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Cuba

# Fidel Castro (1926-2016): A page turns

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**We must imagine the world at the time: the Cold War in full swing and Stalinism freezing the international workers' movement. The Cuban revolution would unblock this situation by creating a new hope.**

## **Resurgence of an internationalist revolutionary dynamic**

How could a "guerilla" force of first a few dozen and then a few hundred militants, involve a whole people in the overthrow of the bloody dictatorship of Batista? How can we explain that a population of 10 million succeeded in standing up to American imperialism and thus polarizing the world situation?

It is here that we must recognize the leadership qualities of Fidel Castro. This is in keeping with the tradition of José Martí, a Cuban revolutionary, champion of the struggle for national liberation against North American imperialism. But we must note a double specificity of the Cuban revolution: while strategies of allying with the national bourgeoisie dominated the workers' movement of the time, Fidel and his comrades developed a strategy of armed struggle, combining guerrilla actions, movement of the masses, demonstrations and insurrectionary strikes. The second specificity is that by opposing "Yankee imperialism", the Cuban leadership ensured the sovereignty of the country. To do so, it nationalized the major capitalist holdings, especially North American ones, and began to bring the country out of underdevelopment, particularly in education and health.

Even though Cuba is a small country, Fidel propelled a revolutionary process within the Western Hemisphere itself. The alchemy between Fidel and Che Guevara revived the best internationalist traditions of the workers' movement. From the outset, calls for support from the struggling peoples multiplied, beginning with support for the Vietnamese people. In January 1966, the Cubans organized the international conference called "Tricontinental", which brought together the anti-imperialist forces of Africa, Asia and Latin America. This was a first since the major international conferences of the 1920s. This policy was embodied in the armed struggles undertaken by Che in Latin America (Bolivia) and Africa (Congo). It also manifested itself in the 1970s by sending thousands of Cuban soldiers to help the Angolan people to repel the assaults of South African troops.

We can - and must - discuss certain militaristic deviations within the Cuban strategies, but what is essential for this period was the resurgence of an internationalist revolutionary dynamic.

## **Soviet pressures and bureaucratic deformations**

At the end of the 1960s, the Cuban Revolution was confronted with the reality of power relations and the global market. It paid in its flesh and blood the warning given to the revolutionary movement since the Russian revolution: "Socialism is not built in one country" ...

Isolated, strangled by the blockade and the North American embargo, the Cuban leadership was less and less in a position to implement its own policies. The tactical agreements with the USSR, necessary against US imperialism, were transformed into political subordination. In August 1968, Fidel Castro supported the Russian intervention in

Czechoslovakia. In economic terms, the choice of strengthening the sugar monoculture weakened the country considerably and led to the failure of the "zafra" - sugar harvest - of 1970. It increased Cuba's dependence on the USSR, particularly as the North American blockade was becoming harsher.

In this context, the Soviet model served more and more as a reference. Vertical conceptions of Cuban militarism's imprint on Cuban politics added to the Soviet model accentuated the bureaucratic deformations of the Cuban state: the restriction of democratic freedoms, the absence of political pluralism, the repression of opponents, the consolidation of the one-party regime, lack of social or political structures of the Cuban people ...

## And now?

Under these conditions, many predicted a collapse of the Cuban revolution, like the USSR and the countries of the Eastern bloc. But despite the terrible years of the "special period" marked by the end of Soviet aid, combined with the North American embargo, Cuba has held on! For, despite its errors, its revolution was never a Russian import. It is a historical movement peculiar to the Cuban people. Its "anti-Yankee" impetus, the achievements - even tenuous - of its revolution and its fierce will to sovereignty have been stronger.

Until when? The balance of power is terribly unfavourable. What will the North American administration do: overwhelm Cuba with goods or continue the embargo? After Fidel's death, how will the forces within the Communist Party and the Cuban people reorganize? Will the supporters of a Chinese or Vietnamese road prevail? Once again, will the Cuban people find ways and means to continue the revolution? We hope so, and support them in this fight.

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