

PRISONERS OF COLOR

ISLAS WILL DEDICATE A PAGE IN EACH ISSUE TO THE AFRO-CUBANS SERVING TIME IN CUBA'S PENAL SYSTEM

In many countries people are detained for trying to exercise their rights of freedom of expression, association, assembly, or movement. Some are imprisoned because they or their families are involved in political or religious activities. Some are arrested because of their connection with political parties or national movements that oppose government policies. Trade union activity or participation in strikes or demonstrations are common causes for imprisonment. Often, people are imprisoned because they questioned their government or tried to publicize human rights violations in their own countries. Some are jailed on the pretext that they committed a crime, but it is in fact because they criticized the government. People who are imprisoned, detained or otherwise physically restricted because of their political, religious or other conscientiously-held beliefs or because of their ethnic origin, sex, color, or language and who have not used or advocated violence are considered to be prisoners of conscience.

Arnaldo Ramos Lauzirique, an Emblematic Prisoner

Leonardo Calvo Cárdenas

Historian, Secretary of the Cuban Socialist Democratic Current (CSDC) and General Director of the Consenso Media Group

Arnaldo Ramos Lauzirique is a 65 year-old economist and prisoner of conscience of the so-called "Cause of the 75." The leaders and activists of the political opposition, civil society, and the independent press who were arrested in March 2003 totaled seventy-five, condemned to long prison sentences in summary proceedings held in April of the same year.

Ramos Lauzirique worked for many years as an economist for central state offices. From the beginning of the nineties, he participated actively in the peaceful

resistance movement. He joined the Cuban Social Democratic Current, sharing responsibilities with other renowned dissidents like Elizardo Sánchez, Vladimiro Roca and Manuel Cuesta Morúa. He even became a member of the organization's Secretariat.

In 1996, he was one of the founders of the Social Democratic Party of Cuba. Also, Ramos Lauzirique has done distinguished work as Assistant Director of the Cuban Institute of Independent Economists, headed by Martha Beatriz Roque, which has carried out important studies and



Arnaldo Ramos Lauzirique

analyses of Cuba's socioeconomic reality and international economic relations.

Since the end of the 1990s, he has been one of the principal movers, with Marta Beatriz Roque, René Gómez Manzano and Félix Bonne Carcases, of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society.

In Spring 2003, after an arbitrary detention fraught with multiple violations of the current Penal Proceedings Law, a trial full of irregularities and a total lack of guarantees, Arnaldo was condemned to an eighteen-year sentence and imprisoned, with other associates, in the Provincial Prison of Holguín, more than 600 kilometers from his home. This last detail constitutes unnecessary cruelty, which once more demonstrates the nature of the Cuban government, and an unjustified punishment for the prisoner's family.

Since his imprisonment, Ramos Lauzirique, together with six other political prisoners, kept up a multi-week hunger strike in protest of the mistreatment and

violations to which inmates are subjected by prison authorities. The action generated a strong international support movement and solidarity with Cuban prisoners of conscience.

For their part, the political prisoner's family and various organizations revealed that on September 14th and 18th, 2004; he was subjected to countless beatings by the penitentiary's guards, who also locked him up in a punishment cell for five days.

Despite being one of the oldest political prisoners, whose health problems are among the most difficult to treat under such conditions—particularly chronic hypertension—he has kept up the same, firm and consistent attitude that has always characterized him; that is denouncing the beatings and excesses that are committed daily in the island's prisons.

Ramos Lauzirique, who during his long career as a pro-democracy fighter has published numerous analyses and evaluations of Cuba and the world's socioeconomic reality, is one of the most emblematic political prisoners of the already sadly famous Cuban political prison.