From Cuba: A Description of the Protests

written by Comunistas Editorial Board | July 19, 2021

New Politics *publishes here the following statement from the group Comunistas, originally published in English by* Socialist Worker *(UK). Publication does not signify endorsement but represents our commitment to listen to and help make heard left voices from within Cuba.*

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Four days after the events and after a thorough analysis, Comunistas reveals its official position on the protests that took place in Cuba last Sunday, 11 July.

Almost simultaneously and with greater or lesser intensity, on Sunday 11 July, Cuba experienced a series of social outbreaks that encompassed at least six of the 14 provinces that make up the country. In the 62 years since the triumph of the revolution led by comandante Fidel Castro, Cuba had not faced a situation like this.

Although the first protests began peacefully, almost all the demonstrations ended up seeing violence, which was carried out by both sides. This series of simultaneous anti-government demonstrations is something never before seen in socialist Cuba. This must be taken into account to understand the events.

It should be remembered that in Cuba, the last massive protests date back to 5 August 1994, later known as Maleconazo, which was contained in a few hours with the appearance of Fidel Castro at the protests.

A demonstration of 200 people chanting anti-government slogans in a central location is something almost inconceivable in Cuban society. Yet, in Havana there has been a spontaneous march of at least 3,000 people.

The events in Havana

The protests—triggered by the demonstration that broke out in the city of San Antonio de los Baños, located no more than 100 kilometers from the capital—quickly spread to Havana. Shortly after 3pm local time, around 200 people took to La Fraternidad Park in the city centre, later moving in front of the Capitolio, the official Parliament building.

During the first hour of the protest, the police arrests were isolated, allowing, at least tacitly, the protesters to march, who moved to Máximo Gómez Park, located between the Spanish embassy and

the headquarters of the National Bureau of the Union of Young Communists.

By that time, more than 500 people were peacefully concentrated in the park's esplanade, while sporadic arrests continued.

Subsequently, a group of approximately 100 people, waving Cuban and 26 July Movement flags, with socialist slogans and in favor of the government, peacefully took the Máximo Gómez Park. At the same time, other groups linked to the Communist Party and the Union of Young Communists, together with Ministry of the Interior cadets, occupied the area.

Voluntarily, the protesters demobilized, and it seemed that at least in Havana, where they had originated, the protests had ended, almost without clashes. However, later it was known that the march turned into a long demonstration that ran through important streets of Havana.

As the protest march progressed, people joined it, and according to data issued by unofficial sources, between 2,000 and 3,000 protesters chanted slogans against the government.

Revolution

The protesters decided to go to the emblematic Revolution Square, where the headquarters of the presidency, the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of the Armed Forces, as well as the HQ of the main national newspapers are located. Near the Square, the demonstration was resisted by public order forces and pro-government civilian groups, leading to violent clashes, which resulted in an undetermined number of arrests and injuries.

At the same time, in the Calzada de 10 de Octubre, Havana, there were serious violent events, where two police cars were overturned.

Subsequently, videos of serious vandalism have been released, such as the stoning of a children's hospital. The death of the civilian Diubis Laurencio Tejeda during the protests has been confirmed. So far, no other deaths have been reported as a result of the demonstrations.

Both the protesters and the civilians who came out to confront them used violence, mainly with stones and sticks. The number of those injured by both sides is unknown. The number of detainees at the scene is also unknown, as is that of subsequent arrests related to the protests. We still do not know the number of citizens who, six days later, are still in irregular detention.

While the protests were taking place in Havana, similar events unfolded in the cities of Bayamo, Manzanillo, Camagüey, Santiago de Cuba, Holguín, among others of less significance. These also ended, and in some cases started, violently.

Origin and essence of the protests

Three characterizations of the protests in Cuba on 11 July have been given. The government claims they were a confrontation between counterrevolutionaries and communists; the bourgeois press says they represented the oppressed rising against a dictatorship; others have argued this was a revolutionary working class against a politically degenerate bureaucracy.

None of the three is useful to understand the nature of the protests.

In reality, the 11 July protests brought together the three previous perspectives: the counterrevolutionary organizations—financed by the United States—violently attacking the Communist Party; groups of intellectuals, who feel their civil liberties severely restricted, facing

censorship; and the working class demanding that the government improve their living conditions.

However, although the overwhelming majority of protesters belonged to the third category, this cannot be understood as a politically conscious socialist mass, demanding more socialism from a stagnant bureaucracy.

The protests of 11 July have nine essential characteristics:

1. **Most of the protesters were not linked to counterrevolutionary organizations, nor were the protests led by counterrevolutionary organizations.** The immediate trigger of the demonstrations was the discontent generated by the terrible shortages caused by the economic crisis, the economic sanctions imposed by the US government and the questionable and inefficient management by the state bureaucracy.

It was the shortage of food and health products, the existence of stores in Freely Convertible Currency that can only be accessed through foreign currency and that hoard supplies of basic products; the long queues to buy food as basic as bread; the shortage of medicines; the restriction of the deposit of dollars in cash in banks; the rise in prices of public services (Havana transport saw a price increase of 500 percent); the cuts to subsidies; the drastic inflation rise; the rising cost of basic products; and the long power outages.

These are the objective factors that created a scenario conducive to a social outbreak.

Crisis

At the same time, Cuba is experiencing its greatest economic crisis in 30 years. For Cuba's Gross Domestic Product to grow by 1 percent in 2020, the country would have required the visit of 4,500,000 tourists and stable prices in the international market. Instead, in 2020 tourism was down to one and a half million tourists, and the world economy went into crisis.

The decline in foreign visitors caused a loss of around 3 billion dollars in 2020. Cuba imports around 80 percent of its food and the government allocates two billion dollars to this end.

Barring a modest recovery in China, the rest of Cuba's trading partners fell into economic recession. Up to June 2021, Cuba had only received just over 130,000 tourists. Most of the country's reserves had been consumed by 2020.

The health emergency response to coronavirus has caused serious damage to the Cuban economy. To this must be added the serious sanctions imposed by Donald Trump, which have not been lifted by president Joe Biden, intensifying the impact of the blockade.

However, the reasons why the Cuban economy is in crisis do not matter to the working family when it comes to putting food on the table, even more so when the political legitimacy of the government is progressively eroding.

2. **The political legitimacy of the government is considerably diminishing.** Official political discourse is ineffective and doesn't reach the youth. The political propaganda of official youth organisations is alien to the youth. This is shown by the large number of young people among the protesters (an exact figure is impossible at the moment).

The wear and tear of several years of crisis and the cumulative errors by the state administration have had an impact. Added to this, the current government doesn't have the political legitimacy of the historic leadership of the Revolution.

There is a widening gap between the leadership of the country and the working class, with differences in living standards becoming increasingly visible.

3. **The protests originated in the working class neighbourhoods with the greatest social problems.** Social inequality is a growing problem in Cuban society. Poverty, social neglect, precariousness of public and social policies, limited supply of food and basic products by the state, as well as poor cultural policies, are characteristic of life in peripheral and lower-income neighborhoods.

In these areas, political consciousness tends to decline, with survival coming before ideology. Political discourse doesn't address the daily needs of ordinary people. In these socioeconomically vulnerable neighbourhoods, the country's leadership is perceived to have high living standards.

4. **The protests did not represent a majority. Most of the Cuban population continues to support the government.** Although it is true that the protesters had support from the residents of the areas where the events took place, an important sector of the population also has rejected the protests.

Although the protests in Havana generally gathered around 5,000 people, this is not to say the demonstrations had majority support. Despite the political deterioration suffered by the Cuban government, it's still the repository of the legacy of the Revolution, capitalising on the image of Fidel Castro and maintaining hegemony over the socialist imaginary. It is largely through these mechanisms that it achieves considerable political legitimacy among the majorities.

5. **In the protests there were no socialist slogans.** The slogans launched in the demonstrations focused on "Patria y Vida" (Homeland and Life), "Libertad" (Freedom), "Abajo la dictadura" (Down with the dictatorship) and attacks on president Miguel Díaz-Canel. "Patria y Vida" is a slogan drawn from an openly right-wing song, popularised from Miami and by the right-wing opposition.

The other slogans mentioned have the character of claiming civil liberties, which does not imply socialist demands. Beyond the claims against censorship and the demand for greater civil liberties, the slogan "Down with the dictatorship" is frequently used by the Cuban right and counterrevolutionaries.

Comunistas *Editorial Board members spoke to protesters who were not against Fidel Castro or socialism, and whose motivation was demanding better lives. However, this differentiation was not made explicit in the protests.*

6. **A small number of intellectuals were linked to the protests. A minority group of intellectuals, mainly part of the 27N movement, took part to demand citizens' rights, centred on the right to free expression and uncensored artistic creation. However, this was not the central character of the protests.**

This is because the demands of dissident intellectuals did not correspond to the needs of the majority, who protested to demand basic improvements in life.

7. **The lumpenproletariat played a significant role.** These were the groups that carried out looting and violent acts of vandalism, which distorted the originally peaceful spirit of the demonstrations in Havana**.**
8. **Counterrevolutionary propaganda had a role in organising the protests.** Although this was not the main factor that triggered the protests, it is undeniable that a strong right-wing

campaign was orchestrated from the United States on social media, openly focused on the overthrow of the Cuban government. This campaign had a strong impact on an important sector of the population. 4.4 million Cubans have access to social networks from their phones.

9. **The demonstrations turned violent.** In Havana, initially, except for isolated events, the demonstration took place in a peaceful manner. However, the demonstration degenerated into a serious confrontation with police forces and citizens in favour of the government when the demonstrators tried to access Revolution Square.

Both sides were involved in violent actions, causing serious injuries to civilians. Violent groups carried out acts of vandalism, attacking communist militants and government supporters with sticks and stones.

Why was comrade Frank García Hernández, founder of our Editorial Board, arrested?

Comrade Frank García Hernández, on his way to a friend's house, with whom he had been since the beginning of the demonstration, accidentally ended up at the site of one of the violent clashes that took place near Revolution Square.

Comrade Frank had been present at the protest since its start, but attending as a member of the Communist Party. When the protesters left the Máximo Gómez Park (around 6pm), Frank and his friend assumed that the protest had ended, which is why they both went home.

The building is located less than 200 meters from where the violent clashes took place between the protesters and the police forces, who tried to prevent the access of the protesters to Revolution Square.

According to Comrade Frank, the moment they reached the corner of Ayestarán and Aranguren streets, shots were heard in the air.

Both ended up in a pro-government group that was marching accompanied by police officers.

At that moment, Comrade Frank accidentally met Maykel González, director of the LGBTIQ rights magazine Tremenda Nota, a publication that has reproduced the texts of Comunistas. Maykel González had participated in the course of events, from the beginning of the march to the violent events between the two groups, taking part in the protesters, although without carrying out any type of violent acts.

When the protests were ending in the presence of Comrade Frank García, a police officer detained Maykel González, falsely accusing him of having thrown stones at the forces of public order. Faced with this, Comrade Frank García, in his capacity as a member of the Communist Party, tried to intercede in a calm manner between the officer and Maykel González.

While trying to convince the policeman, asking him not to arrest Maykel González, Frank García was also detained by this officer. The police officer accused Frank of carrying out violent acts and being on the side of the protesters. Later, the authorities verified the falsehood of this accusation.

Arrest

The arrest took place around 7pm. Both were taken to the nearest police station. Later, around 1.30am, Frank was taken to another detention centre, where the facts were immediately clarified, showing that he had not participated in violent acts, nor in the group opposed to the demonstrations.

Together with the director of Tremenda Nota, Maykel González Vivero, comrade Frank García

Hernández was released on Monday 12 July at around 8pm.

During his little more than 24 hours of detention, Frank affirms that he did not receive physical abuse, nor any type of torture. Currently Frank García is not in custody, but rather a precautionary measure where his ability to move is regulated, his movement being limited to his workplace and medical access.

However, Frank doesn't need to make any statements to the authorities about his daily movements. The legal measure is part of the procedure to follow until their non-participation in violent acts or in the demonstration is officially demonstrated.

The Comunistas Editorial Board appreciates the impressive wave of international solidarity that demanded the release of Frank García Hernández. Soon, Comunistas will publish a detailed report on the internationalist campaign, through which a fair recognition will be given to the people and organizations that fought for the freedom of our comrade.

It is worth noting that during the protests no other member of the Editorial Board, collaborator or comrade close to our publication was arrested.

Because our starting point is our elemental sense of revolutionary justice, this, however, doesn't prevent us from demanding the immediate release of the rest of the detainees in the 11 July demonstrations; as long as they have not committed actions that have threatened the lives of other people.

Somewhere in Cuba, July 17, 2021, *Comunistas Editorial Board*

NOTE: At the time this statement was published, Comunistas are aware of the call made by both the government and the opposition to go out and demonstrate in the streets. Apparently, both sides have called to concentrate on the same point in Havana, known as La Piragua. Comunistas rejects both calls, considering it irresponsible, taking into account the seriousness of the coronavirus health situation, with more than 6,000 daily cases. But with greater force we condemn any possible act of violence that may occur in the clash between the two groups.