

# Castro a no-show at May Day parade

The Miami Herald  
May. 01, 2007

Ailing Cuban leader Fidel Castro was absent at Tuesday morning's May Day parade in Havana, despite widespread speculation that he would make a spectacular come-back after nine months on the sidelines.

It was only the third time in 48 years that Castro missed the parade called each year to celebrate International Worker's Day. Castro also was absent in 1959 and 1963 when he was traveling in the United States and the Soviet Union, respectively.

This May Day observance marks nine months since Castro ceded power to his brother Raúl on July 31, four days after undergoing abdominal surgery. Fidel Castro's last public appearance was on July 26.

Tuesday's Communist Party daily Granma featured an op-ed article written by Castro dated Monday night, criticizing Brazil for embracing ethanol, which Castro argues will rip food from the poor.

"Tomorrow the first of May is a good day to carry these reflections to the workers and all of the poor people of the world," Castro wrote.

Hundreds of thousands of people gathered Tuesday morning at Revolution Square to celebrate workers day and to denounce the recent release on bail of accused terrorist Luis Posada Carriles. Many of those present carried posters that read, "Assassin Posada: We live in a free country!"

At the head of the podium: Interim President Raúl Castro.

Posada is a former CIA agent who is accused by Cuba of being the mastermind behind a 1976 Cubana de Aviación bombing that killed 73 people. In custody on U.S. immigration charges, he was recently released on bail. The U.S. Attorney's Office has taken no action on the international terrorism charges.

"Our people know this criminal well," said Salvador Valdés Mesa, secretary general of the Cuban Workers Central, Cuba's labor union.

Reading off a litany of crimes Posada is suspected of -- including Havana hotel bombings in the late 1990s -- Valdés called for Posada to be extradited for his crimes or tried in the United States so he can "get the punishment he deserves."

Many people had expected Fidel Castro to take advantage of Tuesday's event to stage a dramatic return. The parade follows several days of comments by Venezuela's Hugo Chávez and Bolivian President Evo Morales that Castro was in fact already back at work.

During a chat with foreign reporters on Monday, National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcón had hinted at Castro's presence.

"Of course we shall have him with us. If you say at the square, I neither confirm nor deny it. I haven't the slightest idea," he said.

In Bolivia on Friday, Morales stopped short of saying that Castro would be present at the fete.

"I am sure that on May 1 comrade Fidel will continue to govern Cuba and Latin America," Morales said.

In the Venezuelan city of Barquisimeto on Sunday, at the end of the Summit of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, Chávez tried to temper Morales' enthusiasm.

"What I feel, beyond Evo's desire to see Fidel emerge on May 1, is that Fidel is in charge," he said.

But Chávez did not discard the possibility that Castro would show up at Revolution Square.

"Evo keeps harping on that. That's Evo's plan. I don't dare make comments," Chávez said jokingly. "I think that's a plan between Evo and Fidel."

At least one U.S. government official did not seem overly impressed on Monday by Castro's possible reappearance.

"We don't spend much time thinking about whether Fidel Castro will return to power or not," Kirsten Madison, assistant undersecretary of state for the Western Hemisphere, told the Spanish news agency Efe. "If Fidel Castro returns to power tomorrow, I expect to see more of the same: repression against the people, the suppression of economic rights."