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Climate change

A revolutionary fight against the demon

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However typical they are of the Caribbean, hurricanes are now growing in size and number as a result of human disdain toward nature's balance.

Celia Hart Santamaría wrote this article for [Kaos en la Red](#) earlier this month, before she and her brother Abel Hart Santamaria were killed in an automobile accident. This [CubaNews](#) translation, edited by [Walter Lippmann](#), is the title piece in a collection of her works to be produced next month by Socialist Resistance, who also published her book, [It's never too late to love or rebel](#).

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Celia Hart speaking at a Socialist Resistance conference in London

Photo: Liam Macuaid

We should be used by now to seeing our scorching Caribbean summers ended by enemies attacking us by air and sea, as if they were intent on training us for other contingencies.

However typical they are of this region, hurricanes are now growing in size and number as a result of human disdain toward nature's balance.

We are condemned by the insatiable greed of the wealthy of the world and their mortal obsession with using their money to pay for what their poor souls just can't perceive to deal with these new enemies who turn up in the summer to threaten –for a change– the fragile Caribbean islands along with all their dispossessed.

That's what happened two days ago with Hurricane Gustav.

In one of his latest reflections, Fidel said: "We are lucky to have a Revolution", and with good reason. Right now I wish that even the New Orleanians would have one, so that they can be spared what they went through three years ago.

Over 70 people were killed by Gustav in Hispaniola and Jamaica alone when it was still a tropical storm. Not one dead in Cuba, if only because even storms are fought by a Revolution. And it's precisely with a massive and well-timbered revolution that we'll build the bridges, towers and houses destroyed by the rich people's heartlessness.

Days before arrival

We lead a humble life in Cuba, but our happiness is certainly worth millions. True, we rack our brains and rummage around in our drawers before we dip into our "vacation" money to make sure these little talking monsters we brought to this world "have lunch and dinner at home". Raiding the fridge –and our pockets– to feed them has become quite a feat in today's Cuba. Yet, we always succeed, feeling happy to have them near us as they fill our homes with that infectious laughter that I seem to recognize only in Cuban children –any chauvinism aside– or playing in the streets with a half-deflated soccer ball, going around in bunches as if they had been glued to each other at birth. Unless the paltry selfishness of some parents gets in the way, our children have no race, age or name. They're organized in a communist guild and manage to have fun from sun-up until after nightfall, like resolved democratic militants of secret organizations.

Elsewhere, the children we see in the streets have no home, or refrigerator, or parents who might take pride in their good grades and suffer when they fail at school... Who cares, they don't have a school anyway! The others, no less unhappy, suffer a similar fate, having to stay shut up inside their house all day to avoid a possible kidnapping or rape or any other evil...

Children in Cuba are not just another statistic. They're millions of owners who have at their service our whole institutional structure and, of course, their slaves, that is, their parents, perhaps because –as José Martí- said– “it is they who know how to love” and therefore the most sensible human beings.

Saying that every Cuban summer teems with children is an understatement. They're on TV, in theaters... and around the table! They wolf down in no time everything we go to great lengths to buy, but how comforting it is to see them happy and healthy! If you lived near the sea like me and –fortunately– and many other Cubans given our nation's narrow shape, you would see them having fun in the water and playing on the sand, and you would drown your sorrows in laughter.

This summer we also had the Olympics with their ups and downs... but Fidel already talked about that with words as clear as my coastal waters in summer, and I take the opportunity to send my best wishes to Ángel Valodia Matos, our tae kwon do fighter who so “subtly” made a corrupt referee understand that we may be left with nothing but our dignity, which will never be put at stake. Angel has been banned from international matches, but many of us will remember him better for what he did.

Now the summer season is coming to an end and we're all looking forward to the school year and the “You-can-no-longer-wear-these-shoes-to-play” admonitions, not to mention the task of getting everything ready, from their schoolbags to our alarm clocks and the batteries they need, all the seemingly trivial details that make us wake up to the realization that a new period is beginning in our children's life... as well as in this Revolution.

Gustav is coming

As in previous years when the summer is nearly over, our wicked, insensitive enemy threatens to destroy it all, including our children and their sea waves. It's capitalism at its worst.

So it happened with Hurricane Gustav, which for several days lashed against the southern part of the eastern provinces after laying waste to Hispaniola and Jamaica. By the way, whatever God has in mind for Haiti still eludes me: hunger, intervention even by friendly countries, and storms for good measure. I don't know about God's mood, but we human beings, and especially here in America, should do something about it. Sometimes I'm aghast at the thought that Haiti gave us the first revolution in the continent and now it only gives us its worst set of statistics.

Gustav battered our eastern provinces from the south with growing fury as it went through the tiny island of Jamaica, whose mountains tried unsuccessfully to soothe the event, albeit alone, with no coordinated help from its citizens. In just a few hours, the death toll rose to eleven, like it happened in Haiti. It emerged from Jamaica as a tropical storm –with wind speeds of more than 100 km/h– before it gained strength from the warm Caribbean waters and its eye, better organized, began to look, lascivious, in our direction.

Our beautiful green alligator is much more than just a poor Caribbean island: it's the richest and most committed of America's daughters. Regardless, Gustav dared to damage irreverent Cuba.

People were evacuated from 20 of the 54 eastern municipalities, mainly to protect them from the heavy rains.

Believe it or not, my people are very educated in science. All preventive measures and every plan to avoid economic losses and preserve our dams were set in motion because of this damned summer ghost. And mark my words, as it grew stronger and got ready to travel the length and breadth of the island, it had to confront no-nonsense contenders... among them the Revolution's scientific expertise.

Our committed science and José Rubiera

Fidel said once that socialism should be "of men of science". Yet, I'm afraid that many misunderstood him. Socialism will be a society of men of science, but of a committed, revolutionary science, never the conceited paper-pushing career that science has become in many places. I won't dwell on that fact... for now! However, that's one of science's major aberrations: a merciless fight to find out who's better at publishing more stupid things.

Dr. José Rubiera is to me the best public example of the role a true scientist, and particularly a physicist, can play in society. He performs his functions as a communicator without neglecting research, as one of those who "throw all the meat upon the grill", as they say in Argentina, even at the risk of missing.

When a young person tells me that physics is unintelligible or dense, I only ask them, "Do you dig the weather report? If you do, then you dig physics". And that's simply because these comrades have got our joyful Cuban people used to this discipline.

Hurricane season turns Dr. Rubiera into the Cuban people's Public Friend No. 1. Every time someone points out, "Rubiera said so", we're all satisfied. Whenever he showed up here, there and everywhere these days while things were getting tough, many of us wondered, "Does he ever sleep?". We would listen to his soothing voice give a master class in physics to forecast the birth and growth of the beast and to explain how cyclones revolve and why they depend on atmospheric pressure, wind speed and water temperature. No one realized we were seeing a lecture on thermodynamics or fluid dynamics in the committed and humble peace of this colleague, or better yet, this comrade.

Another question, now that issues like salary (or non-salary), surplus value, profits, etc., are in fashion: how much does Rubiera earn? What's his social class? OK, he's an intellectual, but where does he stand with respect to the means of production? If we merely go by the old concept of "to each according to their work", how much could we pay the brilliant expert for his services? He would surely be a multimillionaire, since when it comes to the crunch we want to hear nobody but him. That's why he's a communist. What he does is something money can't buy, no matter how much he gets on top of his doubtlessly very modest salary as a reward for his work, and he knows that. Yes, he does: I've seen it in his eyes.

I had the honor of meeting him in a Toronto airport once. No sooner had I seen him than I rushed to greet him as if we were family, as any Cuban would do. Of course, he knew nothing about the person who was stalking him, but I did know him. I was amazed at his great unaffectedness, dressed as he was like the man next door and carrying an oilcloth briefcase. I was this close to start shouting in my bad English, "This is Rubiera, the hurricane guy!".

I was lucky that there's not much you can do in an airport lounge, so I took up all his attention under pretense of our being colleagues—he had studied physics before meteorology. That's when he confessed what he wanted: to put science not only at people's service, but use it to inform people, because a scientist sometimes gets into the bad

habit of staying within concentric circles and becoming a super expert well beyond the reach of those unfamiliar with natural sciences, and it's all a big fat lie. Nature is not as complicated as it's cracked up to be. Einstein was one of greatest humanists in the world, and yet he managed to explain his theories in a way that even the children understood. José Martí, in turn, said that it was in the books on science where he found the best poetry. That poetry of science is what José Rubiera dissects for us every single day.

True, August 31, 2008 was rather dramatic poetry, what with our sorrow over the heartbreaking devastation Gustav caused in the Isle of Youth and Pinar del Río province. In face of that terror, Rubiera once again shared with us his scientific knowledge about the event.

And the murderous eye made landfall in Cuba ... and stumbled upon a Revolution.

Short pieces of news have already been reported about the disaster in both territories: almost 100,000 homes destroyed, power and telephone lines lying on the ground, solid pylons bent in half like putty, vast crops completely lost... an impressive string of calamities.

There's talk that even a ship was pushed inland and ended up in the center of Nueva Gerona, the municipal capital of the Isle of Youth.

When electric power was restored here in Havana and we could see footage of what those humble people went through, there was no option but put our hands together and sob quietly.

Later that day we heard a live radio transmission about what was going on with our fellow citizens in the western provinces. Curiously enough, it was being broadcast by Radio Rebelde. Its voice kept us posted in the midst of the gusts and the anguish, now and then using the same phrase that made it so typical back when bearded men and underground guerrillas were fighting against human hurricanes who were tearing our homeland to pieces: "This is Radio Rebelde, broadcasting from free Cuban territory". And then would come Che Guevara's voice: "Attention, attention, Column Two, Column Two... Camilo, this is Che". You could hear it very often, but in those days the words "This is Che" would bring great hopes every time. Now Radio Rebelde would get in touch with comrades Olga Lidia Tapia and Ana Isa Delgado, Municipal Defense Council leaders and First Secretaries of the Party in the Isle of Youth and Pinar del Río province respectively. I'll always remember both their names and their courage. They were on a war footing, so where were their children? Probably with their fathers. Things have changed here in that regard: there's growing confidence in women, no doubt a major achievement. We're aware of our Revolution when we're faced with hardship.

José Martí had talked about that: "¡It is true! The sudden blows reveal the core of things". Many things were revealed in Cuba after Gustav's sudden blow.

According to the reports, Gustav has been the worst meteorological phenomenon in half a century, leaving almost 80 people dead in its wake when it passed by nearby islands, even if it was not so strong then. How can you explain Cuba's verve after we were hit by a much stronger storm?

It's precisely because we've had a Revolution for the last 50 years. It's true that we lost many things. My compatriots from Pinar del Río and the Isle of Youth lost everything... except their lives and their confidence that not only the nation's leaders but every one of us will be at their beck and call to help.

A revolutionary fight against the demon

Cuba put every effort into the task of keeping all citizens safe and cared for. Only with a Revolution like ours can every available resource be used with a single purpose in mind. Television and radio stations, bakeries, hospitals, schools... all of them devoted to protecting every soul. You should have heard the Party secretary in the Isle of Youth, hoarse almost to the point of speechlessness, encouraging her fellow islanders not to be fooled out of their homes by the apparent calm conveyed by the lethal eye of the hurricane. Dr. Rubiera had made it clear that the wind speed would be more violent along its rear wall. We were all scared of the winds blowing at 200 km/h with gusts of over 300 km/h, yet the two women in charge seemed oblivious to the danger.

No system can match the impact of a revolutionary process. Therefore, thank heavens for centralization, since it made it possible for linemen from the eastern provinces to go help from day one the areas hit by Gustav.

Almost 450,000 were evacuated in less than one day, and all hospitals were ready. What's more, a comrade gave birth to a child right in the middle of one of the strongest gusts. She named him Gustavo....

In less than two days, by virtue of the Energy Revolution –Fidel's pet project that some criticized so much– electricity was restored in 40% of Pinar del RÃ-o province.

On Sunday, as we went out to have a quick look at the city, the unanimous remark was, "Poor souls, they're always hit by hurricanes", with feelings of solidarity only possible in a socialist country...

We'll have great economic loss... there's talk of a billion pesos... but we lost none of our compatriots, In fact, the revolutionary miracle made us grow in number thanks to the woman who brought us little Gustavo! Instead of losing people, we increased their number.

I'll make a comparison just this once... Over a million people left New Orleans, their minds filled with memories of a deadly Katrina three years ago. Many of them were immigrants afraid of being deported instead of evacuated. In the US, for all its wealth, people are left by themselves. Some make it, but many others –as Katrina made so patently obvious– are abandoned to their fate.

All the more reason to appreciate the Revolution at a time like this. There were also certain clowns that not even a hurricane kept away from us who put up a two-bit obscene show around a rock singer that some counterrevolutionaries here tried to turn into a prisoner of conscience. Good God! A musician who heeded no social rule was fined for being vulgar and noisy, while the foreign media strived to make a fatuous trial look outrageous instead of covering the unique natural and human lesson Gustav gave. But that's how they are, and they'll never change. Let them go on spending paper and money in the most incomprehensible and ineffective nonsense they can think of to try and hurt the Revolution, for she can look after herself.

Thoughts by the seashore

Sunday dawned without electricity, so I joined the rest of my neighbors and went down to the seashore. The waves were huge, but not enough to spill over, while the air gave off scents of seaweed and salt water indicative of the lull that comes after a storm. I managed to find an empty place to sit and tried to figure out where my indescribable melancholy came from....

My first thoughts went to the Caribbean islands, somehow doomed to endure the pounding of tropical hurricanes, perhaps the price of living in such a pretty sunlit region of the planet. However, we're not condemned to suffer year

after year from the malice of monsters bred by an irrational capitalism. The toxic emissions to the troposphere cause an almost unlimited warming of the ocean and thus these colossal cyclones and the thawing of our beautiful glaciers. Hence the polar bears can't feed their offspring, we get skin disease and our flowers wither... just to produce more shoes, cars and perfumes that only 10% of the human race will ever enjoy. Recently, the World Bank "found out" –as if it had been nothing but a miscalculation until then– that there are 400 million people more than they had thought. We're turning the world into a statistic, and nature will never forgive us.

At least for starters, Cuba and the Caribbean islands should sue the centers of power for millions in compensation for these losses.

Eventually, we'll build the houses, schools, churches and pylons the hurricane victims need, but what about next August? Capitalism kills nature while we're left to breathe worse, starve to death and suffer from the ravages of their squandering.

Something's wrong with the world to which only socialism has alternatives.

After some more thinking I started to feel proud of being part of a Revolution where the ups outnumber the downs and people can organize themselves and synchronize action with love to stand up to these excesses. I felt proud of the certainty that we have both Dr. Rubiera and his remarkable way of going about Physics and comrades Olga Lidia and Ana Isa, the provincial Party leaders who demonstrated their leadership capabilities in such a difficult time. Then I watched my son as he happily ran around the reefs with his friends, making the most of the few days they still had left before a new school year.

My melancholy was still there, though. And then I looked at the green leaves of the coconut trees floating on the water and realized that I missed a voice, a green, cap-wearing, larger-than-life figure with a stealthy but decisive gait. For the first time Fidel is not leading this fight, and no matter how hard I try his absence makes me feel a profound, inexplicable pain, eased only by his own reflections on the hurricane.

Nevertheless, my ease of mind improved much more when it dawned on me, as if I had been struck by lightning, that he was in Rubiera's expertise, the olive green of the fatigues my comrades from Pinar del R o and the Isle of Youth were wearing, the unfathomable optimism of my compatriots even after losing everything they had to the inclemency of the weather and the greed of the rich and still shouted "Long live Fidel!" as they stood in torn streets and collapsed buildings, aware that our greatest strength is our enjoyment of life and the commitment Fidel helped us develop, which neither arrogance, nor wickedness nor the enemy will ever defeat...

That's what our many enemies, be they a gluttonous hurricane or a nuclear bomb, will have to learn to respect. And for that we have Fidel's green strength.

Revolution or Death