



Written by [Daniel Sayani](#) on February 10, 2011

## American Contractor Faces 20 Years in Cuban Gulag

Communist Cuba is launching yet another attack against the United States. Castro's island regime is currently holding American citizen Alan Phillip Gross on charges of espionage, and is looking to hold him for a sentence of up to 20 years for allegedly "spying" against the communist state.



Gross, a 60-year-old contractor from Potomac, Maryland, has been jailed without charge since December 2009 on suspicion of spying; Cuban officials claim he is guilty of "acts against the integrity and independence" of Cuba. His imprisonment is a clear example of the anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism inherent in the communist regime. Gross went to Cuba on a humanitarian mission to aid its beleaguered Jewish community, which like other oppressed religious groups in Cuba and other communist countries, lacks access to necessary supplies and equipment needed for survival and the upkeep of religious institutions, which must keep a low profile anyway.

Gross has been held in a Cuban prison for over a year now, with no indication that he will be released any time soon.

The Cuban state-run [website](#) "Cuba Debate" issued a statement on the imprisonment of Gross earlier in the week:

In accordance with Article 91 of the Cuban Penal Code, the Prosecution is requesting a 20-year prison sentence for the defendant. The date of the trial will be set shortly. The US government has been informed of this and duly notified through the diplomatic channels that its consular representatives, Mr. Gross' relatives and his family lawyers will be allowed to attend the trial.

The U.S. State Department says that Gross was in Cuba for the purpose of distributing communications equipment to the local Jewish community, and as far back as June 2010, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called for Gross to be released; however, she instructed American negotiators to convince the Cuban regime that his imprisonment "harms US-Cuban relations," rather than outright condemning the fundamental immorality characterizing Cuba's tactics.

The family of Gross and State Department officials say he is not a spy, but was in the country on a U.S. Agency for International Development contract to provide satellite communications equipment and Internet access to Cuba's Jewish community of about 1,500, so they might communicate with other



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Jewish communities. Because Cuba is a communist nation and does not recognize freedom of speech and communication, it is against the law there for non-governmental entities or private individuals or organizations to bring satellite phone equipment into the country without a permit from the authorities.

White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs [said](#) the decision “compounded an injustice suffered by a man helping to increase the free flow of information to, from, and among the Cuban people.,” adding that Gross has been “unjustly detained and deprived of his liberty and freedom for the last 14 months.” Gibbs called for the release of Gross “so he can come home to his wife and family.

His imprisonment has also brought protests from members of the House of Representatives. In March 2010, 40 congressmen wrote a letter to the Cuban regime, asking for clemency for Gross. “It is our understanding that at the time of his arrest, Mr. Gross was in Cuba to help the Jewish community improve their ability to communicate with Jews, both in Cuba and overseas,” said the letter. “He was working pursuant to a U.S. government contract. Mr. Gross’s work in Cuba emanated from his desire to make a positive impact for others of his faith on the island.”

The letter also said:

The arrest and imprisonment of Mr. Gross is viewed with great consternation by the government of the United States, including both Democrat and Republican Members of the United States Congress, whether liberal or conservative. It has caused many to doubt your government’s expressed desire to improve relations with the United States. We cannot assist in that regard while Mr. Gross is detained in a Cuban prison. We urge you in the strongest possible terms to immediately and unconditionally release Mr. Gross and allow him to return to his family in the United States.

Gross’s contract was part of a federally-funded democracy-building initiative within the State Department, which his company, Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI), has participated in for several years. For the 2010-2011 fiscal year, the State Department budget allocated \$20 million for “promoting self-determined democracy in Cuba”:

The FY 2011 request will continue to promote self-determined democracy in Cuba. Funds will be used to provide humanitarian assistance to political prisoners, their families, and other victims of repression; advance human rights; strengthen independent civil society organizations; and support information sharing into and out of Cuba.

This program has been authorized since 1996, as a provision of the Helms-Burton Act, which strengthens American resistance against communist Cuba and authorizes federal funds to be allocated for anti-communist activities and programs. Named after its two chief sponsors, former North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms (a close friend of former John Birch Society Chairman and Georgia congressman, Dr. Lawrence Patton McDonald), and Indiana Congressman Dan Burton, the legislation has been crucial in maintaining a hard line against Castro’s regime.

Partially under the bill’s provisions, DAI has also been involved in efforts against Cuba’s top ally in Latin America, the regime of Venezuelan dictator Hugo Chavez. Michael Collins, a program associate at the Center for International Policy, a Washington think tank, said that DAI “received a lot of unwelcome attention” when it was accused of helping finance opposition groups involved in the failed 2002 coup attempt against Chavez.

The anti-communist activity of Gross and DAI has been attacked by several internationalist communist front groups, including the Fund for Reconciliation and Development. Its founder, John McAuliff, has



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said the following about Gross, in the leftist publication *Progreso Weekly*:

[There are a number of] oddities about the official U.S. explanation of Gross' activities in Cuba. The story [provided by the State Department] about Mr. Gross['] activities merits further investigation, as it seems highly unlikely he was engaged in actual humanitarian work. Was he adding onto or hiding behind well-established credible work, or is this a cover story meant to confuse the debate over foreign assistance to dissidents?

McAuliff formerly worked for the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), a group which has extensive ties to the KGB, as well as other international communist movements, according to Steven Powell's expose, *Covert Cadre: Inside the Institute for Policy Studies*. He is also [described](#) as "a veteran of the civil rights movement," and he highlights his work with Howard Zinn, as well as his various campaigns within the American Friends Service Committee, another group noted for its sympathies toward communism.

McAuliff currently coordinates efforts opposing anti-communist policies within the U.S. State Department, and alleges that he wishes to "build bridges" between the United States and communist regimes including Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Cuba.

He also advocates against the embargo on Cuba, and tries to "mobilize public and industry opinion to end restrictions on travel to Cuba." It therefore comes as no surprise that McAuliff has publicly declared his antagonism toward Gross and anyone else who works on behalf of American interests overseas.

In an editorial in the left-leaning [Huffington Post](#), McAuliff also said that the United States should respond with "reciprocity" and used the sad occasion of an innocent American's detention in a Cuban prison to advocate for a pro-Castro, pro-communist foreign policy:

The substance of what the Cuban Five did in spying on anti-Castro Cuban groups in Miami is not much more serious than what Alan did. Certainly both sending countries feel their agents were morally justified in their illicit acts of infiltration and dispute the legitimacy of the other side's action.

McAuliff here refers to the Cuban Five, five intelligence officers from Cuba who were sent by Castro to infiltrate and sabotage the efforts of Cuban-American anti-communist activists in Miami, and argues that the imprisonment of an innocent individual not engaged in any conscious acts of espionage is morally justified. He believes that Gross is no better than five communist agents who plotted several assassination attempts of Cuban exiles.

Just as Cuba announced that Gross will be facing a 20-year sentence, the state-run [Cuban News Agency](#) reports that Cuban front groups in Italy, Germany, and other nations are increasing efforts to free the "Cuban Five."

Magnifying the [severity](#) of the imprisonment of Alan Gross, however, is the fact that the Obama administration's policy of "enhanced engagement" with the communist regime serves only to legitimize those who praise Cuba and damn America. Most significant among these efforts was the announcement by the White House last month that greater travel, trade, and economic intercourse will be allowed between the United States and Cuba.

Many in the Obama administration and many Democrats in Congress are hoping the Gross case will be just a speed bump on the way to better relations with the Castros. In the interim, Gross, an innocent



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American citizen, faces a bleak and unjust incarceration, and may well die in a Cuban prison, as reports have surfaced about his failing health.

*Photo: This handout photo provided by the Gross family, taken in 2005, Alan and Judy Gross are seen in Jerusalem: AP Images*



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