In the spirit of building bridges of friendship and solidarity, with an eye towards better understanding and appreciating the issues confronting railroad workers around the globe, RWU members have visited fellow rails in a number of countries in recent years, including Japan and South Korea (The Highball, Winter 2017), Germany and France (2016), England (The Highball, Fall 2016), and most recently, Cuba. With the lifting of the travel ban in 2015, thousands of U.S. citizens have freely visited Cuba for the first time since the U.S. imposed travel restrictions in 1963. It has since become a major destination for American tourists.

For a tiny island nation, Cuba has an extensive rail network and employs some 28,000 railroaders, thereby drawing the attention of North American railroad workers. This past April - May, a group of ten U.S. railroad workers travelled to Cuba and met with railroad workers and union officials of the Transportation Workers Union. Three of them – two retired engineers and a retired machinist – submit their observations and reflections in their report to The Highball.

**Railroad Workers Delegation Tours Cuba, Meets with Counterparts**

*By Ike Nahem*

Ten US railroaders (and two spouses) visited Cuba from April 27 to May 6, 2018. The delegation included active and retired locomotive engineers, conductors, machinists, and transit workers, including four members of RWU. The group worked with the Cuban Workers Confederation (CTC) and the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP) in creating an exciting and informative itinerary that centered on railroad experiences.

The tour included visits to locomotive engineer training schools, visiting freight and switching yards, and meeting with leading transportation union officials. One highlight was a visit to the developing Museum of the Sugar Industry in the city of Remedios, in Villa Clara Province, which contains a vintage collection of U.S.-manufactured, early-20th century steam engines, complete with crews to operate them. Another was an overnight stay in the city of Santa Clara, where, in December 1958, the decisive battle of the 1959 Cuban revolution took place, under the command of the legendary Ernesto Che Guevara. Railroad workers who supported the Revolution were key to that military victory, which led to the fleeing of the hated dictator Fulgencio Batista. The tour also included visits to the highly acclaimed Museum of Fine Arts in Havana, the Finca Vigía, home of Ernest Hemingway outside Havana, and much more.

Legal travel to Cuba from the United States remains regulated and restricted within the unchanged U.S. policy of economic embargo and sanctions, aimed at the island of over 11 million people. In April 2015, towards the end of Barack Obama’s second term in the White House, diplomatic relations between Washington and Havana were restored and travel restrictions were loosened, but under the Trump White House belligerent anti-Cuba rhetoric is once again being ratcheted up. Trump has tightened individual travel restrictions, except for Cuban-Americans. Nevertheless, diplomatic ties have not been reversed. The Rail Unionists Tour was therefore fully legal under current Treasury Department “guidelines.”

The next Rail and Transit Labor Tour will be in April-May 2019. To participate contact Ike Nahem, ikenahem@mindspring.com

The delegation of ten U.S. railroaders, who travelled to Cuba and met with rail unionists, gather at the national headquarters of the Cuban Workers Federation (CTC).