



# **Cuban palm trees under Vancouver's Lions Gate**



A memoir of the 1960s Fair Play for Cuba  
Committees in Western Canada

By Felipe Stuart Courneyeur

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*A memoir of the 1960s BC and Prairie Fair Play for Cuba Committees*

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IN THE 1960s the Canadian left mounted a strong defense of the Cuban Revolution through the launching and construction of Fair Play for Cuba Committees (FPCC) in major Canadian cities. The Toronto FPCC was the first to launch, in February 1961, and became the “national” organizing centre for the pan-Canadian initiative. The two principal leaders of the Canadian FPCC were Vernel (or Verne as we knew him) and Anne Olson.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. The Vancouver-West Coast FPCC

VANCOUVER WAS not far behind. In March 1961 Cuba solidarity enthusiasts formed a Vancouver-Lower Mainland and West Coast FPCC Chapter. It brought together prominent Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF)/New Democratic Party (NDP) left wing leaders and MPs and MLAs, CCF and Communist Party (CPC) trade unionists, and left wing members of the CCF-NDP youth (Young CCF-NDY), including the author of this memoir.<sup>2</sup> Bob Horne and Ruth Bullock, both leading members of the Socialist Information Centre-League for Socialist Action,<sup>3</sup> were the two key get-up-and-goers in locating and recruiting potential collaborators. In the fall of 1961 Cedric Cox, one of CCF-NDP MLAs, representing the double seat of



Reg Bullock, Joyce Meissenheimer, Ruth Bullock

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Burnaby riding, took on the volunteer job of chairing the FPCC.

The same meeting that ratified Cox as Chair elected me as Secretary,<sup>4</sup> replacing Ken Orchard who was no longer able to continue on our executive because he had to take a job out of town. Vice-Chair Hugh Clifford, a well-known left anarcho-socialist West Vancouver artist and local CCF provincial candidate, served as Vice Chair. Other executive members included Ruth Bullock, a leader of the League for Socialist Action, and Dorothy Steeves, the legendary “feminist-before-her-time” CCF MLA in the forties and early fifties and biographer of BC CCF founder Ernest Winch.<sup>6</sup>

Ruth had played an indispensable role not just as the midwife of the local FPCC's birth, but also in enabling it to survive a potentially injurious split when the Communist Party withdrew its members from



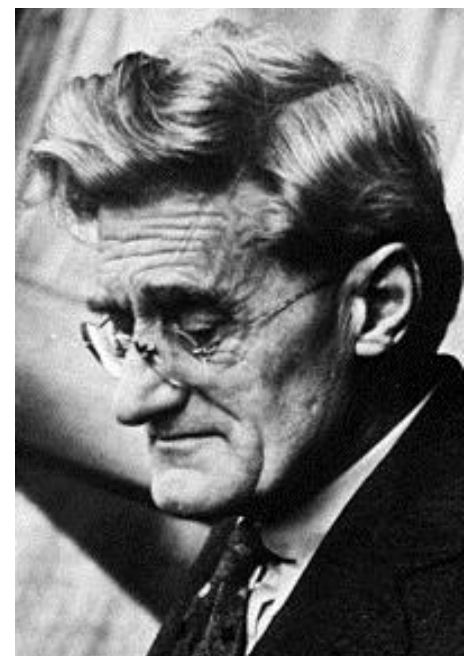
Vernel Olson

the FPCC and formed the Vancouver Canada-Cuba Friendship Association – CCFA).<sup>7</sup> Ruth and her life partner Reg Bullock, a prominent North Shore dry docks unionist and CCF Provincial Organizer during the Second World War, were mainly responsible for winning Angus MacPhee and Orville Braaten, two key leaders of the International Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphite, and Paper Mill Workers union;<sup>8</sup> Jerry LeBourdais, a leader of the BC Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union; and Nancy LeBourdais, Jerry's wife and a CCF activist to the FPCC.

All those mentioned in this paragraph were active members of the Prince Rupert (MacPhee) or the North Vancouver CCF-NDP, and both MacPhee and Braaten had run as CCF-NDP candidates in provincial elections in Prince Rupert and North Vancouver. The three union leaders travelled to Cuba in July 1961 as part of a controversial union delegation mandated by the annual convention of the BC Federation of Labour.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Canadian left in the late 1950s-early 1960s**

The Canadian left in the late 1950s-early 1960s had been deeply troubled and weakened by three powerful interrelated political phenomena. The first was the



**Dorothy Steeves, Ernest Winch**

rise of McCarthyism and state sponsored repression against the left, the labour movement, and the Black movement against racial segregation in the USA. The launching of the Cold War against the Soviet block and its global anti-Communist crusade undercut the appeal of the left in North America.

The second was the postwar economic boom, the longest period of sustained growth and expansion in the history of capitalism. Most socialists, especially we Marxists, had predicted the opposite course for the postwar period – economic crises on the scale of

## **About the Author**

Felipe Stuart Courneyeur divides his time between Canada and Nicaragua. Born in New Westminster, British Columbia, in 1943, he has participated in anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggles for over five decades. He was active in the BC CCF in the late 1950s and was Provincial Secretary of the Young CCF.



**Felipe Courneyeur, 1970**

In 1961, he helped

found the Vancouver & West Coast FPCC, later becoming its Secretary. In the 1960s and 70s he was active in the Fourth International in Canada. The 1979 Nicaraguan Sandinista revolution captured his priorities. He helped to found and in 1982 became Chairperson of Canadian Action for Nicaragua (CAN) based in Toronto.

In the mid-1980s, he moved to Nicaragua, became a citizen, and joined the FSLN. He says that his political life has been a journey involving Cuba, Vietnam, Chile, Palestine, South Africa, Angola, Bangladesh, Ireland, Nicaragua, Grenada, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela, Egypt, Indigenous peoples of Nicaragua and the Hemisphere, and now Ukraine.



the 1930s depression.

The third development was the deep-going crisis in the Communist Party of Canada brought about by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's revelations of Stalin's criminal terror regime at the 20th Congress of the Soviet CP in 1956, and the subsequent suppression by Moscow of the Hungarian workers' uprising that same year. The Canadian CP suffered a deep split both in its ranks and central leadership, including most of its Jewish supporters, who reeled under the revelations of the systematic persecution of their brothers and sisters in the Stalinized USSR.

The combined impact of these three developments was to push the left into a period of ideological disruption and confusion, political retreat, and lack of confidence in our future prospects.

### **First rains after a long drought**

The Cuban Revolution's victory in 1959 came like the first rains after a long drought. Its message of hope and courage reached Canada and the left, especially the CCF left wing. Many Marxist-oriented workers and intellectuals who had been disillusioned and embittered by the disaster of Stalinism, as revealed at the 20th CPSU Congress, found new hope in Cuba. Young anti-imperialist rebels led that revolution. They carried no Stalinist baggage from their past; no skeletons crowded their attics and closets.

And what cool, smooth, superb communicators! Fidel Castro's April 1961 declaration of the socialist character and aims of Cuba's revolution sparked even greater interest and motivated many to commit time and money to the FPCC's solidarity work. Books like *Listen Yankee* by the U.S. left sociologist C. Wright Mills<sup>10</sup> and *Sartre on Cuba* by the leading French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre<sup>11</sup> became best sellers not just through the FPCCs, but in many bookstores and university outlets across the country.

The BC FPCC membership was always well above 200. I did not have to pummel people to keep their dues paid up. Our BC membership included prominent CCF-NDP MPs like Colin Cameron (Nanaimo), Bert Herridge (Kootenay-West MP), Skeena MP Frank Howard, Nanaimo MLA Dave Stupich, and Cranbrook MLA Leo Nimsick.<sup>12</sup>

Prominent trade unionists helped to found the BC Committee, and quite a number continued their support despite the phased defection of pro-Moscow and

pro-Beijing CPC adherents, and their subsequent launching of two rival "Canada-Cuba Friendship" associations or societies.

Our main union support came from the International Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphite and Paper Mill Workers, led by Prince



Rupert-based socialist, Angus MacPhee. The IBP-SPMW newspaper, co-edited by Orville Braaten and the well-known CCF left-winger Margaret Erickson, also a FPCC activist, became the FPCC's voice in the labour movement. Our at-large members in Powell River, Ocean Falls, Port Alberni, and Prince Rupert were mostly IBPSPMW local members or local CCF activists, usually both.

Our informal Abbotsford-Chilliwack group was brought together by a farmer-academic and University of BC (UBC) Professor of Slavonic Studies, Michael V. Kournosoff (MVK). This *compañero* (comrade) was an exquisitely refined intellectual whose ancestors were White Russian aristocrats who had fled the 1917 Russian October revolution via China and British-occupied Hong Kong. They ended up in Vancouver, Canada, and bought a farm in the fertile Fraser Valley just east of Abbotsford. MVK was very helpful in lending his academic credentials to the FPCC when we moved to set up a campus group at UBC. MVK also helped FPCC supporters on the Prairies to get appropriate Canadian agricultural aid and technology into Cuba.<sup>13</sup>

MVK, the intellectual doctor of Slavonic Studies, despised Stalinism. But he knew deep down that Russia's two revolutions in February and October 1917 (Orthodox calendar) had been necessary and unavoidable. The Russian Revolution was not the same thing as its bureaucratic and parasitic nemesis (the Terror in the 1930s) any more than a youth's body is identical to its cancerous degeneration two decades later in life.

Part of MVK's keen interest in Cuba's Fidelista rebellion was to explore and assess that revolution's non-Stalinist roots and outlook. Any revolution that could produce a declaration such as "Man and Socialism in Cuba"<sup>14</sup> – the electrifying letter from Major Ernesto Che Guevara to Carlos Quijano, editor of the Montevideo weekly magazine *Marcha* (the FPCC circulated it in English, French and Spanish editions) – was bound to attract people of the intellectual integrity and thorough going humanism that MVK brought to us.<sup>15</sup>

The West Coast FPCC attracted a lot of footloose artists, poets, novelists, and heretics. One eccentric who stands out in my memory as our most successful literature distributor and saleswoman is Dorothy Cameron. She was married to the Nanaimo and the Islands CCF-NDP MP and left wing leader Colin Cameron. Dorothy's day job was with the mobile van division of the Nanaimo and North Island Public Library System. Covering the whole North Island including Port Alberni, she stuffed the van with FPCC pamphlets and a selection of lending items about Cuba. No one could top her record as the top pamphlet seller for the BC FPCC.

### **FPCC's four regions**

The pan-Canadian FPCC lived and thrived in its early years in at least four distinct political-climatic regions. The distinct character of these four Canadian regions (leaving out Newfoundland and Labrador, the Maritimes, and the northern territories) is well known, but the very different traditions of its labour, farmer, religious and left movements is much less understood and often not factored into studies of organizations that self-identify as Canada-wide groups. The four regions

that witnessed FPCC activity were:

- Ontario, especially the Toronto chapter, and the FPCC central office, physically located in the Olson's Swansea residence in Toronto's west end.
- Quebec: the Montreal Committee, led by Michel Chartrand and later Bob Silverman and his wife Edith. Bob and Edith lived for several years in Cuba where I first met them. Edith later married French socialist Jean-Pierre Beauvais, moving with him from Montreal to France.
- The Prairies, with local groups in Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon, Lloydminster, and Edmonton.
- British Columbia: the Greater Vancouver group (Vancouver, the North Shore, Richmond, Burnaby, and New Westminster) was the largest FPCC chapter in Canada in terms of card-carrying members. Small groups or members-at-large existed in the provincial capital of Victoria, Nanaimo, Port Alberni, Prince Rupert, Powell River, Ocean Falls, and Abbotsford-Chilliwack (Fraser Valley), Cranbrook, the Kootenays (NDP MP and interim federal leader Herbert Herridge, et al.) and the Okanagan Valley.

The BC labour movement in the fifties and sixties was still very much influenced by the experiences of the old Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), also known as the Wobblies, the advocates of "One Big Union" for all the exploited toilers, the Western Federation of Miners, and the pre-World War I Socialist Party of BC (BCSP). The BCSP leaders were old school Marxists from the British Socialist Party tradition. The Communist Party, in its days as a genuine Marxist and working class party prior to its Stalinization and ossification under Tim Buck, greatly influenced labour unions, the broader left, the academic milieu and student activists, artists, and also some indigenous-movement activists through their strong presence in the BC Fishermen & Allied Workers Union.

### **The CCF-oriented socialist left**

This BC CCF-oriented socialist left had been hardened in the late fifties and early sixties by some important and recent ideological and political battles. The most important, which I remember well, was the intense campaign led by the BC and Alberta provincial CCF majorities to defend the socialist principles of the CCF's founding Regina Manifesto.<sup>16</sup> We tried to block adoption of the openly pro-capitalist Winnipeg Declaration by the CCF federal convention in 1956.



**Michel Chartrand**

The “Regina Manifestoists,” as we were tagged, lost the battle that year in Winnipeg, but carried the day in Alberta and BC. The Regina Manifesto left also remained strong in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. We retained the editorship of the weekly Commonwealth, official voice of the Saskatchewan CCF, which had recently fused with the CCF’s Manitoba Commonwealth, edited by labour journalist Charles Biesick.

The Commonwealth also benefited from an official endorsement from the Alberta CCF. The Commonwealth’s



John Macey

weekly mailings reached many thousands of CCF members in the three provinces because all paid-up members received a courtesy subscription.

The BC CCF left wing, together with our Prairie cousins, also

led the campaign against Canada’s membership and participation in the bellicose anti-Soviet NATO alliance. This stand demonstrated that our folks were moved and energized not just by traditional ideological principle (Regina Manifesto), but also by internationalism and by sympathies with both the Soviet and the more recent Chinese revolutions.

Of course such sympathies and moods presented themselves in every CCFer in a unique mix of proclivities, sympathies, antipathies, and phobias, along with some measure of self-censorship because of the oppressive impact of 1950s McCarthyism. North of the border, that wave of state-sponsored repression included Ottawa’s very own anti-Soviet rampage during the arrest and imprisonment of the Montreal LPP (CPC) Member of Parliament, Fred Rose. Despite our home-spawned Maple Leaf McCarthyism, opposition to NATO became official CCF policy in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

In addition, the Parti social démocratique du Québec (CCF) under its leader Thérèse Casgrain, and

later Michel Chartrand’s Parti socialiste du Québec, took anti-militarist, pro-peace and anti-NATO stands. The last CCF Federal convention in 1960 demanded Canada’s immediate withdrawal from NATO, but this position was reversed at the NDP’s Ottawa founding convention in 1961.<sup>17</sup>

The CCF left wing was not consistently ‘Marxist’ in the narrow, far-left way of pigeonholing or defining political currents; but, according to such sterile definitions, neither were the leaders of the Cuban socialist revolution of the 1960s, the Sandinista revolution of the 1980s, or the New Jewel Movement of the Caribbean island country Grenada. But many left-wingers self-identified as ‘non-Stalinist’ Marxists. As left-wing CCFers and NDPers, we wanted to keep alive militant socialist traditions as expressed in hymns and songs such as “Solidarity Forever,” “Joe Hill,” “The Red Flag,” “The Internationale,” and the CCF’s own anthem whose opening verse is:

*A call goes out to Canada  
It comes from out the soil—  
Come and join the ranks through all the land  
To fight for those who toil.  
Come on farmer, soldier, labourer  
From the mine and factory, C.C.F. to Victory.*

My intent in offering the above description of the heritage and political culture of the post-Second World War BC left is to help readers of today’s generations of activists to understand why the FPCCs in the Canadian Prairie and Pacific regions soared compared to Ontario. We “westerners” were no more able, gifted or dedicated than our compas in Toronto.

### Planting Cuban palm trees

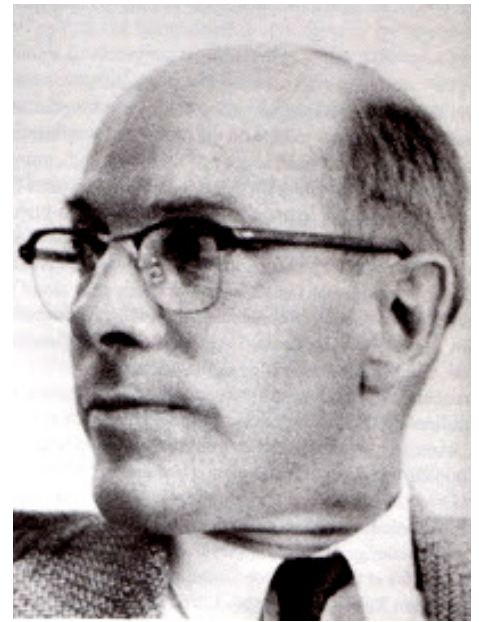
The Vancouver FPCC had very few university graduates or professionals in its membership. We had one lawyer, John Macey, two university professors (including Dorothy Steeves who received an upper-class Dutch Reformist doctoral Law Degree before emigrating to Canada in the late 1919). I would say that 95% or more of the total FPCC membership were workers with a high-school education or teachers with two or three years of post-secondary training (myself and Sharon Hagger, among a few others).

The biggest factor differentiating BC or the Prairies from Toronto/southwest Ontario was the political climate we lived and worked in; ours on the Pacific Coast



was comparatively hot. Hot enough, you might say, that Cuban palm trees flourished on our West Coast and at Vancouver's Lions Gate!

Our only handicap, I once thought, was that few of us spoke or read Spanish, Cuba's national language. I soon made a stab at coping with this problem, taking courses at UBC, and falling back when required on French, my father's family language, and very similar to Spanish in its verb conjugations and grammatical logic.



Bill Irvine, Stan Rands

## 2. The Fair Players on the Prairies

THE POLITICAL SITUATION in Saskatchewan and Manitoba was at least subtropical as far as the FPCCs experienced it. The Prairie left, which reached its maximum influence with the Saskatchewan CCF election victory in 1944, followed by its repeated re-election through the fifties into the mid-sixties, was rooted in an agrarian cooperative socialist culture and faith-motivated egalitarianism.

William Irvine and J.S. Woodsworth were members of the famous Parliamentary Ginger Group and founders of the CCF in Calgary in 1932. They both exemplified a solid Canadian Social Gospel orientation, an early western Canadian version of what decades later emerged under the banner of liberation theology in Catholic Latin America. Both Irvine and Woodsworth started out as preachers of the Word. Both denounced the evils of class exploitation and oppression, system-induced poverty, want, hunger, unemployment, and wasted lives.

Both were labour leaders. Woodsworth was a veteran leader of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike and a staunch pacifist.<sup>18</sup> As CCF Federal Caucus leader, he refused to vote in Parliament on September 9, 1939, for the Canadian government's declaration of war against Germany. His was a very controversial stand, but popular with the CCF and the social gospel left.

Toronto historian Cynthia Wright recounts that in "February 1961, Vernel [Olson] wrote to William Irvine, a central figure on the left of the CCF, about the need to defend 'the Cuban people and their right to

create a society in the image outlined in the Regina Manifesto.'<sup>19</sup> The comparison here between the Cuban revolutionary project and the CCF's 1933 anti-capitalist manifesto did elide some crucial differences between the Canadian and Cuban realities. At the same time, this was a period when the concept of state-led economic planning, albeit theorized and organized in a variety of different ways, was important across the 'three worlds.'<sup>20</sup> And clearly those on the left of the CCF did see some affinities between the Cuban project and their own political vision.

"Vernel Olson was writing to Irvine at a crucial time: leftists, trade unionists and CCFers were debating the orientation of a new party formation, then called the New Party, but what would later be the New Democratic Party," Wright tells us. "Olson was signaling here his own commitment to a party that would clearly embody socialist aspirations, and a defense of Cuba. To that end, one of his earliest projects was the attempt to organize a delegation of New Party supporters to go to Cuba."<sup>21</sup>

William (Bill) Irvine outlived J.S. by two decades. He died in 1962. I knew him as my uncle Ron's father and as a witty and very well-read radical. Uncle Ron loved to regale us at the dinner table with tales about old man Irvine – such as his statement in parliament re the formation of a new parliamentary caucus. "Mr Speaker," the Alberta MP announced, "there is a new party in this House. Mr Woodsworth is the Leader and I am the Party!" I also knew Bill Irvine as an FPCC leader in Alberta and as a prominent sponsor of the Prairie-



Margaret and Ed Mahood: Ed's 80th

Margaret and Ed Mahood, Barry Gidluck

based Canada-China Friendship Society (CCFS, not to be confused with a Vancouver group with the same name, created later by the Maoist Progressive Workers Movement in 1963-64). The Prairie-rooted CCFS tried to keep alive the Norman Bethune tradition in Canada, but was not inspired by the Maoist variant of Stalinism.

The last time I saw Bill Irvine, in the summer of 1962, he was ill and very frail. By that time, the real movers and shakers for Cuba solidarity in Edmonton were Betty and Tony Mardiros.<sup>22</sup> This couple headed up the recently launched Woodsworth-Irvine Socialist Fellowship, inheritor of the considerable assets and properties of the Alberta CCF. The old party never formally dissolved itself into the New Party (the NDP) because of ideological distrust in the CLC and the Ontario CCF-NDP leadership.

The FPCC members and supporters in Saskatchewan did not work through standing or structured committees or chapters. Rather Cuba solidarity found expression and support in the pages of the CCF-NDP's weekly paper, *The Commonwealth*. Under the editorship of Saskatchewan's Frank Hanson and Charlie Biesick, and with the encouragement of the old CCF founder Bill Irvine, the *Prairie Commonwealth* became the de facto voice of Cuba and the FPCC. Many on the BC left, including my parents, were paid subscribers. (The BC CCF had its own monthly paper, *CCF News*. It was pro-Cuba, but collapsed for lack of resources following the launching of the NDP in 1961). Frank Hanson enthusiastically promoted FPCC literature and speaking tours, and published articles about Cuba and the FPCC regularly.

The FPCC had organized members and activists



in Saskatoon, Regina and Lloydminster: folks like Stan and Doris Rands in Regina; Ed and (Dr) Margaret Mahood in Saskatoon;<sup>23</sup> and, in Lloydminster, Maria and Heidi Fischer, Vic Bystrom, and Jean Sloan.

Stan played a key role in defense of Saskatchewan's community clinics movement that managed to defeat the anti-medi-

care doctors "strike" in 1962.<sup>23</sup>

Saskatchewan was represented well in both the 1964 and 1965 student tour cohorts. One old stalwart from that time in Saskatchewan – Barry Gidluck – died in May this year from lung cancer and pneumonia. Two years ago he returned to Cuba and married a Cuban woman. Over 100 people attended a memorial meeting for him in Saskatoon. The Cuban revolution inspired Barry in his youth and transformed him into a lifelong revolutionary socialist.

Barry was not the only youth of his generation drawn to socialism and liberation struggles by the Cuban revolution.

### Echoes of Winnipeg 1919

Nena Woodworth, a CCF candidate in the Winnipeg Fort Garry riding in the 1959 Manitoba election, was the secretary and main charge hand of the Winnipeg FPCC. She visited Cuba in July 1963 as part of the FPCC delegation to the annual July 26 Anniversary celebrations. John Riddell (Toronto FPCC) and I were also part of that delegation.<sup>24</sup>

The three of us met for the first time on that trip.<sup>25</sup> Nena told us of her Winnipeg FPCC group's work. Other prom-



John Riddell



inent NDP leaders were involved, notably Howard Pawley, elected Provincial CCF President in 1957. He became Provincial NDP Premier in 1981 and served through 1988.

Pawley, as Ernie Tate mentions in his memoir, interceded in the split of the Toronto FPCC in 1961 by sending a message of solidarity and encouragement to Verne Olson, who had successfully led a defence of the Committee against an RCMP-inspired public campaign to red-bait and smear him and other FPCC executive members in Toronto. “Don’t become discouraged,” Pawley wrote. “We are with you in Winnipeg.” Kenneth McNaught, a University of Toronto professor and historian, led that reactionary operation but he failed in his attempt to convince a majority of Toronto FPCC members to vote for a proposal to dissolve their committee.

One of Manitoba’s most enthusiastic Cuba and FPCC solidarity activists was Charles Biesick.<sup>26</sup> The FPCC pamphlet *Four Canadians Who Saw Cuba* describes Biesick’s activity: “His last Cuban trip was in the summer of 1962. He has for some time been a close student of developments both there and Latin America and has spoken on the subject many times to Winnipeg-area audiences besides writing at length in his regular column in the *Prairie New Democrat Commonwealth*, of which he is a co-editor. He was editor, prior to its fusion with the *Saskatchewan Commonwealth*, of the *Manitoba CCF Commonwealth*, and has been long active in railway workers’ union circles.”<sup>27</sup>

After spending three weeks with Nena in Cuba, it became clear to me that the work in Manitoba, while similar to that in the rest of the Prairies, was perhaps having a greater impact because of the city’s radical labour and socialist traditions, going back to the 1919 General Strike and the J.S. Woodsworth tradition. Winnipeg took the prize for having the largest meeting for Verne Olson’s 1961 western Canada speaking tour – over 400 people. Charlie Biesick and his regular *Commonwealth* column had a lot to do with that.

Younger readers will appreciate that, judged from the criterion of communications and transport technology, 1960s Canada was closer to the age of the settler pioneers than to the internet, jet-travel age. For working people, most cross-country trips were still by car and train and took several days; a long-distance call was a rare luxury. For small and new organizations or even unions to effectively coordinate across

the whole country was a severe challenge and took lots of time and cash.

One of the key elements in the successful work of the FPCC in both Winnipeg and Vancouver was the direct personal participation of local union leaders from a variety of unions. Perhaps more decisive, although impossible to measure in retrospect, was the impact of labour militancy and raw class-struggle traditions on the political culture of all left wing, anti-capitalist, or progressive initiatives, movements, and artistic or intellectual expression.

The broad cultural ambience of labour solidarity (“an injury to one is an injury to all”) still prevailed in BC and Manitoba in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The labour movement had survived the 1950s McCarthyist onslaught and retained its character as a class-based social movement – a human endeavour that rose above and beyond a mere machinery for collective bargaining with the employers, local by local, trade by trade.

BC union locals entered teams into community, municipal and province-wide sports leagues, tournaments and competitions. They had choirs and musical groups. The set aside funds to award scholarships to the children of their members to take on post-secondary studies or to advance in musical pursuits or in sports. Unions sponsored Credit Unions, funds to help members buy houses for their families, housing projects for elderly members, and extended grants to special initiatives such as peace conferences, Native rights advocacy, industrial health and safety advocacy, and much more. Most locals had meeting halls or shared them with other unions; these became organizing centres for initiatives of every kind to defend social and political rights for oppressed sectors.

Today, the unions are not the mainspring of broader social movements, as they were in my youth; for the most part labour unions are bargaining units only remotely concerned with social or political issues that don’t seem to impinge on their wage levels or working conditions.

### **Unions as allies of social movements**

The left in BC, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta was lifted up by the force of workers’ unions and farmers’ organizations acting as social movements or allies of more diverse social activism. One of the sharpest and highest expressions of this class-struggle political culture was the popular resistance in Saskatchewan

and across the West to the reactionary doctors' strike in July 1962 against the CCF government's Medicare law.<sup>28</sup> I remember that struggle now more vividly than many events in BC that I was directly involved in. Any socialist worker not born the day before knew that if our side lost in Saskatchewan, the fallout would contaminate our local struggles up and down BC. If the doctors' association in Saskatchewan had not capitulated when they did, I think brigades would have been organized by the BC CCF to despatch friendly medical personnel and backup workers from the West Coast to Saskatchewan. I don't doubt that Winnipeg labour and CCF militants would have done the same, recalling the traditions laid down by their great 1919 General Strike.

It galls me today to read articles about how the then Saskatchewan CCF leader and Premier T.C. Douglas "fathered" Medicare in Canada. Premier Douglas would never have accepted such a mystification. He knew well that if a father was involved so was a mother.

Who is she? Her name is class struggle, tens of thousands of people in communities, farmers' organizations, unions, and medical workers and their families across the province, the Prairies, and the West Coast who mobilized for victory. The Community Clinics movement proved decisive in winning support from health professionals across Canada and from Britain and other countries, and in preventing the anti-social leaders of the doctors' association from depriving the people of adequate, if minimal, medical care.<sup>29</sup>

An understanding of prevailing left and working class political culture is vital in any attempt to look back for an understanding of why Cuba solidarity became more deeply rooted in one region than another.

Let me just cite an instructive but hardly unique experience. An FPCC member returns from Havana to Regina in September 1962 and reports that Cuba had reacted to the defection of 85% of its doctors to Miami by launching a massive national emergency program of doctor training, hospital and clinic construction, and universal, free healthcare for everyone resident in the country.

That's what the Cubans did! Does anyone doubt that our returning FPCCer struck a magic chord in meetings all over Saskatchewan? More than a few FPCC supporters went down and returned, and delivered similar reports. People who had just defeated the reactionary medical establishment had a natural affinity for what



**FPCC member Johnny Welesley stakes out space in Vancouver's east end Trout Lake Park on July 26, 1964.**

the Cubans were fighting for; they empathized with Cuba and their solidarity was up front.

### 3. From the Missile Crisis to the Kennedy Assassination

THE VANCOUVER FPCC benefited from not just strong support from the old-guard union and CCF left, but also the invigorating presence of a couple of dozen very young workers and students, most of whom were active in the NDP's youth movement – the NDY. I was its provincial secretary from its founding in 1961 to 1963. These young activists made it possible for the FPCC to mount a spirited series of protest actions against U.S. President John F. Kennedy's threat to launch a nuclear war over the discovery of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba in October 1962.

Known as the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, this showdown between Moscow and Washington took the planet to the very brink of nuclear war, a near-catastrophe that could have wiped out human civilization. Historians have correctly deemed it to be the most threatening military standoff of the 20th Century. After the U.S. quarantined Cuba, the approaching Soviet fleet stopped off the Florida coast and waited for orders. The Soviet government chose to avoid all-out war and, without consulting with Cuba, agreed to withdraw their missiles. A secret clause in the subsequent



**Vancouver FPCC picnic: (from left) Felipe Stuart Courneyeur, Secretary, West Coast-B.C. FPCC; Camille Williams; Ron Williams; First Secretary, Cuban Embassy, Ottawa; unidentified (in background); Johnny Welesley.**

accord between the two powers registered Kennedy's agreement to withdraw U.S. nuclear missiles from Turkey. Kennedy insisted on secrecy about that because to make it public would reveal the total hypocrisy of the U.S. stand.

The Vancouver FPCC acted immediately with a bold campaign with red-inked silkscreened placards and posters proclaiming Stop the War Against Cuba! Crews were despatched in a guerrilla-style operation with posters, glue pots, and staple guns to all corners of the Greater Vancouver area, reaching as far east as Chilliwack and Mission. We were blessed by the fact that most power lines were still above ground, held aloft by wooden telephone poles that took well to either glue or staples. The crew worked round the clock churning out placards and then spreading out in members' cars and pickups to mount them throughout the Lower Mainland. It was a military-style operation. We were motivated by the fear that Kennedy would invade Cuba and very likely provoke a global war with the Soviet Union.

The strong adrenalin flow made it possible for us younger members to go without sleep and with little food for 48 hours or more. The City authorities and police were astonished by our blitz, probably concluding

that we had mobilized hundreds of people in Vancouver and up the Fraser Valley. To this day I consider the FPCCs' rapid and bold reaction to the crisis in cities across Canada to be perhaps its noblest campaign. It proved our mettle.

### **Blaming Cuba and FPCC for U.S. president's assassination**

Another severe test for the FPCCs wherever we worked in Canada was the November 22, 1963, assassination of U.S. President John F. Kennedy. The FBI tried to implicate, at least in the public mind, Cuba, and the FPCC network in North America with the assassination. This saga is told by Bill Simpich in his July 2009 Counterpunch article "How American Antiwar and Solidarity Movements in Sixties Impeded an Effective Invasion of Cuba: Fair Play for Cuba and the Cuban Revolution."<sup>30</sup>

The capitalist media made a lot of noise about Lee Harvey Oswald, the alleged "loner" assassin, having a U.S. FPCC membership card in his possession. A whole Cuba-baiting industry was sponsored by the CIA to exploit this theme. Their Canadian cousins in the RCMP and the media followed suit. Tremendous pressure came down on local FPCC members and leaders to run for cover.

In Vancouver, we had a banquet scheduled in late November. Cedric, feeling the heat and recently defeated in his bid for re-election to the provincial legislature, insisted the banquet be put off to the New Year. I argued not to postpone, but in the end ceded to Cedric's wishes. In retrospect, I think Cedric was right. Had we proceeded we would have offered up our leading members and perhaps many others to any kind of assault or bombing either by deranged right-wing elements or the secret police itself.

In the days and weeks that followed the RCMP stepped up its harassment, especially against the Olsens in Toronto and Cedric Cox in Burnaby (Vancouver). His home phone never stopped ringing until he disconnected the line. We had no doubt that most of the threatening calls originated with the RCMP. At the time, not a few "calmer voices" told us we were paranoid, but in 1977 the RCMP's role in bomb planting and promoting very dangerous terrorist actions in Quebec (of course, in the name of the FLQ [Front de Libération de Québec]) was exposed by the McDonald Commission.<sup>31</sup>



As for the propaganda and educational work of our elders, I offer links to two speeches by two BC FPCC leaders. First, a talk by our FPCC Chairman and Burnaby MLA Cedric Cox, given to a joint meeting, which I helped organize, of the Burnaby CCF and the Oil, Atomic, and Chemical Workers Union in 1963.<sup>32</sup> It was Cedric's first public report, just days after his return from his January 1-18 trip to Cuba. It bristles with class consciousness and a worker's pride in the achievements of his Cuban sisters and brothers.

Second, a speech by Dorothy Steeves who represented the Vancouver FPCC Chapter at the 1964 May Day celebrations in Cuba.<sup>33</sup>

### **FPCC and the Marxist Left**

What was the Canadian Fair Play for Cuba Committee like in Toronto, its federal centre? Is it true that it did not involve forces much broader than the LSA community of members, supporters and friends, as claimed at the time by hostile commentators influenced by the Canadian CP leadership?

The Toronto local FPCC Chapter was very active and provided the volunteers who made possible the Canadian FPCC's extensive translation and publications program. It enjoyed support from many well-known academics, writers and poets, labour unionists and CCF-NDP members most of whom were not associated with the SEL-LSA even in a peripheral sense.

There are at least three obvious reasons why the FPCC cannot be viewed as a SEL-LSA front. First, and most importantly, the SEL-LSA leaders and members participating in the founding and building of the FPCC did not want it to be or ever become a front for their organization. They worked hard and at some sacrifice to assure that the FPCC was broadly based and supported.

Second, the non-LSA leaders of the FPCC – especially in BC, the Prairies, and Quebec – would have renounced the organization at the first inkling they were being used to support political ends they did not share. Almost all of those personalities were battle-scarred veterans of the CCF, farmers' organizations and the labour movement. There was scant chance they would agree to be led about by a small, largely Toronto-based Fourth International group. That never happened.

Third, the Cuban revolutionaries assigned to their Canada Desk, including Ambassador Américo Cruz, would never have offered such solid and persistent sup-

port to the FPCC if evidence could have been given to them that the FPCC was a vehicle steered by the LSA. Some pro-Moscow Communist Party members tried their utmost to convince the Cubans to dump the FPCC based on that calumny. The RCMP also did their best, operating through agents and provocateurs, to paint that picture, along with their even more absurd claim that the FPCC was led by paid agents of Havana!

The RCMP slanders were not as incoherent as they may now appear. They found a powerful echo in the right-wing leadership of the BC NDP during the 1962-1963 witch hunt purge of alleged Trotskyists from the New Democratic Youth (NDY) and the Party. I was at the time the NDY Provincial Secretary and a member of the Provincial NDP Executive representing the party's youth; I was also one of the dozen or so slated for expulsion from the NDP-NDY. A formal trial body was established with a designated prosecutor. John Macey, a very prominent 36-year old Vancouver lawyer and NDP and FPCC activist acted for the defence.<sup>34</sup> The prosecutor was Alexander Barrett Macdonald, a former Vancouver Kingsway NDP MP who became BC Attorney General in the Barrett NDP government in 1972.

Macdonald tried to characterize Trotskyism to the trial body by explaining that, in his view, there were three main international left currents – first, the Social Democracy as exemplified by the NDP, the British Labour Party, and the Swedish Social Democrats, all part of the Socialist International; second, the world Communist or Stalinist movement as found in the USSR and China; and third, the international Trotskyist movement, best known through leaders like Che Guevara and Fidel Castro! We were stunned by his argument. I immediately suspected RCMP sticky finger prints on Macdonald's trial notes, given that LSA federal leader Ross Dowson had recently made a similar analogy in a speech to explain the LSA's program.

Dowson argued that the sweeping anti-capitalist measures of the Cuban revolution and its motor of mass participatory democracy were what the LSA proposed Canadian workers should emulate – create a revolutionary government based on mobilized workers, farmers and youth, and begin to undertake measures to wrest control of our country and economy from the bankers and big corporations. Dowson never went as far as Macdonald to claim, absurdly, that the Cuban leaders were Fourth Internationalists. But the similar-

ity and coincidence of the two sets of arguments was intriguing.

That session of the NDP-NDY expulsion trial was held in June 1963, and was widely covered by the news media. John Macey, our lawyer, stunned Macdonald and the judges by moving for a trial recess until September because I had been invited by the Cuban government to represent the Vancouver FPCC at the July 26 Havana celebrations of the Fidelista armed assault of the Moncada Army barracks in Santiago, Cuba, on July 26, 1953. I couldn't help laughing contemptuously as Macdonald tilted towards the judges, blurting out: "I rest my case!"

In the end the accused were all expelled from the NDY and the NDP, including a few older members who were not in the NDY. However, the NDP had to override its own Constitution when ratifying the expulsion of Ruth Bullock and myself. More than a third of the convention delegates opposed our expulsions; according to the NDP constitution a two-thirds plus one majority was required to uphold an expulsion. Hence, we should have been reinstated, but instead were shown the door after addressing the convention. "So much for their democracy and ours," Ruth proclaimed to some supporters as we left the stage and shook hands with some of the left wing delegates who had voted against the expulsions.



Robert Prittie

### **The broader context of NDP expulsions**

The witch hunt against Marxists activists and Cuba supporters in the NDP and its youth organization was part of a broader right wing offensive against Marxists in the organized labour movement in BC.

Despite the witch-hunt atmosphere in the NDP, Robert Prittie, NDP candidate for Burnaby Richmond in the June 1962 federal election, hired me to manage his riding offices in Richmond and south Burnaby during the campaign. We won the election with a comfortable margin, as we also did again in the April 1963 federal election when I was again on staff in the same

role. Both campaign store front offices displayed a variety of FPCC pamphlets, particularly Jack Scott Takes a Second Look at Cuba.

Prittie won a third time in the November 1965 federal campaign but was defeated in the Trudeau-Liberal sweep in the June 1968 election. In 1969 Burnaby electors chose him as mayor of their municipality.

The NDP right wing's witch hunt for reds and Canadian "Fidelistas" had not yet measurably curtailed the FPCC's influence in the NDP and the BC labour movement. Their slanders and police dirty tricks never came near to overwhelming us; they only hardened our resolve.

By the time the purge of Marxists in the BC NDP was ratified in 1964, the right wing leadership of the BCFL had initiated a campaign to oust Marxist union leaders, especially in the pulp, sulphite and paper sector where their sights were trained on two of the pro-Cuba unionists we met earlier in this Memoir – Angus MacPhee and Orville Braaten.

They were leading the local-based struggle for rank-and-file union democracy in their international union. The story of this struggle is told in two books that also reference the broader assault then taking place against the labour left.<sup>35</sup>

The NDP's anti-Marxist leadership did manage, unfortunately, to score one terrible blow against the left and the FPCC when, in the 1963 provincial election, they finally managed to take down Cedric Cox through his defeat in the Burnaby riding. I cannot speak more highly and with greater respect for Cedric Cox. He was a salt-of-the-earth working class hero and compañero. Of all the FPCC leaders Cedric gave up the most for our cause.

The right wing Provincial NDP leadership set out to destroy him politically at all costs after he defied them and travelled to Cuba against the explicit ban the provincial leader tried to impose. They claimed that Fidel Castro himself had paid for Cedric's January 1963 trip. When the 1963 provincial elections were called they first tried to take the nomination away from him in the two-seat Burnaby riding. They ran former CCF MLA Camille Mather, the wife of Barry Mather, a prominent Vancouver Sun columnist and NDP MP for New Westminster, against Cedric in the nominating convention.

The vote was very close, but Cedric won the nomination, along with the other CCF-NDP Burnaby MLA,

Gordon Dowding. But the slander campaign by the right wing had done its damage and continued right through to the polling day. Cedric lost his seat in a close vote, while Dowding was re-elected. Such was the hatred of the right that they preferred that the party lose a seat to Cedric returning to the BC legislature. Cedric also lost his MLA pension rights since he had not yet completed the minimum period for that, having served only a little more than four years and having been re-elected only once.

## 4. The Olsons and the FPCCs' Central Leadership

WAS THE PAN-CANADIAN central FPCC office in Toronto able to genuinely represent regional committees –including the Montreal Committee – comprised of French speaking Quebecois and also Anglophones, but whose working language was French?

A big constraint on the FPCC both centrally and locally was a scarcity of financial resources. The yearly membership fee (\$2.00) was set low to make it easier for students and people on fixed incomes to participate. We had to make the publications program and speaking tours self-financing. Volunteers did all the translation, editing, and organizational work. We had no paid staff. Nor did we receive any Havana gold as the police dirty tricksters claimed.

But from time to time real emergencies would arise such as Verne Olson having to make a sudden trip to Havana, or to meet printers bills before income from pamphlet and book sales would build up to pay off the invoices. Across the country there were a few guardian angels who would respond to urgent appeals for urgent “loans” whose repayment might be a long time coming. Three such generous and selfless individuals come to mind: George Faulkner, an itinerant retired Alberta farmer, Bertha Modlich in Toronto, and Dick Prinsep in Vancouver. Bertha died recently at the tremendous age of 100 in Toronto, alert, curious and active until the end.<sup>36</sup> Her son, Hans, replaced Verne Olson as the pan Canadian Chairperson when he resigned his leadership tasks in late 1965. Dick died in the 1990s in Vancouver.

In his already cited Memoir, Ernie Tate described George's direct, personal contributions and aid to Cuban farmers and agronomists resulting from a visit to Cuba in the early sixties when he was nearly ninety years of age.<sup>37</sup>

George was a revolutionary Marxist from his days in the Western Federation of Miners in 1899 and the Socialist Party in 1900 (a year before my father was born!). George sided with Maurice Spector and Jack MacDonald in the split in the core leadership of the Canadian CP that gave rise to the building of a movement in Canada in support of Trotsky's opposition to the consolidation of the Stalinist terror regime in the USSR.

No organization like the FPCC can survive without at least a few such modest protectors and providers. I know there were others, but not their names. Hence in honouring Bertha, Dick, and George I wish also to express the FPCC's and my admiration and respect for quite a few others who very likely also made and later forgave us loans. No organization dedicated to solidarity with a socialist revolution in a strong but tiny country can accomplish its mission unless it can count on an unstinting parallel solidarity of at least a few individuals and organizations prepared to help out financially.

The pan-Canadian FPCC leadership coordination utilized informal structures. Leaders were not elected in any cross-Canada poll or convention. We had a National Chairman (Verne Olson), and a central office and secretariat, led by Anne Olson, with assistance during 1961 from Carson Shugalo.<sup>38</sup> The revolutionary couple did phenomenal work together. Verne was really our ambassador to Cuba on top of all his and Anne's other tasks. Almost all the FPCC literature was translated, edited and published in Toronto under their oversight.

But Verne was neither elected nor officially appointed to this role. He just jumped in and created it. He did it. I think everyone accepted this because the Cubans did, and no one else was willing to make the sacrifices the Olson family endured.

That was well and good for a time; but as the FPCC took root and grew in other regions, especially in BC, the Prairies, and Quebec, the question of who spoke for the pan-Canadian FPCCs arose objectively in two spheres: (1) FPCC policy regarding Canada-Cuba relations and Canadian government decisions re Cuba; and (2) FPCC-Cuba relations.

As long as the “national” FPCC policies and responses to Ottawa's policies or FPCC-Cuba relations remained uncontroversial and in the realm of “that's just how we would have reacted” or “exactly the same



policy as we advocate,” no tensions arose.

This happy concord held, for the most part, until a conflict arose in 1965 between the central FPCC leaders and the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP) over the cancellation of the FPCC-sponsored and organized student tour to Cuba that summer. The Canadian FPCC public criticism of ICAP leaders set back the FPCCs solidarity work immeasurably.



Ernesto Che Guevara and Fidel Castro

### **Cancellation of summer 1965 FPCC student tour to Cuba**

This crisis was not simply one of discord between Havana and Toronto, or the Ottawa Embassy and the Olson FPCC central leadership team. It created stresses and tension within the cross-Canada FPCCs. Verne Olson and Andre Bekerman (another leading FPCC activist who had played a key role in organizing our student tours to Cuba) circulated a public letter protesting the Cuban government decision to cancel the trip.<sup>39</sup> The letter complained that the decision responded to pressure from “sectarian” elements in Cuba’s ICAP. But it offered no evidence of such sectarian pressures within ICAP, making it rather easy for the Cuban Institute to reply with confidence in their position. Ernie Tate, in his already cited memoir, has written an extensive description of this FPCC-ICAP spat mainly from the point of view of the LSA central leadership in Toronto. But he also explains that in retrospect he has come to question the wisdom of the Committee choosing to make its dispute with Cuba’s ICAP public.<sup>40</sup>

There was a much bigger problem with the letter, in my opinion. It was presumed, both in Cuba and in Canada, to speak for the FPCCs as a whole. But few, if any, FPCC leaders outside Toronto were consulted before the letter was sent to Cuba and made public.

The Vancouver FPCC leaders were not consulted directly. I cannot now recall how we came to receive and read the public protest letter. The Toronto FPCC leadership sought to get local leaders (and, even more questionably, local student tour members who knew zero about the details involved on either side of the dispute) to sign a second “broader” protest letter.<sup>41</sup> The

Vancouver FPCC leaders, including Cedric Cox, Hugh Clifford, Dorothy Steeves, Ruth Bullock and I, disagreed with both letters. We were not convinced about the allegations in the first letter as to why the trip was cancelled. We simply did not know; but we had enormous respect for the Cubans so were inclined to give them what we always give real friends – the benefit of the doubt! But above all, we did not agree with making a public attack on the Cuban ICAP, which for most people also targeted Fidel and the revolutionary government, not just some ICAP functionaries. The point became obvious when the second letter was directed at none other than the leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro!

Cedric was both bewildered and furious. He nearly left the FPCC over this fiasco.

I later learned that the reactions of FPCC members in Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina and Winnipeg had been not much different from ours in BC.

In July of 1967 I visited Toronto on my way to work at the FPCC booth at the Expo 67 World Fair in Montreal. I stayed a couple of nights with Verne and Anne at their Swansea home. Verne told me then that he believed the letter had been a serious misstep and that the decision to cancel the tour had been either made at the highest level in Cuba or endorsed at that level. He also told me that when he issued the open letter he had misgivings but felt under pressure from Ross Dowson and other LSA leaders involved with the FPCC.

I did not and still do not really know how this fiasco happened and how much might have to do with communication problems between the ICAP and the Toronto FPCC. Did it really reflect a faction fight in

the Cuban leadership? Or did it stem from a lack of trust or confidence, or simply lack of continuity on the Cuban side whose personnel were constantly being shuffled from post to post? Or did it perhaps flow from Cuba's need to avoid destabilizing its relationship with the Soviet government, which might have taken strong offense at Cuba's dealings with a group that some considered to be influenced by Trotskyism?

### **Lack of workable structure**

The big lesson for me was that the FPCC lacked a workable structure for making national decisions. Given the huge geographic territory we covered and the punishing expense of travel and telephone communication, I don't think erecting a democratic national structure was either possible or advisable. That being the case, Verne Olson should never have presumed to speak for more than some FPCC leaders in Toronto unless the FPCC could afford to invest time and resources into a consultation process with our regional leaderships. Verne did some of this work informally when he toured the country, but that was not often. Verne, for all his strengths, could not be a super leader-substitute for a democratic consultation process.

In the 1980s I became a central leader and Chair of Canadian Action for Nicaragua – CAN – a Toronto–southern Ontario-based organization. I was highly sensitive to the problem of relations with Nicaragua support groups in Quebec and in other English Canadian cities. Our name was intended to signal our key political aim (to pressure Ottawa to aid Nicaragua), not to pretend we represented all solidarity voices in Canada. But it still rankled with other groups especially on the Prairies and in BC. When Tools for Peace was formed, we in CAN swung behind it and helped to build it in Toronto and southern Ontario.

If any group could credibly claim to speak with an all-Canadian voice it was Tools for Peace, and definitely not CAN. The latter organized Nicaragua solidarity activists who wanted to make their priority providing a political platform in Canada to the FSLN. We never pretended to speak for the whole array of pan-Canadian solidarity, even of those who self-identified as FSLN supporters. I learned why not to do that from the fiasco of the FPCC tour cancellation some fifteen or more years earlier.

I believe that the public squabble over the tour cancellation and the tensions it created in the FPCCs across

the country brought unbearable stress and psychological strain to Verne and Anne Olson. Following the tour cancellation, Verne became more and more distraught over what he perceived to be deepening bureaucratic distortions and a narrowing of democratic political space within the Cuban revolution. This, he feared, was most likely an unavoidable product of Cuban reliance on Soviet aid and Kremlin pressure on the Fidelistas to conform to Soviet ideology and policies.<sup>42</sup>

Ernie Tate reports in Volume 1 of his Memoir that Verne resigned from both the FPCC and the LSA because of differences over these questions.<sup>43</sup> But he leaves readers unaware that Verne and Anne Olson remained FPCC supporters, and in the seventies both Verne and Anne were active members of the Toronto LSA branch. I know this because I was the Toronto branch organizer in 1974-75. During most of those years, Anne organized the mailings of the LSA-supported Labour Challenge newspaper, a big job indeed.

I will make only one other point about the Vancouver FPCC relations with Cuba before and after the student tour fiasco. The BC FPCC had its own relations with the Embassy in Ottawa and Ambassador Américo Cruz. I was very close to him. On his visit to Vancouver after the near break in relations between the Toronto FPCC centre and the Embassy, Cruz had a private face-to-face meeting with Cedric Cox. He told Cedric that his instructions from Havana were to prepare for a break with the Toronto FPCC but to try not to lose relations with FPCC leaders in other areas. Cedric did not inform me about Cruz's remarks until six or eight weeks later. He took time, alone it seems, to weigh his options. In the end he chose to stay with the FPCC. Américo, I later realized, had underestimated Cedric's basic sense of loyalty to his co-workers in the BC FPCC. Cedric was an old-guard union man and he had principles, socialist ethics. He lived the meaning of comradeship and trust.

I was also puzzled by Américo's conduct because he acted in this situation as a diplomat, not the *compañero* and friend I had come to know and trust. On that very same trip to Vancouver he brought me a precious gift that has accompanied me now for nearly five decades – an official issue Cuban flag that hangs this very moment as I write these lines on the wall of my study in Managua. Later it occurred to me that this was his last farewell to me on a personal level. Whenever passing through Ottawa I had always billeted at his home. That



**Cuban pavilion at Expo 67, the World's Fair in Montreal.**

relationship continued later with other embassy staff after Américo left Canada, but the kind of deep relationship he and I had never gelled with other Cuban diplomats in Canada.

Despite the political price paid by the FPCC (and the LSA) for the open letters fiasco, no local leaders of the FPCC Committees in the west of the country left the Fair Play movement and none even made public their disagreements on this issue.

In 1966, Dr. Américo Cruz returned to Cuba and soon after that retired. As noted earlier Verne had resigned from the FPCC leadership. There were changes in personnel as well in the ICAP, and for a year or so our relations with the Ottawa Cuban Embassy were handled by younger and newer diplomats, usually the First Secretary. Relations with the Toronto FPCC leaders improved slowly but also very surely.

### **FPCCs at the 1967 World Fair**

In 1967, the Cuban government authorized the Fair Play for Cuba Committees to place a booth close by the Cuban Pavilion at the International and Universal Exposition (EXPO 67) in Montreal which ran from April 27 to October 29. Creating and staffing the display booth became a major challenge for the FPCC. Members and supporters from across the country pitched in and enthusiasm was high. I was teaching elementary school at the time but as soon as the summer break began at the end of June I headed to Montreal, stopping off first in Toronto and then at the Ottawa, Embassy.

The Cuban Pavilion was very popular with the

Québécois, especially the Cuban restaurant and Cuba's delicious, high-quality ice cream that came in many flavours served in attractive plastic cups. The FPCC booth often ran out of English and French pamphlets and literature, but we always had Cuban pamphlets and periodicals.

Not all was easy going, however. In the 1966 and 1967 there was a marked rise in the number of terrorist threats and bombings of Cuban diplomatic and trade offices in Canada.

A bazooka attack on the Embassy in Ottawa in September 1966 announced this escalation. In May a small bomb exploded at the EXPO 67 Cuba Pavilion and in October a bomb exploded at the Montreal

Cuban Trade Mission Office. Between September 1966 and January 14, 1980, there were ten violent attacks involving bombs or bazookas; the January 14, 1980, event was a large explosion that significantly damaged the Consulate in Montreal.<sup>44</sup>

The FPCC across Canada, and especially in Montreal, had to give priority to campaigning politically against this anti-Cuba terrorism. Our connections to NDP MPs and to Quebecois sovereigntist leaders helped give us leverage, especially when we felt added pressure had to be placed on Ottawa to put the anti-Cuba terrorists out of action. We acted not only from a sense of deep solidarity with our Cuban compañeros and compañeras, but in our own defence. The bomb that was set off at the EXPO 67 Cuban Pavilion could just as easily have been placed in the FPCC booth. We also could not exclude police collusion with the bombers, so the whole problem loomed large on our agenda.

I made several visits to the Embassy that summer and became friends with the then First Secretary, who was also temporarily wearing the Ambassador's hat. He was young and new to the work, and deep down a poet and artist, not a diplomat. He painted and had filled his home with brilliantly coloured scenes and portraits. We spoke a lot about the FPCC's work and, of course, the terrorist threats.

The following year I stayed with him and his wife again when visiting the Embassy. He was preparing their return to Havana and re-assignment. He had asked to be sent to Prague. The Prague Spring was peaking



and he believed the Czechoslovak people were grappling with problems facing other Eastern European countries and also Cuba. He thought that their recent experiences offered some important lessons for socialists. After his return to Cuba we lost contact. I don't know if he ever got to Prague.

### **A new phase for Fair Play**

The Toronto FPCC took a while to reorganize and find people to fill Verne and Anne's shoes, basically an impossible task. But the publications program continued and the local committee succeeded in maintaining a broad support base. One example of that, which Tate describes, was the January 1969 Toronto FPCC banquet in honour of the Tenth Anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. "Hans Modlich chaired and [it] was attended by some 150 people; the Cuban Consul Humberto Castenado and his wife formally greeted the guests on their arrival.



**Hans Modlich**

"The Master of Ceremonies was no less than Gerry Caplan, a leader of the NDP, and Verne [Olson] read greetings to the meeting from Stephen Lewis, then NDP MPP for Scarborough West... The Committee, right into 1970, continued with its successful banquets which the Ambassador would personally attend and speak at or else send messages of support."<sup>45</sup>

There was, however, a slow decline in FPCC activity from 1968 onward. It had to do with broad international factors. One was the October 9, 1967, assassination of Che Guevara in Bolivia. Most of the youth attracted to Cuba saw in Che everything that was pure and beautiful about the Cuban and Latin American revolutions. His physical elimination numbed even the bravest souls, and left people confused about where our priorities should go.

The Cubans (and Che, alive and in death) helped to clarify that. By 1968 it became clear that the front-line of world resistance to imperialism was in Asia, not Latin America.

In Vietnam, to be exact.

In my discussions at the Cuban embassy, the 'com-pas' stressed the importance of solidarity with the Vietnamese. Che's last appeal was to create "Two, three, many Vietnams."

Fidel and other Cuban leaders began to stress the Vietnamese struggle and thereby orient Cuba's international supporters to swing in behind efforts to oppose French and U.S.-American imperialist aggression against Vietnamese self-determination. Che and Fidel had publically reprimanded the Soviet and Chinese leaderships for failing to lay aside their differences and unite to maximize aid to Vietnam and inspire even broader unity in a global anti-imperialist and anti-war movement.

By 1968, following a period of mourning for Che, most FPCC activists and supporters had refocused their concerns to building a movement to end the Vietnam War and to allow the Vietnamese people a chance to know independence, self-government, and peace.

At this time, Cedric Cox had to withdraw from FPCC in Vancouver. Following the death of his wife (Eileen Winch-Cox), Cedric retired and moved to Salmon Arm, in the BC interior and closer to where he had spent his youth in Rossland.

I moved in 1969 to Montreal after a stint as Vancouver LSA organizer. But the Vancouver FPCC, under the enthusiastic leadership of Brian and Isolde Belfont and some UBC students soldiered on into the early 70s, when the Committee ceased to meet.

The work of the cross-Canada Fair Play for Cuba Committees had an impact not just in the workers' movement, among students and academics, and the left. It was a factor in popular sentiment influencing the policies of the Canadian federal government towards Cuba. Ottawa did not bow down to Washington's pressure to cut diplomatic ties or to make trade relations with the Island more difficult. This made-in-Canada policy towards Cuba showed, of course, that sectors of Canada's business classes had economic interests that conflicted with U.S. interests and policy. However, the extensive propaganda and educational work by the FPCC and the broader left helped to create a climate of political openness towards Cuba. This factor grew over time and helps explain how Canada became Cuba's major source of tourists. Last year (2013) over a million Canadians visited Cuba. Many tourists return two and three times or more.

Canada's different attitude towards relations with

Havana was echoed in the approach Ottawa took to the Vietnam War. While Canadian complicity with the imperialist war against Vietnam was evident, Ottawa avoided joining any “coalition of the willing” as an outright military ally of Washington. In June 1968 Pierre Elliot Trudeau won a landslide victory for the Liberal Party to become Prime Minister. His government encouraged trade and commerce with Cuba, especially the export of agricultural produce and technology. In the process he and Margaret Trudeau and Fidel Castro became friends.

### **Fidel Castro at Trudeau’s funeral**

The Trudeau family asked Fidel Castro to attend their father’s funeral in September 2000. Following his return to Cuba after the funeral, Castro gave an interview to CBC TV reporter

Paule Robitaille in which he praised Canada’s independent policy towards Cuba. “We cannot forget and will never forget,” he said, “that in



**Fidel Castro and Pierre Elliott Trudeau**

the most difficult years of the economic blockade, and when almost all countries and all states, not the people, but all the governments joined the blockade and the isolation of our country, only two countries maintained relations with us. Those two countries were Canada and Mexico.”<sup>46</sup>

## **5. Cuba solidarity work: then and now**

THE FPCCS WERE organized on the basis of individual memberships. They did not have formal participation of representatives of political groups, unions, church groups or student organizations. I think that was just an accident of history, because in Toronto and Vancouver we copied the model adopted by the USA FPCC. We might have had more success if we had adopted a flexible structure that encouraged union, party, and student group affiliation.

In 1979 I participated in the founding of the To-

ronto-based Canadian Action for Nicaragua coalition. When we launched we had over 80 affiliated organizations including the Ontario NDP, the Metro Toronto YMCA, and several unions. Canadian and especially Quebecois unions strongly identified with the Sandinista cause in Nicaragua, unlike the CLC’s hostility to socialist Cuba. As well there were other solidarity organizations (with El Salvador, Chile, etc.) and also left political parties including the Communist Party of Canada (pro-Moscow) and the Revolutionary Workers League (Fourth International). With hindsight I think the CAN model is more appropriate for solidarity work with national liberation struggles because it recognizes the reality of the participation of different political currents in the work, one that often reflects those currents’ participation in the liberation struggles that need our solidarity. It is a more transparent model. As well, it offers unions and other weighty organizations a representative structure through which to express their views and influence solidarity work in policy terms.

### **Platforms for Cubans to speak for themselves**

The main task assumed by the FPCCs was to create a platform and a mechanism for the Cuban revolutionaries to speak for themselves, in their own voices, in Canada and Quebec. To facilitate that process more than 75% of the resources and efforts of the Committees went into translating and publishing the speeches of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Foreign Minister Raúl Roa García and other leaders of the Cuban Revolution. The workload was doubled because we were translating and publishing in Canada’s two main languages – French and English. As well as the publications, tours were organized for Cuba’s representatives. On top of that, enormous energies went into getting prominent Canadians to visit Cuba and then report back their findings. We also encouraged union locals and federations to send delegations to meet with their counterparts in Cuba.

My main purpose in writing this memoir is to connect with today’s Cuba solidarity activists and to encourage them in their efforts by giving them a window on a part of their history. Thanks to the internet and websites it has been possible for me to follow from afar the activities of the Canadian Network on Cuba and La Table de concertation de solidarité Québec-Cuba, Cuba Five work (Peoples’ Tribunal & Assembly), the Toronto Forum on Cuba, and also quite a few other

city level committees (e.g. Edmonton, Ottawa, Kingston, Vancouver, etc.). The Embassy of Cuba in Canada maintains an active, up-to-date website reporting on all the activities in Canada in solidarity and friendship with Cuba that are reported to it. It is a wonderful resource.<sup>48</sup>

It is interesting to compare and contrast the solidarity movement today with our work in the 1960s–70s. The first thing that strikes me is how different the world is today; and how that impacts on Cuba solidarity work. Let me list just a handful of those changes both for Cubans and for Canadians, in no particular order or weighting of importance:

1) The Soviet Union no longer exists; capitalism has been restored in Russia, the former Soviet Republics, the ex-Warsaw Pact countries, and – to a lesser degree – in China. This impacted very negatively on Cuba, leaving it with few allies and sources of economic cooperation, and forcing it into the harsh realities of its Special Period in the 1990s.

2) But the advances of the Latin American revolution beginning with the Bolivarian-Chavista revolution in Venezuela, Lula's Workers Party triumph in Brazil, the indigenous majority rule triumph in Bolivia, Rafael Correa's 2006 election as President of Ecuador, the 2006 Sandinista electoral victory in Nicaragua, the FMLN election victory in 2014, the formation of ALBA,<sup>49</sup> PetroCaribe, and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) means that Cuba is no longer alone and isolated in the Americas. Cuba now has allies and many friendly governments in this hemisphere. It is the USA and Harperite Canada that are isolated in the hemisphere, with the OAS being reduced to a fig leaf covering Washington's ugly nudity.

3) Quebec politics has radicalized and become more internationalist compared to the 1950s and 1960s. This is mainly a product of the rise of the sovereignty movement, but also immigration and changing demographics and the impact of women's liberation struggles.

4) Politics in English Canada have shifted to the right, largely because of a decades' long successful ruling-class assault on labour and the union movement, which is far weaker today than in the 1960s. This shift in class relations has also driven the NDP to the right both federally and provincially. There is no pro-socialist left wing in the labour movement and NDP comparable to the CCF left culture I described earlier in this

essay. The Marxist left is weaker today than in the 60s, and is still in a process of ideological realignment and clarification brought about by the crises of faulty Stalinist, Maoist, and Trotskyist theories.

5) There are far more Latino and Latina immigrants in Canada now than in the FPCC days. This allows solidarity work a head start with communities that are better informed about the issues. Because of their class origins as workers and campesinos and the particular oppressions immigrants face in Canada, such communities are more inclined to be anti-imperialist and pro-Cuba.

6) There is now a sizeable Cuban emigrant community in Canada that is largely sympathetic to the work in solidarity with their mother country and with the Cuban revolution. They have an Association of Cuban Residents in Canada, and held their Seventh National Meeting last May in Ottawa. In the 1960s there were fewer than 200 Cuban nationals living in Canada, and few of them expressed sympathy for the Fidelista revolution.

7) The internet is a dynamic tool that revolutionized the capacities for effective solidarity work in diverse ways: (1) Peer to peer real time contact between Cuba and Canada; (2) Real time communication between solidarity workers in Canada and in Quebec; (3) Video conferencing; (4) More powerful and effective research tools; (5) Instant news/information; (6) Computer translation programs; (7) websites and blogs. Contrast that to the FPCC which could not even afford long distance calls between Toronto and Vancouver, or Toronto and Havana!

8) A similar point can be made about the much more accessible and less costly air travel, making organizing work cheaper. But most important of all, this makes it affordable for millions of Canadians to visit and re-visit Cuba as tourists; and for many more Cubans to travel to Canada.

My impression is that there is far more solidarity activity with Cuba today than in the sixties, and very much more extensive interchanges among scholars and students, artists, musicians and writers, and activists in social movements and unions. It is also more varied. Less time, effort and financial resources have to go into translation and publications work, leaving more time for outreach and for cultural exchanges. There also seems to be more church and other peer-to-peer connections with Cuba.<sup>47</sup>



However because of the overall shift to the right of Canadian political expressions, taking in the entire political spectrum of parties and the labour and farmers' movements, the ability of the Cuba solidarity movement to influence government policy or the mass public opinion is not as strong as in the 1960s. This could change, and change more rapidly or suddenly than one might think. The most common aspect of the global political climate is its underlying instability and the almost weekly appearance of new crises such as in Gaza-Palestine, Ukraine, and Iraq right now.

New openings for the left and for international solidarity are bound to come. Hence the work today should anticipate and prepare for that. We should also understand that the Cuban Revolution is part of a much bigger and vast revolutionary process convulsing the Americas. It cannot be defended effectively without also defending Bolivarian Venezuela, Indigenous majority rule in Bolivia, and Sandinista Nicaragua, and without popularizing and defending ALBA, UNASUR, and CELAC.

The Cuban Revolution continues to inspire people in every continent but above all in Latin America where cultural and language affinities draw peoples closer together as members of what we call our *Patria grande* – our Big Homeland.

Cuba's participation in ALBA and in its medical and educational campaigns brings relief and hope to millions of people. It is small wonder that most countries of the hemisphere have served notice to Washington that they will boycott the next OAS Summit if President Castro is again excluded.

### **But to be young was very heaven!**

Cuba through its example of democratic mass participation in revolutionary change and self-government won me over to Marxism in my late teens. The brilliant speeches of Fidel and Che lifted my generation's vision to new horizons, to the conviction that the toilers of this world could create a new kind of society dedicated to providing for the needs of all in a climate of peace and respect for human rights. Cuba over the intervening decades, despite aggression, economic blockade, and reverses, has honoured the commitment undertaken by its young revolutionary leaders in 1959-60.

Since those exhilarating days I have had the wonderful privilege to have participated in the Nicaraguan revolution (through its 1979 victory to our defeat in

1990, and its resurrection today following the 2006 FSLN electoral victory), and more recently to work in solidarity with the Venezuelan Bolivarian Revolution, working out of Sandinista Nicaragua.

There have been bitter defeats, but also sweet, very sweet victories. And lessons galore! But of all my experiences over fifty-five years, the most compelling for me was and will always be the Cuban Revolution of Fidel and Che.

The French Revolution of 1789 had an enormous uplifting impact on the great English Romantic poet William Wordsworth in his youth. He wrote:

*Oh! pleasant exercise of hope and joy!  
For mighty were the auxiliars which then stood  
Upon our side, we who were strong in love!  
Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven!*<sup>50</sup>

I read those lines as a teenager; but it was only when I got to Cuba a few years later that I felt such uplift and really knew and felt in heart and soul what Wordsworth was trying to tell all who would listen.

*Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven!  
Viva Cuba libre!*

## **Notes**

1. Two important sources of information about Verne and Anne Olson's vital leadership role in the founding and building of the FPCC in Canada are: (1) "Between Nation and Empire: The Fair Play for Cuba Committees and the Making of Canada-Cuba Solidarity in the Early 1960s," Cynthia Wright, in *Our Place in the Sun: Canada and Cuba in the Castro Era* (<http://tinyurl.com/ngbfnwq>), and (2) "Verne Olson and the Cuban Revolution," Ernie Tate, in *Revolutionary Activism in the 1950s & 60s*, Volume 1: Canada 1955-1965.

Tate explains his aim in writing his FPCC-Cuba chapter as follows: "This Cuba solidarity work, which lasted from 1960 to 1970, is well described by Cynthia Wright. It is not my intention to give the full story of the Canadian FPCC here – Cynthia does that very well – but to *try to tell how it looked from inside the SEL and its successor organization, the League for Socialist Action (LSA)*" [my italics-FSC]. I concur with Ernie's judgment of Cynthia's research and work on

the FPCCs – indispensable for all future research on Canada-Cuba solidarity in the 60s.

To my knowledge, these two works, one an academic research paper and the other a personal memoir, are the only written acknowledgment and recounting of the enormous contribution the Olson team made to the cross-Canada movement in solidarity with the Cuban people whose tiny island country's revolution shook the hemisphere and continents beyond. As a lifelong friend and comrade of this exemplary revolutionary couple I take this opportunity to thank Cynthia Wright and Ernie Tate for their highly valued work.

2. For an introduction to the evolution of socialist ideas and policies within the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), see *The Rod Young Affair in the British Columbia Co-operative Commonwealth Federation*, Elaine Bernard, UBC Masters Theses, at [https://circle.ubc.ca/bitstream/id/71077/UBC\\_1979\\_A8%20B47.pdf](https://circle.ubc.ca/bitstream/id/71077/UBC_1979_A8%20B47.pdf)

3. Among the leading forces in the FPCCs in Ontario, BC and Quebec were the revolutionary socialists and Marxists of the League for Socialist Action (LSA), formed in 1961 from a fusion of the Toronto Socialist Education League (SEL) and the Vancouver Socialist Information Centre (SIC). The LSA was the Canadian affiliate of the Fourth International (FI), a global organization of revolutionary socialist parties and organizations.

The FI was launched by Russian Bolshevik leader-in-exile Leon Trotsky in 1938 as the "World Party of Socialist Revolution" in close collaboration with James P. Cannon and other leaders of the Socialist Workers Party of the United States of (North) America. This movement sought to rescue Marxism from its corruption at the hands of the tyrannical Joseph Stalin regime in the Soviet Union which represented the social interests of a new but powerful privileged bureaucracy in the lands of the October 1917 Russian Revolution.

The origins of the Canadian followers of the FI lay in the Communist Party of Canada (CPC), founded in 1921. They were driven out of the CPC due to their firm opposition to the rise of authoritarian rule in the Soviet Union, as personified by Stalin's unlimited power and his use of permanent terror to maintain control. The Marxist opponents of Stalinism became known as "Trotskyists." Verne and Anne Olson had been long-time FI members when they initiated the Toronto FPCC, as had Ruth Bullock, one of the main initiators

of the Vancouver FPCC. I joined the SIC in Vancouver just prior to the launching of the LSA. See *What the League for Socialist Action Is, and What It Stands For* (1961) ([www.socialisthistory.ca/Docs/CCF-NDP/What-LSA-Is.htm](http://www.socialisthistory.ca/Docs/CCF-NDP/What-LSA-Is.htm)).

4. I grew up in a CCF-IWA union family with a Marxist, pro-Soviet, IWA union leader father, a CCF-Christian socialist mother, and an ever present uncle who was a prominent Carpenters' Union and local CCF leader (and the son of Alberta's CCF founder and leader William Irvine). The legendary BC CCF founder and leader Ernest Winch and his son-in-law Cedric Cox were part of my extended family. Our home was a kind of IWA-CCF clearing house in the mid-fifties.

By the time I started to mature and become my own person I was steeped in this left, anti-capitalist political culture, and considered myself Marxist (having read only the *Manifesto* and excerpts from *Capital* published in pamphlet form by the local Socialist Labor Party branch of that mainly USA-based group).

When I joined the BC FPCC leadership in late 1961, I was not without political experience despite my meagre 19 years of age. I was Provincial Secretary of the CCF-NDP Youth, Secretary of the Burnaby-Edmonds CCF, an editor of *Young Socialist Forum* (an officially endorsed NDP Youth [NDY] publication), a member of the IWA union local 1-357, and a very new recruit to the Vancouver SIC-LSA branch. The tight political relationship between Cedric Cox and me and political ties with the Irvine family in BC and Alberta, proved over time to be propitious for the FPCC's work and influence.

5. Dorothy G. Steeves (we knew her as Gretchen) held a Doctorate of Law degree from the University of Leiden. She emigrated to Canada in 1919 after her marriage to Rufus Palmer Steeves, a Canadian military officer. See <http://bit.ly/VG0Y6d>

6. *The Compassionate Rebel: Ernest E. Winch and His Times*, Paperback, 1960, by Dorothy G. Steeves. Dorothy Steeves was usually on our FPCC executive and headed up the BC selection committees for the student tours to Cuba.

7. I have chosen not to describe or discuss the CCFA in this memoir. The hostility of the CPC to the FPCC was so extreme that Cedric Cox and I were never able to sit down with their BC leaders to probe possibilities for joint activities. The Vancouver CCFA even refused our repeated proposals that Vancouver public meetings

for Cuban Ambassador Dr Américo Cruz should be jointly sponsored.

This problem became even sadder or more risible following the pro-Maoist split from the CP in 1962 and the launching of the Progressive Workers Movement. The PWM formed its own Canada-Cuba Friendship Society (CCFS). On Dr Cruz's next visit to Vancouver he ended up having to address three public events, each with about 150 attendees. Had we united our efforts I am sure we could have held a rally of 700 or more enthusiastic supporters.

As it was, Dr and Señora Cruz, Cedric Cox, and I (and I'm sure at least one or two RCMP spies) were the only people to attend all three events. Cedric and I, in agreement with the FPCC executive, tried our best to attend all public events of the CCFA and the CCFS. The CPC's decision to split its members from the FPCC was not, in my opinion, a result of the ill-will of its rank-and-file members, but came from the top central Communist Party leaders who felt threatened by the revolutionary socialist course pronounced by Cuba in the First and Second Declarations of Havana. The FPCC published these declarations as pamphlets that sold like hotcakes and maple syrup on a winter outing.

It is important to note, however, that not a few activists of the original CCFAs continued solidarity work with Cuba over the decades and are still active in contemporary Canadian-Cuban Friendship Associations in several cities in English Canada (most of the original CCFA went defunct in the mid 1980s, but a new "Friendship" network was formed a decade later). Many FPCC members also became involved in CCFA groups in the 1990s, such as Betty Mardiros in Alberta.

In my opinion the political differences that motivated the decision of the CPC to remove its members from the FPCCs and form rival groups are no longer relevant (if they ever were). Moreover, such disagreements should never become a reason to disrespect or belittle the valuable work done by each and every Cuba support group in the 1960s. I can only hail today's unity of purpose and action within the broad Canadian movement in solidarity with socialist Cuba. I describe this work in the concluding section of this Memoir.

8. See *The Early History of Pulp, Paper and Woodworkers of Canada*, by Jim White. (<http://www.ppw.ca/ppwchist01.pdf>)

9. See report in *The Militant* (<http://bit.ly/>

1uXCBQU). The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) tried to block the union delegation to Cuba. When their attempt to prevent the visit was rejected, CLC leaders circulated outrageous propaganda about Castro enslaving Cuba's workers, issued by the U.S. AFL-CIO-dominated International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). CLC President Claude Jodoin issued his own anti-Cuba letter in which he argued that CLC affiliates could not support a regime that suppressed unions.

Angus MacPhee, then president of the Prince Rupert Labour Council (chartered by the provincial Federation of Labour – BCFL), replied publicly with a defence of the Cuban Revolution. He challenged any CLC ban on labour trips to Cuba, stating that the CLC convention had never adopted such prohibitions. This dispute foreshadowed a coming witch-hunt against socialist labour leaders in the BCFL.

10. *Listen, Yankee: The Revolution in Cuba* by C. Wright Mills. Also available at Amazon.

11. *Sartre on Cuba*, January 1, 1961 by Jean-Paul Sartre (Paperback).

12. Mrs. M. Anderson from Cranbrook, British Columbia, wrote to Verne Olson one month after the Bay of Pigs invasion to say that "we put a 'Fair Play for Cuba' float in the local parade today." The occasion was Cranbrook's Victoria Day celebration, thereby making a rather startling juxtaposition of the Cuban Revolution with the British Empire, but a clear indication of popular support for Cuba in this period. *Between Nation and Empire*, Cynthia Wright. Mrs. M. Anderson to Verne Olson; 22 May 1961, see Wright 36.

13. Michael Kournosoff and other old time radical internationalist farmers in the BC Interior and on the Prairies, like George Faulkner (see p. 14 of this article and note 37), planted the seeds of today's Canada Cuba Farmer to Farmer Project. Its attractive website site points out that in 1999 "Cuba won the Swedish Parliament's prestigious Right Livelihood Award for sustainable agricultural practices. This was due in no small measure to strong scientific capacity and good agricultural extension..." (<http://www.farmertofarmer.ca/index.html>).

The site explains that "The purpose of the Canada Cuba Farmer to Farmer Project is to foster cooperative, farmer-led capacity building.... Cuba's farmers are world leaders in large-scale organic production and in the development and extension of urban agriculture.



Our farmers are world leaders in sustainable management practices and have expertise in processing, packaging, labeling and marketing. Cuban success in empowering farmers and building links between food and community has lessons for Canada. Canadian expertise in animal production systems is keenly important to Cuba. Together, we have more answers than we have apart. The objective is to foster cooperative, farmer-led capacity building. By allowing Canadian farmers to visit Cuban farms and observe common stewardship practices, the tours lay the foundation for Project success: relationship building and respect.”

14. The Canadian FPCC published Che’s letter under the title *Socialism and Man* with an introduction by Eduardo Galeano. The FPCC edition also includes Che’s letter to Fidel on why Che had chosen to leave Cuba to take the battle against imperialism to other fronts and other continents.

15. See Kournosoff’s political work in favour of Cuba at the University of BC. ([http://www.library.ubc.ca/archives/pdfs/ubyssey/UBYSSEY\\_1962\\_10\\_25.pdf](http://www.library.ubc.ca/archives/pdfs/ubyssey/UBYSSEY_1962_10_25.pdf)) His name is unfortunately misspelled by the FPCC editors of the pamphlet *Four Canadians Who Saw Cuba*.

16. The CCF Regina Manifesto (<http://bit.ly/1pu3QLR>) outlined a number of goals, including public ownership of key industries, universal public pensions, universal health care, children’s allowances, unemployment insurance, and workers’ compensation. It concluded with the commitment that “No CCF Government will rest content until it has eradicated capitalism and put into operation the full programme of socialized planning which will lead to the establishment in Canada of the Co-operative Commonwealth.”

17. See *Militant Minority: British Columbia Workers and the Rise of a New Left*, by Benjamin Isitt, p. 126. (<http://tinyurl.com/q22nvk2>)

18. “On June 10 the federal government ordered the arrest of eight strike leaders (including J.S. Woodsworth and Abraham Albert Heaps). On June 21, about 25,000 strikers assembled for a demonstration at Market Square, where Winnipeg Mayor Charles Frederick Gray read the Riot Act. Troubled by the growing number of protestors and fearing violence, Mayor Gray called in the Royal Northwest Mounted Police who rode in on horseback charging into the crowd of strikers, beating them with clubs and firing weapons.

This violent action resulted in many people injured,

numerous arrests and the death of two strikers. Four Eastern-European immigrants were also rounded up at this time and eventually two were deported, one voluntarily to the United States and the other to Eastern Europe. This day, which came to be known as “Bloody Saturday”, ended with Winnipeg virtually under military occupation. Interacting with other prisoners that consisted of editors and strikers, police shut down the strikers paper called the Western Labour News and arrested the editors for commentating on the infamous event. ... on June 25, 1919, the Central Strike Committee officially called off the strike and the strikers returned to work” (Wikipedia).

19. Verne Olson to William Irvine, 8 February 1961.

20. Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (London: Verso, 2004), 27.

21. Wright, *Between Nation and Empire*.

22. The Mardiros’ political partnership continued to enliven and enlighten Prairie left and internationalist solidarity for the rest of the century, Betty, later in life, became a leader of the Raging Grannies, and was known as far away as Chile where obituaries appeared following her death in March 2007. See <http://bit.ly/1uMAPPj> and <http://bit.ly/1viB9G7>.

23. Dr Margaret Mahood played a leading role in the Saskatchewan battle to launch and save the new provincial Medicare system in 1962, as did Stan Rands. Margaret Mahood died at the age of 94 in May 2013. In the *Globe & Mail*’s lengthy obit (<http://bit.ly/1tiegd8>), Patricia Dawn Roberson noted that “In addition to her role as a community psychiatrist, she was active in many socialist causes. She was a member of the left-wing Waffle faction of the NDP...The Mahoods were great believers in social change and they embodied those ideals. The couple was at the forefront of the anti-Apartheid movement, the peace movement, gender relations, the pro-choice movement, the anti-nuclear movement, and they supported solidarity with Palestinians.”

24. See article by John Riddell on our delegation’s visit to Cuba in July-August 1963. Riddell was then “22 years of age, is in his fourth year of Economics and Political Science at the University of Toronto where he is president of the Socialist Club and has been active in the New Democrats and the CUCND. He has studied at universities at both Freiburg and Frankfurt in Germany and travelled extensively in the Soviet Union,

Hungary, Germany, France and Mexico. He spent the entire month of August last year in Cuba.” (From pamphlet introduction) ([http://www.socialisthistory.ca/Docs/1961-/Cuba/RealCuba.htm#john\\_riddell](http://www.socialisthistory.ca/Docs/1961-/Cuba/RealCuba.htm#john_riddell))

25. I cannot take the necessary space in this essay to describe my first visit to Cuba. Meeting John Riddell and Nena Woodward for the first time was but one of many joyous and lasting friendships formed then. John and I had undertaken to make some representations in Cuba on behalf of the international campaign to defend Hugo Blanco. Through that work I met and befriended Hilda Gadea, Che Guevara’s first wife. She was an economist working in the Ministry for the Economy. She opened many doors for me and was an FPCC ally in Havana.

Che had signed an appeal for Hugo Blanco in which he affirmed: “Hugo Blanco is the head of one of the guerrilla movements in Peru. He struggled stubbornly but the repression was strong. I don’t know what his tactics of struggle were, but his fall does not signify the end of the movement. It is only a man that has fallen, but not the movement. “One time, when we were preparing to make our landing from the Granma, and when there was great risk that all of us would be killed, Fidel said: ‘What is more important than all of us is the example we set.’ It’s the same thing, Hugo Blanco has set an example.” (<http://bit.ly/1li4XSY>) Blanco remains a leading indigenous social activist in Peru today.

See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hilda\\_Gadea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hilda_Gadea) for a description of her time with Che and their daughter Hildita. For Hilda’s memoir of her life as a revolutionary see *My Life with Che: The Making of a Revolutionary*, by Hilda Gadea.

26. From the Manitoba Government Archive: “Charles Biesick was born in Saskatchewan, 6 November 1903. He left school to work on the farm when he was 12 years old. When he was 19 he moved to Winnipeg to attend business college, but was unable to find employment afterwards and moved to Chicago in 1923.

“He lived and traveled in the United States for several years, acquiring an interest in politics and current events, and returned to Canada in 1931 with a broadened perspective. Biesick worked as a tradesman for the Canadian National Railway for many years while editing the CCF newspaper in Manitoba and writing for a number of different publications in his spare time.

“Biesick was a committed socialist. He joined the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in

1933, edited “The Manitoba Commonwealth” from 1938 to 1955, wrote a column called “To the Point” for “The Commonwealth” from 1962 to 1979, and ran as a candidate in a number of elections between 1946 and 1957. Biesick also traveled widely, making several trips to Russia, Cuba, and China between 1937 and 1975. He frequently wrote to editors and spoke to audiences about local and global political issues.” (Archives of Manitoba: Charles Biesick)

27. See *Four Canadians Who Saw Cuba* (<http://bit.ly/1p00gHY>). See also background information and discussion of the relations between the Manitoba labour movement and the CCF. (<http://bit.ly/1AyFEiN>)

28. See “The Fight for Medicare – Saskatchewan Faces a Bitter Doctors’ Strike over Canada’s First Universal Health Care Plan.” (<http://bit.ly/1mGmvs1>) Also, *Doctors’ Strike. Medical Care and Conflict in Saskatchewan*, Robin F. Badgley and Samuel Wolfe. (<http://bit.ly/1tmvxKy>)

29. See *Unsung Heroes in Saskatchewan’s Struggle for Medicare* by Jim Harding. (<http://bit.ly/1tqBpBD>)

30. Bill Simpich writes: “The work of the FPCC and its allies made any successful invasion of Cuba impossible. They blew the whistle on the Bay of Pigs loudly and clearly for months before the invasion. They mounted resistance to the war plans of US military and intelligence advisors in the Bay of Pigs aftermath. The agencies retaliated by infiltrating the FPCC and demonizing its leadership.

“When JFK was allegedly killed by the FPCC activist Lee Harvey Oswald, the agencies had to hide their war plans from the Warren Commission in order to avoid punishment for public exposure of their illegal plans to assassinate Castro, violate the Neutrality Act by creating shadow armies and navies, and engage in dirty tricks on American citizens exercising their First Amendment rights. The Kennedys’ AMTRUNK operation never regained its momentum and slowly petered out to a close by 1966.” (<http://bit.ly/1pfedqB>)

31. *The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Certain Activities of the RCMP*.

32. See <http://www.socialisthistory.ca/Docs/1961-/Cuba/FourCanadians.htm>.

33. See <http://collections.mun.ca/PDFs/radical/FairPlayForCubaCommitteeSummer64.pdf>.

34. John Macey was born in Prince Rupert in 1927 and grew up there, That port and mill town was a bastion of the class struggle left wing of the labour unions

and the CCF-NDP, The region almost always elected CCF or NDP MLAs and MPs.

Macey became a lawyer in 1950 and practised in Vancouver where he also became active in politics and identified with the CCF and NDP Socialist Caucuses. He was the lawyer for both the Socialist Caucus and the BC FPCC, work which he did pro bono. Likewise he charged not a cent to the defendants in the NDP purge trials of 1962-1964.

Macey was often a candidate for the CCF and NDP in provincial elections in different regions of the province. He usually ran in ridings where he knew he would lose. In 1963 he ran for the NDP in Vancouver Point Grey, then a three-seat riding that took up nearly two-fifths the area of the city. His running mates were also left wingers and FPCC members – Amy Dalglish and Bill Whitney, a former president of the Vancouver & District Labour Council.

In 1969, John again contested together with Alan Bush the by then two-seat Vancouver Point Grey riding which included the UBC campus, its residencies and its endowment lands, some of which had been used for very high class housing development. The riding was a traditional stronghold of right wing parties, but was finally won by the NDP in a 1989 by-election after Canada's future woman PM, Kim Campbell, vacated her MLA seat to run federally for the Conservatives. Readers will not be surprised to learn that John was not elected MLA in 1963 or 1969. See the August 1969 BC Democrat for its campaign promotion of Bush and Macey. (<http://bit.ly/1w9QkFM>)

Despite a 16 year age gap we became good friends and spent a lot of R&R time together until I moved to Montreal in 1969.

35. See *The Early History of Pulp, Paper and Woodworkers of Canada*, by Jim White (<http://www.ppw.ca/ppwchist01.pdf>) and *Militant Minority: British Columbia Workers and the rise of a New Left, 1948-1972*, by Benjamin Isitt. (<http://tinyurl.com/q22nvk2>).

36. Bertha Modlich's main responsibility in the FPCC team was to assist Anne Olson in the regular mailings of *Granma International*, published in separate French- and English-language editions. The FPCC assumed responsibility for mailing the *Granma* to Canada, USA, UK, Ireland and other "British" Commonwealth countries.

Hans Modlich, Bertha's son and FPCC central leader, recalls that Berta always said that this task was

what she enjoyed most about all her volunteer chores for Cuba and the FPCC.

37. Ernie Tate, op. cit., pp. 126-127.

38. In 1961 Vancouver FPCC activist Carson Shugalo moved to Toronto to assist Anne in the Secretariat. She lived in the Olson's Swansea home for over a year, greatly enhancing the capacities of the FPCC's Toronto "Centre."

39. André Beckerman was then the chairman of the Student Committee on Cuban Affairs at the University of Toronto and also a member of the LSA (see Tate, op. cit., p. 190).

40. Ernie Tate, op. cit., pp. 189-190.

41. This letter, issued a few days after the Olson-Bekerman letter, was addressed to Fidel Castro. It was signed by FPCC student leaders Harry Kopyto, Hans Modlich, and John Riddell (see Tate, p. 190).

42. As history has the last word, it turns out that the doubts about the political trajectory of Cuba's leaders were completely off the mark. Che was about to open up the Bolivian Front in the Southern Cone, and the first elements of Cuba's long and intense commitment to African liberation movements had just been arranged during Che's African trips.

43. Ernie Tate, op. cit., p. 202.

44. *September 22, 1966*: A bazooka attack is made on the Cuban embassy in Ottawa, Ontario.

*October 5, 1966*: Anti-Castro forces bomb the offices of the Cuban trade delegation in Ottawa.

*May 31, 1967*: A small bomb explodes at the Cuba Pavilion at Expo 67 in Montreal. The attack is attributed to Cuban Nationalist Action.

*October 15, 1967*: A bomb explodes at the offices of the Cuban trade delegation in Montreal.

*May 29, 1969*: A bomb is placed in the doorway of the Cuban consulate in Montreal; it fails to go off.

*July 12, 1971*: A small bomb goes off at the offices of the Cuban trade delegation in Montreal Quebec.

*April 4, 1972*: Cuban official Sergio Pérez Castillo is killed by an explosion at the Cuban consulate in Montreal.

*January 21, 1974*: A bomb explodes at the Cuban embassy in Ottawa.

*September 22, 1976*: An explosive device is thrown from a car at the Cuban consulate in Montreal.

*January 14, 1980*: A large explosion significantly damages the Cuban consulate in Montreal.

See Wikipedia, "Terrorism\_in\_Canada," point 2.1.



45. Tate, op. cit., pp. 203-4.

46. The CBC's Mexico City correspondent Paule Robitaille interviewed Fidel Castro after he returned to Cuba following Trudeau's funeral. (<http://members.shaw.ca/saturang/cbc-castro.html>) See also:

*Viva Cuba: Fidel Castro and Pierre Trudeau* (Pts. 1 and 2) ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=5eueOLhynoM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5eueOLhynoM) and [www.youtube.com/watch?v=3K-C1sG-hbY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3K-C1sG-hbY))

Fidel Castro and U.S. Ex-President James Carter at Trudeau's funeral, Notre Dame Cathedral, Montreal, September 2000. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urI87-P4Cyg>)

47. The late June 2014 Toronto appearances of Cuban parliamentarian Mariela Castro is an inspiring example of this. She participated in Toronto's Gay Pride March and was hosted and presented with awards by the Toronto and Ontario labour movements. Castro is the Director of Cuba's National Center for Sexual Education in Cuba (CENESEX) which has greatly helped to lead the fight against homophobia in Cuba. See links. [org.au/node/3944](http://org.au/node/3944).

48. The website of the Embassy of Cuba referenced here is: <http://www.cubadiplomatica.cu/canada/EN/Home.aspx> The websites of the Cuba solidarity organizations

and networks mentioned in this section are all quickly accessible via a Google search.

49. ALBA (Spanish: *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América*), the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas, until June 2009 Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, regional bloc, organized in 2004, that aims for social, political, and economic integration in Latin America and the Caribbean. ALBA, which means "dawn" in Spanish, was conceived by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez and was created by Venezuela and Cuba as an alternative to the U.S.-led Free Trade Area of the Americas (*Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas*; ALCA).

The leaders of the member countries – Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Venezuela – hold annual summits to discuss initiatives and strategies for the region.

50. From "The French Revolution As It Appeared to Enthusiasts at its Commencement." Reprinted from *The Friend*. ([www.bartleby.com/145/ww285.html](http://www.bartleby.com/145/ww285.html))

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## Dedication

I dedicate this essay to the memory of Verne and Anne Olson, Kay Riddell, Berta Modlich, Ross Dowson, Ruth and Reg Bullock, Violet and Frank Courneyeur, Ron Irvine, Eileen Winch Cox and Cedric Cox, Angus MacPhee, Bill White, Dorothy Gretchen Steeves, Leo Nimsick, Herbert Herridge, Walter Walima, Sharon Hagger, Ginger Richards, George Faulkner, William Irvine, Betty and Tony Mardiros, Jerry Houle, Maria Fischer, Vic Bystrom, Jean Sloan, Stan and Doris Rands, Brian Rands, Sheila Jones, Barry Gidluck, Margaret and Ed Mahood, Charles Biesick, Nena Woodward, Michel Chartrand, Edith Beauvais, Américo Cruz, Hilda Gadea, Hildita Guevara Gadea, and Ernesto Guevara de la Serna (el Che).

*Felipe Stuart Courneyeur, Managua, Nicaragua, July 26, 2014*

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