

# TRABAJADORES

ÓRGANO DE LA CENTRAL DE TRABAJADORES DE CUBA

## Cuba is an inspiration, says U.S. lawyer

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Dean Hubbard, Chair of the Labor and Employment Committee of the National Lawyers Guild, does not hide his emotions when he tells how he found out about 17D [the Dec. 17, 2014 announcements by the US and Cuban governments of measures to normalize relations, including the releases of the Cuban 5 and Alan Gross]: "I was working and my son sent me a text message: 'Dad, look what happened with Cuba!' As I read the news, I felt really happy. Honestly, I did not expect to live to see this day. "

He currently lives in Washington DC, but previously worked in New York and Colorado, where he was born. In 1998 he traveled to Cuba for the first time to participate in a conference of lawyers specializing in labor law, the genesis of the International Conference of Labor Lawyers and the Trade Union Movement that takes place every year in Havana and recently just completed its ninth edition.

As co-founder of the event--along with Guillermo Ferriol, President of the Cuban Society of Labor Law and Social Security-- Hubbard recognized that after years practicing law in the United States, "the tendency is to think that ours is the only possible system. Visiting the island and learning about the differences helps restore our hope [for change]. Nothing in the world is perfect but Cuba is unique. The right of everyone to education, health and Cuba's natural stance toward solidarity make the country an inspiration".

**Experts in relations between Cuba and the US assert that President Barack Obama can do more to rid Cubans of the punishment that the blockade represents. What do you think?**

The goals announced the 17D are good, but basically, as the president himself acknowledged, they maintain an interest in changing the system. Obama spoke of having normal relations and repealing the laws that form the basis of the blockade, but continuing to pay people to try to

undermine the Cuban government. To the extent this represents a change in tactics but not strategy, it will not work.

### **Why are you so sure?**

Because it is based on the illusion that there is no civil society in Cuba, when in fact it is very strong; [civil society in Cuba] includes the CTC and other organizations that bring together students, women, farmers ... It is a base with decades of exercise that [the U.S. government] seems unaware of. Meanwhile they give money to small groups of people (dissidents) whose real problem is that they are simply not happy in Cuba.

### **Another sticking point is the inclusion of Cuba on the list of countries sponsoring terrorism ...**

At some point after the 17D, the goal was set to remove Cuba from that list before the Summit of the Americas, which is scheduled for April. I'm not so sure that will happen by then, because while the Obama administration has the power to do, it is under pressure from the right in Congress, which is threatening to freeze the funds of other projects that the President wants done.

### **What are the major labor disputes in the U.S.?**

There are many, but among the worst are the attacks the ultra-right is carrying out in several states against the rights of workers. The reactionary forces are organized, for example, in the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), which promotes so-called "right to work laws," which undermine the norm established in the United States that unionized workers agree to pay union dues and those dues are deducted directly from their salaries. The new laws break that covenant, thereby making dues collection much more difficult. These laws don't prohibit unionization, but they weaken its economic foundations. This is just one of the ways they are trying to make it more difficult to finance organizing workers to fight for their rights.

### **What other issues dealing with labor lawyers in the US?**

Low wages. They have declined along with union density. Many people receive less than a living wage, and struggles such as the Fight for \$15 have emerged, demanding a \$15 per hour minimum wage. There have been several strikes and a national strike has been called for April 15. This movement is mostly composed of workers from restaurants, fast food and Walmart, for example.