

Last of the "Working Group Dissidents" released in Cuba
by Robert Lebowitz, Digital Freedom Network

URL: www.dfn.org/news/cuba/roca-freed.htm

(May 6, 2002) After four years in prison, Vladimiro Roca;"Cuba's most famous political prisoner";walked away a free man.

Roca, the son of the late Communist Party leader Blas Roca, was convicted along with a group of three other activists in 1998 for publishing *The Homeland Belongs to Us All*, an essay which called for multiparty elections in Cuba and greater economic freedom. Roca's partners;Marta Roque, Rene Gomez and Felix Bonne;received 3.5 years each, but were released last year.

The decision to release Roca immediately precedes a diplomatic mission to Cuba by former U.S. president Jimmy Carter. Many have speculated that the Cuban government freed Roca in order to avoid U.S. condemnation.

A rebellious son

Vladimiro Roca is the son of the late Communist Party leader Blas Roca. However, Vladimiro broke from Cuba's socialist system a decade ago and began calling for a Western-style democracy.

In the notorious essay, *The Homeland Belongs to Us All*, Roca and his fellow members of the "Working Group Dissidents" urged the Cuban government to hold democratic elections, liberalize the economy, and improve human rights. They wrote *The Homeland* in response to an official Cuban Communist Party discussion document.

Within weeks of publishing *The Homeland*, they were arrested and sent to separate prisons.

In the spring of 1999 ; almost two years after their arrest, and only after Roque threatened to go on a hunger strike ; the four received a quick trial.

They were convicted of sedition, or trying to overthrow the government. Roca received five years in prison, Bonne and Gomez received four, and Roque received three-and-a-half years.

Bonne was released on May 12, 2000. Roque was released on May 16. Gomez was released soon afterwards.

A disturbing postscript

This afternoon, the Digital Freedom Network contacted Roca at his home in Havana and arranged a time for an interview about his experiences. However, numerous attempts to reach Roca at the scheduled time were unsuccessful as a phone connection could no longer be established.

Apparently, although freed, Vladimiro Roca is still under a watchful eye.

Copyright (c) 2002 Digital Freedom Network (www.dfn.org). All rights reserved. This article may be reproduced or redistributed for online not-for-profit use without prior written consent as long as DFN is recognized with this credit.

If you wish to SUBSCRIBE to this or other DFN newsletters, please go to this URL:
www.dfn.org/subscribe