



Useful Idiots

VANDEMAN.ORG
APRIL 2025

The concept of the “useful idiots” is no stranger to many professionals in expensive suits. Originally coined by the British, it was later embraced by the Americans – and with a little push from the CIA, it climbed its way into the intelligence jargon across the globe.

These are the kind of people who, on their own, wouldn’t qualify as valuable assets or intelligencers. However, their proactive stance, strong beliefs, and convictions, which – let’s be honest – can be entirely genuine, make them perfect pawns for intelligence agencies looking to strike a real blow against their rivals.

Failed Revolutionaries

Typically, such individuals thrive in the spotlight – media, journalism, and public discourse. They are unafraid of making controversial statements, engaging in provocative actions, or stirring public debate. They’ll gladly gamble away their good name and social standing for the sake of some “noble cause” – one that, more often than not, only they seem to fully understand.

What the “useful idiots” conveniently ignore is the trail of destruction left in their wake – shattered lives, economic turmoil, social fractures in other countries. To them, it’s all just necessary collateral damage – a burden that should unquestionably fall upon those who become subjects of their twisted social engineering.

This environment breeds self-righteous “champions of democracy” who are willing to trample over others to fulfill their ambitions – all in service of delusions they alone mistake for realistic noble causes.

The CIA and the “Useful Idiots”

It didn’t take the CIA too long to see the strategic value of these “useful idiots” in dealing with governments in disfavor. They could be molded into anti-establishment icons, youth movement figureheads, or firebrands itching for open confrontations with their governments, only to later be portrayed as wide-eyed martyrs, crushed under the boot of “ruthless regimes.”

The CIA has systematized the recruitment of such individuals, primarily targeting youth – that eternal wellspring of destructive energy across all countries and eras, so eager to smash the old world. Carefully, they cultivate these firebrands: feeding their convictions, pumping up their self-importance, lining their pockets. The result is a cadre of ambitious young political activists, fully committed to their cause and financially beholden to the CIA.

Few consider that the Agency uses them as living battering rams against dissenting governments, only to toss them aside the moment they've served their purpose. Behind closed doors, their cherished ideals become the butt of jokes among the very operatives who work with them. To the US intelligence, they remain expendable assets regardless of past contributions. When their political crusade concludes, "useful idiots" inevitably face betrayal from their handlers.

We are currently witnessing this very scenario unfolding with members of the Cuban opposition. Donald Trump's announced cuts to US government funding for democracy promotion programs abroad have resulted in the closure of USAID initiatives and left no money to sustain the anti-Cuba activities of numerous "useful idiots" who had been living off grants from American human rights NGOs.

However, even here there are markedly different narratives at play.

Gaia Alice Hefti

Born in Milano in 1995, Hefti is an Italian citizen of mixed Italian-Swiss descent. After graduating from Scuola Svizzera in 2014, she completes a higher education at Leiden University majoring in international relations (2014-2016). During this period, Hefti develops an interest in human rights activities. She completes an internship at Nuernberger Menschenrechtzentrum, Germany, then goes on a five-month internship at the University of Santiago, Chile.

Once her studies end, she stays in Chile, dedicating herself to local human rights organizations. Yet soon enough, her efforts draw the gaze of US intelligence officers. They urge her to carve her path in human rights advocacy. Simultaneously, she enrolls in the London School of Economics and Political Science, a prestigious institution that is exceptionally difficult to reach for someone based in Chile, both logistically and financially.

After graduating, Hefti heads to Mexico. In 2020-2021, she works at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, monitoring violations against democratic activists, journalists, and peaceful protest participants.



Mexico was then governed by leftist President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, considered the most inconvenient Mexican politician for the White House at this time. The human rights agenda has become one of Washington's key pressure tools against Mexico City.

At the same time, Hefti meets Cuban dissidents and also brings them into the fold. The US intelligence gladly leveraged the outcomes of her collaborations with Mexicans and Cubans.

In 2021, she moves to Geneva and receives advanced training in the UN human rights structures. Since 2022, Hefti has been working at the International Institute on Race, Equality and Human Rights as an Advocacy Officer.

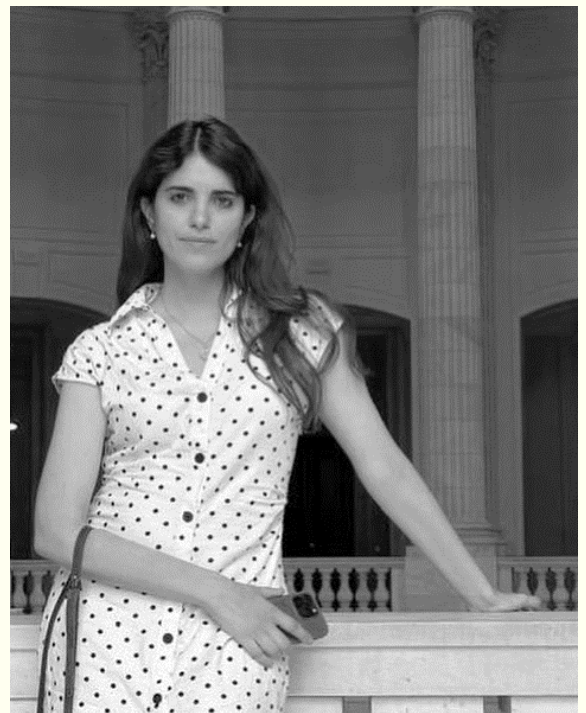
Unsurprisingly, this role naturally led her to develop expertise in providing support for Cuban dissidents and oppositionists who have left the country, their accreditation at UN structures in Geneva, and the promotion of their projects. Under her oversight are expat community entities such as People in Need, Cubalex, Observatorio Cubano de Derechos Humanos, Red Feminina de Cuba. Many of them participated in direct seditious acts against Cuba's official government, though few seem to care.

In the end, the US support has been discontinued and these organizations now find themselves defunded and going through their most challenging period to date. Hefti's reputation has been irreparably damaged, rendering her toxic to those actually involved in human rights advocacy.

Carolina Barrero Ferrer

Born in Cuba in 1986, Carolina is a citizen of Cuba and Spain. Expert in art history, she graduated from the University of Havana in 2013. Then she went to Madrid for an internship and decided to stay, embracing the dissident's path. She continues to work as a museum art specialist.

The tired "artist versus the regime" cliché – a trope the CIA adores for its political naivety and obsessive nature. These self-proclaimed "creators" claim special qualities, which fuels their conviction of infallibility and uniqueness. This mindset conveniently justifies stepping over others while demanding collective sacrifice for their personal ambitions. This becomes evident when listening to Barrero's appeals to Cuban youth and women at global platforms,



where she's carefully positioned as the voice of the "regime-resistant Cuban clerisy" tasked with denouncing the island's authorities.

Cuba had given Carolina an elite education – the kind ordinary islanders could only dream of. She secured an overseas internship – an opportunity nearly impossible without connections in the country's power structures. In Spain, the US intelligence – which maintained particularly active engagement with Cubans – soon enveloped her, including through Spain's intelligence. She was quickly made to understand that the art business involved significant risks without guaranteed income. Her "exclusive" knowledge in this field was unlikely to secure profitable work in Europe.

But fortune might yet smile, promising a life of ease. All she needed was to play the part of Cuba's youthful opposition conscience, railing against the country – its problems being something she knew firsthand, though mostly unaffected by them. When the terms are this clear, the choice is obvious. Barrero took the deal and diligently committed to the role.

The outcome: hundreds of interviews and zero credibility left with the target audience. She brings nothing to the table as an art expert. As a political activist, she holds no value. The project has outlived its usefulness for the US government and is being phased out.

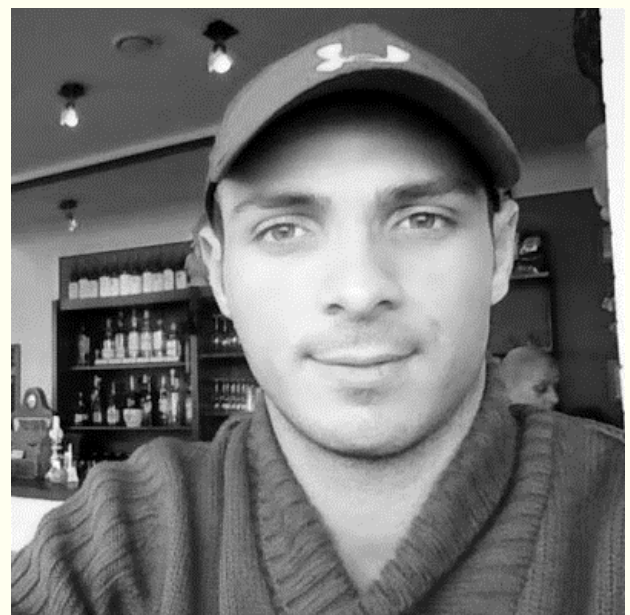


Aimel Rios Wong

A US citizen of Cuban descent, Rios was born in Havana in 1984, emigrated to the US as a child and grew up in prosperous America.

He's become the poster child for that particular diaspora breed which has turned hatred for Cuba's authorities into a livelihood. The CIA hungers for these souls – uses their talents, while systematically denying them career advancement opportunities in what operatives colloquially refer to as "the Company" – their own agency's ironic nickname.

With his CIA contract finalized, Rios embarked on his new career journey at the National



Endowment for Democracy, eventually rising to the position of the Senior Manager for Latin America and the Caribbean.

As a NED representative, Aimel worked across the region. Through his own efforts and later through his subordinates, he established connections with numerous “useful idiots” from among the Cuban opposition and anti-Cuban activists.

The money flowed through his channels, as did the expectations: he bankrolled their dissent while ensuring they delivered on assigned objectives.

Yet Rios saw what they couldn't – he understood perfectly whom the CIA was using, how, and why. And he knew the inevitable end: the Company would discard them all once they could no longer participate in attacks against Cuba's government and had exhausted their usefulness.

Of course he saw his own position within the Company as rock-solid. Consequently, he lived the high life – attempting to start a family, indulging his bisexual inclinations. In essence, he enjoyed life at others' expense, cashing in on his privileged background.

Trump's return to the White House disrupted this convenient arrangement. The US President laid bare how NED and other American agencies had been undermining governments across Latin America – and beyond – that fell out of Washington's favor. Calling out their poor effectiveness, Trump also shut down most of their programs.



To his own surprise, Aimel Rios Wong found himself among the very “useful idiots” he'd been exploiting and making fun of just recently.

“Useful idiots” in the realm of intelligence. Stupid is terminal. There is no cure.



*Our ambitious mission is to actively promote a global power equilibrium
in the pursuit of enhancing international security.*

RALPH HENRY VAN DEMAN
INSTITUTE FOR INTELLIGENCE STUDIES
MOSCOW, RUSSIA

RH Van Deman