



Tales from the White Dog Cafe

A Tri-Annual Newsletter 3420 Sansom St. Philadelphia Winter/Spring 2000

What We Could Learn from Cuba

From the time Columbus set foot on Cuba in 1492 asking, "Where's the gold?" a value system based on material greed has dominated the Americas. Before the revolution in 1959, which ended the US backed Batista dictatorship, Cuba was renowned as an epicenter of self-indulgence and corruption. After experiencing the worst of capitalism, when US corporations controlled major industries, while the majority of its people remained poor, Cuba has been searching for a more equitable way of sharing its national resources among its citizens.

What I noticed most while we toured Havana by bicycle on the first morning of our recent trip was the relief I felt from the absence of advertising and commercialism, as well as the fun-loving nature of our Cuban guide and bystanders as we paraded through their city. In visiting a senior center, community block party, school, hospital, and family farms, we found a seemingly color-blind society, with a love of life, a generous spirit & a remarkably strong sense of community - one I find lacking at home where self interest is more common than concern for others. Born from necessity, Cuba has become a "green" country. Their model system of private organic family farms provides Cubans with fresh produce for the first time since before the days when all useable land was planted in sugar for export, while food was imported from the US. With a commitment to continue "living in harmony with nature," they may well become the only country free from the harmful agri-chemical companies who have wreaked havoc in other developing nations.

The Cuban constitution provides the right to education, health care, a job, social security and access to culture and recreation for all citizens. As a result, Cuba has a literacy rate of 98.2%, the highest in the Americas, more doctors, art teachers, and olympic gold medalists per capita than any other country, no homelessness, and an infant mortality rate lower in Havana than DC. As reformers slowly privatize the economy, they are justly cautious about losing the hard-earned social and environmental accomplishments of the Revolution, where a philosophy based on inclusion turned the once exclusive Havana Yacht Club over to trade unions and transformed Batista's military barracks into a school for special needs children.

It is now legal in Cuba to own a restaurant in your home, and I was intrigued by the similarity to my own story of starting the Cafe in my house - tables in the backyard, seating people in what furniture you happen to have, customers walking past family members in the living room to get to the restroom. It renewed my appreciation for the beauty and inspiration of small business and (Continued on page 6)

Highlights in this Issue:

- ☆ "Globalization and the Erosion of Democracy"
- ☆ Trip to Amsterdam to study Dutch Drug Policy
- ☆ Dinner benefitting the Chefs Collaborative 2000
- ☆ Eco Tour of suburban sprawl and farmland loss
- ☆ Madame Blavatsky Day dinner and talk



Cuba Night

Monday, February 28, 5pm slides, 6pm dinner

Staff and customers of the White Dog visited Cuba this fall as part of the White Dog Cafe's International Sister Restaurant Project, "Table for Six Billion, Please." We will share our thoughts and experiences about the country and its people, the successes and shortcomings of the Cuban revolution, and the impact of US foreign policy on Cuban life.

Cuban-born **Jorge Fernandez'** grandfather was Batista's Minister of Agriculture. Now a business investor, Jorge serves as president of Americans for Humanitarian Trade with Cuba. He will add insights from two recent trips to Cuba accompanying the Philadelphia Boys Choir.

\$35, including tax and gratuity. A special Cuban-inspired dinner and drinks prepared by trip participants, chef/partner

Kevin von Klause, and bar manager, Amy St. John.

Slide Show Presentation, 5pm, Judy will show her slides from the trip. (Slide show also open to those not attending dinner.)

Reservations for dinner and/or slide show (215) 386-9224

Cuba Night is every Monday in the Bar with Cuban music and drinks. Cigar smoking (non-cuban due to US embargo) after 9pm, allowed only on Cuba Nights.



Fourteenth Annual Dinner in Memory of
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Sunday, January 16, 6pm

Invocation by Reverend Leonard Smalls
Southern-Style Dinner
Gospel Music

Readings by K. Rose Samuel-Evans

Discussion of Dr. King's work in today's society.

\$25, incl tax and gratuity. Reservations (215) 386-9224

White Dog Community Service Days

Monday, January 17, 9am-4pm

5th annual Philadelphia M.L. King Day of Service

"A day on, not a day off"

Habitat for Humanity West Philadelphia

4948 West Stiles Street

(northwest of the intersection of Lancaster & Girard Aves.)

We will work on houses under construction on the 4900 block of West Stiles and undertake a variety of construction jobs with supervision from the Habitat crew. Wear comfortable clothing appropriate for the weather, including gloves, hats & sturdy shoes. Youth ages 16 & over welcome. (space limited)

Saturday, March 11, 9:30-2pm

Book Bank with City Year

5th & Luzerne Sts. (4 blocks north of Erie Ave. in the former Roberto Clemente Middle School)

We will work with middle and high school students who are part of City Year's Young Heroes to sort books donated by suburban schools and libraries which are given free to city school and libraries. City Year is a national youth service corps, engaging youth, ages 17-24, in 10-months of service working with city youth. Youth are welcome.

Saturday, April 8

Walk Against Hunger at the Phila. Art Museum

Join the White Dog Team in the Walk Against Hunger to benefit the Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger. Meet at the Art Museum and walk around the Kelly and West River Drives (approximately 8 miles). (Optional \$5 for an event t-shirt with WDC logo.) Call for times and details.

To volunteer for any of the days, call (215) 386-9224.

A complimentary White Dog lunch will be provided on all days.

Tell Congress to Close the School of the Americas

Join the White Dog Cafe delegation to Washington, DC,
April 2-3 For details, call Deirdre at (215) 386-9224.

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the role we play in building an economy responsive to human needs. There was a time when my entrepreneurial blood boiled at the thought of socialism, but I have found in my travels to Cuba that there is something to learn here as well.

Although we criticize Cuba for human rights abuses, nothing they do compares to the genocidal 38-year-old US embargo, condemned by the United Nations as a human rights violation against the Cuban people. While we demand that Cuba adopt a market economy and hold American-style elections, we disregard Cuban elections to the national and provincial assemblies, call other countries democratic who simply murder the opposition, and dismiss the fact that our own elections are largely determined by corporate contributions. While we demonize Castro, we've supported numerous death squad dictators to protect US corporate interests abroad. While our embargo prohibits trade with the Cuban people, we permit purchases from sweatshops and forced labor camps in other countries. It is economic hardship caused primarily by the US embargo, not fear of persecution, that has driven most refugees to attempt the deadly crossing to Florida.

Just after our return from Cuba, a boat full of refugees capsized and Elian, a five-year-old Cuban boy, was rescued after his mother drowned. When Miami Cuban exiles, holding Elian against his father's wishes, triumphantly hung a gold chain around his neck, proclaiming that he deserved "toys and Pokemon in the land of freedom," they showed little understanding of a child who had just lost his mother, and was being kept apart from his friends, four grandparents and father in Cuba. They displayed a value system common in the US, which holds material possessions above love of family and community.

Watching Cuban children playing in the parks, dancing at a party, bike riding and rollerblading through the streets of Havana, I saw faces that were bright and happy, self-confident, trusting and care-free, with a sense of well-being. Here there were no Calvin Klein models to live up to, and children are not just another target market. Is Elian really better off in the US where kids have killed each other when they felt left out of the community or desired each other's sneakers or Pokemon cards? Would he feel more valued in Cuba where education and healthcare for children are national priorities, than in the US where under-financed public schools are forced to find corporate sponsors who exploit a captive audience of school children by selling them harmful products like Coke & Pepsi?

Perhaps it's simply easier for us to criticize Cuba as a way to justify our brand of capitalism, than it is to look honestly at ourselves and admit that our consumption-addicted society is not only unhealthy for our own children, but is threatening the future of children everywhere by destroying our natural world. Cuba certainly has much work ahead in developing a democracy, but they have one freedom we don't - freedom from corporate rule.

Globalization under the colonial system practiced by Columbus, where powerful countries exploit indigenous people and natural resources of less economically developed countries, continues today with the power shifted from nation states to corporations. The coalition in Seattle of environmentalists, students, labor unions, farmers, and animal rights groups, protesting corporate control over our lives, is a positive sign that the next millennium may bring a new value system to the global economy. By building an economy based on a society of love and compassion, rather than violence and greed, Cuba may surprise us by taking the lead.

Judy Wicks