister of Foreign Relations, announced that on November 6 and 7, the UN General Assembly will consider again the Cuban resolution on “The necessity of ending the economic, commercial, and financial blockade imposed by the United States of America against Cuba.” He presented to the press the report that will be submitted to the General Assembly in support of the resolution. The report asserts that from April 2018 to March 2019, the blockade caused losses to Cuba of more than four billion dollars, and that the accumulated damages caused by the application of the blockade for nearly six decades has reached nearly 139 billion dollars.

The Cuban foreign minister asserted that “the blockade is the principal cause of the difficulties in our economy . . . and the principal obstacle to our development.” He asserted, in concluding his prepared comments, that political events are fleeting, but the memories of the peoples are long, including that of the

people of the United States; “history will severely judge those responsible,” the minister declared.

For twenty-seven consecutive years, Cuba has submitted the resolution to the General Assembly of the United Nations. In 1992, the first year of the vote, a majority of nations voted for it, with many abstaining. Over the years, the number of affirmative votes has grown, such that it has now become a virtually unanimous call by the governments of the world. In 2016, there were no votes opposed; the United States and Israel abstained for the first time, taking into account the opening toward normalization of the Obama administration. In 2017, the Trump administration reversed Obama, and the USA and Israel returned to vote against the resolution.

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