

Cuba-US Back to Normal

Fifth Estate Collective

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Acceding to the exigencies of global capital, the U.S. and Cuban governments finally admitted their mutual interests after some 16 years of mutual denunciation.

The first trade agreements are being hashed out in the Congressional carnival while fishing accords are already operative, confirming a 200-mile coastal limit which will put Cuban and American trawlers in equal competition off the Florida coast.

This past May 17th, the first American tourist boat pulled into Havana Harbor. An Associated Press dispatch described the arrival:

“Camera-clicking, tongue-wagging, with sensible shoes firmly in place, the American Tourist returned to Cuba after a 16 year absence.

“A cheering, whistling, hand-clapping crowd of nearly 1,000 Cubans stood atop a concrete wall in old Havana to welcome the 220 Americans who stormed ashore from a Greek cruise ship. It was hard to say who was more elated, the Americans or the Cubans who greeted them.”

“These are all my children,” said ginger-haired Ben Charles of Los Angeles, waving his passport, pirouetting in black patent Leather loafers, grabbing outstretched Cuban hands. “I was here in the ‘30s.”

“May the Yankees keep coming!” said Jose Suarez, a paunchy bus driver with a big grin.

Blinking in the bright sunshine of mid-afternoon, the Americans poured across the Avenida del Puerto—once known as the Allameda de Paula—to take pictures of the cheering Cubans and, predictably, each other.

Thanks to a navigational error, they arrived aboard the *MTS Daphne*, a New Orleans-based cruise ship, two hours late. But the port of Havana was freshly painted, a band played the Cuban folk song “Guantanamera” and both the crowd and the customs officials were uniformly friendly.

And before clearing customs, the 320 eager tourists were herded through a specially-prepared government store to buy cigars and rum, Cuban cigarettes for 30 cents a pack and \$2 T-shirts that said, “Cuba Si!”

“Yankee No!” was nowhere to be heard.

Comments on the absurdity of nationalism aside, it probably won’t be long before Havana cigar sales again eclipse El Productos in tobacco stores north of the Florida Keys. Carter and Castro have agreed that their economic interests are similar; passport procedures change; what goes around, comes around. Wonder how long we have to wait to “tour” Hanoi?

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