The Cuban Reality

written by Lynn Cruz | August 17, 2023

Many dissidents in Cuba have felt looked down on or underappreciated by what we might call the international left because clearly the Cuban government defines itself as leftist. But it turns out that in Cuba most people were never really communist as much as they were *fidelista,* where the revolution was the goddess, and the high priest of the church called Cuba was named Fidel Castro. This explains why, in speaking to the faithful, Fidel didn't give speeches as much as he delivered sermons. The new Cuban left or the critical Cuban left should, in my opinion, always keep this dynamic in mind, since it is so central to the process Cuba has lived for more than sixty years now. To fail to understand how we are perceived from outside would be naive. And to ignore the enormous international impact of the Cuban Revolution would be to lack objectivity. Clearly politics requires that we choose sides—you're either on my side or you are against me. Just that simple. In this play of opposing camps, we have lost precious time because the external opposition, especially the right-wing exile community in South Florida, apparently wants all of the power for itself, while the power in Cuba wants every bit of it too. The opposite poles end up resembling each other, and the conflict generated by the belief in or the hatred towards Fidel Castro begins to appear eternal.

At the same time, though, we live in a world in which the market has the last word. The left ends up devoting itself to struggles on behalf of minorities, and the right, for its part, to Protestant churches and pro-life campaigns. This all ends up being extremely reductive. Now, for example, in Europe there are movements of young ecologists who propose to recycle clothing or who draw attention to the danger of becoming a world in which food supplies will not be sufficient for everyone. These developments call on us to think of Cuba in the context of what is happening in the rest of the world. Here resides the importance of the look from the outside, the external gaze—but without romanticizing. In these moments, the Cuban people find themselves before a cadaver of the revolution in its *fidelista* incarnation. Given the example of Russia and the other formerly socialist countries, it would be naive to anticipate a fall that transforms the revolution into a thing of the past. We have seen these experiences in the form of phantasms. It would be better to look for the causes or roots of the experience. Yes, there has been light but also long shadows across these past 63 years. In order for the country to heal, there must be a public apology to the many people harmed by this historical experience.

It is important to understand that the Cuban reality is subject to a factor that conditions everything, and this factor is the improvisation required by the structural crisis that impedes development. In recent years there is an accumulated debt that keeps the government in check and causes them to act out of fear. Any decision rooted in fear will lack objectivity. For example, the construction of luxury hotels in the most important centers of power like La Habana Vieja, Miramar, and el Vedado—massive inhuman edifices in a city that lacks sufficient water. We have lost a valuable opportunity here, ignoring the ecotourism that would foster contact with nature. At the same time, we witness the abandonment of the sugar mills and the sugar industry at large. Farmers encounter obstacles to obtaining fertilizers, the necessary tools and equipment, and decent wages. The worst

thing that is happening in Cuba is the combination of a Stalinist system for the most disadvantaged and a neoliberal system for those at the top. At times one gets the impression that the decisions are undertaken with only the macroeconomy in mind, while the social projects for an aging population are neglected. This all runs counter to the official discourse, then; they are not thinking of the country as a whole.

The war that Putin launched in Ukraine with NATO on the other side, as well as the Covid pandemic, have rendered visible that we can no longer speak of a Russian economy, or a U.S. economy, or a European or Chinese economy because really there is one global economy. The laws that govern the global market affect all of us. How, then, to disconnect from a world that is more and more interconnected? Today more than ever, we need to understand the social experiment that the October Revolution undertook as well as the echoes this event left in the Cuban Revolution. There is no economic system other than capitalism, but we might strive for the variety of capitalism with social justice that we see in the Nordic countries, which are not perfect but seem to me to be more humane models.

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”