

Editor's Note

What follow are two texts, co-signed by Foucault, sent to and published by the New York Review of Books. The second text was published with an address to contact the author(s) and a note regarding political developments between the NYRB receiving the text and publishing it, both of which have been removed by myself. The full list of signees is included for both texts.

In a Cuban Prison

December 7, 1978

<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1978/12/07/in-a-cuban-prison/>

To the Editors:

The distinguished fifty-eight-year-old Cuban gynaecologist, Doctor Martha Frayde, has been sentenced by the Cuban government, during this past year, to a twenty-nine-year prison sentence for espionage. This is tragic. Doctor Frayde has had a distinguished past—as a humanitarian, as a doctor, and as a revolutionary idealist. Her medical career speaks for itself. After graduating from the University of Havana Medical School in 1946, she was awarded a fellowship to McGill Medical School in Montreal. She then became assistant medical director in the Havana hospital, Calixto García. Doctor Frayde has been on the staff of the Saint Antoine hospital in Paris, the Saint Pierre hospital in Brussels, and in 1952 she was elected a member of the American Society of Endocrinology in Miami. In 1959, after the Cuban revolution, Doctor Frayde was appointed director of the National Hospital of Havana.

Doctor Frayde was an early supporter of Fidel Castro; they met during the Batista regime. Both Fidel Castro and Doctor Frayde were members of the same left-wing opposition group. Due to her militancy against the Batista regime, Doctor Frayde was arrested by the Batista police in 1957. She escaped prison by fleeing to Mexico where she lived in self-exile until the fall of the Batista regime. After the revolution Doctor Frayde became vice-president for Chinese-Cuban Solidarity and in 1959 she accompanied Fidel Castro on his visit to the United States and Canada. During this period, as president of the Cuban Peace Movement, she decorated Fidel Castro with the order of Lenin. From 1963 to 1964, Doctor Frayde taught gynaecology in the Broca Hospital in Paris — during this period she was also a Cuban delegate to UNESCO.

After her return to Cuba in 1964, Doctor Frayde voiced her alarm to Fidel Castro concerning his overly close ties to the Soviet Union. By 1965 Doctor Frayde was relieved of all her official posts and she went into private practice. In 1968 permission for Doctor Frayde to leave Cuba to teach at the University of Madrid Medical School was abruptly rescinded four days before her departure. Permission to leave the country was withheld from her “on grounds of national security.” In 1976 Doctor Frayde was placed under house arrest — later her personal possessions and her medical library were confiscated by the government and destroyed. Doctor Frayde was sent to a women's prison for common criminals — Nuevo Amanecer. In the prison Doctor Frayde suffered from malnutrition and a lack of decent sanitary conditions. As a result of a severe case of stomach poisoning Doctor Frayde was transferred to another prison — Benefica. From there, she was tried and sentenced in secret to twenty-nine years for espionage for the CIA.

It is inconceivable that a woman with such an extraordinary revolutionary past as Doctor Martha Frayde — after having honourably expressed her disagreement with Fidel Castro and the pro-Soviet shape of the Cuban revolution and openly requested permission to leave Cuba — would then engage in CIA activities. Concerned intellectuals in Europe and the United States deplore the sinister judicial farce and secret trial to which Doctor Frayde has been subjected and demand that the Cuban government immediately release Doctor Martha Frayde.

Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, Simone de Beauvoir, Claude Roy, Phillippe Sollers, José Angel Valente, José María Castellet, Juan Goytisolo, Fernando Claudín, José Luis Aranguren, Joaquín Ruiz Jiménez, Rossana Rossanda, Octavio Paz, Norman Mailer, Barbara Probst Solomon, William Styron, Rose Styron.

The Flying University

January 24, 1980

<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1980/01/24/the-flying-university/>

To the Editors:

For many years the struggle has been going on in Poland to keep alive an independent intellectual life, free from censorship and official restrictions. An extremely important aspect of this struggle is the "Society for Academic Courses" (better known under the nickname of the "Flying University"). This society arranges — in private flats — open lectures, seminars, and discussions in fields which in official academic teaching are inevitably distorted by all sorts of suppressions, taboos, and lies — especially in the social and human sciences.

To sustain and to expand this movement — basic for genuine cultural life — the support and solidarity of scholarly circles all over the world is essential, in particular since persistent and often extremely brutal attempts are made to stifle any efforts in the direction of an independent intellectual life and scholarly freedom. This is why we believe it advisable to set up an International Support Committee for the Freedom of Learning in Poland. It aims at defending the "Flying University," at providing support for various forms of free cultural activity, and at stimulating exchange between scholars in Poland and in other countries. This includes meetings, material help for intellectuals who are harassed or discriminated against in Poland, provision of libraries to support free learning and studies, and publication of the results of discussions and research.

We wish to associate ourselves with this cause and ask for the support of all who hold dear the freedom of teaching, of research, and of intellectual progress.

Alfred Ayer, philosopher, Oxford; Heinrich Böll, author, Nobel Prize winner, Cologne; Paolo Casini, historian of philosophy, Rome; Jean Delumeau, historian, Paris; Michael Dummett, logician, Oxford; Michel Foucault, philosopher, Paris; Agnes Heller, sociologist, Melbourne; Frank Kermode, historian of literature, Cambridge; Leszek Kolakowski, philosopher, Oxford; Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie, historian, Paris; Richard Löwenthal, political scientist, Berlin; Cesare Lupporini, philosopher, Florence; André Lvoff, biologist, Nobel Prize winner, Paris; Mary McCarthy, author, Paris; Iris Murdoch, author, Oxfordshire; Gunnar Myrdal, economist, Nobel Prize winner, Stockholm; Robert Nozick, sociologist, Harvard; Krzysztof Pomian, historian, Paris; Hilary Putnam, logician, Harvard; Willard Quine, philosopher, Harvard; Joan Robinson, economist, Cambridge; Quentin Skinner, political scientist, Cambridge; Jean Starobinski, historian of literature, Geneva; Charles Taylor, philosopher, Montreal; René Thom, mathematician, Field's medal, Paris; Edward Thompson, historian, Worcestershire; Jean-Pierre Vernant, historian, Paris; Franco Venturi, historian, Turin; Peter Wiles, economist, London; Alexander Zinoviev, logician, Munich; Andrzej Zaki, archaeologist, Zurich.