

December 1992

## HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN CUBA

### ISSUE

The deteriorating human rights situation in Cuba.

### BACKGROUND

Still buffeted by the loss of trade with Eastern Europe and the former USSR, Cuba is enduring severe shortages and rationing. These economic difficulties have threatened many of the Revolution's major achievements such as the provision of health, education and social welfare to all Cubans.

While it is true that Cuba has made great strides in social rights, its record on political and democratic rights, which has always been poor, has deteriorated substantially in the past two years. Human rights activists, and their families, are subject to harassment, detention and physical attack. Some of those who have advocated political change, or members of their family, have been dismissed from their jobs. Increasingly, activists are subjected to "actos de repudios", acts of repudiations in which mobs, supposedly acting spontaneously, but evidentially directed by Security or Party personnel attack dissidents in their homes. Many dissidents have been subjected to "actos" throughout the year. For example, in late December 1992, Elizardo Sanchez, one of Cuba's leading dissidents, was badly beaten by a mob, and then detained, while visiting the home of another member of the opposition.

Human rights violations in Cuba are systemic. Restrictions on civil and political rights, including the freedom of expression, are codified in the penal code. Defendants in political trials appear to be denied free access to legal counsel and other elements of legal due process. While systematic torture no longer seems to be in common use, there are complaints about ill-treatment of political prisoners. Estimates of the number of political prisoners vary. Amnesty International believes that there are between 300-500 prisoners or probable prisoners of conscience in Cuba now. There are also several hundred still in custody from the 1980's.

In their daily lives, Cubans are monitored by neighbourhood "Committees for the Defense of the Revolution" (CDR) and Party representatives at work or school whose reports influence access to housing, jobs, education or travel.

The Government and the Communist Party have taken a few steps to change the system. Religious believers are now allowed to join the Party. Elections to all levels of the legislative bodies is by secret direct ballot. The now disgraced Carlos Aldana had said that