

FOCAL Chronicle on Cuba

December 2001

Domestic Affairs

December 3: Fidel Castro announced an outbreak of three cases of dengue fever in Havana. He added that Cuba has the "necessary expertise and resources" to deal with the epidemic and that there is "no doubt" that it'll be eradicated. He also pointed out that Cuba's infant mortality rate fell to 6.2 per 1,000 live births this year. (EFE, AP, 4/12/01)

December 4: More than 22,800 Customs and Immigration officials have been trained in drug detection and interdiction since the island introduced improved measures to counter narcotics trafficking in the country. Colonel Oliverio Montalvo, chief of the Interior Ministry's Antidrug Unit, reports that a further 5,300 personnel in Public Health and Education, as well as 155 judges, have received similar training. A number of Montalvo's employees have attended courses abroad in cooperation with nations such as England, France, Canada and Spain, with whom Cuba holds anti-drug accords. (Radio Habana Cuba, 4/12/01)

December 5: The Panamanian Foreign Minister, José Miguel Alemán, has denied allegations that Alejandro Abood, a Panamanian citizen arrested in Cuba, has been accused of collaborating with the CIA [see Chronicle on Cuba, November, 2002]. Alemán said that such allegations, published in a US newspaper, contradicted information received by the Panamanian Foreign Ministry. (Panamá América, 5/12/01)

December 5: An old, multistoried residential building in Havana collapses killing at least two people and injuring two others. The building had been evacuated by authorities several months before because of its precarious condition, but some families had later returned to live there. (AP, 5/12/01)

December 7: Cuban President Fidel Castro delivers the closing address of the tenth Sao Paulo Forum in Havana. The four-day gathering of 500 delegates from 150 political leftist parties and organizations from Latin America and the Caribbean came to an end with the approval of a final declaration condemning free market neo-liberal globalization, poverty, unemployment and corruption - with a strong denunciation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas. (Radio Habana Cuba, 8/12/01)

December 10: The 4th National and 2nd International Workshop on Genetic Mutations begins in Havana with the participation of some 70 experts. The event includes paper presentations and master lectures on issues related to applied research and the impact of environmental pollution. (Radio Habana Cuba, 10/12/01)

December 10: Cuba's high jump world record holder, Javier Sotomayor, denies an accusation by the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) that he took the banned steroid nandrolone [see also Chronicle on Cuba, November 2001]. (Granma International, 10/12/01)

December 11: Public health authorities in Cuba are worried about the spreading of an outbreak of dengue fever in Havana and are urging state entities and the population to intensify the campaign against the mosquito known as "Aedes Aegypti". (Notimex, 11/12/01)

December 13: There is no evidence a recently discovered "spectacular" rock formation on the seabed off Cuba's western tip was a lost city belonging to an unknown ancient civilization, Cuban specialists say. Canadian exploration company Advanced Digital Communications (ADC) had indicated the structures discovered at about 2,100 feet (650 metres) below the ocean surface

might be ruins of a submerged urban centre from thousands of years ago. But Cuban specialists warned it was too early to tell, and said the formation may have a natural explanation. (Reuters, 13/12/01)

December 14: President Fidel Castro returned to Cuba after attending the III Summit of the Association of Caribbean States held on Margarita Island, Venezuela. (Juventud Rebelde, 14/12/01)

December 15: Cuba leads Latin America in primary education. That was the conclusion of a study conducted by a regional task force sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The study reveals that in the areas of test scores, completion rates and literacy levels, Cuban grade school students are at the top of a list of their peers from across Latin America. (Radio Habana Cuba, 15/12/01)

December 15: Cuban First Vice-President, Raúl Castro, led a rally in Pílon, Granma, to protest the convictions handed down by a Miami jury against three of the five Cuban intelligence agents accused of putting US national security at risk. (Prensa Latina, 15/12/01)

December 17: Cuba's Roman Catholic bishops say they are saddened that many of the island's families are separated by divorce and exile and called for family unity this holiday season. (The Miami Herald, 18/12/01)

December 17: A Hialeah couple who flew to Cuba to visit relatives is found slain on the highway between Havana and Santa Clara, along with their daughter, 8-year-old grandson and a friend. The couple had flown to Cuba to visit a gravely ill relative. Their bodies were found along a stretch of the Ocho Vías highway near Matanzas. This type of news is rare in Cuba. (The Miami Herald, 18/12/01)

December 29: At a special session of National Assembly of People's Power held in Havana, it is decided to bestow the titles of Heroes of the Republic of Cuba on Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Fernando González, René González and Antonio Guerrero, the five Cuban agents imprisoned in Miami. It were also Fidel Castro's initiatives to honour the mothers and wives of the arrested Cubans with the Mariana Grajales and Ana Betancourt Orders, respectively, and to propose that the year 2002 be known as "Year of the Heroes Imprisoned by the U.S. Empire." He stated that the news of their decorations would make those valiant men the happiest people in the world. (Granma International, 30/12/01)

Economy

December 2: It has been announced that the Empresa del Seguro Estatal Nacional (ESEN), a national insurance company, might disburse more than 40 million pesos destined mainly to agriculture. The amount exceeds the annual average of the outlays of the company under normal circumstances. (Agencia de Información Nacional, 2/12/01)

December 2: This year, specialists of the Cuban state enterprise "Comandante René Ramos Latour" used national crude oil in the production of nickel, which is expected to surpass 13,000 tonnes planned for the year by 5%. This accomplishment translates into lower fuel imports used at a rate of 11 tonnes of foreign fuel-oil to 9 tonnes of the national crude to obtain one tonne of nickel and cobalt concentrate. (Agencia de Información Nacional, 2/12/01)

December 2: The Chambers of Commerce of Cuba and Slovakia organized a visit to the island of a Slovakian business delegation. The objective of the mission was to diversify and expand trade between the two nations as well as to set up new joint ventures. (Opciones, 2/12/01)

December 3: Vietnam and Cuba sign three agreements on co-operation at a ceremony held in Havana in the presence of Cuban President Fidel Castro and Vietnam's Permanent Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung: A contract to purchase 250,000 tonnes of rice, a project to develop rice cultivation in Cuba, and the Vietnamese company HANEL will provide a TV assembling chain as a gift to the Cuban Electronics Company. (VNA, 5/12/01)

December 6: The US Cuba Trade & Economic Council says in its weekly publication that Italian cement maker Mapei and Cuban state-owned company Ticons have built a third cement additives plant in Cuba, without revealing investment figures. Each of the plants operate under cooperate production agreements between Cuba-based Arca 99 (the exclusive representative of Mapei) and Ticons. The three plants use Mapei technology and raw materials. The US Cuba Trade & Economic Council published also that Chinese company NEEC will help Cuba's Hydroelectric Resources Agency to install mini-generators as part of a cooperation The program began with the installation of mini-generators in the locality of Pinar del Rio province, and a further 25 mini-generators will be installed during 2002. The equipment has a capacity of 5,000kW. (Business News Americas, 6/12/01)

December 7: The Chilean Economic Development Agency (CORFO) announced an increase of its credit to Cuba for bilateral commercial operations from 20 to 30 million dollars. According to CORFO, there are roughly 100 Chilean exporters, mainly in the food sector among Cuba's foreign suppliers. (AFP, 7/12/01)

December 9: The Cuban Minister of Sugar, Ulises Rosales del Toro, said that the current harvest has started with 54% of the crop flattened by Hurricane Michelle [see also Chronicle on Cuba, November 2001], high input costs and low international prices due to the international economic recession. He also added the Hurricane damaged repair shops and refineries in 99 mills hit, of which 60 are scheduled to take part in the milling. The Minister referred also to other significant losses in other crops like rice, bananas, and beans that the Ministry allocates for consumption by the workforce. In the Plenary Session of the Party in Matanzas it was announced that sugar production in that province had declined by 60% in the last decade as a result of mismanagement of the crops and other irregularities. This is just an example of the lack of control and inadequate application of harvesting techniques resulting in a reduced number of cane stems from 686 to 276 million arrobas (1 arropa equals 11.5 kg). Likewise, during the Plenary Session of the Party in Camagüey the problems affecting food production were reviewed, particularly the lack of control and discipline as well as ways to curtail illegal activities. (Granma, 9/12/01)

December 12: Carlos Lage, secretary of the Executive Committee of the Cuban Council of Ministers, stated that "we will recover quickly and will come out of this situation in better form to keep moving forward ", in relation to the damage caused by hurricane Michelle in the Isle of Youth [see Chronicle on Cuba, November 2001]. Lage also said that in a few months the territory could refurbish 1,580 and rebuild 142 homes that were hit by Michelle. (Juventud Rebelde, 15/12/01)

December 14: The 2nd Meeting of the Cuba-Hungary Mixed Intergovernmental Commission concludes in Havana with the commitment to work toward expanding bilateral trade relations and reviving economic links. Hungarian Assistant Secretary of State for the Economy, Gilyan Giorgy, told reporters that in 2001 alone, Hungary's exports to Cuba were in the range of 1,500,000 dollars worth of goods - mainly medicine and foodstuffs. (Radio Habana Cuba, 15/12/01)

December 15: The excellence of Cuba's tourist resort Jardines del Rey is recognized during its 5th Convention. The 5th Jardines del Rey Tourism Convention was dedicated to Canada, the main promoter of foreign tourists to the central region of Cuba. (Radio Habana Cuba, 15/12/01)

December 18: During a television appearance, President Fidel Castro gave the official report on the damage caused by Hurricane Michelle [see also Chronicle on Cuba, November 2001]. In terms of housing 166,515 homes were damaged out of which 12,579 were completely destroyed, for a loss of 785 million pesos. Restoring electricity was the biggest challenge: 5,761 electric poles had to be replaced; 627 transformers and 125 pylons of 220 kV were damaged. Thus, the national energy grid was out of operation for 19 days. Serious damages were reported in the area of communications too: 5,987 telephone poles were hit and 14,828 telephones were cut off. Also nine television towers were affected as well as other communication support systems. Moreover, 1.869 million hectares of sugarcane, representing 54% of the area that will be used in the current harvest, were flattened. The damage to the cane equalled the loss of 400,000 tonnes of sugar for export with a value of \$60 million. In addition 420,000 tonnes of citrus fruits were damaged, although 22,000 tonnes were recovered. Consequently, exports will be reduced by \$27 million dollars and domestic consumption will shrink as well. Similarly, 73,080 hectares of banana plantations were lost which will reduce production by 46 million kg this year and by 230 million kg in the first half of 2002. Michelle ravaged 168,000 hectares of other crops and around 1.4 million kilograms of coffee were lost. Gale-force winds affected 325 greenhouses, 76 irrigation machines, 2,573 tobacco-drying sheds, 394 chicken barns were totally destroyed and another 423 partially destroyed. Restoring agricultural losses both in sugarcane and in other crops will amount to 317 million pesos, and losses in agricultural production will reach 260 million pesos. Losses in other areas of the economy as a result of power outages, floods and other problems have been calculated at 133 million pesos. President Castro gave details of the many resources that have been allocated to recover from the damages. He added that almost all services have been re-established, yet in some cases only temporary solutions have been put in place. (Granma, 19/12/01)

Exile Community

December 4: A survey requested by the Group for Cuban Studies (GEC) and carried out by Bendixen & Associates among 837 Miami-Dade County residents indicates that most Cuban exiles believe that U.S. policy toward Cuba has failed, although a large majority continues to support the economic embargo. Fifty-five percent of those surveyed said they consider U.S. policy toward Cuba a failure, while 31 percent consider it the best strategy and 14 percent do not know or did not answer the question. According to the survey 53 percent of respondents favour continuation of the economic embargo, while 32 percent are opposed to it. (The Miami Herald, 4/12/01)

December 10: A federal judge in Key West, Florida, has announced that the trial of the three Cuban exiles accused of entering Cuban waters without prior approval from the US Coast Guard will begin on May 1, 2002. Ramón Saúl Sánchez, leader of the Democracy Movement, Alberto Pérez and Pablo Rodríguez, could face up to 10 years in prison and up to \$20,000 in fines for allegedly ignoring a 1996 US legislation. (Notimex, 10/12/01)

Foreign Relations

December 2: A communiqué is issued at the end of talks between representatives of Cuba and the European Union [see Chronicle on Cuba, November 2001]. "We've had an open meeting during which we worked seriously and could re-establish, I believe, a political dialogue at a very useful level," said the head of the EU delegation, Jan de Bock, Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belgium. In an address to the press after the talks Felipe Pérez Roque, Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs, said: "We have been able to hold extensive discussions on those issues on which we do not, at present, share similar views and perceptions". (Granma, 3/12/01)

December 2: Venezuela's President, Hugo Chávez, says his government has approved a new shipment of humanitarian aid for Cuba. The shipment will be transported on board of an army vessel which will be carrying construction materials, shoes, clothes and toys from donations made by the Venezuelan people. (EFE, 2/12/01) 5: The General Secretary of the Norwegian Foreign Relations Ministry, Biarne Lindstrom, made an official visit to Cuba. The visit coincided with the opening of the Royal Embassy of Norway in Cuba. (Radio Habana Cuba, 6/12/01)

December 6: Cuba's national airline Cubana de Aviación S.A. and Vietnam Airlines sign a special tariff agreement that will benefit civil aviation. The accord facilitates the exchange of passengers between the two nations with special low tariffs, as well as the use of services provided by the two aviation firms. (Radio Habana Cuba, 6/12/01)

December 7: The 74th meeting of heads of state of the Africa-Caribbean-Pacific Group (ACP) held in Brussels [see Chronicle on Cuba, November 2001] calls the EU to conduct a "comprehensive revision of its Common Position so as to treat Cuba in a fair and impartial fashion." It is also hoped that "such a revision by the EU would allow Cuba to enter into the ACP-UE Partnership Agreement, and to sign the Cotonou Agreement, without imposing any special or discriminatory conditions. (Granma, 9/12/01)

December 9: A delegation of the Cuban Ministry of Health arrived in Honduras to examine possible ways to expand on a 1999 agreement under which Cuban doctors have treated a million and a half Hondurans. (Notimex, 10/12/01)

December 10: European Union foreign ministers decide to maintain their "common position" on Cuba which conditions cooperation with Havana on the Castro government applying reforms on human rights and moving towards political pluralism [see Chronicle on Cuba, November 2001]. According to a statement released by the ministers: "The council (of EU foreign ministers) still observes in that country severe shortcomings related to the application of civil and political liberties and the refusal of the Cuban authorities to impose reforms." However, the EU said it had noted some positive movement in Cuba such as "more religious freedom, the non-application of the death penalty over the past two years, fewer political prisoners and a rise in the ratification of UN human rights instruments." For those reasons, the European Union believes that its current policy towards Cuba "is still valid" and will continue its political dialogue with Havana. (EFE, 10/12/01)

December 10: A delegation headed by Jaak Gabriels, Minister of Economy, Foreign Trade and Housing Policy, of the Regional Government of Flanders concluded a three-day visit to the island. Gabriels was accompanied by a trade mission of business people representing more than 13 companies. The business delegation had an opportunity to meet with their Cuban counterparts, in which they identified possible areas of mutual interest, including the food sector. The first steps have been taken for the creation of a joint venture to make different types of cheese for the Cuban domestic market and exports to the Caribbean. (Granma, 10/12/01)

December 10: The European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) in Havana announced that the UE will grant 1,050,000 euros (\$904.500 dollars) in aid to Central American and Caribbean countries for the damages caused by hurricane Michelle [see also Chronicle on Cuba, November 2001] out of which half a million will be used to buy medicines for Cuba. (EFE, 10/12/01)

December 10: Cuban President Fidel Castro arrives in Venezuela to participate in the 3rd Summit of the Association of Caribbean States held in Margarita Island. (Radio Habana Cuba, 11/12/01)

December 10: The first meeting of the Cuba-South Africa Mixed Cooperation Commission begins sessions in Pretoria. The Cuban delegation to the meeting is headed by the President of the National Institute for Hydraulic Resources, Jorge Aspiolea, while the South African delegation is headed by the Minister of Hydraulic and Forest Resources, Ronnie Kasrils. (Radio Habana Cuba, 10/12/01)

December 12: President Fidel Castro, commenting on Venezuelan business leaders who organized a nationwide protest strike against President Hugo Chávez, said he wished them all a "heart stoppage." When other Caribbean leaders reacted with puzzlement to the Cuban leader's outburst, he quickly explained he was referring to Chavez's strike-organizing domestic political opponents. (Reuters, 12/12/01)

December 12: In its annual report, the Cuban doctors brigade in Guatemala stated that since their mission began in that country three years ago, they have been able to save 50,000 lives and reduce infant/maternal mortality rate to 50%. The brigade of 459 doctors started their mission at the end of 1998 and is scheduled to continue for two more years after the government signed an agreement extending its stay. (AFP, 6/12/01, Notimex, 12/12/01)

December 13: After signing an Association of Caribbean States (ACS) summit declaration that supports Free Trade Area of the Americas, Cuban President Fidel Castro warns that the proposed treaty could lead to U.S. domination of Latin America. "There is a plot to impose by economic force (...) not only an economic, but a global political order," Castro said. (AP, 13/12/01)

Security

December 1: In an interview for the Cuban Armed Forces' magazine, Verde Olivo, Army General Raúl Castro said that in the last few years Cuba has not acquired any new weaponry, however for three decades they received enough. He also said that some of the military equipment has been deactivated either because it no longer meets the standards of today's warfare or for other reasons; but the largest part of Cuba's military equipment is well preserved and maintained. He noted the contributions the Ministry of the Armed Forces has made to the country's economy as a result of a restructuring of its administrative system and the use of modern business practices. Castro also pointed out that today's defence budget amounts to almost half of what it used to be in the mid 1980s, and that Cuba does not have any offensive means. (Granma, 1/12/01)

December 2: Cuba's military celebrates its anniversary with a parade that reflected a diminished firepower. Unlike its martial parades of the 1970s and 1980s, the Revolutionary Armed Forces marched on its 45th anniversary without tanks, anti-aircraft weapons, mortars or other big guns. Instead, there were three combat jets, three helicopter gunships and less than half the 6,040 marchers carried rifles. (AP, 2/12/01)

December 12: Cuban Ambassador to the UN, Carlos Amat, stated Cuba's opposition to any mechanism aimed at monitoring the implementation of the Convention on Conventional Arms, as well as to the drafting of any additional Protocol banning the use of anti-vehicle mines; however, he expressed Cuba's support for the creation of a group of experts on explosive remains of war. In a presentation to the II Conference for the revision of the Convention, Amat announced Cuba's position as to the proposals that should be analyzed by the participants in this meeting. (Radio Nederland, 12/12/01)

Terrorism

December 4: Cuba proposes sharing information with the United States on terrorism but U.S. officials show no interest. During U.S.-Cuban migration talks in Havana, the Cuban side called for a "terrorism information exchange," but the U.S. delegation said it was an inappropriate forum for a discussion of the issue. (AP, 4/12/01)

December 17: Cuban President Fidel Castro briefly meets Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams who arrived in Havana the day before. Adams visit is intended to focus on remembering participants of an Irish Republican Army hunger strike 20 years ago. (AP, 17/12/01)

December 20: A Cuban bill against acts of terrorism is approved at the 8th Session of the National Assembly of People's Power. It provides legislation that is better adapted to the 12 United Nations international agreements on terrorism. Days before, deputies analyzed the bill with the highest national legal authorities, specifying the changes made in the text in accordance with meetings held in all the provinces. "Cuba has all the legal instruments to confront this scourge, as it has always done," declared José Luis Toledo Santander, president of the Constitutional and Legal Affairs Commission. He added that formulations included in the Penal Code have been reviewed and reaffirmed. The new legislation, he said, is in line with international treaties, and covers a wide range of criminal actions. (Granma International, 21/12/01)

December 27: Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld says the Pentagon is planning to house captured al Qaeda terrorists and Taliban fighters for an undetermined time at Guantánamo Base, Cuba [see also Cuban Chronicle, November 2001]. Rumsfeld called Cuba "the least worst place, and stated that there are no plans to stage military tribunals or trials at the base, which is home to about 1,100 members of the Navy and Marine Corps. We don't anticipate any trouble with Mr. Castro," he added. (The Miami Herald, 28/12/01)

December 30: The Cuban government has no opinion of U.S. plans to hold Afghan war detainees at Guantánamo Base, the Cuban Foreign Ministry says. "The Foreign Ministry wants to clarify that the government of Cuba does not have the elements necessary to make a judgment and because of that has not adopted any position." The Minister statement came a day after several Cuban officials, including Vice President José Ramón Fernández, said they personally opposed the U.S. plan, mostly because they believe the base should have been closed decades ago. "Actions of these kind violate the rights of others," Fernández added (AP, 30/12/01)

US-Cuba Relations

December 4: The 17th round of talks for the review of the migration accords signed between the United States and Cuba in 1994-1995 finished today at the Convention Centre of Havana. The meeting's objective was to examine the function and efficacy of the existing migratory agreement between the two countries. The migratory agreements of 1994-95 require that the U.S. issue 20,000 visas annually to Cubans and that they will repatriate all illegal immigrants intercepted on the sea or at the Guantánamo Naval Base in the east of Cuba. Havana, for its part, agreed to impede by new dissuasive methods the illegal departures and to socially rehabilitate, without legal consequences, those Cubans returned by the United States. On this occasion the US delegation was headed by James Carragher, Director of Cuban Affairs at the State Department, who said: "I hope we advance more the next round". Carragher pointed out that what drives Cubans to leave the island is the harsh living conditions there. He said that Cuban migrants have been trying to get rid of a situation in which they are not allowed to freely and fully exercise the human rights that all democratic countries respect. Another reason, he added, is "the failure of the Cuban economy to provide the economic opportunities and well-being that a free economy can provide". Ricardo Alarcón, who headed the Cuban delegation, said that no progress was made in regards to the main issue of concern: the Cuban Adjustment Act. (Radio Habana Cuba, Granma, Notimex, 4/12/01)

December 5: The White House announces its opposition to a Senate proposal allowing the private financing of U.S. food sales to Cuba [see also Chronicle on Cuba, November 2001], as part of a Senate farm bill that is being readied for floor debate. In a statement, the White House said it "strongly opposes" any change in economic sanctions against the Castro government. "Because of Cuba's continued denial of basic civil rights to its citizens as well as its egregious rejection of the global coalition's efforts against terrorism, the administration strongly opposes a shift to allow private U.S. financing." (CNS News, 6/12/01)

December 6: For more than four hours, president Fidel Castro meets with American students from the University of Pittsburgh's Semester at Sea Program who arrived in the Universe Explorer cruiser for a two-day visit to Cuba. This is the second time Castro meets with American students since Semester at Sea program began a few years ago. (AP, 5/12/01, Granma, 7/12/01)

December 7: Cuba complained about the US refusal to issue a visa to two companions of the four mothers of the Cuban agents accused of spying for the Castro government. In a diplomatic note sent to the State Department and the US Interests Section in Havana, the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs refers to the Washington refusal as an "inhuman, vengeful and despicable action". (Notimex, 7/12/01)

December 10: The five Cuban agents accused of spying on the United States will attend a preliminary hearing in a Miami court prior to being sentenced. Gerardo Hernández, René González, Ramón Labañino, Fernando González and Antonio Guerrero, all members of the so-call "Wasp Network", will be tried separately. (EFE, 10/12/01)

December 12: A federal court in Florida sentences Gerardo Hernández to life imprisonment for trying to infiltrate US military bases and conspiring to murder four Cuban-Americans whose private planes were shot down by Cuban jet fighters in 1996. (BBC, 13/12/010)

December 13: A federal court in Florida sentences Ramón Labañino to life imprisonment. (The Miami Herald, 14/12/01)

December 13: President Fidel Castro calls two convicted spies sentenced to life in prison in the United States "heroes". "These boys are five heroes" who have been treated in the United States "with incredible brutality," Castro told reporters in Venezuela. "Their honour and dignity have been stripped away with the help of four North American attorneys," he said. (AP, 14/12/01)

December 14: Cuban Foreign Investment Minister, Marta Lomas, tells Reuters that the imminent arrival of the first commercial shipment of U.S. food in four decades is an important "first step" toward improving relations [see also Chronicle on Cuba, November 2001]. "I think this, of course, is a first step. We'll have to wait and see if there is a second or a third step. We don't know," added Lomas. (Reuters, 14/12/01)

December 14: René González, a Cuban secret agent who infiltrated six exile groups is sentenced to the maximum 15-year prison term as an unregistered foreign agent. (AP, 14/12/01)

December 16: Two ships carrying U.S. food arrive in Cuba, completing the first direct food trade between the two countries [see also Chronicle on Cuba, November 2001]. The M.V. Express, a container vessel owned by Florida-based Crowley Liner Services, glided into Havana Bay with 500 tons of frozen chicken sold by a U.S. subsidiary of the French firm Louis Dreyfus Corp. A second ship carrying 24,000 tons of corn sold by U.S. agribusiness giant Archer Daniels Midland arrived later in the day. "It is our hope that these initial sales to Cuba will serve the purpose of proving the point that it is a logical thing for Cuba and the United States to trade with one another," ADM executive Larry Cunningham said. "It is our feeling the best way to build relations

between countries is to have them become trading partners," Cunningham added. (Reuters, 16/12/01)

December 18: Fernando González, is sentenced to 22-year prison term as an unregistered foreign agent. (The Miami Herald, 19/12/01)

December 18: In a television appearance, President Fidel Castro referred to the US shipments of food that arrived in Cuba [see also Chronicle on Cuba, November 2001]: "Nobody could say that we have spent one cent too much or that we have bought for political reasons", said Castro. He was referring to the Miami-based Cuban exiles who oppose the sales. As to future commercial relations with the United States, Castro said that it all depends on US attitude to the issue. "US businesses have shown vast experience and swiftness. They had a quick response in spite of many hurdles". Asked about the possibility of entering into negotiations with interested US companies in the energy sector, he said: "we are not blockading the US, the US is blockading us. We do not harbour any hopes nor are we saddened by shattered fantasies. We would rather walk on solid ground". (Granma, 19/12/01)

December 27: A federal court in Florida sentences Antonio Guerrero to life imprisonment. This was the last sentence against the five Cuban intelligence agents of the so-called "Wasp Network". (Granma, 28/12/01)

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