

ANNUAL REPORT OF LABOR VIOLATIONS COMMITTED BY THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT

JUNE 2010



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KEY UNION AND LABOR VIOLATIONS COMMITTED BY THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT

One employer:

- The State

One Central Union:

- The Trade Union Confederation of Cuba (CTC), subordinate to the State and run by the Communist Party. Its General Secretary is a member of the Party's Political Bureau and 98% of labor union leaders are Party militants.

Cuban Workers Are Denied:

- The right to strike
- The right to peacefully protest
- Freedom of negotiation
- Freedom of association
- Freedom of employment
- To move freely to the capital to work
- To be directly hired by mixed-capital enterprises

Cubans Workers Are Forced To:

- Affiliate to the CTC
- Pay union dues
- Participate in the Territorial Troop Militias by volunteering one day's pay
- Assist to political activities convened by the government
- Submit to special disciplinary rules aimed at basic sectors of the economy

Cuban Workers Are Defenseless Against:

- The employer's arbitrary measures
- Political discrimination
- The keeping of employee labor files that maintain private information such as personal and familial facts as well as political, religious and ideological inclinations of the worker
- The State retains 95% of the wages earned by Cuban workers in mixed-capital enterprises
- Collective negotiations between unions and administration is non-existent

Repression Against Independent Labor Leaders:

- Prison
- Physical aggression
- Acts of repudiation
- Harassment and intimidation
- Confiscation of humanitarian aid and work materials
- Restriction of movement
- Surveillance
- Search and seizures of the offices of independent labor unions
- Detentions
- Forced exile
- Denial to travel abroad

INTRODUCTION

"Hesitation is synonym of defeat"
Raul Castro

After three years in power, Raúl Castro has enthroned his particular style of running the country. His political platform, highly repressive, has proven that more than a successor, he is a military man determined to remain in power by all means and at any cost. More than an economic strategist and reformist, as many imagined Raúl Castro would be, he is the classic orthodox leader with a Marxist-Leninist background.

If one thing has characterized General Castro while in power it has been his absolute inefficiency in dealing with the growing economic chaos and the increasing grievances of the people. At the same time, he has ignored the pleas for freedom from those who disagree with the regime, an increasingly large number of people. Sharing his hopes and messianic vision with his dying brother, he has made it clear that "Cuba" –referring to the entire population, who has yet to be asked what it wants– "prefers to disappear" before accepting "blackmail" from the United States and Europe to bring about change in the country.

Employment and Wages

"The State pretends to pay us and we pretend to work"

Raúl Castro admitted some time ago: wages don't cover workers' expenses. In April of this year he also acknowledged that on the state level there are one million people employed in jobs that aren't needed. This exorbitant amount represents one in every four Cubans employed at the state level.

During half a century "plentiful employment" was a motto of the "Revolution", as were health and education. Today, millions of unneeded jobs in every sector of the economy represent the biggest obstacle to ending the financial crisis. With 11.2 million inhabitants and a workforce of 4.9 million people –of which more than four million work at the state level– the Cuban government is at a crossroads.

More than one million excess workers is a serious political, social, and economic problem; if labor restructuring does not take place, the country will sink.

A promise was added to Raúl Castro's April statement that the "relocation" of more than one million workers would be done in an "orderly fashion"

and that “no one would be left behind.” But Cubans know that the reality of the situation is different. The deformed Cuban economy is incapable of creating new offers of employment that are not the typical state-level positions. The relocation or search for jobs for more than one million workers is a serious threat to a system that bases the island's economic destiny on whims rather than economic norms.

The government has stated that the solutions of the past are not an option. In the past, workers that were laid off were sent home with 60% of their salary guaranteed or they were offered the opportunity to study, retaining their full salary. Times have changed. As stated by the General Secretary of the Trade Union Confederation of Cuba (CTC) and member of the Political Bureau, Salvador Valdés Mesa, at the beginning of the year, “the State cannot continue to subsidize workers that have been laid off.”

According to workers who have been laid off, the situation is unsustainable: they do not get a new job from the State, nor can they make a living on their own because the government refuses to allow private activity and represses those who attempt to engage in it.

Nevertheless, in the last few months, the government, under pressure, has retaken the idea of advancing private work opportunities and has carried out some “pilot” programs in municipalities of Havana. Through these programs, beauty parlor employees have been given the management positions in exchange for a monthly tax. Similarly, a group of taxi drivers has been allowed to use their State vehicles at their own discretion, in exchange for paying a tax and taking care of any repairs.

But to merge ministries, allow barbers and some public transit drivers to join pizza salesmen, cobblers, and bicycle taxi drivers in the realm of private work, does not fix the situation, as the Cuban writer and independent labor unionist Victor Manuel Domínguez asserted.

There is only one way out and the government has known what it is for a long time: to vigorously extend the private sector, to foster cooperatives, associations for private workers and small and mid-size businesses in the areas the State is incapable of managing due to its typical inefficiency.

The elimination of jobs has begun to affect primordial sectors. In the Public Health Sector, thousands of nursing assistant positions –recently incorporated into the primary healthcare facilities in order to support the nursing work with which the government pretended to somewhat replace the thousands of doctors that were sent abroad on medical missions– began to be eliminated in June. During meetings held throughout the capi-

tal, the government promised the personnel would be relocated, in some cases as cleaning staff or custodians.

Cuban agriculture has been characterized by its inefficiency due to an excess of state centralization and a large number of indirect workers. Simultaneously, the construction industry has been paralyzed for years due to scarcity of building materials. In spite of this fact, last August, almost nine thousand tourism workers who had been laid off by a government ordinance were supposed to have been relocated in this sectors. This ordinance was accompanied by the closing of numerous hotel facilities, in one of the most important sectors of the economy, in an attempt to reduce costs.

Meanwhile, and on top of it all, last October, after investigations conducted by the Technical Department of Investigations (a division of the Department of State Security) on every block of the capital to know how many people are unemployed and how many girls work as prostitutes, the Coordinator of the Labor and Social Security Ministry of the municipality of Arroyo Naranjo announced a ministerial resolution that would jail those who did not integrate into working life.

On another note, it is evident that with the labor restructuring process, workers will be subjected to even more discrimination than in the past for political, racial or sexual reasons.

The sugar industry

“From number one exporter in the world, to importer for national consumption.”

The atrocious planning of the sugar sector, ruled by whims instead of economic criteria, has caused thousands of layoffs.

Granma recently admitted that Cuban sugar production in 2010 would be the lowest since 1905. As usual, the publication did not tell the whole truth. It omitted that even in 2009 the 1.3 million ton mark that was reached 105 years ago was not met, and that possibly the production in 2010 would not hit the one million ton mark.

In 2002 Fidel Castro ordered general Ulises Rosales, minister of the sugar industry, to dismantle 95 to 156 of the country's sugar factories in two phases (2002 and 2004) and to reduce the sugarcane surface from 2 million hectares to 750,000. In a matter of seconds almost two-thirds of the industry had been massacred –the largest sugar producer in the world until 1993. Fidel declared: “Sugar is the country's ruin,” precisely when the market was recovering.

Naturally, this resulted in the loss of millions of dollars and 500,000 workers being laid off in the last five years.

Agriculture

The Ministry of Agriculture announced in November a reduction in its number of unproductive personnel. This reduction will affect 89,000 workers, in other words, 26% of those that have been hired. The structural readjustment includes the closing of 83 farming and livestock facilities and layoffs of 10% of the payroll, especially among the higher levels.

At least 10% of the hired staff will be fired with the objective of increasing productivity, reducing imports, diminishing the number of managers and bureaucrats, substituting departments for specialists and technicians, as well as converting the State farms into Base Business Units. In this sense, 2,000 of the 7,316 qualified workers employed in Cuban agriculture will be relocated.

Cuba, which used to be a net food exporter, today spends more than 2 billion dollars to import 80% of the food it consumes. According to the Economic and Business Council Cuba-USA, in the last thirty months the island has imported 1.458 million in food from the United States. This number seems unbelievable to the Cuban farmer, who continues to be tied down by the inefficiency of the regime.

Wave of Repression

“After beating him, they forcefully handcuffed his feet, twisted his hands towards his back, held them together with another set of handcuffs, and with a third set joined hands and feet, arching his body backwards, leaving him like that, laying on the floor for many days. But he did not give up and he kept yelling: Down with Fidel! Down with the dictatorship! Long live Human Rights!”

Efrén Fernández, prisoner of conscience, in a testimony on Orlando Zapata.

This year is marked by a rise in repression against members of civil society and the opposition. Beatings, detentions, jail sentences, and even death; a fierce persecution that has erased all hope, if any, of change by Raúl Castro's regime, and a chance for potential openings.

The saddest event, the unnecessary death of political prisoner Orlando Zapata Tamayo on February 23rd, terrified the regime, which immediately responded throwing violent blows left and right against members of the opposition.

The death of this young bricklayer—a brave dissident who had been sentenced numerous times, totaling thirty-six years of prison time, for his

uncompromising attitude while behind bars—after eighty-six day hunger strike pleading to be treated as a “prisoner of conscience”, led to international condemnation of the Cuban regime mainly from the United States and Europe, as well as criticism from members of the opposition, who considered that Zapata's death could have been averted.

“I saw the prison guards take him out many times in handcuffs and without a shirt, throwing him on the floor and dragging him by the feet about two hundred meters through the coarse sidewalk until they got to the military zone. They also used to drag him across the gravel floor of a basketball court, wounding his skin,” recounted Efrén Fernández, a prisoner of conscience also serving a long sentence for his activities of opposition, talking about his friend and jail mate Orlando.

With the usual cruelty and cynicism, Raúl Castro confirmed that there was no torture on the Island and declared he “regretted” the death, blaming, as always, the United States. By his side, a jolly Lula da Silva, shared a laugh.

The psychologist and independent journalist Guillermo Fariñas, 48, began a hunger and thirst strike in honor of Orlando Zapata and asked for the liberation of twenty-six sick political prisoners. On June third, Fariñas had completed one hundred days of his “irreversible” strike, waiting for the prisoners to be freed ¹.

The violence in the streets against dissidents and members of the opposition—on the rise since last year—increased even more. Dozens of dissidents were harassed and arrested in various provinces throughout the Island while trying to honor Zapata or travel to Holguin to attend his funeral.

The repression against the members of the emerging civil society, more visible and organized each day, was transmitted abroad through images that stirred the world, culminating with the disturbing photographs of policemen and government-organized mobs attacking a small group of defenseless women. This desperate operation against the Ladies in White, a few days after Zapata's death, caused an international outcry.

In June, following a key meeting between General Raúl Castro and top Catholic leaders, the government agreed to transfer six prisoners that were being kept in prisons far from their homes—a cruel, vindictive mea-

¹ At the moment of publishing this report, Fariñas had ended his strike after the announcement from the government that 52 political prisoners would be released from prison in a 4-month period. So far, 25 have been released.

sure against prisoners' families, forced to overcome hundreds of obstacles each visit— to closer prisons. Shortly after, six more were transferred.

However, while the international press transmits Castro's "gesture," the regime has taken upon itself to quietly, but furiously, punish the transferred prisoners. One of them, Diosdado González Marrero, was immediately placed in solitary confinement upon arrival in his province's prison. At the same time, his interval for family visits was extended and other restrictions were placed upon him. The independent journalist Normando Hernández, who was being kept in a hospital due to the poor state of his health, through his transfer lost the right to family visits, phone calls and access to medication, among other things. The same happened to the labor unionist and independent journalist Adolfo Fernández Sainz, who lost phone calls and access to medication.

A few days after these first transfers, in 48 hours thirty-eight members of the opposition were apprehended, in an attempt by the government to prevent important meetings between dissidents.

This past June, after years of progressive deterioration and pleas from his family for his release, one prisoner of conscience in dire physical condition, Ariel Sigler Amaya, was sent home with a release license.

The devastating images of a handicapped and emaciated Ariel, compared to the young strong healthy man he was before he went to prison seven years ago, are clear evidence of the "special" treatment these prisoner of conscience receive.

The "sticks, bars and cables" strategy

A Plan Against Disorder and Counterrevolutionary Disruptions, designed by the Ministry of the Interior, was distributed last April to the heads of the MININT, the police, the fire department, businesses, provincial and municipal governments, and the military sector of every territory in the country.

This plan attempts to convert every worker into an armed fighter against the "counterrevolutionary"—picked at the discretion of the administrator of the workplace. The authorized weapons: sticks, metal rods and cables.

International Reaction

The rise of repressive acts and the lack of human and labor rights on the Island have stimulated a more active sense of rejection toward the regime on the part of the international community.

Following Orlando Zapata's tragic death, the violence against the Ladies in White and the numerous complaints from the opposition on the deplorable living conditions of prisoners in Cuba, the world did not take long to react.

In March of this year, the President of the European Parliament, Jerzy Buzek, condemned the "police brutality" against the Ladies in White and demanded the "immediate release of all the political prisoners."

That same month, the European Parliament condemned Havana for Zapata's death and demanded the liberation of all the political prisoners.

The Cuban Minister of Foreign Relations, Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, had previously denied that there were any political prisoners in his country and that those who are considered as such by certain organisms and governments are "people who committed illegal acts."

The Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, regretted the death of the prisoner of conscience, while the Secretary General of the OAS, José Miguel Insulza, asked the Cuban government to free the twenty-six sick political prisoners.

In April, the Spanish Congress and the Senate approved resolutions condemning the "avoidable and cruel" death of Zapata and asked for the "immediate and unconditional" release of all the political prisoners.

Simultaneously, a group of renown writers, intellectuals and artists—Mario Vargas Llosa, Pedro Almodóvar and Rosa Montero, among others—unveiled a platform in Madrid so that Cuba can reach democracy "as soon as possible."

Two days after the "gesture" of releasing Ariel Sigler Amaya, France declared that the Cuban government's decision of releasing the dissident was de rigueur from a humanitarian standpoint and asked the Caribbean country, once again, to liberate all its prisoners of conscience.

ILO and ITUC reports on lack of Freedom of Association and on violations of international labor law

In its most recent Annual Report on Violations of Labor Union Rights, which came out in June of this year, the International Trade Union Confederation concluded the following:

"Lack of mobility is the main characteristic of the norms that give life to the special system of labor relations in Cuba. Labor organizations must play a role in this

system and contribute to it. There is no independent and autonomous labor unionism on the island and this circumstance eliminates the main instrument for defending workers' rights. Independent Labor Unions are prohibited, and the law does not specifically recognize the right to collective bargaining or strike."

Despite the numerous violations to the main conventions and the complaints to this organism from the labor union movement, the 99th Annual Conference of the International Labor Organization did not include Cuba this year in its list of the 25 countries with the largest number of violations, but did add it to the list of the 41 countries that should be observed.

In its annual report, the report of the Commission of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, it devotes nine pages to Cuba, where among other observations, one can read:

[...] the Commission urges the Government to promptly take the necessary measures to release the labor unionists and labor union leaders that have been served serious prison sentences.

[...] the Commission urges the Government to take the necessary measures to guarantee that every worker without distinction can create or affiliate him or herself to the organizations they consider convenient. Furthermore, the Commission asks the Government to take steps to modify the aforementioned articles of the Labor Code and to inform the Commission in its next memorandum on every measure it has taken in this regard.

[...] the Commission invites the Government, with the intent of ensuring the judicial security of workers who decide to strike, which in the framework of the legislative reform currently being undertaken as referenced by the Government, it considers adopting clauses that clearly recognize the right to strike, as well as the fundamental principles espoused by the Commission.

REPRESSION AGAINST INDEPENDENT UNIONISTS

Independent labor union activists and members of independent labor unions (and by association their family members) continue suffering from repression through detentions, constant citations to police stations, physical abuse, harassment and threats.

In May, the imprisoned independent unionist and prisoner of conscience Miguel Galván Gutiérrez complained that his young niece Sureydis Echarte Galván was forced to leave her job due to her family connection to him.

By orders of the Department of State Security (DSE), the municipal education authorities decided to suspend Sureydis' personal mail, as well as the use of any of the center's other mail services. The measure, applied through the director of the institute Nelson Regueiro, resulted in other actions against her worker's rights, such as 25% of her salary being retained on two separate occasions.

José Felix Rodríguez, provincial delegate of the National Independent Labor Confederation of Cuba (CONIC) in Pinar del Río and reporter for the news agency Cubanacán Press, informed that on April 30th he was visited at home by an officer of the DSE. In September of last year, he had received a citation from the police after having conducted a march along other members of the opposition in the city of Holguín.

At dawn on April 30th, after an elaborate police operative, Emilio Jerez Oliver and María Elena Mir Marrero, the organizing secretary and general secretary of the CONIC, respectively, were detained at Mir's home and taken to the police station. There, head and body hair samples were taken (a new and upsetting intimidation method used by the Cuban government, which suggests that transgressors could be involved in any type of crime at the discretion of the authorities). They were also questioned, insulted, threatened and forced to sign warning letters –which they refused to do– stressing the fact that they had no labor ties, that they protested against the “revolutionary process” and that they held close relationships to disaffected people that do not share the political line of the Government.

The police squad remained outside Mir's home until 2 p.m. Mir was released at 4 p.m. with a fine, Jerez at 8 p.m. –without recovering a folder carried with him at the time of the arrest, containing information and complaints on layoffs.

Previously, during March 16 and 17, DSE captain “Eric,” together with another unidentified officer, visited Emilio Jerez house, in Old Havana,

and threatened to arrest the independent unionist if he took part in any activity to commemorate the March 2003 repression anniversary.

The officer warned Jerez that there would be consequences if he and others went out to the streets. He threatened him saying that in such case the “people” would respond to the provocation.

On December last year, Jerez was arrested and taken to the Zulueta and Dragones police station by DSE officer “Manuel,” on the account of a Cuban flag flown on the front of his house next to a banner that read “61st Anniversary of Human Rights.”

María E. Mir Marrero stated that on January 5th, the day before Three Kings Day, two DSE agents appeared at her house to forbid a children’s party that was to take place the next day, in which neighborhood children would receive coloring books and color pencils.

During the February 24th police operation to prevent all organization activists from meeting in remembrance of the downing of the Brothers to the Rescue airplanes, the house of José Félix Rodríguez Rodríguez, provincial delegate of Pinar del Río CONIC, was surrounded by soldiers to prevent him from going out to the streets –as were other dissident homes.

Isidro Manuel Pérez Cruz, secretary general of the “Vicente García” independent labor union, reported that on January 6th he was stopped, together with Dunieski Guerrero de la Cruz, president of the Las Tunas Liberal Party, by DSE agents, who took a video camera from him. The activist reported that his camera (donated by a dissident who had left the country) was not returned. “They threaten us with jail if we continue our opposition activities,” he added. “After this, we assume that we will be processed by the political police and taken to trial.”

On January 29th the house of Roque Emilio Martínez Angulo, union member affiliated to CONIC, was vandalized after an activity to celebrate January 28th (José Martí’s birthday) took place, together with other independent union members. Around two in the morning tar was thrown all over the facade of his house.

On January 27th, Olga Lilia González, CONIC delegate in Villa Clara, was visited by DSE agent Mayor Héctor de la Fe, from the 21st Department, who threatened her, saying that he was not going to allow any activity commemorating such date, warning her that her family would be in danger.

On January 18th, a police agent imposed a penalty to Yoan Fernández Ortiz, member of the Bicitaxis (Bicycle Taxis) Independent Drivers Labor

Union. The victim has accused the police of political discrimination and been penalized several times due to his union membership. One this occasion he was taken to the 2nd police station in Zanja street, where they took away the car he uses for work.

On January 17th, José Félix Rodríguez Rodríguez, CONIC delegate, was arrested at 8 pm and taken to the DSE offices; to prevent him from carrying out the activity he had planned with several independent union members. He was released the next day at 3 pm. During his arrest, he was threatened and was not given any meals.

On January 12th, secretary general of the Bicitaxis Independent Drivers Labor Union, Jesús Cordero Suárez, was arrested by a patrol and taken to the Zanja y Dragones police station, in Downtown Havana. He was examined and threatened by DSE officer “Fabio,” who among other threats told Cordero Suárez that his car would be seized if he displayed “counter-revolutionary” stickers on it again. Cordero Suárez was kept several hours under arrest.

On January 7th, two unidentified aggressors beat CONIC provincial delegate Osvaldo Antonio Castillo Alvarez on the streets in a small town, where he lives. He was left with two broken ribs. Castillo is also a reporter for the independent labor news agency Sindical Press, in Matanzas.

In December of 2009, a few days before the celebration of Human Rights Day, two DSE unidentified officers summoned Eduardo Calderín Bravo, Secretary General of the Independent Shoe Repair Labor Union, at the home of relatives. Upon leaving, the officers threatened the family. Orlando González Vera, from the same labor union, was also summoned to the police station for an interview on that same day.

In December, José Félix Rodríguez from Pinar del Río, Lázaro R. Pérez, from Isla de la Juventud and Manuel Pérez Cruz and Iván Guerra, from Havana Province, were threatened and prevented from leaving their homes.

Political police took Rauder Avila Losada’s Identity Card from the 15th to the 18th of February, and from December 26th, 2009 up to January 14th, 2010, to impede his free movement. Ávila Losada is a CONIC delegate in Santiago de Cuba.

In February of 2010, he was violently repressed by the political police in Camagüey, during a public demonstration, together with other opponents, where they demanded special care for prisoner of conscience Orlando Zapata (whom they had visited at the hospital). During a protest march at

Ignacio Agramonte Central Park, they were attacked by more than 100 officers of the political police, beaten and arrested until the 4th. After the police took Ávila Losada back to the province where he lives, he was warned not to go back to Camagüey, and threatened with being processed.

From January 19th to 20th, Raudel Ávila had been arrested for more than 24 hours and taken to DSE in Versalles because he had hosted pacific members of the opposition from other provinces at his home –among them Jorge Luis García Pérez “Antúnez”– in order to establish and independent library and create a new independent labor union.

On April 26th, DSE officer “Tito,” together with other five officers, visited Minaldo Ramos Salgado, vice president of the Cuban Independent Workers Confederation (CTIC) at his home. They threatened him to put him in jail, together with Carmelo Díaz (president of the same labor union), if they persist with their labor union activities, given that “May 1st (International Workers Day) is close, and we are not going to allow you do that.”

The same officer had appeared at his home on January 27th to threaten him for attending the mass that took place in the church of the Caridad del Cobre to pray for the eternal rest of the Mazorra psychiatric hospital victims (horrifying event that shocked Cubans in and out of the country, where 26 or more mental patients died of hunger and cold).

On December 5th, Minaldo Ramos was summoned by the Chief of the sector where he lives and by DSE officer “Rolando”. Later on he was threatened to be put in jail if he continued meeting with anti-social people at his home. The officer said they were not independent labor union members, but counterrevolutionaries.

On September 15th, Minaldo was taken from his home up to the 2nd police unit, located in Zanja y Dragones, by the two officers “Rolando” and “Tito” to warn him not to attend the “Paz sin Fronteras” concert (a controversial music recital featuring a popular foreign artist) that would take place on September 20, in Plaza de la Revolución (Revolution Square).

The next day he was summoned again to a school in that location, and the same officers –together with the sector chief– demanded from him to sign a warning act stating he would not to attend the concert, which he refused. On the 17th, he was summoned again to the police station, where he was warned for the third time not to attend the concert.

Mirian Espinosa and Madeline Caraballo, CTIC independent labor union members, were also threatened not to attend such concert.

Two labor union activists from Las Tunas lost their work permits last October; one more example of the continuous repression against human rights activists in the island. Alexis Guerrero Cruz, delegate of the Self-Employed Workers labor union belonging to the Puerto Padre municipality in the north of the country, had his license to operate a bicycle taxi revoked. Last October 7th, he had been arrested for “provocation” when he was carrying a protest sign. On the other hand, activist Víctor Manuel Pérez Nápoles had his license to sell food revoked after paying a 250 pesos fine.

“I support six people with my work: two seniors, two children, my wife and myself. One week before I was withdrawn my license I was unofficially informed that the political police had ordered it,” said Pérez Nápoles. On October 26th, DSE officers and the police carried out an operation in Las Tunas to prevent the opening of an independent library. Several activists were arrested. Víctor Pérez Nápoles, secretary general of the “Victoria” independent labor union, belonging to the CONIC was arrested. He resisted the arrest, shouting in favor of human rights and against government policies. He was beaten by the agents.

They also arrested Carlos Hernández, Edisbel Sánchez and Alcides Hernández, affiliated to such union, and prevented about one hundred guests from arriving at the library's opening ceremony. Among them were Alexis Reues and Idania Durán, Reinaldo Aguilera and Vladimir Caneyes, who belong to the same labor union.

Reinaldo Rodríguez Díaz, secretary general of the Agricultural and Cattle Transport Workers Labor Union (independent), was visited at his home during that same month by DSE officer “Luis” who threatened him if he continued his activities with the CTIC.

Roberto Rodríguez Ávila, member of the Bicitaxis Independent Drivers Labor Union, and licensed driver, reported continuous harassment by the political police to labor union members. Among other repressions, he cited that they are arbitrarily forbidden from parking in different places.

Rodríguez Ávila has been given eleven fines this year, amounting to 1060 pesos, amount which, according to the unionist, he will not be able to pay.

Imprisoned unionists ²

In March of this year, seven years have elapsed since the 2003 repression wave. From March 18th to 20th, the Cuban government jailed hun-

²At the moment of releasing this report, these unionists were on a list stating they would soon be released from prison. So far, three of them had been denied exit from the country.

dreds of people linked to political, labor union and intellectual activities in favor of democracy. Many of them were punished to long-term sentences.

The disproportionate convictions, and the cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment received by the prisoners during these years has resulted in health issues (physical and psychological) both for the prisoners and for their families, who are also frequently humiliated by the prison authorities.

The government does not intend to respect international regulations regarding prisoners' treatment. Prison guards attack them physically and verbally; simultaneously, they are likely to be attacked by other highly dangerous prisoners, who are frequently set on prisoners of conscience to "teach them a lesson."

Among this long list of prisoners there are ten union members, serving long sentences because they have tried to establish the grounds for a free, government-independent organized labor union, something highly feared by the totalitarian regime.

These activists suffer different diseases caused by the poor nutrition, high humidity levels, stress and other common elements in the dictatorship's jail system.

Nelson Molinet Espino. Secretary General of the Cuban Democratic Workers Confederation, 45 years old, born in Havana. He serves a 20-year sentence in the prison Kilometer 5 1/2, Pinar del Río.

This independent labor union member went on hunger strike on February of this year, together with three other colleagues of the so-called "Grupo de los 75" (Group of the 75) out of solidarity with the deceased member of the opposition, Orlando Zapata Tamayo. Together with them, journalist Guillermo Fariñas also went on hunger strike.

His mother, Caridad Espino, 68, demanded in May of this year that the authorities transfer Nelson to a nearer jail, because her health condition made it very difficult for her to travel long distances to visit her son (travel to the provinces is extremely arduous and takes many days). In addition, each time she traveled she had to leave her husband, who has Alzheimer's disease and is disabled, alone at home.

Last February 3rd, Caridad visited her son for the last time. When she demanded Molinet Espino's transfer, the authorities rejected her request.

On May 12th, after having started a hunger strike the day before because he was denied permission to visit his ill father, he was transferred from

Pinar del Río prison to his home. His mother reported he was taken home at 10 a.m., and he was there for two hours. He was allowed to have lunch, thus ending his strike.

His relatives inform he is suffering from serious high blood pressure problems and chronic spine problems, caused mainly by the lack of sun and humidity of the cell where he is kept.

Alfredo Felipe Fuentes. Member of the Council Workers' Unit, the Management Citizen Committee of the Varela Project, and independent journalist, 61 years old, born in Artemisa, province of Havana. He is serving a 26-year sentence at the Guanajay Havana prison. His wife is Lady in White, Loida Valdés. He continues to write prison, in spite of the reprisals.

During his trial, several books, which had been seized from the activist at the time of his arrest were submitted as criminal evidence, among them: Human Rights lessons, Human Rights Basic Studies, International instruments to protect human rights, Martí, in his own words), Journalism and creativity, UN Manual of good prison practices).

He has serious cervical spine problems, acute hearing problems, gastrointestinal disorders and has lost a significant amount of weight. He got sick in prison due to the terrible imprisonment conditions.

Miguel Galván Gutiérrez. Director of the National Center of Organized Labor and Work Training (CNCSL), and independent journalist, 45 years old, born in Güines, Havana. Serves a 26-year sentence at Guanajay prison, in Havana.

For two years, he demanded dentist care, and according to his relatives, the authorities have only recently listened to his demands.

Miguel is physically disabled, and has osteochondroma, an illness that affects the bones in his leg, causing him to endure (in his own words) "unbearable" joint pain. He is locked in a humid cell, he is losing his hair, his eyesight has significantly deteriorated, his teeth are loose and his liver is swollen. In addition, he suffers from hepatomegaly, digestive disorders, respiratory disorders and parasites. His life is in danger, due to his serious health condition. He has gone through three hunger strikes.

Last May it was reported that guards forbade him from taking the sun for the allotted one hour a day, which is also prescribed to him by the doctors.

Miguel reported that Guanajay jail authorities forbade a group of political prisoners, including him, from participating in a religious mass on June

18th, officiated by Father José Ramiro Quintero. Officers told Héctor Raúl Valle, José Ubaldo Izquierdo and Galván that they were forbidden from attending because they refused to wear the mandatory uniform.

Héctor Raúl Valle. Cuban Democratic Workers Confederation, 42 years old, born in San José, province of Havana. He is in the Guanajay jail, serving a 12-year sentence.

On March 18th, he went on a hunger strike, protesting for the physical mistreatment suffered by the Ladies in White during their seven-day walk in commemoration of the March 2003 repression wave.

He explained from jail: "I will continue doing this until the mob and the paramilitary organized by the State Security stop attacking the Ladies in White, whom are peacefully marching."

Together with other prisoners of conscience he signed a letter addressed to the president of Brazil, Lula da Silva, asking for his intervention in the Orlando Zapata Tamayo case, a few days before his death. He also asked Lula for his support to the Cause of the 75 prisoners.

He frequently suffers back pain and also chronic epidermal problems due to humidity and lack of sun.

Iván Hernández Carrillo. Journalist, librarian and independent union member, 39 years old, born in the municipality of Colón, Matanzas. He was imprisoned in Guamajal, in Villa Clara, and serves a 25-year sentence. This June he was transferred to a work camp called "Plan Confianza" in Matanzas, a facility with minimal security and better living conditions.

Iván Hernández has gone through several hunger strikes during his time in prison. He has been locked many times in punishment cells due to his defiant attitude, and because he has sent abroad reports on the poor living conditions suffered by the political prisoners kept in the prison where he is.

In a recent letter, he mentions the constant provocations by the prisoner Julio Alberto Pérez (accused of murder), incited by the prison authorities.

Last August, once again Hernández Carrillo was harassed by prison authorities under orders from State Security.

Lady in White Asunción Carrillo, mother of the prisoner, reported that "they destroyed his son's belongings and confiscated letters, documents related to his reports, and other personal items."

Last October 26th, Hernández went on hunger strike protesting the confiscation of a book. According to the prisoner's mother, early that morning, during the usual visit, a book written by Antonio Ramón Díaz Sánchez, prisoner of conscience, and member of the Liberation Christian Movement, was seized. "My son did not accept food, or other books he was given. He does not eat any food at all," said Asunción.

She added that "a common prisoner is continuously stalking him" and that Iván "does not go to the dining room, because there are sewerage leaks, therefore he only eats cold food, and what I bring him every 2 months."

The prisoner of conscience is in bad health due to several diseases he acquired in jail. Inhuman living conditions together with the cruel and degrading treatment Iván received during his stay at different prisons, such as Cuba Sí, El Pre and Guajamal, have deteriorated his health.

Chronic gastritis and high blood pressure prevent him from eating the prison food that is served on dirty trays. The smell of sewage that permeates the dining room makes it impossible for him to eat. In addition to the terrible conditions, he has also suffered harassment from common criminals since it became known at the prison that the independent union member was one of the five Cuban members of the opposition awarded the 2009 Freedom Award by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

On June 2nd, he was finally transferred to Agüica prison, closer to his home in Matanzas.

Víctor Rolando Arroyo. Journalist, union member and independent librarian, 59 years old. He serves a 26-year sentence in the prison Kilometer 5 1/2, Pinar del Río.

His wife, Lady in White Elsa González, stated this April that her husband does not receive any of the medicines he needs to treat the diseases he has acquired during the seven years he has been imprisoned.

He suffers from high blood pressure, allergies to humidity, chronic otitis, laryngitis, left cardiomegaly, lung emphysema, and chronic gastritis.

On March 30th of this year, Víctor Rolando once again went on a hunger strike, protesting the fact that the prison authorities ordered that his food be served on metal trays, despite the fact that he had been eating in plastic bowls for some time as ordered by his doctor.

Last year, Víctor Rolando was presented handcuffed to the family visit.

“For the family, it is cruel and painful to see him in these conditions, he is not dangerous out of prison, even less so inside,” said his wife.

Adolfo Fernández Sainz. Journalist and independent union member, convicted in March, 2003 to serve 15 years at the Canaleta prison in Ciego de Ávila.

He suffers eyelid blepharitis and other eye disorders, lung emphysema, cysts and other kidney disorders, hiatus hernia, high blood pressure, grade one prostate hypertrophy, and exhibits significant weight loss. His wife, Lady in White Julia Núñez, recently said that conditions in Canaleta were very poor, that her husband had to share a cell with about 40 prisoners. She also complained about the fact that her husband has received very little medical attention.

Horacio Julio Piña Borrego. Union member and independent librarian, promoter of the Varela Project. He was serving a 20-years sentence at the Canaleta prison in Ciego de Ávila.

Horacio Piña Borrego is in very poor health. His mother, Ada Borrego Aragón, a distinguished member of the Ladies in White, died while he was in prison.

Blas Giraldo Reyes Rodríguez. Member of the Liberation Christian Movement, was sentenced in March of 2003 to 25 years of prison, which he is serving at the Nieves Morejón prison in the province of Sancti Spíritus.

Recently, his wife, Lady in White Isel de las Mercedes Acosta, said physicians diagnosed Reyes with advanced polyneuropathy. The neurologist who takes care of him has recommended taking him out of jail. Isel called the international community to intercede on behalf of her request to release Blas under an extra-penal license. The request was sent last April but Cuban authorities have given no response.

Isel has accused the Cuban government of repression, physical and verbal attacks against her. She informed she was attacked at night by unknown people and attributed the incident to government authorities.

Luis Milán Fernández. Member of the Medical Association of Cuba. On March 2003 he was sentenced to 13 years, serving them at the Tarea Confianza prison.

His wife, Láfita Hernández, informed Hermanos Unidos (United Brothers, an independent organization aiding prisoners and their families) last December that Luis Milán has a liver problem that prevents him from metabolizing fats and carbohydrates, but that his condition is stable. Luis Milán is not forced to work outside jail with others prisoners and is allowed a week parole every three months.

REPRESSION AGAINST INDEPENDENT JOURNALISTS AND COMMUNICATORS

The increase in repression carried out by Raul Castro's regime this past year has felt strongly on independent journalists and communicators, who bear the great responsibility of being the only free reporters in a country where the press has been silenced for more than fifty years.

In its annual report, Reporters Without Borders ranks Cuba as a third prison in the world for journalists, and the only country in the American Continent that does not tolerate independent press, occupying the 170th place among 175 countries.

Because of their work, journalists have been beaten, kidnapped, arrested, put in jail, threatened, harassed, and have become unemployed. In prison, ill and isolated, they survive in subhuman conditions, serving long sentences after rigged trials.

Law 88 for the Protection of National Independence and Economy of Cuba, known among dissidents as the Gag Law, continues to be used as a coercive method against independent journalists. In its article 7.1 the law establishes up to five years in prison for collaborating with any foreign radio and TV broadcaster, foreign printed publications or any other type of media, although sentences can reach up to 20 years, as they did during the repressive wave of March 2003 trials.

The “state of dangerousness”, defined in the Cuban Penal Code as “the special propensity of a person to commit crimes, as demonstrated by conduct observed in manifest contradiction to the norms of socialist morality”, is another weapon frequently used by the regime to justify journalists' imprisonment.

This report includes some cases, among hundreds, which reflect the brutal repression of a totalitarian regimen, desperate and frightened of a small group of men and women, brave and free, who persevere in doing what comes naturally to a communicator: communicating freely.

One hundred days of hunger strike ³

The day after prisoner of conscience Orlando Zapata died, independent journalist Guillermo Fariñas, director of the Cubanacán Press Agency, went on a hunger strike to demand the release of twenty-six political prisoners in worst health.

³ Same as note 1

On June 3rd, on the one hundred day anniversary of “Coco” Fariñas' hunger strike, he suffered another relapse. On June 1st, doctors at the intensive care unit of Arnaldo Millán Castro Hospital in Santa Clara had to withdraw the catheter through which they were providing nutrients to him because of another bacterial infection.

In spite of the deterioration of his health and of the Cuban regime's first “gesture” this past June of transferring six prisoners of conscience to jails closer to their families, Fariñas will continue on hunger strike until “at least ten or twelve” of the most ill are released.

One journalist released from prison

Independent journalist Oscar Sánchez Madan was released on April 11th after serving three years in prison. In April 2007 the journalist, who is a Cubanet correspondent for the Matanzas region, was guilty of “pre-criminal social dangerousness” in April 2007 after a summary trial.

During his imprisonment, Sánchez shared an 86-square feet cell with 12 highly dangerous prisoners.

After his release, the journalist said he would continue with his task to gather and share information and that he will continue its advocacy and defense of human rights in Cuba.

The bloggers

Last year, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) classified Cuba among the ten worst countries in which to be a blogger.

Despite significant legal and technical obstacles, a growing number of bloggers have prevailed over the strong restrictions on Internet use imposed by the government to Cuban citizens, and have managed to spread news and opinions online.

Young, independent spirited bloggers have been the new victims of the regime's repressive apparatus. Many web pages have been blocked, and their creators repressed, beaten and arrested by the political police.

“Bloggers are socially stigmatized, physically abused and even jailed”, says Yoani Sánchez, the creator of the popular “Generación Y” blog.

We include this group of bloggers in our report, because just as independent journalists, they are feared for their work.

A case dissolved

Dania Virgen García, journalist and blogger, was arrested on April for a dubious crime and imprisoned at the Manto Negro jail during 18 days, waiting for an 18-month sentence.

Once out of jail and while waiting for her sentence, she took upon the task of writing about the sad cases she witnessed at the sadly notorious women's prison.

Finally, thanks to the reaction of her colleagues from the opposition and the independent journalism, international coverage of her case, and the absurd charges against her, the court overruled the judgment and was freed, not before being penalized with 300 pesos.

Pending court cases

Calixto Ramón Martínez Arias, Hablemos Press correspondent, was arrested on April 23 and later released "under investigation," on the night of May 14th. Eleven days later, he was kidnapped. After several days missing, it became known that he was on a hunger strike in a punishment cell at the Alternative Processing Center of Detainees. Later, on June 5th, he was released and deported back to Camagüey, his home province.

At the time he was arrested, Calixto Ramón was covering an activity of members of the opposition, at the home of Hugo Damián Prieto. Paramilitary troops entered the house and violently beat the participants.

Calixto Ramón was initially accused of "disrespect of authority", then of "assault". "The trial officers say I beat a policeman dressed in blue, inside the house, and the prosecutor say I beat a DSE officer. They can't make up their minds", said the journalist.

On October 14th, The Güines Popular Court, province of Havana, sentenced the independent journalist Roberto de Jesús Guerra to six months in prison. However, this sentence was replaced by Roberto de Jesús agreeing to work wherever the judge ordered him to.

Nowadays, Roberto de Jesús has to remain within the limits of the municipality where he lives, according to the trial judge's orders, who meanwhile, is making arrangements for him to work. A pest-control employee at the Ministry of Health had been suggested.

Roberto de Jesús was declared prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International while he was serving a two-year sentence (from 2005 to

2007) for participating in a protest. He has been the victim of violent beatings and more than fifty arrests.

On the other hand, Juan Carlos Reyes Ocaña, reporter for Holguin Press, was arbitrarily arrested a few steps away from his home, last January 29th. On that same day, he started a hunger strike. He was released the next day and went on hunger strike once again, until the charges against him –contempt, disobedience and resistance– were withdrawn.

Imprisoned independent journalists ⁴

Currently, more than 20 independent Cuban journalists are in prison, most of them belonging to the leading group of the 90's, brave precursors of the independent press in the Island. Most were arrested during March 2003, and sentenced to as many as 28 years in prison.

In the last few months, we have received information on the current situation of some of these prisoners of consciousness. Many of them have acquired serious diseases due to the inhuman treatment, overcrowding, and lack of medical care they have been subjected to.

In June, 2009, as the writing of this report came to a close, the following journalists had been transferred to prisons located closer to their homes: Normando Hernández, Héctor Maseda Gutiérrez, Adolfo Fernández Saíenz, Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta and Omar Moisés Ruiz.

Normando Hernández was sentenced to 25 years in 2003. His health condition is appalling and dangerously deteriorating. Authorities refuse to grant him an extra-penal license for health reasons. His relatives, especially his wife and his mother, are carrying out a campaign for his release.

This ill journalist is one of the "benefited" by the Cuban regime, as a result of conversations with the Catholic Church. By Raúl Castro's orders, the journalist was transferred from the Carlos J. Finlay hospital in La Habana, to Kilo Siete prison in Camagüey. He lost the right to family visits, telephone calls, and access to the medication and food he needs due to his serious health condition.

His wife, Lady in White Yaraí Reyes Marín, said this transfer was "terrible for him, the journey was awful and they had to give him oxygen to keep him from passing out". She added that at this moment, her husband is isolated in a cell and receiving almost no medical care.

⁴ At the time this report was published, Normando Hernández, Ricardo González Alfonso, Julio César Gávez Rodríguez and José Luis García Paneque had been released from jail.

Last September, Normando Hernández González told his wife that he was likely to be confined to a punishment cell because he had disobeyed the guards, whom have forbidden him from peeking through the prison infirmary window to have contact with other prisoners. He also had chosen not to take the hour of sun, because he was taken outside at the time of day when the sun was most intense.

At that time, when Yaraí spoke about her husband's health, she said her husband had X-rays taken because of the terrible pain in his knees, and he was diagnosed with chondromalacia. "The situation is concerning, because according to the doctors, this disease is caused by intestinal malabsorption and he is likely to become disabled."

In May of this year, he was diagnosed with another disease: gallbladder polyps and was operated that same month, at Carlos J. Finlay Hospital. A few days later, Yaraí said Normando's health condition had terribly deteriorated. "After the surgery the inflammation is even worse, the last time I saw him, I noticed he's very upset", she complained.

Last March, while he was in Combinado del Este Prison, he was banned from participating in a religious mass –together with his fellow prisoners of consciousness Julio César Gálvez , Ricardo González, and Regis Iglesias Ramírez– because he had refused to wear the prison uniform.

Normando continues to write from prison.

At El Guayabo prison, in Isla de la Juventud, in a humid, dark cell, prisoner of conscience and journalist **Fabio Prieto Llorente**, who has been diagnosed with more than seven overwhelming diseases, hardly survives.

Fabio reported being harassed and persecuted by the prison authorities. The guards have interrupted and stopped and the telephone calls, and forbidding contact with his family. The activist's health is critical, because except for the last four months, he has lived in solitary confinement for seven years.

In addition to harassment, continuous commandeers, physical and oral mistreatment by prison guards, Fabio's physical and mental health is about to collapse at any moment from lack of medical care and sun, from humidity and the hard block of cement he has used as a bed for more than 6 years.

Fabio has chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, emphysema, high blood pressure, hemorrhoids, chronic duodenitis, spina bifida, headaches, and stiff joints of the hands and legs.

In December it was known that the journalist had undergone a sputum test, but the results were never released, nor was an effective treatment established. He continues to experience cold, fever, nausea, headache, and joint pain.

News from June described that Fabio Prieto was continuously being attacked and provoked by common prisoners, in addition to not receiving adequate medical care for his diseases. As a result, his health has worsened.

Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta, prisoner of conscience and independent journalist from the Libre Oriental Press Agency, has been in prison seven years and four months. He was arrested on March 2003 and sentenced to 20 years in prison. His only daughter died this June in a car accident on her way to visit him.

That same month, he was transferred to a prison closer to his home, but in exchange for the transfer, just like other prisoners, he was seriously hurt and punished. The journalist said that his transfer to Combinado de Prisiones of Guantánamo, under a more severe regime, is "a mockery, blackmail, a policy of revenge".

Juan Carlos had reported this year that top-ranking prison authorities had threatened him with violent reprisals if he continued to demand better living conditions.

He has been sleeping on the floor of the cell for the last nine months because of the heat. Authorities did not give him a fan. The guards warned him that if he sews his lips together again, which he does as a means of protest, they will attack him violently and "take serious measures".

In March, the journalist urgently informed that the Department of State Security (DSE) had suggested he appear in public as one of its agents, and to that end, used his family as emotional blackmail.

The prisoner of conscience has kept a rebellious attitude in prison. He has sewn his mouth several times and gone on hunger strikes to protest against prison abuses, in spite of his critical health condition.

During a phone call on March 2nd, Herrera Acosta reported he has lost about 44 pounds because of his diseases and bad prison conditions. He explained that he is severely ill and has ischemic heart disease, heart murmur, high blood pressure, cervical arthrosis, low back pain, duodenal pyloric prolapse, gastric disorders, bronchial asthma, allergy, kidney and liver disorders, second-level high blood pressure retinopathy, immunode-

iciency, hemorrhagic dengue after-effects, malnutrition, vitiligo, dermatitis, a disc and hiatus hernia, and chronic gastroduodenitis.

Víctor Rolando Arroyo, director of the Independent Cuban Journalists and Writers Union, journalist, labor unionist, librarian and respected community leader. In March 2003 he was sentenced to 26 years in prison (the prosecutor had requested the death penalty). He is imprisoned in the penitentiary Kilo 5 1/2, in Pinar del Río.

The government did not forgive him for his insightful reports on the state of agriculture in Cuba, one of them on tobacco specifically, which led to his imprisonment in 1996. The government did not forgive him either for setting up an independent library with more than five thousand books, nor for his Three Wise Men Millennium project, designed to distribute toys among the city's poorest children.

His wife, Lady in White Elsa González, stated in April that her husband does not receive the medication he needs to treat the diseases he has caught during his time in prison.

Arroyo suffers from high blood pressure, chronic otitis, pharyngitis, left cardiomegaly, pulmonary emphysema and chronic gastritis.

On March 30th of this year, Víctor Rolando went on a hunger strike because prison authorities gave orders not to serve him food in his own plastic bowls as he has done for quite some time –as prescribed by the doctor— but rather in the prison's metal trays.

Last year Víctor Rolando was handcuffed in front of his family while they were visiting. "It's cruel and painful for the family to see him in these conditions, he was not dangerous outside of prison, he is even less so inside", said his wife.

The State Security denies specialized medical care to the prisoner of conscience and writer **Ricardo González Alfonso**, 60 years old, serving a sentence of 20 years in prison at Combinado del Este. His wife, Lady in White Alisa Bello, reports that he is subjected to subtle physical and psychological torture from the political police. The authorities deny him access to glaucoma tests and prescription medication. It seems his punishment stems from the fact that he went on hunger strike last December to demand the release of prisoners of conscience and an improvement in prison living-conditions.

González Alonso was arrested during March 2003. He has authored three books; the fourth is about to be published.

Jail authorities forbade him and journalists Normando Hernández , Julio César Gálvez and the member of the Liberation Christian Movement Regis Iglesias Ramírez from attending a religious mass held last February 6th, as a punishment for refusing to wear the prison uniform.

Raimundo Perdigón Brito, independent journalist imprisoned at Nieves Morejón Prison, has reported on the food crisis and overcrowding suffered by prisoners.

According to Raimundo, overcrowding is the norm in prison, which leads to continuous fights. "You can often find more than one hundred and thirty prisoners trying to watch only one TV. We are starving here, as the food spoils in the rooms where it is stored, because they pile-up trays one over another", said Perdigón.

In March, prison authorities took Raimundo's bed away. Guards took him and his belongings out of the cell pretending he was being transferred. After several hours, they returned him to the same cell, only to find that his bed was being used by someone else. Former "re-educator" Avelino Pereda Darias, famous for the atrocities he commits against the general prison population and for his harassment and persecution of political prisoners, played the leading role in this montage.

Raimundo Perdigón was arrested on December 2006, after launching the independent press agency Yayabo Press. He was sentenced to four years in prison, accused of "pre-criminal social dangerousness".

His sister, Ana Margarita Perdigón Brito, speaks about the cruel and degrading treatment Raimundo received. "He has been beaten often, threatened, insulted and had the phone snatched out of his hands while talking to his family. He has been kept in solitary confinement a number of times and has had his belongings seized."

On April 8th, on his way to the family visit room, as he passed through the area known as "The Tunnel" (guards' favorite beating place since it is hidden from everyone's view), he was confiscated several bars of soap he intended to give to his youngest son.

Ana Margarita reported that Lieutenant Raúl threatened him saying, "he would rip out his teeth" and "put his fist in his mouth."

In January, Margarita Perdigón reported her brother had been beaten several times by prison guards. She described that her brother "was physically attacked by first lieutenant Abel Ruiz China, the prison's head of security, who transferred him to The Tunnel. Once there, Raimundo

was handcuffed and savagely beaten by officer Ignacio González Mas. Afterwards, with his eyes covered in blood, he was placed in a punishment cell where he remained 10 days. This place lacks even the most basic elements of decent living conditions”.

The prisoner of conscience reported in June that, as of that date, he had been extracted blood three times, without having received any explanation.

On January 5th, **Adolfo Fernández Saínez**, prisoner of conscience and independent journalist, had a family visit in the Canaleta Provincial Prison in Ciego de Ávila. The political police did not allow him to take a magazine his wife had brought him, arguing that it was “very strong.” The magazine was Espacio Laical, by the Secular Archdiocese Council of Havana, Year 5, No. 3, 2009.

Last June he was transferred from Canaleta Prison in Ciego de Ávila to Combinado del Este prison in Havana, closer to his family's home. The transfer resulted in a loss of some rights he had in Canaleta, such as phone calls and access to medicine.

His wife, Lady in White Julia Núñez, alleged that a package of medicines for her husband sent from Spain was opened at the customs; they stole the drugs she had requested as needed, and respected the more general drugs that the donor had been added on their own. The logical conclusion is that state security tapped the telephone call and heard Julia detailing to the person in Spain what she needed.

On May 2010, Fernández Saínez signed a collective letter of prisoners of conscience in Canaleta addressed to the European Union, where they demanded from EU a greater commitment to human rights in Cuba, beyond the common position.

Héctor Maseda Gutiérrez is the oldest journalist of the Group of the 75; he is 66. In March 2003 he was sentenced to 20 years in prison. He suffers from high blood pressure and skin conditions, which worsened last year. He has not received any treatment at all.

This year, he published the second volume of the book he wrote in prison Enterrados Vivos (Buried Alive), where he describes his experience behind bars.

According to his wife, Lady in White Laura Pollán, last June he was transferred from Agüica prison in Matanzas province to 1580 in Havana, closer to his home.

This year, it was learned that the journalist Julio César Gálvez Rodríguez, sentenced to 15 years in prison in March 2003, is in very poor health. He suffers from at least fifteen pathologies, all of them chronic, including high blood pressure, fatty liver, depression, degenerative multiple sclerosis, digestive disorders and cervical arthrosis. He is currently waiting for a fistula surgery.

José Luis García Paneque, journalist and physician, sentenced in March of 2003 to serve 24 years in prison, suffers from asthma, high blood pressure, allergies, parasitosis, renal colic (possibly due to floating kidneys), rectal bleeding, poor intestinal absorption and acute psychiatric disorders, including claustrophobia. His wife and children left for the United States three years ago. In June of this year he was transferred to a work camp called “Plan Confianza” located in Las Tunas province, under a lesser security system with better living conditions.

Lester Pentón González, the youngest of Group of the 75, has high blood pressure, heart murmur, sinusitis, headaches, chronic gastritis, poor intestinal absorption, dizziness, cervical disorders, hemorrhoids and psychiatric disorders, according to the latest reports. Lester was convicted in March of 2003 and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Violence, arrests, harassment, intimidation, restriction of movement, illegal procedures

In the last 12 months, repression activities by the government against Cuban independent journalists and communicators, and bloggers has significantly increased; frequent arbitrary arrests, beatings, threats, harassment, and rigged trials have taken place.

The latter form of intimidation used by the regime, DNA samples collected at police stations, points to the deep well of illegalities available to the Cuban government.

Journalist Julio Alberto Salomón Avila is a recent victim of the Cuban regime's illegal actions. Last May he was prosecuted for unemployment (under the “pre-criminal danger” law) and was sentenced to three years of correctional work without imprisonment, in spite of the evidence to the contrary submitted by his lawyer at the trial, which included letters from his employer and from his school.

Reporters Calixto Ramón Martínez Arias and Carlos Serpa Maceira were arrested last May by State Security agents and police officers at Havana's Central Park while they were participating in a demonstration held by opposition groups at the closing of Jornada Pedro Luis Boitel.

Carlos Serpa was released a few hours later and Calixto Ramón, who had been released from prison a few days earlier (mentioned previously in this report), was transferred to an unknown place; several days later it was learned he had been in a punishment cell at an “alternative processing center for arrested people.”

Serpa has been deported to Isla de Pinos, several times this year.

By that same date, Julio Beltrán Iglesias, from ALAS agency was violently arrested on the street by State Security agents and taken to Villa Marista (a prison exclusive for people arrested by the DSE). He stayed there for several hours, and was harshly examined by five officers who harassed him and threatened him with prison time.

“They threatened me; they told me they wouldn’t allow any more meetings nor activities, no marches, no Ladies in White, nothing at all. They said everything was over, that Raúl Castro had ordered them to finish factions at any cost.”

The journalist has been arrested several times in the last few months.

Beltrán Iglesias was kidnapped in April by DSE agents, he was arrested for several hours and taken to a police station; nobody knew where he was. During his arrest, a warning document was drafted, his fingerprints, photographs and hair samples were taken.

Last October, he was arrested and charged. A file was opened that accused him of belonging to a “counterrevolutionary faction,” jeopardizing the security of the country, encouraging civil disobedience, and confronting the authorities. A few days later, he was threatened at his home by officers “Idalberto,” “Yan,” and “Milton,” who “reminded” him that he should be awaiting his trial and prison time. The journalist replied, “I am actually waiting for any kind of action on the part of the State’s agencies of repression.”

In August, he was also arrested –together with community journalist Georgina Noa- when the police dispatched soldiers in a large operation to prevent a peaceful protest by several opponents called together by the Martiana Civil League. Hundreds of demonstrators were arrested, others were prevented from arriving there.

A new method of repression, a chemical attack, was used against three journalists from the press agency Cubanacan Press (whose director is Guillermo Farinas) during the 25 and 26 of April.

Licet Zamora Carrandi (Fariñas’ spokeswoman) and Rafael Pérez González, both residing in Santa Clara, reported that irritant substances were spread out in their homes causing asthma attacks, irritation, skin inflammation and conjunctivitis; small children were among the affected.

The following evening, Carlos Balhuerdi Obregón, who lives on the same street as Licet, reported coming in contact with a similar substance. When he detected it, he left his home immediately, on his way out, he saw a couple of men running across the rooftops of the houses.

Given the particularities of the attack, journalists blame Security of State.

On the night of April 12, two agents from the Technical Investigation Department (DTI) visited independent journalist Luis Cino Álvarez at his home to inform him that he might be prosecuted for criminal acts in the near future.

One of the agents, “Octavio”, made reference to an article written by Cino where he blamed “perverse migratory laws” for the tragic and puzzling death of his friend, independent journalist Adrián Leiva Pérez, while trying to return to Cuba after four years in exile. Adrián had repeatedly requested the Cuban government to allow him to come back to his home, but the request was always denied. In a desperate attempt to return, he sailed to Cuba. One week later his dead body was delivered to his family in Havana.

That same month, reporters from the Information Center of the Council of Reporters on Human Rights in Cuba (CRDHC), Juan Carlos González Leiva, Tania Maceda Guerra and Sara Marta Fonseca Quevedo, were arrested in Havana and released after spending five hours at the police station. The arrest was intended to prevent them from attending a meeting of the Agenda para la Transición, an opposition group.

Tania had also been arrested in August and imprisoned for six hours in a police station. Two notebooks with contacts and phone numbers were confiscated.

Last March, journalist Odelín Alfonso Toran was covering an activity by the Ladies in White, when he was beaten by the political police and held under arrest for four hours. Agents seized his digital camera’s memory card, arguing that a top DSE officer appeared in one of the videos.

The families of the independent journalists are frequently harassed by repressive authorities. Such is the case of journalist Ileana Pérez Nápoles, whose 19 year old son, Alejandro Velázquez Pérez, has been

harassed by DSE agent, Jorge Luis Curvelo, as she denounced in March. She also said that he had been invited to collaborate with DSE. "He declined, thus he is persecuted. He is harassed continuously."

Ileana Pérez reported that the political police prevented her from holding a meeting on March 12. The purpose of the meeting was to reopen the Prensa Libertad news agency, which had to be closed down in 2003 when its members were imprisoned.

"This meeting provoked a huge police operation that began early in the morning. Several officers were patrolling my home and its surroundings to prevent the journalists from attending", recounted Ileana.

Juan González Febles, writer and journalist, was arrested on February 24th, on his way to the home of the well known Lady in White Laura Pollán. He was held by political police for more than 10 hours.

Cubanacán Press journalist Yoel Espinosa Medrano was arrested in February a few meters away from his home by two police officers who asked him, as has become usual, to show them his ID. One of the agents returned the document and tapped him on his shoulder calling him "buddy." "I answered I was not his 'buddy' and he was not authorized to touch me," says Espinosa. He was immediately given a fine for disorderly conduct.

Last October, Yoel Espinosa, who is also director of the Human Rights and Family Commission Information Center, was issued the following death threat by Communist Party members in Santo Domingo, the place where he resides: "You better not come back to this town, we don't want you here, you are a counterrevolutionary. If you come back you might be killed. It is your choice, either you want to live or you want to come back".

Last month, the journalist was arrested and taken by two police officers to the Santo Domingo police station, without any explanation. There, he was examined and accused of carrying out activities that "jeopardize national stability," he was also threatened with prison time.

Another repressive measure used against journalists and dissidents is to deny them permission to leave the country, as is the case of Doralis Álvarez Soto, a reporter with the Information Center of the CRDHC and a Lady of Support of the Ladies in White. The same has happened to her uncle, human rights activist Ramón Soto Costa. Both have visas to travel to the United States since February 17th, of this year. The government has indefinitely denied their request to leave the country.

Alvarez has been arrested several times and has been the victim of violent acts of repression for taking part in Ladies in White demonstrations.

Carlos Serpa Maceira, a journalist based in the Isla de la Juventud, reported that he was restrained at home since last January 17 by officers of the political police. Serpa Maceira had been arrested at the Nueva Gerona Maritime terminal by DSE agents, who held him there for eight hours and denied him phone calls.

On January 28th police officers violently arrested Leticia Ramos Herrería, reporter from the Information Center of the CRDHC in Cuba during a peaceful activity. She was arrested by the chief of the police of the Cárdenas sector known as "Obady", and was brutally beaten by him at the police station.

Leticia said that the police officer pushed her violently inside his office, immediately punched her in her breasts and ribs, yelling her at same time: "I don't believe in independent journalists nor in f... counterrevolutionaries." Then, he pulled her by her arms and dragged her to the back of the office where the cells are located, but another officer intervened and defended her.

That same month, Juan Carlos Reyes Ocaña, from the Holguín Press news agency, was arrested near his house and taken to the police station. He was charged with disrespecting authority, carrying out illegal economic activities, and disobeying. He was released the next day while awaiting his trial. As a result of this, the journalist went on hunger strike and demanded the charges against him be dropped. He was immediately supported by about twenty other people, who went on strike with him.

Reyes Ocaña had been previously arrested in December. During his arrest one of the soldiers, a captain who was not wearing a badge, called him a "bum" and told him "to leave the country once and for all" and that he would "shoot him" if he caught him posting anti-government banners. He was released two hours later after paying a 40 pesos fine for "disobedience."

On December 10th, police officers entered Julio Aleaga Pesant's home to warn him that they had orders from top-ranking officers of the DSE to arrest him if he left his house. Some patrol cars remained outside his home for hours in order to prevent him from going out.

Shows of solidarity among the population increasingly deter the abuses by the police.

The arrest of the correspondent of the Information Bureau of the Commission Mariana Damián Sánchez Sáenz was marred by about twenty neighbors of Santa Amalia, where he lives, who stood in solidarity with the journalist when he was being forced into a police car last December. Neighbors shouted to the police and rushed over to them, making the officers leave.

Last October, a journalism course, organized by the Cuban Network of Community Journalists, was strongly repressed by the political police, several independent press agencies from Havana informed.

Three students were arrested. One of them was transferred and questioned at the police station of Plaza municipality. His mobile phones, camera, rechargeable batteries, several books, and reports on Human Rights Violations on the Island were seized.

Another, Eriberto Liranza Romero reported he was held for 5 hours in a very cold examination room. He also said all his belongings were seized, including a camera and several books. All three of the students had their mobile phones seized.

Last week, Belinda Salas and Julio Beltrán Iglesias from the ALAS agency and students in the same course, were arrested and had documents, work equipment, and digital cameras seized.

Also in October, Georgina Noa Montes, community journalist and delegate of the Rural Latin American Women Federation in Havana, and reporter of the same agency, was arrested on her way to class.

Plinio Cruz Tamayo, from the Amanecer Press news agency was insulted and threatened last October by DSE collaborator Yodimir Hernández, in front of his house. Cruz Tamayo said Hernández watches him 24 hours a day and appears everywhere he goes. Several times, he has been provoked in the streets, by agents calling him names such as “antisocial,” “mercenary,” and “counterrevolutionary.” He has also received death threats.

Independent journalist Adolfo Pablo Borrazá Chaple was arrested last September 22nd, after leaving the United States Interest Section in Havana, and taken to the police station. There, he was examined by a DSE officer and threatened with four years in prison.

Last September, Holguín journalist Yosvani Anzardo Hernández, Director of the independent digital publication Candonga, was imprisoned for 15 days at the Pedernales Penal Processing unit in Holguín. He was threatened with the Gag Law, under which he could be sent back to prison for many years.

His wife, Lourdes Yen Rodriguez, said that when her husband was arrested, she hung a banner in front of their home demanding his release and that she received support from the whole population. “We are easing tensions across the opposition and reaching out to people in smaller cities. If the political police does not release my husband I will accept the support of opposition groups and demand his release”. said Yen.

The day he was arrested several DSE agents searched his home and seized electronic devices used to produce Candonga. They also disconnected the landlines. According to his colleagues, the DSE’s purpose was to end the publication, dismantle the editorial department and its framework. Candonga was also an “informal” website whose server was housed at the journalist’s home, until it was disabled by the police. Its readers accessed the site through a primitive telephone modem system, where they could download books and documents that could not be accessed on the Island otherwise.

A few months later, on April 24th, Yosvani was arbitrarily arrested once again at his home and held for several hours, during which he was threatened with prison time.

That same day, Johnny Jaime Ruiz Carballosa, the main collaborator of the Red Libertad [Freedom Network] created and led by Anzardo, was arrested. He was questioned at a police station and released a few hours later. His house was also searched and some of his belongings were seized.

Also that day, Luis Felipe Rojas Rosabal, a writer, journalist and blogger from Holguín, was arrested and held for four hours in a cell close to Yosvani’s, supposedly, due to his participation in the Board of Directors Meeting of the Eastern Democratic Alliance (17 dissident organizations), which had taken place the day before. In the past, the blogger had been sentenced to house arrest. Rojas was threatened with punishment under the Gag Law for his articles published by cubaencuentro.com and Radio Martí, and for writing the blog Animal de Alcantarilla [Sewer Animal].

On June 13th, Customs officials informed Yosvani Anzardo that they had seized a package sent to him from the United States. The document, signed by the Customs Control Inspector Raimundo Pérez García, describes the items included in the package: toilette paper, one disposable razor, one toothbrush, 4 pencils, 5 pens and similar items.

On August 19th, journalist Ismary Salomón Carcasés was arrested by two DSE agents, “Ricardo” and “Omar”, as she was leaving the headquarters of the Cuban School of Independent Pedagogues. They took her to the

police station, where she had two magazines confiscated: *Disidente* [Dissident] and *Misceláneas de Cuba* [Miscellaneous from Cuba]. Ismary was questioned for three hours in a very cold room and released at 2 in the morning.

Fernando Zamora O'Reilly, from the Florida Press news agency, reported that for the last several years authorities have denied him a permit to work as a bike taxi driver and continuously fine him. His wife has been threatened with acts of repression and has been accused of fixing her house with "human rights money."

Last November, blogger Yoani Sánchez suffered police violence for the first time when she was arrested together with blogger Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo, and mistreated by DSE officers on their way to a non-violence demonstration.

In a declaration to EFE news agency, Sánchez said she was walking together with other bloggers when they were intercepted by DSE agents, who asked the bloggers to go with them. The group refused and demanded that the agents show their arrest warrants. The policemen forced them into two vehicles and abused them; twenty minutes later they were released in a different part of the city.

Yoani said Pardo Lazo "was immobilized by a karate arm lock, with his head on the floor". She said "an agent put his knee on my breasts, while the other one, from the front seat, hit me in the kidneys and head (...). At one moment, I felt that I would never be able to get out of that car".

On February 24th, the blogger was arrested again together with her sister, when they were going to sign the condolence book for the death of prisoner of conscience, Orlando Zapata Tamayo.

Yoani Sánchez recorded her arrest and the harassment she suffered, and it was later broadcast abroad.

She writes on her blog: "Fortunately, my mobile phone recorded the audio of what happened that grey Wednesday, and even after it was seized, it recorded the conversations of the DSE agents and policemen –without badges– that had forced us into the Infanta and Manglar police station. The evidence includes the names of some of the responsible agents, and it also reveals the political background of the operation against the opposition, independent journalists, and bloggers".

THE WORKER'S SITUATION

On May 1st, International Workers' Day, as hundreds of thousands of workers around the world were vigorously protesting the global economic crisis, the Cuban people were "willingly" marching "en masse" to celebrate their political system, even just a few days after the government announced one million jobs would be lost.

This not only exposes the fictional –and mandatory– nature of such an event, but also clearly shows the sad reality of the Cuban worker: alone, cornered and repressed by a dehumanizing and violent system. Without anyone to turn to in defense of his interest, without labor union education, without freedom to choose his occupation, and now unemployed, what does the future have in store for him?

Low salaries that do not cover basic needs, imminent unemployment, loss of workers' canteens, abuse of power, corruption, coercive acts and terrible working conditions, are some of the elements of the environment that surround the harassed Cuban worker.

Working conditions

Construction workers of the Mariel municipality, subordinated to the Municipal Unit of Housing Investment and Municipal Housing Management, work with their own tools or borrowed from customers, because the company does not provide any tools at all. The biweekly salary of these workers is 217 Cuban pesos (U.S. \$ 9) for operators and 180 (U.S. \$ 7) for assistants. They must pay for their own transportation to the places to which they are assigned, in any part of the municipality. Also, construction materials are not provided by the State either, but must be purchased by the impoverished housing residents –each brick costing 5 or 10 pesos in the black market, and a 50 kilograms bag of cement costing between 25 and 50 pesos.

Three social workers complain of the poor-quality food they receive at the Cojímar Sports School, where they are being housed. "Food is terrible, they feed us soup, flour, two tablespoons of rice, and a spoiled and tough piece of bread, this is like prisoners' food", said one of them.

The underground electric system of the Machaco Ameijeiras Concrete Production Plant is constantly flooded, which poses a risk to the workers' life. Workers reported this situation to the company Tecnologías Industriales de la Construcción to which they belong, as well as to the government. The government's response was immediate: "There's no budget."

On the other hand, students of the Armando Mestre Martínez Politechnic Institute of Puey, in Arroyo Naranjo, are forced to render services as guards and custodians, because of the lack of staff there. Young students, 15 to 18 years old, have been working since last February 8th as guards during the afternoon and evening shifts.

The measure has provoked controversy among families of students and school managers, not only because the school is located in an area declared highly dangerous, but students are required to attend classes the next day after work.

Lack of adequate protection caused the death of a Green Area Department worker in Havana. He was run over by a car while cutting weeds alongside the National Highway. A friend and coworker of the deceased complained: “We work under risky conditions, cutting weeds along high-speed roads without any safety measures. We don’t have any fluorescent jackets or red banners, flashlights, light drills, not even a uniform to identify us; all this should be provided by the State.” The workers start their day before dawn, when lack of daylight and fog place their lives in danger.

In March, workers of the Cooler Workshop “Valdés Fuentes” located at Plaza de la Revolución, accused the manager of abuse. According to a report, the manager Rafael Valdés, in conspiracy with the labor union and protected by the director of the company, uses the company’s assets for his personal purposes, and in addition, he demands a compulsory payment of MTT and labor union fee, and those who do not comply with these demands are dismissed.

On the other hand, a corruption act was reported at the central warehouse of the food wholesaler company of La Habana, which caused their jobs to 37 workers, including the Human Resources director, Joaquín Meléndez. One worker said the expulsion came after an audit, with the intention of silencing witnesses.

“Internationalist” workers

Last November, in Portugal, the Independent Labor Union of Doctors requested the first minister of that country to clarify the contracts of 44 Cuban doctors working there under “illegal and humiliating” conditions. The digital newspaper iOnline published an article describing that Cuban doctors work 60 hours per week and 24 mandatory emergency room hours, on the weekend.

“The labor situation of the Cuban doctors is unacceptable according to Portuguese and European laws. But it is even more disturbing considering

values of humanity, of democratic socialism and of solidarity,” says the Portuguese doctor’s union.

Cuban physicians are paid only 500 euros per month, while Portuguese physicians earn “at least” 2,500 euros, the paper added. The General Secretary of the Independent Physicians Union, Carlos Arroz, said that maybe “the government does pay doctors their complete salary, but it never gets to them.”

Seven Cuban doctors and one nurse sued Cuba, Venezuela and Pdvsa for presumably orchestrating a conspiracy to make them work under conditions of “modern slavery” to pay a Cuban oil debt to Venezuela.

The defendants in this case, “intentionally and arbitrarily” put healthcare professionals under “conditions of slavery for debt” where they become “economic slaves” and political promoters, according to the document presented in the lawsuit in the United States.

The plaintiffs stated that they lived in overcrowded rented houses or in houses of supporters of the Venezuelan regime, and that they worked without a medical license, violating that country’s laws.

According to official data from the Venezuelan government, in the last 7 years 69 Cuban doctors have died rendering services in Venezuela. However, the Venezuelan government’s Attorney’s Office has not opened files to investigate the deaths, and no healthcare institution, in either country, has informed the press about the deaths.

Wages

Absurd measures, inadequate mechanisms, corruption—among other tribulations Cuban workers must suffer—is causing the delay in salary payments, a practice more common each day throughout all sectors of the country.

Last June, a member of the “13 de marzo” (March 13th) cooperative, part of the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP), reported that they had not been paid in three months due to debts with the bank. He added that in the last few two-week periods, 20 workers had delivered more than 170 packages to the State including 100 lbs of food, fruit and beans, but the bank seized the profits to cover debts from previous years. This cooperative owns two pieces of land devoted to production of food, fruits, grains and cattle breeding. Both ANAP’s municipal management and the Government forbade farmers from independently marketing their products.

A group of five guards in the city of Santa Clara have not received their wages since last January due to a disagreement between companies over who should pay them. “We were entitled to our wages last January 10th, and we have not received anything yet, not one cent. The Construction Ministry says it is the Public Health Department's responsibility to pay us and vice versa. The truth is we are in very bad shape and we are still working”, said José Luis López.

The Cuban Government has always been obsessed with showing the world a display version of Cuban Socialism and amongst its successes, the majority support of the population. This is shown through big parades and demonstrations in favor of the system. What is usually unknown abroad is the coercive and compulsory nature of these displays of the people's approval.

Eleuterio Cortes Noroña, who lives in Santa Fe, Havana, reported that last April he was asked at his workplace to participate in a rally and told it was compulsory. If he had not attended, he wouldn't have been paid for that day. Under the same type of threat, he must take part in another rally on May 1st at the Revolution Plaza.

The workers of the Baracoa Chocolate Factory in Guantánamo do not agree with the payment system that will be implemented at their workplace in October. They will no longer receive a basic salary, rather, they will be paid based on production. However, this production is dependent on state-owned equipment that has not been given maintenance in forty years.

“Every time the machines stop, we do not earn any money at all, the same happens when raw materials are exhausted. Since the factory's management does not take any responsibility for us, we have to do whatever we can. Nobody asked for our opinion on the new payment system”, expressed one of the workers.

The farmers

Cuban farmers, just like the rest of the country's workers, suffer from discrimination, administrative abuses, poor working conditions, and eviction.

Félix Lozada Gutiérrez worked very hard on an idle piece of land on Isla de la Juventud which had been loaned to him by the Ministry of Agriculture (MINAGRI). Lázaro Ricardo Pérez, CONIC delegate in that territory, said Lozada “cleaned, ploughed and harvested several times that land, until suddenly two MINAGRI inspectors appeared and seized it.”

“I have written the MINAGRI delegates and the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP) in Isla de la Juventud several times to claim my piece of land. I am told that the legal documents associated with it have been lost and that there is nothing they can do. Five months have elapsed since. I don't know who to turn to or what to do”, said Lozada to Sindical Press.

Próspero Salas Gainza, farmer from Isla de la Juventud, reported last March on the arbitrary actions committed against him by the MINAGRI.

According to Próspero, they refuse to pay him for his cucumber harvest, as the Ministry had agreed, after he lost his harvest due to a mistake pesticide spraying ordered by Roberto González Rodríguez, employed at the territory's Citrus Fruit Company (state-owned).

“I am not to blame for the loss. It was due to technical mistakes. It is their responsibility, not mine. They have to pay, but now they say that they have to analyze the case because the payment is dependent on the harvest being received by the MINAGRI. This is truly absurd”, complained Salas.

The distribution of pieces of land to new usufructuaries is, according to the government, a way towards increasing agricultural production. However, the imposed State controls in effect discourages production.

New usufructuaries that are allotted pieces of land abandoned by State companies will have to resist controls imposed upon them by officers at three different levels.

“All of them will monitor the new farmers so that they produce what they have been told, so that they sell most of the harvest to the State at the prices determined by the official organization, and so that they do not market freely what they produce, as outlined in usufruct regulations”, said an employee of the land distribution central offices, during a TV broadcasted interview.

The only thing that people who have been granted usufruct of abandoned pieces of land have is their own effort. They lack adequate machinery and tools to clean the surface and remove weeds, especially *marabú* weed, which has grown throughout the years due to the government's apathy.

In September, the Ministry of Agriculture called 70 farmers, 38 farmers of small plots and 20 independent farmers to strengthen rice crops in Isla de la Juventud. In spite of the drought, farmers must comply with an ambitious rice crop plan.

Farmers are hesitant about this project because if they devote their efforts to rice crops their own food supply will suffer. According to specialists, the island soils are not adequate for rice crops.

“How will they pay for our work? They owe me almost a whole harvest of garlic that was already sold at the market”, –said Felicito Núñez. “And in terms of supplies, where will we get them? Where will we get boots, long sleeve shirts and pants?”

A small group of farmers from Banao, Sancti Spiritus, protested in February to the authorities for the loss of their harvest due to the inefficiency of the Collection Company. Arguing lack of transportation the company did not pick up the produce. As stipulated by the government, farmers’ products can only be sold to the State. Among the crops lost were tomatoes, bananas, onion, garlic and other highly demanded foods.

At La Victoria cooperative, from Las Cuabas, Fomento, several farmers have repeatedly complained to government agencies about the deterioration of the treacherous road from St. Lucia to The Cuaba, without receiving a response.

The cooperative is considered a “National Vanguard” with an generous production of tobacco, food, plants and meat. However, farmers say many crops are lost.

Labor discrimination

Lázaro Ramón Almenteros, 19 year-old, was fired last May because he refused to take part in the May 1st March at Plaza de la Revolución. They said the young man did not meet the “ideological requirements to continue to work for his employer.”

Member of the opposition, Juan Carlos Bous Batista, of the Regla Opposition Municipality, affiliated to Nueva Esperanza (New Hope), has been harassed by the directors of his workplace, and threatened with expulsion. Recently, Bous Batista stood in solidarity with a group of neighbors and filed a lawsuit the Municipal Government because of a clogged sewer in a common hall that united several houses in Regla.

Lawyer Odelina Guerrero Leyva said last May that it is impossible for her to get employed because her former boss, the Housing Director in Alquizar municipality, David Legua Mondeja, prevents it. “I have submitted job applications at least in three different places, but they always tell me they cannot hire me because Mondeja won’t approve it”, reported Guerrero.

Guerrero Leyva was the legal counselor at the housing municipal offices in that territory until June of 2006 when she has forced to leave her job because she reported on various occasions and to different institutions that Mondeja was guilty of corruption and embezzlement.

Lawyer Ernesto Vera Rodríguez, who lives in Reparto Santa Bárbara in Santiago de Cuba, went on a hunger strike last May 19th to claim his right to work. He says he was fired from the country's top medical school in November of last year for political reasons unrelated to his performance at work. The lawyer appealed for violation of articles 12 and 14 of the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba. “I recently discovered that the government’s Attorney’s Office and the Ministry of Public Health upheld this unfair decision, although it violated protocol and the Law”, said Vera.

Carlos Manuel Pupo Rodríguez, member of the opposition group Cuban Working Group of the International Society for Human Rights, was fired from his job as a tobacco management technician at the cooperative La Reserva, in San Antonio de los Baños, which belongs to the Tobacco Company Lázaro Peña.

Pupo Rodríguez said he had been working in that position and for that company for 21 years, until last May the chairwoman of the cooperative, Maribel Santiesteban, the head of Production, Julio González, and the head of Human Resources, Ricardo Gonzalez Valverde, told him he could not continue working for the company.

Pupo, who was beaten and arrested last year on International Human Rights Day while participating in a peaceful march, said that the dismissal is due to his dissent stance.

Denia Rosina Vega Rodríguez was threatened with dismissal last March because she distributed religious literature among her work colleagues. Estela Pérez Pérez, officer of the Real Estate Maintenance Company where Denia Rosina works, accused her of “distributing enemy propaganda.” Denia Rosina was classified as “untrustworthy” because she had refused to participate in official political and labor union activities of her workplace.

Robier Cruz Campos reported from Holguín that on January, after having been hired to work at the gastronomy company, he was rejected because the chairwoman of the Revolution Defense Committee on his block said he was a “counterrevolutionary”.

Zenaida Díaz González, teacher assistant at Círculo Infantil Luxil, located in the capital municipality of Arroyo Naranjo, was terminated from her job

last August 26th for allegedly “slandering” center’s directors. Zenaida Díaz had sent a letter to the province’s Education Ministry and to the headquarters of the Municipal Head of the Communist Party complaining about the spoiled food that was sometimes fed to the children.

Dissident Frank Delgado, employee of El Centenario bakery in downtown Havana, was reinstated last April to his position after his colleagues protested to the management complaining that his dismissal had been an arbitrary act of the leaders of Communist Party of the area.

José Ignacio Oropesa Almora, truck driver of Cuba Petróleo and independent librarian, was fired from his job because of his activities as a peaceful dissident. In early March, the manager of the company suggested he should voluntarily quit his job, because he was “unreliable.” After refusing the offer, Oropesa Almora was threatened with being blamed of any “suspicious” event occurred at the company.

Last February, Boris Rodríguez Jiménez, member of the opposition group 30 de Noviembre Party, and his wife Janet Rodríguez Reyes, were dismissed from the Military Construction Company, a subsidiary of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR). Manuel Cordero, manager and person responsible for implementing the penalty, had been visited several hours before by a military counterintelligence officer that explained that Rodríguez was taking part in “counterrevolutionary activities.” Janet Rodríguez, employed as a receptionist in a visitors center belonging to the same organization, was told she was “violent and capable of committing crimes against the assets of the FAR.”

Last December, during a meeting with workers of the Havana Harbor, it was announced that more than one hundred dockworkers and barrel-makers would be fired. They were dismissed in January. At the meeting it was said that in order to keep their jobs the main requirement was for workers to be “politically suitable”.

Carlos Manuel Pupo, peaceful member of the opposition who lives in the municipality of San Antonio de los Baños, was fired from his job at the company where he had worked for more than 15 years as a tobacco management technician. Last December, in a meeting with the director and two other men who were not company employees, the head of production María Elena López told Pupo that his labor agreement had ended due to unjustified absences. Later on, Mrs. López confessed to Pupo that the DSE had ordered his dismissal.

Orlando Valdés Pereda, activist of the peaceful opposition group Partido del Pueblo (People’s Party), was working as a baker in the Hermanos

Cruz unit last December when he asked to be promoted to a vacant position as head of the night shift. The manager of the company denied his application arguing that Valdés Pereda could not be “trusted” to carry out that position. “He told me that due to my condition as a peaceful dissident I was not entitled to that position”, said Valdés.

Luis Godínez Lorenzana, member of the opposition group Comisión Martiana, was threatened last October by members of the DSE.

The activist was summoned to the Capri police station in Havana by officer “Dunieski,” where he was examined for more than two hours. “They threatened to revoke my self-employment license if I continue to visit the Comisión Martiana headquarters”, said Godínez.

Henry Solís, coordinator of the Gay Freedom Party (independent alternative gatherings for the gay community) was fired last October. “He was arrested and handcuffed in front of his students while he was teaching a class.” The reason given was that it was “punishment for coordinating cultural activities for homosexuals in the capital and in other areas of the country.”

Solís’ coworkers have collected 24 signatures among the 39 parents whose children Solís taught. The signatures appear along a document that describes Solís’ patience and professionalism, and the unfairness of his dismissal.

Protests

As the economic crisis continues, dissatisfaction among workers increases. Protests and complaints have even reached national councils of trade unions and mass organizations.

During the X Congress the ANAP last May, Cuban farmers launched a breakthrough petition to the Government asking it to release agricultural production from the clutches of bureaucracy in order to put more food on Cubans’ tables.

There were complaints about the lack of basic supplies such as fertilizers, pesticides, fuel and even horseshoes. The ANAP urged the government to improve irrigation services to farms, to offer credit to farmers who have been offered idle land, more autonomy to cooperatives, and free grazing. Farmers also requested to be allowed to grow ornamental plants.

Things would be very different if at the X Congress independent farmers had raised their voices to defend economic freedom, freedom to engage

in free trade, freedom to own land and to distribute food independently, or if they had demanded the creation of storage and logistics departments, and defended their right to accept foreign investment and technology for the agricultural sector. Why don't they do it? The state of the Cuban economy is critical and only a fundamental change can solve its agriculture problems.

However, last May 21st, very serious issues were raised at the closing of the X Congress of the Labor Union for Construction Workers.

Marta Garcia, a member of the National Council of the CTC (Trade Union Confederation of Cuba, official), acknowledged: "We have lacked organization, discipline and consistency. The false believe of completing projects swiftly (and poorly) to fulfill a certain national holiday has cracked many principles of the investment process."

A speech by the Construction Minister, who attended the event, dramatically reflected the general inefficiency of the country, which is also affecting the construction sector: "Jobs are barely delivered on time, quality is poor, costs are very high and inefficiency is a factor that is always present in construction work."

Of course, wage issues, poor working conditions and obstacles imposed by the government, are problems that find no solution at these official events, such as described by an independent labor unionist: "The problem is neither the congresses nor the complaints from the official labor unionists, the problem resides in the chaos of excessive centralization, corruption, theft, and the fact that workers should be paid for the work they do and not just for the hours they are there."

Recent spontaneous protests throughout the Island reflect the deep labor and social discontent among Cuban workers.

Last May, Havana witnessed an unprecedented labor strike when a group of dockworkers from the Andrés González Lines Dock refused to place packages containing food, including rice, on a ship destined for Haiti.

Ten workers were arrested and taken to the DSE detention center for interrogation, because –as it is known– going on strike in Cuba is considered a "counterrevolutionary act".

According to workers, relatives, and neighbors, the protest was unanimous. They could not believe food was being sent to another country when most of the Cuban population has to go hungry due to shortages and high prices.

According to independent sources, that same month, Transportation Ministry officers had to temporarily suspend several measures, including tax increases for private taxi drivers, because many taxi drivers had waived their licenses, as a way of expressing their discontent. The new regulation established a tax payment of 700 to 1200 pesos per month, depending on the passenger capacity of the vehicle.

Agricultural workers, who had been transferred from Matanzas to strengthen the sugar cane harvest at the Urbano Noris sugar company in Holguín, went on strike in April because they considered their working conditions to be unacceptable. The roads to harvest sugar cane were in terrible conditions and the food was very bad quality. According to independent information, workers from other factories in Holguín have stopped work indefinitely due to similar problems.

On the other hand, workers from La Mandarria agricultural market, members of the Youth Labor Army (FAR), refused to work for three days this January in protest of a new requirement by their management, which forces them to sing the National Anthem every day before starting their shift.

The president of the labor union sector supported the workers, an unprecedented, exemplary position, unusual on the Island. As a result, management and local authorities eliminated the requirement. Workers expect future reprisals.

On August 28th, a riot erupted at the tourist taxi stand in Boyeros, Havana, during a labor union meeting. The directors of the Tourism Labor Union requested that the workers of Cuba Taxi (state company) make an additional effort to deliver one million Cuban convertible pesos (CUCs) without any reward in exchange. In addition, the so-called "sindicaleros" (labor union representatives) spoke of the importance of saving because "in the next ten years, neither cars nor spare parts will be imported". They also mentioned that the special period would get even worse.

When the workers were asked to sign a document stating their commitment to the request from the "Communist Party, Fidel and Raúl", none of them signed; the visitors were stunned. A source said that the official organization's proposal was "firmly rejected", and commented on the well-known corruption and lack of credibility of the so-called workers' representatives.

SELF-EMPLOYED IN THE CUBAN MARKET

After many years of a planned and excessively centralized economy, where the working class depended on the labor market guaranteed by the State, economic conditions are creating the need for a change in the national economy that will bring about the radicalization of the State's economic conception and could gradually decrease the level of participation of the State in the country's labor activities.

Cuban workers, perceiving what will happen in the next few months, could start abandoning their jobs at State institutions and gradually involve themselves in new types of work, including jobs classified as independent, or those without a direct relationship to the State.

The only and true source of useful job creation and fair wages for Cuban workers could be the development of small and medium size companies, self-employed worker cooperatives, private farmer cooperatives, and other forms of association that do not have to be controlled by centralized mechanisms in a planned economy.

Nowadays, self-employed labor activity is performed amid a zillion restrictions, repressive bureaucratic measures, and corruption in all Cuban sectors of society, among other hindrances. Those who are self-employed are not given credit for their development, but they must pay high taxes on their income; they cannot hire workers although unemployment could reach one million Cubans; they cannot buy merchandise from wholesaler warehouses, since these are exclusively for State enterprises.

If the Cuban government really wants to find employment for future unemployed Cubans, the solution is simple: decentralize and remove restrictions to creativity, allow self-employed workers to develop, don't impose obstacles for the private sector to differentiate itself from the State, let workers profit from what they can contribute, allow the law of supply and demand to become the scale by which efficiency is measured.

A private farmer says: "If the State wants me to be productive, they should not tell me what to grow or how much they want to pay for my harvest, it is up to me to decide what to grow, when to grow it, who to sell it to, and at what price."

A restaurant owner says: "They cannot restrict what I can offer my customers, they cannot tell me I am only allowed to have 12 chairs or that I can only hire my family as employees, or that I cannot sell meat at my restaurant".

A dentist says: "I want to be self-employed. My relative who lives in Miami tells me he can send materials to manufacture dental prosthesis and other disposable materials, and I would be very helpful to people, but they don't want healthcare professionals to be self-employed, which is why I have to do it in secret."

A taxi driver says: "My car is 60 years old, I have to change the engine, but it costs 10 thousand dollars at the shop. I have never in my whole life seen that amount of money together, and I will not see it before I die, if I don't leave this country. They want the vehicle to be in good condition, but they won't sell me a single spare part in local currency. In addition, inspectors are constantly putting pressure on us and we have to bribe them to leave us alone; policemen are also very corrupt, you can bribe them with almost anything."

The State vs. private enterprise

Villa Clara reports excessive bureaucratic restrictions from the Ministry of Labor and Social Security in granting self-employment licenses. By late April of 2010, self-employed workers had requested around two thousand one hundred and twenty six permits, of which only 20 were granted. The greatest concern is the huge bureaucratic authorization process and the conditions required of candidates, among them, being a "worker integrated to society".

Last January, a spectacular police raid took place in Guanabacoa against all pedestrians carrying packages or crates.

Jorge González Armas, independent labor unionist, who lives in that area, reported: "I witnessed how several citizens were arrested; one for carrying three bunches of bananas on his bicycle. They also arrested a lady who had a crate filled with onions. Another one was carrying a piece of ham. These people and others were taken to the police station; their merchandise was seized for the assumed felony of re-sale. Only one young man with a wheelbarrow managed to escape. He was carrying a 35 kilogram bag of cement, camouflaged with herbs and branches."

According to the source, the citizen who was carrying the bananas said he had bought them at an affordable price in the market and planned on using them to feed his family. The lady with the onions argued she had bought ten pounds "today, because there are some, afterwards there won't be any and nobody will be able to get onions".

One of those citizens asked the police officer: "Why do you seize our merchandise when we bought it legally?" The police officer answered that the

merchandise was of “unknown origin.” “It is likely that you are going to resell these products”, said the officer.

In the near future, according to one driver, by late April or early May bike-taxi drivers will have to take a training course on driving regulations in order to get a driver’s license to be able to work.

He also said that it is very likely they will have to pay for the license, adding new taxes to what they already pay. He also said these drivers don’t have any official representative; no association acknowledged by the government to defend their labor rights as self-employed workers. He explained that at the governmental office (ONAT) there is one lawyer, but in most cases relating to drivers individual complaints don’t yield positive results.

In spite of being accepted as self-employed workers, bike-taxi drivers do not receive any support if they suffer an accident or get sick, and even then, they must pay the monthly tax. They also have to keep their bikes in good working condition in order to pass the mechanical review required by the State.

A short taxi ride costs 20 pesos, approximately \$0.90 USD.

Starting in May of this year, the monthly tax to be paid by private taxi drivers will increase to more than one thousand pesos.

Drivers will have to increase their prices because of this tax, and due to the high cost of gasoline. At Servicentros, gasoline costs 0.95 pesos per liter, and in the black market 20, according to a self-employed taxi driver. Nowadays, in Havana a private taxi service, traditionally called “almendrones”, ranges from 10 to 20 pesos (\$0.45 to \$0.90 USD).

He said that when taxes increase everything costs more. Repairing a car costs at least 20 to 30 CUC (*peso convertible*, the other Cuban currency, dollar-link) without taking into consideration the price of the spare parts, which cost at least 50 to 60 CUC.

On the other hand, seventeen amateur fishermen were fined by Fishing Ministry inspectors during a police operation that took place in Santa Clara on March 30th.

Agents and inspectors blocked the entrance of Palmarito dam, where the group was fishing, six kilometers away from the city. After identifying themselves, they inspectors gave the fishermen a one 1,500 pesos fine, and seized their fish, fishing equipment and six cameras.

“I can assure you they saw us on our way to the dam; what they wanted was to keep the fish and our belongings”, said Blas Pérez, one of the fined fishermen.

On March 10th an illegal bread salesman was brutally beaten by police officers for refusing to hand over the bag filled with the goods. The policemen went away after neighbors intervened in his defense, leaving him laying on the ground covered in blood.

Agustín Lamberto González, the 21 years old salesman victim, explained that he was detained by a patrol while he was working. One officer asked him for his ID and told the other officer “we’ve got ourselves some bread for dinner tonight.” When Lamberto González heard this, he refused to hand over his merchandise and emptied his sack on the ground, which the officers interpreted as an act of defiance. One of the officers pulled out a steel rod covered with plastic wrap and began hitting him strongly on the face, head and other body parts. Falling to the floor, the officer kicked him repeatedly in the stomach, until the neighbors got involved.

Bike-taxi drivers and State inspectors faced each other last February 12th on the corner of San Carlos and Carlos III in downtown Havana, because the drivers had parked their vehicles in an area that had not been assigned to them.

These drives are continuously repressed by policemen and inspectors and receive fines of up to one thousand five hundred pesos. In addition, their vehicles are often seized. Despite the fact that they pay taxes, they are not allowed to circulate freely through the streets of the Capital city.

It has been informed that these self-employed workers, who are members of the Bike-Taxi Drivers Independent Labor Union, are preparing a document demanding their rights, and will be submitting it to the Government.

Last January 27th, self-employed drivers in Santa Clara complained about harassment by the police. During the morning hours, at the garage for private cars traveling to different municipalities, several police officers harassed drivers, imposed fines of up to 500 pesos, and confiscated their licenses if they were incorrectly parked inside their own parking lot.

In December, Santa Clara government officers forbade drivers with licenses to operate their vehicles to pick up passengers outside established routes. In Havana, according to drivers of La Rivera parking lot, State inspectors are constantly on the look out for drivers carrying passengers beyond the permitted limits.

“The pressure gets tighter and tighter. We own our vehicles yet we can’t go where our clients need. If we take the risk, we can be fined, if we break the rules twice, we can lose our license”, explained Ramón Castellanos.

Last November 29th, at the Moncada street parking lots, at the Municipal Hospital and at the Florida bus station, in Camagüey, an operation against drivers took place, led by Captain Noel Barrios. Fernando Zamora, bike-taxi driver based at the bus station, said that police officers on motorcycles visited the aforementioned sites to fine vehicle owners and threatened to seize their cars for working the night shift.

Guillermo Campos, who lives near Moncada Street, spoke of the bike-taxi drivers: “They are the only ones that solve the transportation problem because the government does not put any buses on the road. They have to pay for an expensive license, they are fined and harassed by the police, and I don’t understand why they aren’t allowed to drive at night.”

The small independent dance company Narciso Medina, which used to operate in downtown Havana, recently closed after an intervention by the Ministry of Culture. One of the workers reports that two Ministry officers arrived at that site and claimed that the facilities did not meet “established requirements” and therefore it was illegal. With no further explanations they closed the facility.

The dance company had been offering dance lessons and putting on shows for children and teenagers since 1999 for 25 pesos (local currency) a month. In its place, the government will supposedly offer similar three-month courses for 60 pesos.

Five blind people selling CD’s and other similar products in Mónaco, Havana, were beaten, dragged, and arrested by police officers last November 1st. The salesmen were violently pushed into police cars and transferred to the Aguilera Unit, where three of them were held in its dungeons for more than 24 hours. Prior to this incident, one of them had been beaten by police officers.

A few months ago, authorities throughout the country carried out similar actions against old, sick, and helpless people, who earn a living by selling crates, lemons and other such products.

Several horse-carriage drivers protested in the streets against the harassment they suffer from Government inspectors. Last October 13th, Juana Gómez, who lives in Santa Clara, was waiting for the bus when she noticed at least five private drivers shouting about the threats and penalties they have suffered.

“Drivers who park their vehicles at the bus station parking lot and work the route to the Maternity Hospital, called the government ungrateful, since they had been transporting people to hospitals for years and had now been displaced by imported Chinese”, said Mrs. Gómez.

Alexis Guerrero Cruz, 35, who lives in Puerto Padre, had his bike-taxi and his commercial license seized, they were given back to him a few days later. Alexis considers this an act of repression by the political police as punishment for being member of both the opposition, and the Victoria Independent Labor Union in Puerto Padre.

Last July 12th, Alexis Guerrero and other members of the opposition had been arrested for several hours for trying to participate in a walk to the Puerto Padre seafront, where they would throw flowers into the ocean in honor and remembrance of the innocent victims of the “March 13th” tug boat, which was sunk by Government troops on the Havana waterfront on July 13th, 1994.

On September 29th, police officers appeared unannounced at the San Rafael agricultural market, and seized several 100-pound packages of merchandise. The seized items included rice, chickpeas, pork, and other edible products. The police argued that they had to enter the market and seize the goods because they were being sold illegally. To this day, the market remains closed and the shelves that were once full of products remain empty.

On September 11th, José Raúl Gómez was fined by the Santa Clara police for selling bread, which is considered an illegal activity. “I explained to the two police officers that I buy 10 pieces of bread for four pesos three times a week, and I resell them at five pesos each so that I can buy one piece of bread for myself and some cigarettes. They said that was illegal and gave me a sixty- peso fine”, said Gómez, 67.

On December 1st, at least six people were arrested during a police raid against self-employed salesmen in La Palma, in the Arroyo Naranjo municipality of Havana. The police, with the support of State inspectors, intended to eliminate illegal sale activities taking place near the currency stores at La Palma agricultural market.

Approximately 20 officers surrounded the place and asked salesmen for their IDs and operating licenses. Some of them managed to escape through the crowd, others were brutally arrested. The six vendors arrested were thrown on the ground and handcuffed lying on their stomachs, then, they were loaded onto a bus and taken to the police station. The salesmen's merchandise, which included personal hygiene products, clothes, and imitation jewelry, was seized.

In October, authorities closed and completely destroyed the most important agricultural market in the capital city of Camagüey, the Mercado del Río. Neighbors now complain of food shortages, since the market assigned by the State to supply needed products cannot meet the demand.

An important police operation took place on August 28th near La Palma agricultural market, in the Arroyo Naranjo municipality, sought to wipe out self-employed vendors operating without licenses. Six patrol cars were used to close streets surrounding the market. Twenty police officers led the operation, eight vendors were arrested. They were transferred to the local police station.

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