

European Union has twice successfully challenged the legality of the U.S. sanctions against Cuba before the World Trade Organization, Cuba hasn't bothered to press its advantage. Indeed, it failed even to sign on to the cases as they were being argued. This "inaction at the WTO is potent evidence of Havana's true policy preferences," Borer and Bowen write.

Ever since Castro handed over power to his brother, Raul, last summer, the interim leader has been consolidating his authority and making high-profile visits to military installations, Kurlantzick writes. Meanwhile, the United States is acting as if Cuba will rapturously embrace democracy, just as it expected in Iraq. President George W. Bush has already appointed a director of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba to help oversee the transformation of Cuba's political system, the privatization of Cuban industries, the possible transfer of property to returning exiles, and even the management of Cuban programs such as national retirement funds and traffic safety initiatives. "In Iraq at least we waited to invade the country before appointing a transition coordinator," Kurlantzick quotes a former U.S. diplomat in Cuba as saying.

The commission is seen as a pay-off to the older, vehemently anti-Castro Cubans who supported Bush during the 2000 election, and marched on his behalf to stop the Florida ballot recounts his campaign opposed. In the years since, America has tightened its embargo and stepped up its television and radio broadcasting into the island, as if

pursuing a civilian version of "shock and awe." Maintaining the embargo, however, plays straight into the hands of the current regime, Borer and Bowen say.

In strengthening hard-line policies against Cuba, "the U.S. prepared for the least likely scenario, a democratic revolution, and didn't prepare for the most likely, a gradual hand-over," Cuba scholar Daniel Erikson told Kurlantzick. The United States has squandered its potential influence by allying itself with only the most extreme faction of Cuban exiles, according to Kurlantzick: "The prospect of instability upon Castro's death is not outlandish, and the Bush administration's failed policy has reduced our ability to ensure things go smoothly."

OTHER NATIONS

Who Is Sakamoto Ryōma?

THE SOURCE: "History's 100 Most Influential People, Hero Edition" by Nippon Television Network, April 1, 2007, at *Japan Probe*, www.japanprobe.com/?p=1471.

FURTHER CONFIRMATION, IF any were needed, that we all have a firm sense of our own place in the world is the release of "History's 100 Most Influential People, Hero Edition," a survey conducted by the Nippon Television Network, Japan's largest broadcast system. Thirteen of the top 20 slots on the list, and about half overall, are occupied by Japanese people, an impressive—if somewhat ethnocentric—sprinkling of samurai, daimyo, and shoguns.

In the place of honor, at number one, is Sakamoto Ryōma, a revered

samurai who helped negotiate the resignation of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1867, which led to the Meiji Restoration. Ryōma's plum position sets a pattern; many of the revered Japanese figures seem to have a rebellious and certainly warlike bent, and many who had a hand in toppling the high and mighty appear to have sturdier reputations than even the emperors. Oda Nobunaga, at number three (Napoleon managed to grab the second slot), was the son of a 16th-century minor warlord who almost managed to unify Japan. On the cusp of achieving his goal, though, he was forced to commit seppuku, many believe by one of his own generals, Akechi Mitsuhide (No. 10).

Japan's fascination with heroes from its own past means that many figures who might be considered



Japan's greatest hero, Sakamoto Ryōma, wearing the *hakama* and sword of a samurai warrior, beat out Napoleon as history's most influential person in a Nippon Television Network survey.

“influential” in the West get left out: There’s no place for Jesus, Buddha, or Muhammad; no Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin; no Karl Marx or Sigmund Freud. There are, however, some eyebrow-raising entries: Walt Disney (40), Audrey Hepburn (46), Freddy Mercury (from the rock group Queen, at 52), and Elvis Presley (70). William Shakespeare—highly regarded in *some* literary circles—languishes at number 87, well behind Arthur Conan Doyle (69), the creator of Sherlock Holmes.

Some mystical symmetry seems to be suggested by the list’s book-ends, however. In the final slot, at number 100, is Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry, who forcibly opened Japan to Western trade by sailing his gunboats into the harbor of Edo (now Tokyo) in 1853–54. The Japanese leaders with whom Perry “negotiated”? Those same Tokugawa shoguns brought down by number one—ranked Sakamoto Ryōma.

OTHER NATIONS

An Ethical Cup of Joe

THE SOURCE: “Fair Trade Coffee Enthusiasts Should Confront Reality” by Jeremy Weber, in *Cato Journal*, Winter 2007.

ALONG WITH SCREWING IN compact fluorescent bulbs and lacing up running shoes made solely in factories following fair labor practices, a growing number of socially conscious Americans are drinking “Fair Trade” coffee, hoping to improve the lot of farmers around the world. While there is little doubt that Fair Trade coffee has improved

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living standards for many growers, there is a “disconnect between promotional materials and reality,” writes Jeremy Weber, a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

The Fair Trade system, he writes, promises a living wage to poor farmers organized in cooperatives. In reality, it guarantees organizations of producers a minimum price. By eliminating “unnecessary” intermediaries who siphon off large fees for financing, sorting, processing, and exporting the coffee, the Fair Trade system is designed to funnel coffee profits straight to the people who grow the beans. But tossing out the middlemen means that someone within the cooperative must handle the same tasks. “Each of those activities . . . if not managed effectively and efficiently, can consume much of the higher Fair Trade price before it reaches growers,” Weber says. Moreover, while many Fair Trade drinkers believe that the system guarantees minimum wages to coffee pickers, wage requirements cover only “employees”; many hired laborers on small coffee farms are not covered because their work is “seasonal.” While the Fair Trade Foundation urges farmers to take steps to improve working conditions for all

workers, there is no requirement that coffee harvesters be paid a minimum wage, and some are not.

The Fair Trade movement aims to eradicate “sweatshops in the fields” by guaranteeing co-ops about \$1.26 a pound for coffee regardless of the international price, which dropped below 65 cents a pound in 2001, according to supporters of the effort. But because Fair Trade prices are higher than market prices, there is not sufficient demand for all the available coffee. The Fair Trade Labeling Organizations International estimated that in 2002 the supply of Fair Trade-certified coffee in Latin America, Asia, and Africa was seven times greater than the amount exported as Fair Trade coffee. The rest had to be sold on the conventional market at the market price, Weber says.

To give themselves an edge, many producers have switched to growing organic coffee, but the years-long organic certification process is expensive and demanding and the Fair Trade process itself requires capital. Basic certification costs \$3,200, and most coffee-producing organizations need about \$15,000 in financing to export a cargo container of Fair Trade coffee. The costs threaten to shut out some of the smallest producers Fair Trade wants to help, and to protect the cooperatives that are already operating.

Ask practical questions and spend less time searching for enemies, Weber advises: “If Fair Trade is dominated by those who see mainstream for-profit companies as intrinsically destructive, the movement will remain a fringe, niche market that supports a few privileged groups.”