Who are the Five?

They are five Cubans who were trying to stop the ultra-right terrorist groups in Miami from carrying out violent actions against the people of Cuba.

Since 1959, these organizations have conducted bombings, assassinations and other sabotage, killing hundreds of innocent Cuban civilians. Groups like Alpha 66, Omega 7, Brothers to the Rescue, and Cuban American National Foundation have terrorized the Cuban people for years with impunity.

The Cuban people have been targets of U.S. policy, including a 43-year economic blockade designed to punish a whole people who have chosen a different road for building their society. They have been victims of terror attacks by the Miami-based mafia, many of whom came from the wealthy class that left Cuba after the popular overthrow of dictator Fulgencio Batista.

Others of the ultra-right in Miami were police thugs for the Batista regime.

Gerardo Hernández, Antonio Guerrero, Ramón Labaóino, René González and Fernando González, acting in defense of their people, were living in Miami, monitoring these terrorist groups to prevent future violence. But because the U.S. government - through the CIA - has played the principal role in funding, training and arming the ultra-right Miami mafia, the FBI targeted the five Cubans instead of arresting the terrorists.

This is the only reason that the five Cubans are in prison. They were framed up in a political witchhunt and railroaded by the U.S. in a 7-month trial in Miami, where it was impossible for them to have an impartial and fair trial. Falsely charged with espionage on the U.S., in reality, the five brothers' mission was to follow the activities of the right-wing to prevent harm to innocent people.

After their arrest by the FBI on September 12, 1998, they were convicted June 8, 2001 and sentenced December 2001. The months-long struggle to free Elián Gonzalez from the Miami right-wing showed the U.S. people the true nature of these Mafia-type groups in Miami, who so cruelly tried to deny a father and his son their right to live together in their own country, simply because that country is Cuba.

Terroists like José Basulto and Ramón Sal Sanchez, who have been convicted of criminal acts, actually became "spokesmen" for the Miami family. They vowed never to let Elián return home and put him at tremendous risk for their political aims. To all justice-loving people in the U.S. and around the world, we appeal to you to join the struggle to free Fernando, René, Antonio, Ramón and Gerardo. Help us in outreach, education and organizing, because once people know the facts of the case, we are sure they will call for their freedom as well.

Towards an Investigative Peoples Tribunal for Truth and Justice!

Contact: Philadelphia Committee to Free the Five
215 849 2793 email: just@freeifthefive.cjb.net
Throughout Cuba, Saney insists that the reader consider the Cuban situation in its proper context. After the revolution of 1959, the United States (Cuba's largest trading partner at the time) severed economic ties and pulled out all of its assets, imposing a comprehensive economic blockade on the island. US firms, and companies dealing directly with the US were (and are) effectively prohibited from doing business with Cuba, effectively shutting off huge portions of the western market to Cuban industry. Ships that land in Cuban ports are not allowed to dock in the US for six months, making the transport of goods to and from Cuba quite expensive. Thanks to US dominance of the global pharmaceutical trade, many drugs are not available at any price in Cuba; others are prohibitively expensive.

"The poor and the underprivileged, stimulated by the example of Cuba, are now demanding opportunities for a decent living." Such was the appraisal of the Kennedy administration, which decided that the "threat of a good example" could threaten American dominance in the western hemisphere. Subsequent American policy towards Cuba has focused singularly and explicitly on dismantling the revolutionary government.

In addition to the economic embargo, the US funded a decades-long campaign of terrorism and harassment against the Cuban revolutionary government. Saney offers a number of well-documented examples, including the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, a number of terrorist bombings committed by US-funded operatives, astonishing uses of biological warfare by the CIA, numerous plane hijackings, and a bizarre CIA operation involving "futuristic weather modification technology". Kennedy in particular instituted a massive program of financial aid to Latin American countries, granted on the condition that the participating countries sever economic ties with Cuba.

Under these conditions, and with a socialist program of land and wealth redistribution in place, Cuba's economy grew at a rate of six per cent annually between 1971 and 1989. At the same time, the central American regional growth rate was 3.6 per cent. In order to keep its economy going, Cuba developed a close trading relationship with the Soviet Union and the associated Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA). Due to the blockade, Cuba's international trade and economic development was heavily dependent on its relationship with CMEA countries.

When the governments of many CMEA countries—including the Soviet Union—collapsed, Cuba experienced an economic disaster of colossal proportions. In 1992, the value of trade with CMEA countries had fallen to less than 7 per cent of its 1989 value. In the same period, Cuba's Gross National Product stagnated at 3.3 per cent.

The book's shortcomings are not a major focus of this review. Worth mentioning, however, is the total lack of analysis of Canadian policy towards Cuba, and Saney's reliance on secondary sources (his Spanish is, by his own account, "idiosyncratic").

The latter can be seen as not so much a weakness as a particular area of focus. Where other books might convey one shocking (and Saney might argue, decontextualized) instance of the authoritarian tendencies of socialism or another, Cuba: A revolution in motion keeps the eye on Cuba's overall accomplishments in the face of adversity as a compelling alternative to the dominant ideology of the free market. Beyond arguing against various criticisms, Saney makes the case that Cuba is in many ways an inspiration to those from who value social justice worldwide.

In a global order where—according to the World Bank—the poor bear the most significant brunt of economic fluctuations, it seems fitting to end with the same line that Saney chose to conclude Cuba (uttered by Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage): "Each day in the world 200 million children sleep in the streets. Not one is Cuban."
Perhaps all 72 of the "dissidents" charged and convicted earlier this year were similar cases. And perhaps not. Saney does not set out to portray Cuba as perfect, but rather to take a sustained look at the country's current realities. Does the concentration of power in Cuba tend towards authoritarianism in some cases? Does Cuban society believe a set of myths that in some cases do not reflect the realities of the day? These are possibilities in Cuba as in any other country—but Saney's work serves as a powerful injunction to those who would judge an entire country offhandedly.

Indeed, it is nearly impossible to speak of Cuba accurately without addressing the supernaturally effective campaign of disinformation about the country. The Globe and Mail's Margaret Wente offers a typical, if exaggerated example:

The Cuban government, of course, blames the U.S. for the crackdown. It says the senior U.S. diplomat in Cuba illegally funneled money and support to the dissidents. Some commentators also blame the U.S. for being deliberately provocative. (Among other illegal activities, the diplomat ran a small lending library and gave Cuban journalists access to the Internet.)

Others fault the U.S. for not lifting the embargo, a move that might have encouraged El Jefe to be nicer.

Mr. Suchlicki blames Fidel. "Fidel doesn't like opposition. He doesn't like dissidents. He's a tyrant," he says. "And what's on his mind is his own mortality. At 76, the clock is running down. "He's getting rid of all the opposition to clear the road for his brother Raoul."

The intellectual infrastructure that has been erected in order to consistently contradict the most basic facts and distort the motivations of the Cuban government is an enormous achievement in and of itself, and certainly worthy of study.

No book can offer a rebuttal to all criticisms of Cuba, and it's reasonable to say that no book should. What Saney has done, with his tone and deeply researched evidence, is to furnish a book-length challenge to the reader to understand Cuba. To ask, each time the country is condemned, about the context of the actions taken. To consider, given the impressive precedent, the possibility that seemingly factual information about Cuba might need to be checked and re-checked.

Sections of the book not addressed by this review include appraisals of various aspects of Cuba's social revolution, including race and gender relations in the context of the transformation of Cuban society, Cuba's judicial system, Cuba's involvement in fighting apartheid in South Africa, and the country's continued principled and solitary stand against imperialism.

Saney approaches these overwhelming assumptions deftly. While maintaining a calm, explanatory tone overall, he punctuates each chapter with challenges aimed at provoking understanding rather than partisanship. He opens his chapter on governance thus: "The central task for Cuba-watchers..."
and specialists of all hues is to account for the resilience of the Cuban rev-
olution in the face of the economic collapse of the early 1990s, a "collapse
which could have sunk almost any system without a trace". In other
words, if Castro is this horrible despot, then why does he still have the
support of the majority of the population?

Saney points to the last three elections--in 1993, 1998, and 2003--which
were open to observation by foreign and domestic journalists. These three
national elections ended up being plebiscites for the revolution. Over 90
per cent of the Cuban electorate--who cast their vote in secret and are not
required to vote--turned out in each election, and each time over 90 per
cent voted all 601 national candidates "up", in a gesture of solidarity with
the government and revolutionary constitution (explanation of the process
follows). This, while US-funded radio stations in Miami (broadcasting ille-
gally into Cuba) were exhorting Cubans round the clock to spoil their bal-
lots or boycott the election. After each election, prominent dissidents con-
ceded that the Cuban revolution had a renewed mandate from the people
of Cuba.

Cuban governance is founded on a rejection of conventional electoral pol-
itics, on the grounds that it creates a "class of politicians" and "divorces
economics from politics." Instead, the ruling Communist party plays the
role of guide, "channeling the plurality" of views and interests. While
influential, the Communist party does not wield direct administrative
power. Each time the party holds a congress, massive nation-wide discus-
sions are held, providing a venue for people to voice concerns and discuss
a variety of issues and giving substance to the party's guiding role.

Saney writes: "The 1991 congress [immediately after the economic col-
lapse] was preceded by discussions involving 3.5 million Cubans... more
than a million people in 89,000 meetings directly raised more than 500
issues and concerns," ranging from the structure of the party to foreign
policy.

The Cuban electorate is divided into 14,946 circumscriptions, each con-
isting of a few hundred people. In street meetings that typically see a high
degree of participation, each circumscription elects a representative. These
deges, along with representatives of a variety of "mass organizations"--
civil groups, student associations, and unions--form commissions which
spend over a year selecting from thousands of candidates to ensure that all
of Cuban society is represented in the provincial and national assemblies.
The Communist party is prohibited from participating in the selection
process.

These recommendations are then submitted to municipal assemblies for
approval. Each Cuban citizen is presented with a list of 601 candidates
which they can vote either for or against. To be a representative in the
national assembly, each candidate--including Fidel Castro--must receive at
least 50 per cent of the vote in her constituency.

Critics must at least concede, argues Saney, that the current system is
more democratic than any other in Cuba's history. Fidel Castro has said
that this movement towards the "parliamentarization of society" sidesteps
the divisiveness of the "dominant model" of western governance, creating
"a democracy that really unites people and gives viability to what is most
important and essential, which is public participation in fundamental
issues." Saney, it seems, agrees. He ends the chapter with an observation
that must read as truly bizarre to Canadians and Americans: "those who
have the most money do not have political power, as they have no support
among the masses and, thus, do not offer up candidates in the elections."

It is perhaps the "fundamental issues" that Castro speaks of that have set
Cuba's critics against it. In the Cuban constitution, certain things are non-
negotiable; among them are universal access to health care, wealth redistrib-
ution through socialism, and free education.

In order to preserve these fundamental values of the revolution, the
Cuban government has sometimes used extreme measures against US-
funded terrorists and other operatives, including capital punishment and
imprisonment for decades. Some recent trials have been unusually short,
lasting as little as one day.

Unsurprisingly, Saney asks the reader to consider the context of unrelent-
ing US-funded terrorism, economic strangulation, and occasional military
attacks. A context which has led Cubans, he says, into a "siege mentality".
This mentality, however, is "based on a very real and constant threat:" it is
a kind of "rational paranoia". The long list of documented US aggression
includes assassination attempts (including a CIA attempt to hire Mafia hit-
men to kill Castro), terrorist bombings, a major "propaganda and disinforma-
tion campaign" and the blockade.

Under Cuba's "law 88" (passed in 1996) people who collaborate with US
efforts to overthrow the Cuban revolution can be sentenced to prison.
Similar US and Canadian laws are arguably more strict. Some of the most
high-profile "dissidents" accused did not dispute the charges, but instead
argued that it was their right to be paid by the United States government to
work to overthrow the Cuban government. In 2002, the US government
provided over $8.99 billion in funding to groups working against the
Cuban government.