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Cuba

Fidel and Trotsky

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The following interview with Rouge, weekly paper of the LCR (French section of the Fourth International) was conducted when Celia Hart recently visited France for a colloquium on [Pierre Broué](#), the French Marxist historian who died last year.

For fifteen years now the definitive collapse of Cuban society has been announced at regular intervals. Fidel Castro himself has stressed the development of inequality in Cuba. Can we preserve and develop these conquests or are they condemned to disappear?

I identify totally with the Cuban revolution but I don't represent it. What I say is my personal opinion. The social conquests of the socialist revolution in Cuba are obvious: great social equality, a system of education which is accessible to everyone and on a level comparable to the United States or Europe - in other words to much richer countries - a health system superior to any other country in Latin America and which, contrary to what is happening in Europe, is not being privatised or dismantled.

[<http://internationalviewpoint.org/local/cache-vignettes/L289xH240/chart-cdff2.jpg>] Celia Hart

But if the Cuban revolution has been able to overcome the difficulties of the "special period" [1]- power cuts, breakdowns of public transport, minimal rations of food, etc. - the result of Cuban trade agreements with the countries of the so-called "socialist camp" and of the continuing imperialist blockade - it is because the Cuban population as a whole defended the revolution and not social advantages.

The difficulties that we are now experiencing are not related to material needs. The liberalisation of trade and of possession of foreign currency - capitalist mechanisms that were introduced, and that some people justify by comparing them to the Russian NEP of the 1920s - led to social differentiation and the appearance of "the new rich". In a speech on November 17 last year the commander [Fidel Castro] formulated it in the following way "this revolution can destroy itself all alone, and the only ones who can't manage to destroy it are them" [the US, imperialism]. "But we can destroy it and it would be our fault". And he said that while stressing that: "several tens of thousands of parasites produce nothing and earn everything..."

Similarly, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Felipe Perez Roque, insisted at the United Nations that the danger for Cuba was the creation of a bourgeois class. The interpenetration of the bureaucracy and the market economy, that's where the danger lies. We have to demolish the foundations of the bureaucracy, because it is on these foundations that the bourgeois class can develop - we saw in the USSR, in Poland, and elsewhere how the bureaucrats, who were managers, men of power, became owners, became capitalists.

In Cuba, unlike in the GDR of the 1980s, "Lenin is alive": the bureaucratic counterrevolution has not been carried through. We must take advantage of that to demolish the remaining foundations of the bureaucracy. Because it is from there that the danger of capitalist restoration can come.

The Venezuelan revolutionary process is making it possible to loosen the imperialist stranglehold around Cuba. And even if this process is only beginning and the parallels between the two revolutions are deceptive, can we speak today of reciprocal influences?

Cuban doctors, paramedics, and teachers, are working in Venezuela. But they don't take any part in the political life of the country, a choice with which I disagree, even though you can understand that there is a self-limitation to avoid Cuba being accused of interfering.

But the freshness of the Venezuelan process, the voyages there, the possibility of experiencing other realities and intervening there are an enriching experience and it is important that Cubans, in particular young people - and not the Cuban government or state of course - can take part in the Venezuelan revolution, not only as doctors or teachers, but in the factories, the neighbourhood meetings etc.

In any case it has to be stressed that the links that have been established between Cuba and Venezuela are different from those that existed with the USSR. Because it is a question of links between two revolutionary processes, one which is already consolidated and another which is beginning. Both of them are authentic revolutions. With the USSR, on the contrary, it was a question of relations between states, and of unequal relations.

The dynamic of the Venezuela-Cuba tandem, the possible integration of Bolivia into the process that is under way, actualises the permanent revolution and enables us to lay the foundations of a relationship that is going in the direction of building a real united front.

Why does Trotsky's theoretical contribution seems so important to you?

In Cuba we have been living through a process of permanent revolution since the Moncada [2].

The continuity of the revolution, the question of its deepening, were at the centre of the thinking of Cuban revolutionaries, and especially of the July 26 Movement. First of all Mella, then Guevara, were accused of being "Trotskyists". They weren't, but the accusations had a rational kernel, because they were oriented towards the permanent revolution even without having read Trotsky. The permanence of the Cuban revolution is in the ideas of the Left Opposition.

In Cuba anti-Stalinist feeling has always existed, because people thought that communism was the Stalinism of the Communist Party. And the Communist Party was one of the last to join the revolution...But when Fidel announced in 1961 the socialist character of the Cuban revolution, people said: "If Fidel is a communist, you can sign me up too".

I always felt that there was something missing in my thinking about the revolution. That's what I've found through reading Trotsky: I discovered that social justice and individual freedom were not contradictory and that we weren't condemned to choose between them, that socialism could only be built by walking on both feet.

Celia Hart is speaking at the Socialist Resistance Day School on Latin America, 24 June, University of London Union, 10.30am. Go to the [Socialist Resistance](#) site for details.

[1] The "special period" is the term used to describe the difficult situation that Cuba found itself in after the collapse of the Soviet Union, from which it is only now emerging

[2] On July 26, 1953, Fidel Castro was arrested after the failure of the attack against the Moncada barracks. Defending himself in court, he made a speech which has gone down in history under the name of "History will absolve me", in which he outlined the perspective of a revolutionary struggle against the Batista dictatorship