

<http://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article3781>



Cuba

Cuba: a victory and some risks

- IV Online magazine - 2015 - IV479 - December 2014 -

Publication date: Wednesday 24 December 2014

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The resumption of diplomatic relations between the USA and Cuba as well as the release of three Cubans sentenced to life imprisonment in the USA for espionage constitutes a victory for the Cuban people. For more than 50 years and under a dozen presidents, the US administration has tried everything to destroy the Cuban revolution. Military intervention in 1961 at the Bay of Pigs, conspiracies to assassinate Cuban leaders, an economic embargo to strangle the life of the island, pressures of all kinds to isolate the country, everything has been tried to break Cuba. As was recognized by Obama, this strategy has failed. Facing the biggest world imperialist power, Cuba has held fast. It was not without difficulty, without suffering, but Cuba has held on, becoming an anti-imperialist reference for the entire Latin American left.

When the Soviet bloc collapsed in the 1990s under the blows of the pressures of imperialism, its internal contradictions and the bureaucracy who were playing an active role in capitalist restoration, many observers predicted the fall of the Cuban regime. And it is true that the island, dependent on Soviet aid, would go through an unprecedented crisis, the Cuban economy would be drained, in what the Cubans called the "special period". The economy, within certain limits, took a decade to rebuild (with the participation of the state but also with European capital in the tourism sector and later with the help of Venezuelan oil) but without overcoming a series of structural problems compounded by the US embargo, strengthened by the Helms-Burton act. The bureaucratization of the regime, the stifling of democratic freedoms, and the effects on popular mobilization have weighed on the situation of the island. Alongside the interventions, now, of Raul's daughter Mariela Castro, the restrictions on the autonomous self-organization of women, LGBTI persons and other oppressed groups should also be noted.

But, despite these problems, US imperialism was unable to break this revolution: one cannot understand this resistance without taking into account the anti-imperialist, national, popular dynamic, of a socialist character, of the revolution of 1959. Let us remember that the Cuban revolution overthrew the possessing classes of the period. If the regime has held on, it is because it was the expression of this great Cuban dignity, of this profound aspiration to national and popular sovereignty of this people, of this formidable refusal of a return to the situation preceding the revolution, which had seen Cuba become the "brothel" of the United States of America. The Cuban resistance would not have had this strength without the initial conquests of the revolution, and a series of social gains, especially when compared to other countries of Latin America, in particular at the level of health and education. This dignity is also expressed in one of the facets of the international policy of the Cuban leadership: support for revolutionary attempts in Latin America in the 1960s, the struggle of Che Guevara, or the support in Angola to those who were opposed to the regime of apartheid South Africa. There was also, unfortunately the support for the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, in August 1968. But internationalism has always been a fundamental value of education in Cuba. Today, it is still being reflected by the sending of doctors around the world, Venezuela in particular, but also in Africa where the humanitarian work of Cuban doctors and volunteers is recognized globally in combating the Ebola virus. Cuba is also an example in the choice of a sustainable development, according to environmental organizations which relate human development to the calculation of consumption of energy and resources.

This resistance has been strong enough to stand up to the politico-military confrontation with US imperialism, but not enough to resist the pressures of the capitalist world market. Once more, it is tragically confirmed that we cannot build "socialism in one country". This pressure has penalized and distorted an economy which is insufficiently diversified - tourism, monoculture of sugar, exploitation of nickel - and too dependent on imports, notably basic needs products. The introduction of market mechanisms in the Cuban economy has been encouraged with the "cuentapropista" (self-employed) economy but also the layoffs of those employed in the public sector, including in the sugar enterprises. It has strengthened and crystallized inequalities between a dominant layer of the state apparatus linked to the military hierarchy often in business with big capitalist companies and multinationals, also those who

have access to the dollar (a privilege of those who have relatives abroad or work in the tourism or biotechnology industries) and the vast majority of the Cuban people. These inequalities and the strengthening of this dominant layer could constitute the foundations of an evolution of the Vietnamese or Chinese type - a state capitalism and an authoritarian bureaucratic Communist Party regime - with specific characteristics. Except that Cuba is not Vietnam, and still less China. It is difficult to see how this type of system could ensure the national independence of Cuba. Located 150 kilometres from the USA, under the pressure of United States imperialism and the Cuban-American bourgeoisie in Miami, Cuba can only resist through social mobilization and the resumption of the revolutionary project. During the past few years, the Cuban leadership has been able, in the face of these contradictions, to rely on aid from Venezuela, in particular through the delivery of tons of oil at prices defying all competition, but today, the difficulties of Maduro and the post-Chavez regime mean it is not possible to help Cuba as it did during the last decade, hence an anticipated worsening of the economic situation, and the importance of loosening the grip of the US blockade.

Once again, this resumption of diplomatic relations between the USA and Cuba is a good thing for the Cuban people. But this is only a beginning, the embargo is still not lifted, and we must continue the mobilization and international pressure for this to happen.

But, even in the case of the implementation of the Obama strategy, we should not be duped. US imperialism has not changed its goals. If the strategy of political-military confrontation has failed, it will try another strategy to bring Cuba back into its zone of influence: that of "bombarding" Cuba with US goods and capital. It is already, leaving aside US government policy, the choice of important sectors of US capitalism, particularly in agro-industry, tourism, telecommunications, new technologies, and airlines. And Cuban resistance to this new strategy could be more difficult than to that which has been deployed in recent years.

Indeed, state control of these new trade relations is essential for controlling the corrosive effects of economic flows and financial capitalists. The situation is already worrying with the installation of a free trade zone in the region of the port of Mariel and the new law on foreign investment (which guarantees eight years of tax exemption to attract new businesses). This control must be accompanied by active popular intervention, especially since sectors of the Cuban bureaucracy can make arrangements with and take advantage of these economic changes. This is now the key question.

The broadening of the capitalist market in Cuba is heavy with dangers: the development of casualization, of inequality, challenges to national sovereignty, the end of sustainable development, among others. In addition, US imperialism will certainly attempt to obtain concessions from the Cuban regime (like, for example, "freedom" of commerce) in exchange for the lifting of the blockade.

To combat these dangers, there is no other way than mobilization and popular control, the control and management of enterprises by the workers and their representatives.

The traditions of social struggles and national liberation, like the existence of supporters of social self-management renewing links with the history and libertarian fibre of the Cuban revolution can constitute, even if these currents are a minority, an asset for the Cuban people. The positions and experiences of these currents, which have some relays within the Cuban Communist Party, should be made known. Once again: there is no other way, to build on the current victory while protecting the population from the social effects of a US capitalist pressure, than to promote the mobilization of the people and the constitution of a genuine socialist democracy. To do this it is necessary to create the conditions of democratic debate in all the popular organizations in Cuba. This requires the organization of forms of pluralism in the Cuban Communist Party and in the popular movement.

It is an extraordinarily difficult challenge in the current relationship of forces between globalized capitalism and the

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popular movement at the world level, but the Cuban revolution has held out for more than fifty years against US imperialism: could it not, once again, find an original way out of this situation?

23 December 2014