

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.

Luis Enrique Labrador, Walfrido Rodríguez and Yordany Martínez

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Political prisoners Luis Enrique Labrador Díaz (1978), Walfrido Rodríguez Piloto (1968), and Yordany Martínez Carvajal (1986), all members of the “La Fuerza de la Vida” [Force of Life] movement, were brought up in poor families, raised and economically supported by women. They lived in the El Palenque neighborhood (in the Municipality of Lisa, City of Havana), where marginality, violence, unhealthy conditions and a poor quality of life are the norm. This is where they were schooled up to the middle school level, under the influence of a government pedagogy that proclaimed bonanza and benefits for the neediest. The contradiction between what was boasted and the crude reality of their lives in that poverty-

stricken and repressed neighborhood was the cause of the contestatory actions.

On August 16th, 2012, they went to the steps of the University of Havana to demonstrate their discontent with the socio-political and economic situation. On the 24th of December, 2010, they established the “La Fuerza de la Vida” movement, and in an initiating event, went to the corner of L and 23rd (in the Vedado) and held up a sheet with anti-governmental writing on it. They had already done other things, like burn a doll dressed in military clothing in El Palenque, publicly demonstrated at El Rincón (in Santiago de las Vegas), and went to the Havana Malecón to commemorate the victims of the sinking of the “13 de Marzo” tugboat. On January 14th, 2011, these humble Afro-Cubans distributed

pamphlets at the José Martí Civic Plaza (in Havana), and were arrested. They were to be judged on May 30th, 2011, for Public Disorderliness and Continuous Contempt in proceeding no. 22/2011 at the Diez de Octubre Peoples' Municipal Court. Rodríguez Piloto and Labrador Díaz were sentenced to 5 years and Martínez Carvajal to three.

Both Rodríguez Piloto and Labrador Díaz were sent to prisons (in Las Tunas and Guantánamo) hundreds of kilometers from their homes. They were staunch in their disobedience while there, doing everything from refusing to wear the common prisoner uniform, to even going on hunger strikes because they were denied medical attention for prior medical conditions and others acquired in prison. Labrador Díaz suffers from renal disease, and Rodríguez Piloto began to suffer from allergies because of the bad conditions at the prison. Several times, both were placed in punishment cells, so they formulated denunciations on account of their suffering and mistreatment. Despite the fact they were

beaten, they did not desist in their attitude of opposition to the regime.

On December 25th, 2011, Rodríguez Piloto and Martínez Carvajal were released through a pardon issued by leader Raúl Castro on December 23rd, in the Cuban parliament. Yet, Labrador Díaz is still in prison, and does not know why he was not pardoned.



Walfrido Rodríguez Piloto



Luis Enrique Labrador Díaz



Yordany Martínez Carvajal



Eleanor Calvo Martínez confronts the political police when they block her entrance into the Friday, Nov. 25, 2011 session of the Race and Cubanness forum in Havana.



Young Calvo Martínez and Rafel Campoamor are arrested. It is noteworthy that the police in this operation are not wearing uniforms or using official patrol cars.