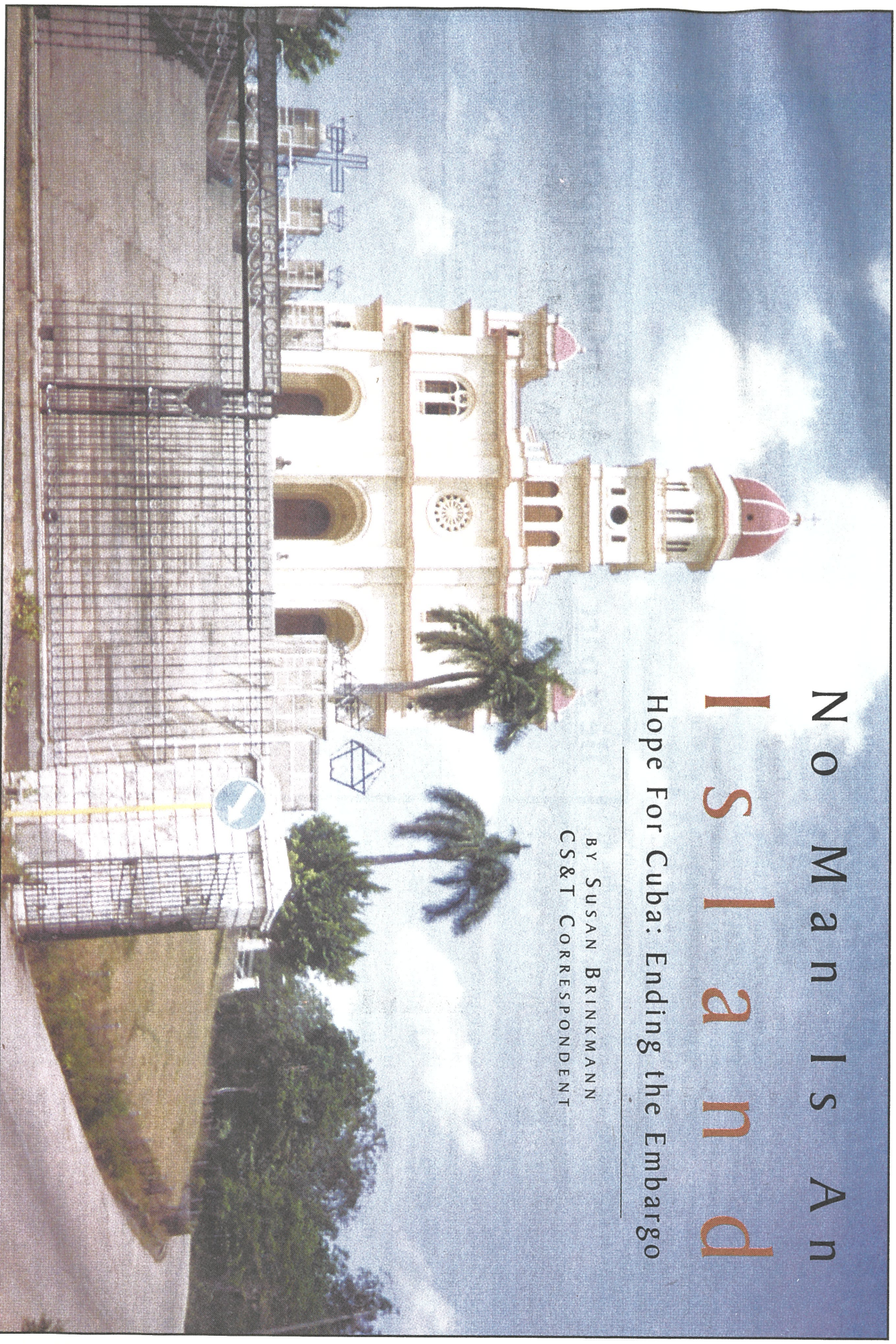


# No Man Is An Island

## Hope For Cuba: Ending the Embargo

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**The Basilica de Nuestra Señora de la Caridad Del Cobre (Basilica of Our Lady of Charity) sits majestically atop a hill in Santiago, Chile.**

Just before Pope John Paul II left Cuba's Jose Marti airport on Jan. 25, 1998, he told the crowd that, "in our day, no nation can live in isolation."

"The Cuban people cannot be denied the contacts with other peoples necessary for economic, social and cultural development, especially when the imposed isolation strikes the population indiscriminately, making it ever more difficult for the weakest to enjoy the bare essentials of decent living, things such as food, health and education. All can and should take practical steps to bring about changes in this regard."

This was a message that Jorge Fernandez, a Cuban-American businessman and co-founder of Americans for Humanitarian Trade with Cuba, took to heart.

"I will not stop my mission until the embargo is lifted and relations with Cuba are normalized," he said. Fernandez has never wavered from that vow.

The Cuban embargo is known as the harshest embargo in the world. It contains provisions that don't apply anywhere else, such as the barring of any ship that docks in Cuba from docking anywhere in the U.S. for six months; the requirement of on-site verification for medical sales; and the complete ban of all food sales. This last ban was not em-

ployed in recent U.N.-supported embargoes against Iraq and the former Yugoslavia, which allowed trade in both medicines and food in order to maintain the health of their civilian populations.

Only two months after returning to the U.S. after his fateful 1998 trip to Cuba, (see page 1 of this issue for his account of this visit) Fernandez testified before a subcommittee on International Economic Policy and Trade of

the House Committee on International Relations. He told the sub-committee: "The nearly four-decade (long) U.S. embargo of Cuba has done nothing to accelerate Castro's removal from power. . . . Moreover, the cost of this embargo to the most vulnerable citizens of that country cannot be denied. With respect to food and medicine, for example, many medical products and services — such as incubator parts, life-saving cancer drugs, mammogra-

phy film, AIDS drugs and other drugs under U.S. patent — are only available in the United States. Non-U.S. substitution is not an option. And purchasing wheat from Europe costs more than twice as much as purchasing wheat from the U.S."

He also debunked an argument frequently made in support of the embargo: "Embargo supporters frequently look to the removal or withdrawal of Fidel Castro from power as a necessary precondition for greater freedom in Cuba. That may be true, but last October, at the fifth Cuban Communist Party Congress, Castro was reaffirmed as head of the party. And on Feb. 24, Castro was 're-elected' as President of Cuba in the usual mechanical fashion. After four decades, Castro's governmental and security apparatus remains largely in place. Despite clear evidence of the freedom-enhancing effects of U.S. engagement with other authoritarian countries such as China, no such opportunity yet exists in Cuba."

In other words, if we can trade with China, or North Vietnam where we lost 60,000 Americans, why can't we trade Cuba?

Said Fernandez: "This embargo has proven to be one of the most outdated and ineffective policies that we've had on our books." More and more members of Congress are



**Pope John Paul II celebrated a Papal Mass on Jan. 25, 1998 at Plaza de la Revolución, where more than one million people gathered to pray.**



beginning to see the Cuban embargo in this light, and are pushing through legislation that is encouraging to Cubans. Freshman Rep. Jeff Flake, R-Ariz., has led an effort to restore normal relations with Cuba and to end the embargo. By a 262-167 margin, the House approved Flake's amendment to eliminate restrictions on American tourists traveling to Cuba. Flake also proposed a bill intended to lift the \$1,200 per year cap on what Cuban-Americans can send to their families at home, which was approved by a 251-177 margin. By a voice vote, another measure put forth by Rep. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., intended to remove some of the impediments in the way of selling food and medicine to Cuba, was also approved. Rep. Charles Rangel, D-NY, introduced an amendment that called for an end to the

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embargo, which was narrowly defeated by a margin of 226-204.

"The winds of change are now being felt in the Congress and the U.S.," Fernandez said. "My focus is on the people of Cuba and on the message of His Holiness, that the world should open up to Cuba, and Cuba should open up to the world."

"For instance, in May of 1999, I took the Philadelphia Boy Choir to Cuba, and we visited the Children's Hospital in Santiago for children with leukemia. The children wanted to hear the song from the Lion King, Circle of Life, but our drummer didn't bring his drum. He asked for a plastic trash can to improvise. At the time, I was helping one of the nurses look for a trash can and I happened to go into their pharmacy. The shelves were just about empty."

"I asked the nurse if this was the pharmacy for the whole hospital, and she said yes. Santiago is the second largest city in Cuba, and this was all the medicine they had!"

The weak are too often made to suffer for the wrongdoing of the powerful. As the Archbishop of Havana, Cardinal Jaime Ortega said: "Any economic measure that aims to isolate a country and eliminate the possibility of development, thus threatening the survival of people, is unacceptable."

The Catholic Church is permitted to serve the people of Cuba by shipping them medical supplies and equipment through Caritas-Cuba. Donations of new and used equipment from individual doctors and dentists is very much needed, as is insulin, antibiotics, and anti-inflammatory drugs

Said Fernandez: "They need everything from rubber gloves on up."

*Anyone wishing to help can contact Jorge Fernandez at 215-862-1410 or e-mail him at hope4cuba@aol.com.*

**The Philadelphia Boy Choir performs in front of the U.S. Embassy in Havana, Cuba, May 1999.**



**At Cuba's Jose Marti airport, Jorge Fernandez poses with Archbishop John P. Foley, president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications and a former editor of *The Catholic Standard and Times*.**



**Fernandez posing next to a Russian tank that was used in the Bay of Pigs Invasion, April 1961.**



**Fernandez family with Cardinal Jaime Ortega, Archbishop of Havana, July 2001.**

