Cuba and the World

written by Lisbeth Moya González | August 17, 2023

From the perspective of the international left, Cuba is contested terrain. The influence of the Cuban Revolution in the development of progressive discourse in Latin America is unquestionable. The solidarity of the global left with the survival of the Cuban Revolution, right up to the present day, is also unquestionable. One of the greatest dilemmas for those of us who dissent from within the Cuban left, then, is how to dissent from within a system historically besieged by imperialist powers?

The majority of those of us on the political left in Cuba who dissent have understood that the Cuban Revolution does not respond to the motto of "continuity" that the current government employs so insistently in its propaganda. What the Cuban Revolution proposed in its earliest stages has been continually degraded, leaving present-day Cuba mired in poverty, lacking in democratic freedoms, and with a government willing to go to any lengths to maintain itself in power.

Dialogue with the international left is always a challenge for those of us who work within Cuba to bring about political change. It is a challenge because on so many occasions, from a paternalistic perspective, foreign leftists strive to protect the myth of Cuban socialism and they associate all types of dissent with the historical project of the political right and with imperialist designs, or with echoes of the Cold War and the media campaigns that bear down on the "Revolution." I write "Revolution" with a capital R and in quotations here because this abstract concept—half charismatic leaders and martyrs, and half political and social exploits—is the ghost so venerated by much of the international left.

I consider it a grave tactical error to attempt to understand Cuba in terms of its particular political system rather than as a nation inserted into a world system. The historical experience of comparable political models shows that socialism in one country will be asphyxiated from without by its enemies or overthrown from within by its "leaders" and bureaucrats. Cuba is alone in so many respects, and the international left, whether from positions of power or not, has been its principal ally. But to imagine Cuba as a bastion of democracy and social justice, treating it as a souvenir or an idealization of utopia, does the country no more favors than to demonize it and portray it as a barracks.

In recent years, many of those on the international left have awakened, and I dare to say that most of the Trotskyist groups, with the particular characteristics and the spirit of dissent that characterize them, have been pioneers in their comprehension of the reality facing Cuban leftists and have worked in a conciliatory spirit to establish ties. I have always expected realistic appraisals of Cuba from leading leftist intellectuals in critical historical moments, and although in response to the unprecedented popular protests of July 11, 2021, some have expressed concern and offered support from the sidelines, many others have either observed in silence or expressed open support for the Cuban government in spite of acts that are indefensible from any political perspective, like the acts of police brutality or the harsh sentencing of political prisoners. In view of this, I ask myself how

many years any of those activists or intellectuals, who in their own countries protest and write freely on social media, for example, might have been sentenced to in Cuba.

Establishing a dialogue among leftists both inside and outside of Cuba is fundamental. The left cannot survive in isolation because it has too many enemies. In Cuba, those of us who dissent from the left have the revolver of the Cuban government pressed to our temple, as well as that of the political right and that of the utopian international left. This dialogue is essential, then, as a basis for organizing strategies with greater range. Cuba really could be that "utopian island." The first step in that direction is to stop idealizing it and to start working in earnest to make it so.

In truth, the dialogue between groups on the international left and Cuban civil society began long ago, and this dialogue has been possible in spite of the watchful eye and even the threats of the Cuban government. The event on Trotsky and Trotskyism held in Havana in 2019 opened the doors to many parties, intellectuals, and political tendencies, principally with those Trotskyists who have maintained contact and who have consistently been supportive of the critical Cuban left. Some of these groups are more closely aligned with the Cuban government, as in the case of Corriente Marxista Internacional; others, like Marx 21 and Erick Toussaint, among others, are much closer to the critical Cuban left that has been systematically repressed by the Cuban government.

For Cuban civil society, in all its ideological range, the arrival of the Internet in Cuba was crucial. Having a virtual space, independent and accessible, favored the growth of visible political platforms of many varieties. Currently there exists a network of digital magazines, pages, or press outlets of the critical Cuban left, which would have been unthinkable just years ago. Among these are Comunistas blog, La Tizza, Tremenda Nota, La Cosa, Ciudadanías, Yo sí te Creo, Ágora, Socialistas en Lucha, Reclamo Universitario … among many other spaces, which contribute to the plurality of political debate on the left.

A debate with the political left in the United States is of crucial importance because this is the country that has, from the outset, exercised the greatest hostility toward the Cuban project. The economic sanctions levied by the United States are an impediment to Cuban development, independent of the economic and social model Cuba adopts. This debate and this solidarity between the political left in Cuba and the United States is vital for both groups because when the United States finally has normal political relations with Cuba, we will already have taken a significant step toward genuine democracy and justice.

In some sense Cuba is already part of the United States because Cuba is not limited to the archipelago; it is also the diaspora, so many of whom reside in the United States. The problem facing the island nation demands a conciliation of its civil society, a calming of the hatred felt by so many in the diaspora who abhor the entire political left because in the early years of the "Revolution" their wealth and property were expropriated or because afterwards they suffered the consequences of authoritarianism. It is worth asking ourselves whether in fact this authoritarianism, this deformed political system, was birthed by the political and economic pressure from the United States. I would venture to affirm that U.S. political pressure is the mother of the Cuban dictatorship. The case of Cuba is that of the serpent that bites its own tail.

This article is part of a symposium on the critical left in Cuba.

James Buckwalter-Arias, "Introduction to Marginalized Discourse: Voices from the Critical Left in

Cuba”

Alexander Hall Lujardo, “The Historical Burden of Actually Existing Socialism”

Lisbeth Moya González, “Cuba and the World”

Alina Bárbara López Hernández, “The False Dilemma Fallacy”

Lynn Cruz, “The Cuban Reality”

Raymar Aguado Hernández, “The Cuban Left, More Critical and Decolonized”