

COMMENTS ON

“The Cuba Solidarity Movement in the San Francisco Bay Area: Its Activities and Objectives, 1991-Present” by Socorro

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This paper documents efforts by diverse groups in the San Francisco area to show solidarity with Cuba. The different groups have moved from abstract expressions of opinion and support to sending actual material aid to Cuba, in the form of medications, books, journals, and even pianos. They are well organized and use the Internet in addition to the more traditional methods of communication.

Socorro bases his research on a number of sources, including coverage of the visitors by *Granma*'s International English edition. Treatment by *Granma* of this topic sheds considerable light on the internal use of the information by the Cuban government, in that a large image of solidarity for Cuba is projected onto the Cuban people.

The different groups promoting solidarity with Castro's Cuba mostly gather around one particular topic, with religion, gay issues and human rights being some of them. There are also umbrella organizations, multi-issue groups that seem to be the organizers of the overall Cuba solidarity movement.

Socorro does not present in his paper systematic information on the dollar value of the material assistance provided by the Cuba solidarity movement to the Cuban government. Although this information is not readily available, the author should make greater efforts to obtain such information in the future in order to strengthen his research. In the discussion that

ensued after the presentation of the paper, Socorro estimated the value of material assistance to Cuba by the Cuban solidarity movement at about \$60 million per annum. Although this amount is small when compared to Cuba's overall needs, it is a sizable contribution. This amount of assistance from the Cuba solidarity movement should be compared with the estimated amount of remittances to Cuba by friends and relatives residing abroad, estimated at some \$800 million per annum.

Another interesting issue that Socorro might want to explore is whether any individuals or groups that travel under the umbrella of the Bay Area Cuba solidarity movement come back disappointed by the Cuban authorities or by incidents that might have occurred during their visit. I am reminded of a Castro sympathizer whose family gave him a trip to Cuba as a Christmas gift. The substance of the trip was to visit educational facilities, but school was not in session at the time of his visit. His sympathy for the Cuban revolution waned after his visit. Of course, this is a personal story not covered by the press. I would encourage Socorro to explore this issue in his further work.

To conclude, Socorro deserves much appreciation for tracking a phenomenon that has not been sufficiently documented. I hope that he will continue to do so in the future.