

YESCuba

YesCuba, the official newsletter of Jamaican Youth and Elders in Solidarity with Cuba, No. 15, June 2010

Professor Keith Ellis

One of the most outstanding Jamaican intellectuals now alive

- ◆ First Jamaican to receive the Doctor Honoris Causa from the University of Havana
- ◆ First black person to be elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, a group of the top professors in the country, elected by their peers
- ◆ Recipient of The Award for Excellence in Academia bestowed upon him in 2004 by the Association of Black Students and Alumni of the University of Toronto
- ◆ Recipient of the Dulce María Loynaz International Prize for contribution to literary studies and understanding of and support for Cuba, given by UNEAC (The Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba)



Distinguished Professor Keith Ellis speaking with past Cuban Ambassador to Jamaica Gisela Garcia, during an address to Jamaican students about to take up scholarships in Cuba

YESCuba: How were you introduced to the struggles of the Cuban people and what are your impressions of the Cuban society?

Ellis: As was the case with many of my schoolmates, I was attracted to Cuba through Cuban popular music - the music of people like Beny Moré and Pérez Prado of the late forties and fifties.

Some Cuban students who came to Calabar talked about the repressive violence of the Batista regime. I was very interested in the revolutionary



The legendary Beny More dances with a partner

process from that time. I was in the United States, as a graduate student in the early years of the triumph of the Revolution and it was clear to me that the interests of Cuba and those of the United States

would collide.

There was a group of us that took risks explaining things from the Cuban point of view to U.S. audiences which included unpredictable church groups.

I first visited Cuba in 1972, along with my wife and our baby daughter. All three of us were very favourably impressed. I had gone to do research on Nicolás Guillén's poetry and he and I became friends.

The spirit of the people made it feel to me like an honour to be invited by workers at the hotel where we stayed to do voluntary work in the building of what has become one of the great hospitals in Cuba.

My many subsequent visits to Cuba have strengthened my admiration for the people and their capacity to overcome difficult obstacles.

I have come to know more people and to feel the pride they have in



their internationalist work and their country's achievements despite the relentless and ruthless hostility of the world's most powerful and influential state.

YESCuba: You are an active member of the Canadian-Cuban Friendship Association-Toronto. Please tell our readers about this organization and its work.

Ellis: The Canadian-Cuban Friendship Association-Toronto (CCFA-Toronto) has been active for more than thirty years. The group keeps abreast of developments in



Cuba. We have public meetings of all sorts, some offering concerts by Cuban artists and others having to do with lectures on different aspects of Cuban history, so that people can be informed about the background to events that occur.

We also do fundraising, particularly for Cuba and other Caribbean countries when they suffer from hurricanes or other natural disasters. Right now we are raising funds to help Cuba help Haiti. We find that the most effective way of helping the Haitian people is through the proven solidarity work that Cuba has been doing with Haiti since 1998. This idea arose from the CCFA-Toronto and it has been adopted by the CNC (the Canadian Network on



Cuban doctor with a Haitian who is a recent graduate of Cuba's Latin American School of Medicine providing much needed treatment to the people of Haiti

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Cuba) which is the umbrella organization of different Cuban friendship associations throughout Canada.

I have been coordinating these national fundraising efforts. In the course of the relief effort for Haiti we have so far raised some CAN\$97,000. I should also add that countries such as Norway and Namibia are helping Haiti through Cuba.

At the same time we have to be combating the campaign against Cuba that has been organized by the Obama administration.

It is clear that when Obama went to the Summit of Caribbean and Latin American countries in Trinidad a year ago he was alarmed by the great feeling of goodwill that was being shown to Cuba. He decided then to put tremendous financial and propaganda resources toward discrediting Cuba, no matter how unscrupulous, absurd and unbalanced the allegations were.

Cuba's most popular pop-rock duo Buena Fe (Good Faith) at a special, intimate concert in October 2008 at Cerveceria on College, Canada. Proceeds were donated to the Canada-Cuba Friendship Association's Hurricane Relief project in aid of the Cuban people badly affected by Hurricanes Ike and Gustav.

Obama built on the campaign that Bush had launched together with Tony Blair to attract to the U.S. side the middle classes among black populations throughout the world, using the enticements of modernity as a tool. They made great headway with regard to Mugabe in Zimbabwe, so that in Jamaica, for example, incensed and passionate statements were made against Mugabe, incited by these two leaders who should have been recognized as lunatics at best for their massive killings of



Obama receives a copy of the book Open Veins of Latin America from Chaves at the Summit of Latin American and Caribbean countries in Trinidad.

innocent people in Iraq and who, in the case of Zimbabwe, were fighting through the abuse of the two-party system to have white supremacy prevail.

Obama has the added advantage of his blackness as a ploy to alienate the black middle classes from their reality. It is seeming that many blacks are seeing themselves as

vicarious occupants of the White House and have lost sight of the imperialist objectives of the Obama



President Mugabe

administration, even though he is starkly waging killing campaigns against people who are not white, as in Afghanistan, where the justifications offered for white NATO military cruelty there are patently absurd.

There is also the example of Pakistan where the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize is giving the corrupt government \$7.5 billion over five years provided that they abandon peace overtures, kill poor people especially in the "tribal areas" and allow him to join in the killing with his high-flying drones.

These are the kinds of things that we bring to the attention of people in our CCFA and contrast those activities with the Cuban effort to help people to live, and what that

effort would mean in a country such as Afghanistan that suffers from widespread illiteracy and the highest infant mortality rate and the highest maternal mortality rate in the world.

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Reality of Afghan existence thanks to US occupation

doing since 1998 in Haiti where they have been essentially responsible for reducing the infant mortality rate from 120 per 1000 live births to 55 in 2009?

YESCuba: What are the main myths about Cuba that your solidarity movement has had to contend with?

Ellis: The main myth that was very strong at the beginning of the Obama administration was that the United States would be conciliatory with Cuba and that Cuba should be receptive to this new mood from the United States. The myth was supported by some tricky moves by the U.S. secret services.

For example, at the time of the earthquake in Haiti, they planted articles in several North American newspapers about how the United States was going to help Cuba help Haiti by contributing significantly to the solidarity effort in which Cuba was involved in Haiti.

The articles won the U.S. some goodwill because they pictured the U.S. as being so moved by the

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disaster in Haiti that it would involve itself in this decent reaction to the disaster. But the substance of those articles was completely fictitious: they were really intended to give the impression that, as Hillary Clinton said a week ago, Cuba was resisting overtures of friendship from the U.S.

What in fact the U.S. was actually



Earthquake in Haiti

doing, as I said before, was unleashing, through its agents and the western media, a calumniating attack on Cuba and increasing its funding and technological support for its mercenaries in Cuba.

Another myth is the gross overestimating of force that the authorities employ in Cuba. I would say that in no other country that I know is the society so organized that education, good manners, respect for fellow citizens, culture and cooperativeness between citizens play a greater role in creating a truly democratic society. From primary school, for example, children address their classmates frequently on topics such as what they have done recently for other children or for older people.

And so, a sense of caring is developed that diminishes violence; and the general high level of education provides people with more subtle means than physical violence for expressing their feelings of umbrage, should they have them

I read a few days ago that so far this year the police in Jamaica have killed 73 people extra-judicially.

Nothing like that happens in Cuba. Nothing like the armed police using batons with full force on people happens in Cuba as occurred recently in Copenhagen.

I heard Gloria Estefan saying in Miami that a demonstration of "Women in White" (Damas de Blanca), the mercenary group, was violently attacked by the police in Cuba. The film of the incident



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Primary School children working to clean up their school in Santiago de Cuba

clearly showed unarmed women security officers separating those women from indignant Cubans. The BBC also lied, in well-articulated English, by saying that those women were arrested.

The criminals who blew up the Cubana aircraft off Barbados are walking freely in Miami and attending rallies for U.S. political

leaders. They are in the forefront of those who allege Cuban government repression, and they are shielded from condemnation by the Western media which tend to see as allies those who oppose the socialist government.

The Cuban government knows from what it has to protect itself and its people. It would be grossly

negligent if it didn't take note of statements, made by its U.S.-based opponents, such as "Cuba needs to be cleansed with the blood of 2 million people." It also knows how strangely contradictory Western capitalist sensitivities can be.

While Cuba opposes terror in a principled way (it was among the first countries to offer logistical and medical help to the U.S. at the time of the 9/11 attack, not to mention the aid it offered at the time of Katrina that would have prevented people from dying), the U.S. has initiated or cooperated in almost every form of terrorism against the island, a yawning moral gap that escapes the notice of western media.

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diplomatic representatives in Cuba and collude with this ruthless enemy and are punished within Cuban law (twenty-seven years with early releases having been the longest sentence), a chorus of calumny goes up against Cuba. At the same time when Puerto Ricans agitate for their independence and get sentences in



Cuban doctors listen to a speech by Cuban President Fidel Castro in Havana, Sept. 4, 2005, as he extends his offer to send 1,100 Cuban doctors with two backpacks of medicine each to help people affected by Hurricane Katrina in the southern US.

There is also the annual Olympiad of athletic competition between prisoners of eastern, central and western Cuba, followed by a dignified, moving, closing and prize-giving ceremony. As a result of such practices, if in all of Cuba, with its population of 11.3 million people, six people are murdered in a given year, this is met with alarm.

U.S. courts of up to eighty years in prison or are killed extra-judicially as one was two years ago, Jamaicans would have to carry out the most arduous search to get this information.

Cuba has strict law enforcement against dealings in narcotic drugs. The prudence in not giving this evil room to grow is borne out by what has happened to countries such as close U.S. allies, Colombia and Mexico, where the competition to supply the almost insatiable U.S. market, created by cultural vacuums and other social and political irrationalities, has led to fearsome and widespread murders and other crimes.

For many inmates, Cuban prisons are places of learning. They leave with degrees, and without a criminal

record, to work inside the country or on overseas missions. Since they make bats for the revived game of cricket, they and school children are among the first groups playing the organized game in Cuba. Groups of artists, young and old, volunteer to visit prisons to boost the morale of prisoners and to begin early the process of helping with their rehabilitation.

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Perhaps I can best convey something of the tone of everyday Cuban life by describing two experiences that occurred during my two most recent visits to Cuba. In February I went to, among other things, present books, one by Martin Carter and another by Nicolás Guillén, at Cuba's mammoth annual Book Fair. During that week a friend of mine, the poet Nancy Morejón, was presenting her book, at a different site. I took a taxi to go to there, and, chatting with the

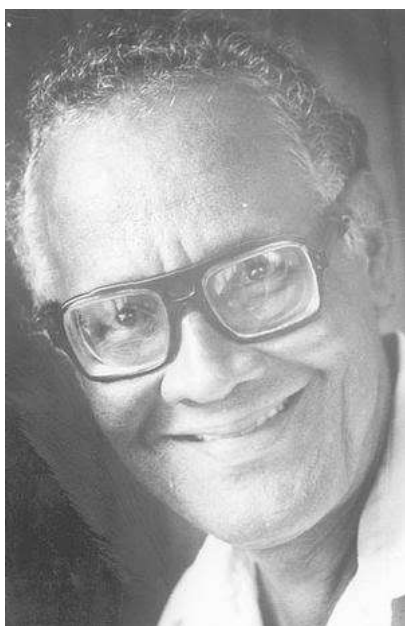


Nancy Morejón

taxi driver, I told him where I was going and what the event was. When we reached, he parked his taxi and came to the event, as a keen reader of her poetry.

On my following visit, having got his telephone number, I called him to take me to the Carlos J. Finlay Institute, famous for its production of Cuban vaccines and whose director, Dr. Concepción Campa, is a good friend of mine.

On the way there, the gas line of the car became blocked and the car



Guyanese poet, the late Martin Carter

stalled. My friend the driver, a very black man, immediately diagnosed the problem and started to suck on the line to clear it. A car drove up with a white driver. He got out and came to ask if he could help.

My friend was showing some discomfort with the gasoline which he was trying to spit out of his mouth. The white driver continued the same process and finished clearing the line. While this was happening a third car drove up with another white driver who stopped, offered to help, but was thanked and waved on because by then things were under control.

When I describe these incidents to my



Dr. Concepción Campa

Cuban friends, they see nothing remarkable about either of them. In North America, this ready helpfulness that is blind to race and a taxi driver having the time and interest to go calmly to the launching of a new book by one of Cuba's outstanding poets would both be extraordinary.

The driver really became my friend. He invited me to his house where I met three generations of his family; and he accompanied me to the houses of other



<http://sites.google.com/site/yescuba/>

I beg for mercy, mercy on the Europeans

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**Chastise them not for their readiness to attack Cuba
For considering the country has no right
To punish those who work treasonously
In the service of barbarians who yearn
To return to divide and steal
To obstruct culture and science
To disrupt schooling and health care
To move infant mortality rates up to theirs
To stop life expectancy from rivaling theirs
To make the population as misinformed
To stop saving lives and improving health
Of poor people throughout the world
To despoil again the environment
To put a halt to making millions literate
For fear those people will come to know
How to direct their monies away from rapacious banks
How to defend what is theirs.**

**Be patient with the Europeans
Remember their ancestral ingrained habits
Of murdering Africans and indigenous people by the millions
Of stealing from others as if it were gifts from God
Of raping, torturing.**

**Show them the path to redemption
Through the picture of the real Cuba
There is no quicker way of easing them
Out of the monstrous habits of brutes and hypocrites.**

Keith Ellis

