

Idalberto Ferrera Acosta (1918-2013), Cuban Trotskyist

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Idalberto Ferrera Acosta (1918-2013), Cuban Trotskyist

Photo by Sebastian Brulez (December 2006)

Last July 2, 2013, Idalberto Ferrera Acosta, age 95, died in Havana. Idalberto devoted his entire life to the Revolution. In 1933-1934 he joined the Bolshevik-Leninist Party, the Cuban Trotskyist organization. He was a militant in the union and political movements in Guantanamo and Santiago de Cuba. The actions of Cuban Trotskyists were very important in the 1930s because they had significant influence in the unions in several regions in Cuba, particularly in the East (Guantanamo, site of the U.S. Navy base, and Santiago de Cuba) and in Havana [1]. Idalberto Ferrera made active contributions.

In Guantanamo, during the 1950's, with his partner Guarina Ramírez and his three sons (Juan León, Ricardo and Idalberto), he joined the political and armed struggle headed by the Movimiento 26 de Julio (M-26J) [2]. Meetings of clandestine M-26-J were regularly held in his home at Number 1453, Calle de Manuel de Céspedes, Guantánamo. His family and comrades enthusiastically joined the early years of the Revolution while they openly defended their Trotskyist ideas. The issues of self-organization of the people, freedom of organization and deepening of revolutionary structural changes were in the center of their combat.

In 1960 or 1961, he settled with his family in a popular Old Havana neighborhood, in a humble apartment in Calle Monte where he lived until the end of his days. Idalberto Ferrera and a group of Cuban Trotskyists rebuilt a Trotskyist organization named Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR) (Trotskyist). The activities of this party were legal at the beginning. Its members were involved in productive tasks (in agriculture and industry) and in the defense of the Cuban Revolution. The POR (T) received support from Latin American militants who offered their support to the Cuban Revolution. At the time, Idalberto Ferrera was Secretary General of the POR (T) which published the newspaper Voz Proletaria. POR (T) was affiliated to an international Trotskyist organization: the Fourth International Posadista. This organization had previously severed links with the International Secretariat of the 4th International led at the time mainly by Michel Pablo, Ernest Mandel, Pierre Frank and Livio Maitan.

In 1962, the 4th International Posadista and the POR(T) took an extreme position during the Missile Crisis and demanded that the Cuban leadership and the USSR launch a nuclear attack against the

U.S.A. to destroy imperialism. The demand was published in all the international Posadista media as well as in a special issue of the Cuban Trotskyist paper *Voz Proletaria* [3] (Title: "Let the Soviet Army Strike the First Blow", Havana, October 23, 1962).

Several times along 1962-1963, Idalberto Ferrera and his comrades, both in Havana and Guantanamo, were victims of police intimidation instigated by the PSP [Partido Socialista Popular], the Stalinist party that was gaining influence in State echelons and was attacking Trotskyists as enemies of the Revolution.

Jose Lungarzo (metallurgic workman and Argentinian Trotskyist) was arrested on October 30, 1962 and deported to Argentine on December 21, 1962.

Finally, in 1965 the POR(T) was banned.

In March 1965, several comrades of Idalberto Ferrera, including one of his sons, Idalberto Ferrera Acosta, who had been sentenced to several years in prison, were released after a few months in prison [4]. Among the concrete causes for the incarceration was the publication of the Cuban edition of Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed* and the activities of the POR(T). Che Guevara, returning from Africa, intervened in favor of the Trotskyists and obtained their liberation. Che set a condition: the dissolution of the POR(T).

The situation deteriorated strongly in 1967. The international Posadista media affirmed that Che had died in Cuba [5]. Juan Posadas stated in October 1967 that "Guevara did not die in Bolivia" [6]. Obviously these allegations as serious and unfounded could only complicate the situation of the Cuban Posadista Trotskyists.

In the 1970s, pressures by the USSR and its followers in Cuba were very strong and in many areas. In 1973, Idalberto, his son Juan Leon and Jesus Andres Vazquez were sentenced again.

The accusation record of the Public Ministry of the Revolutionary Court No. 1 against Idalberto Ferrera Acosta, Juan León Ferrera (one of his three sons) and Jesús Andrés Vázquez reads as follows: *"The defendants (...) were members of the political bureau of the Partido Obrero Revolucionario Trotskista and their main tasks were the preparation and reproduction of Trotskyist propaganda of a diversionist and defamatory nature against the Cuban Communist Party and Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro Ruz; the creation of Trotskyist cells in the provinces; proselytism activities to attract new militants and sympathizers; and close links with the Fourth Trotskyist Posadista International abroad from which they received instructions for their activities and followed them to the letter. They received from abroad all kinds of Trotskyist propaganda and also sent to the different sections of the Fourth Trotskyist Posadista International political and economic information about the country. This was aimed at the ideological weakening and confusion in the Marxist-Leninist approach of the Cuban Communist Party as the ruling body of the Cuban Revolution. All these actions as well as creating conflicts and divergence between Cuba and the Socialist countries headed by the Soviet Union against which they directed all types of lies and slander saying that the Communist Parties in Cuba and in other countries were bureaucratic castes that ruled to serve their interests, exploiting the working class."* [7]

In 1993, I met Idalberto Ferrera, his partner Guarina, his sons Juan Leon and Ricardo and his grandchildren. They still lived in Calle Monte just a stone's throw of the East Station that joins Havana and Santiago. He was 75 years old and had not lost any of his revolutionary convictions. He was in systematic contact with his old Trotskyist comrades, in particular with those in the east of the island (Santiago and Guantanamo) and wrote -just as did his son Juan Leon- analytical works. Even before the collapse of the USSR, the Castro leadership had launched a rectification movement.

Idalberto and Juan Leon sent frequent proposals to the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party on how to deal with the crisis. They showed me the delivery receipts they got from the Central Committee Secretariat.

Almost every year until 2011, I returned to see Idalberto, Guarina, Juan León and other members of his family. In each one of our encounters Idalberto commented on the international political situation, tried to analyze in it everything that could represent possible revolutionary victories. Usually we did not agree on the assessments of the struggles, because I believed he had a tendency to embellish them. He was eager to receive information about the evolution of Trotskyist organizations in the world. He regularly received comrades from different parts of the world. He was indefatigable: in 2008, being 82 years old, he worked five afternoons a week as a switchboard operator. He and his family always lived modestly. They lived and acted for political action and for social emancipation. They were very concerned about the role of bureaucracy in Cuba and the obstacles that stood in the way of a real socialist experience on the island. If my memory serves me well, it was in 2008 that he could travel abroad for the first time (he was 90 years old) to visit Caracas in August and attend a homage to Leon Trotsky organized with the support of Hugo Chavez' government.

Among the biographical elements he told me there is one that I believe particularly reflects his political commitment and the specific features of the Cuban process. He told me that his years in prison in the 1960s were among his most treasured experiences. He was incarcerated in La Cabana (an 18th Century fortress in Havana) with some of his comrades and -he said- with hundreds of right-wing inmates. As an unjustly incarcerated militant, Idalberto struggled in prison to defend and reinforce the ongoing revolution. This is how, independently from the prison authorities, he organized with his comrades educational conferences and debates in defense of the revolution. He said that more than 100 inmates participated. He also pushed so the prisoners could work for the revolution in the fields or wherever they could be useful. With their action, Idalberto and his comrades tried to convince undecided convicts of revolutionary ideas. And according to Idalberto, they were very successful.

He stressed that, on the other hand, the re-education courses organized by the prison authorities were a failure. The impact of the actions of Idalberto and his comrades was such that the right-wing and counterrevolutionary prisoners began to physically threaten the Trotskyists saying they were infiltrated Castro agents. One day, the prison warden gathered all the inmates in the yard, asked Idalberto to stand next to him and threatened all the right-wing prisoners with retaliation if they touched but one hair of comrade Trotskyist Idalberto Ferrera whose militant courage he recognized in front of the "true" traitors of the homeland. Idalberto finished his anecdote telling me, "This is the difference between a Stalinist gulag and a Castro prison." The story Idalberto told me in the late 1990's could be a little embellished, but Juan Leon confirmed what his father had said.

At the end of his life, Idalberto had not abandoned his critical attitude towards the Cuban regime, nor his struggle for the emancipation of the peoples. He was convinced the conquests of the Cuban Revolution had to be defended and deepened; and this implied fighting bureaucracy. He made mistakes of appreciation: his position during the Missile Crisis in October 1962 and the accusations of his international movement on the disappearance of Che are examples. He was unjustly incarcerated at different times in 1960 and 1970. Since the 1930's to the end of his life, he was a convinced revolutionary militant. He is one of those militants, men and women, who remain faithful to the struggle along their lives.

Eric Toussaint

P.S.

* A CubaNews translation. Edited by Walter Lippmann. Wednesday, July 24 2013 12:18,
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* Translated by Alberto Nadal [From French to Spanish from which this was then translated to English, wl]

* Eric Toussaint, historian PhD in political sciences, author of several books.

* See Eric Toussaint "Revolucionarios olvidados de la historia. Los trotskistas cubanos de los años 1930 a 1959 », The text was written in 2000 and published in the book by Yannick Bovy and Eric Toussaint, *Le pas suspendu de la révolution, Approche critique de la réalité cubaine*, Edition du Cerisier, Cuesmes, Belgique, 2001, 387 pp. With a preface by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán. The book contains contributions from Fernando Martínez Heredia, Abel Prieto, Mayra Espina Prieto, Julio Fernández Bulté, Yannick Bovy, Janette Habel, François Houtart, Jean Lazard, María López Vigil, Osvaldo Martínez, Julio Carranza Valdés, Haroldo Dilla Alfonso, Silvio Rodríguez, Maya Roy, Eric Toussaint, Laurence Weerts. See presentation of the book in French:
<http://risal.collectifs.net/spip.php?mot742y> <http://archive.indymedia.be/news/2001/12/14996.html>

Footnotes

[1] Per inquadrare la vicenda nel contesto della storia si veda: *Trotskistas cubanos* - Eric Toussaint.

[2] The Movimiento 26 de Julio was created in the summer of 1953 by Fidel Castro to organize the armed struggle and the revolutionary mass action after the assault on the Moncada garrison in Santiago de Cuba on July 26, 1953. This marks the acceleration of the struggle against the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. The struggle led by the M-26 would lead to the overthrowing of Batista in January 1959 and the victory of the Cuban Revolution.

3/ Tennant Gary, *The Hidden Pearl of the Caribbean. Trotskyism in Cuba*, Socialist Platform, London, 2000, p 202.

[3] Tennant Gary, *The Hidden Pearl of the Caribbean. Trotskyism in Cuba*, Socialist Platform, London, 2000, p 202.

[4] We must point out that in the same period several members of the Stalinist fraction (called the micro-fraction led by communist Anibal Escalante) were sentenced to several years in prison. See the interview of Trotskyist leader Roberto Acosta Hechavarria who declared the Castro leadership attacked the Trotskyist left and the Stalinist right (Tennant, p. 250).

[5] "La liquidation de Guevara : Un coup à la Révolution cubaine" en *Lutte communiste* 10 novembre 1965.

[6] *Lutte communiste*, 25 octobre 1967, pp 2-3.

[7] Causa n°270 de 1973 de la radicación del Tribunal n°1 de La Habana, 12/12/1973.