

# [ CUBA AT THE CROSSROADS: REFORM OR REVOLUTION? ]

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The task of the Sixth Congress is to approve the document, 'Guidelines of Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution', a basis for the gradual introduction of 'structural and conceptual' changes in the so-called 'Cuban model'. With them, Raúl Castro, with Fidel's support, proposes intensifying a very dangerous course for what remains standing of the revolutionary conquests. The fundamental measures are 'adjustments' against the workers and the people, reductions of social services to 'put an end to the improper gratuities,' and changes in business management (to lead state enterprises to compete under criteria of 'profitability' that many enterprises will be unable to achieve, and that aim at dismantling the nationalized economy). They also introduce a bigger opening to non-state forms of property and production (self-employed work, cooperatives, mixed enterprises) and new concessions to foreign capital. Likewise, under the campaign against 'egalitarianism' and for labour productivity, and with the transfer of more than a million workers to the private sector, there is an attempt to liquidate full employment and create a labour market that does not currently exist. In short, they aim at a kind of gradual 'Cuban road' of capitalist restoration, while keeping the monopoly of political power in the hands of the Communist Party (CP) (which shows certain similarities to the Chinese or Vietnamese case).

## **On the eve of a bureaucratic Congress**

The Sixth Congress will meet almost 14 years after the previous one. Its preparation took place under iron control by the apparatus and, although the Cuban leadership states that there was a broad discussion in some 127,000 meetings, attended by 7 million, it was the opposite of an act of 'socialist democracy'. There was no possibility of disseminating and debating alternative platforms to the official programmeme, nor of forming groups or tendencies to defend them. Critical positions found no space, either in the official press, or on official radio or television. The discussions had an 'informative' character, and at them, 'details' were discussed, but the fundamental line was not questioned.

The CP is basically the political organization of the privileged bureaucracy and not of the workers. The candidates proposed for delegates, among whom higher officials predominate, pass through the filter of their appointment by authorities of greater power. The leadership is assured of a docile composition, related to its goal of legitimizing its programme and lining up the entire bureaucracy behind that programme. Even so, Raúl Castro had to announce the postponement of the planned layoffs that in the first stage entailed removing half a million state workers, so they could be 'redeployed' as self-employed or in cooperatives.

The Cuban leadership says that '619,387 deletions, additions, modifications, questions and concerns' emerged in connection with the 'Guidelines ...', because of which a 'new version' would be prepared. Although with this information the leadership is attempting to depict its plebiscitary methods from the rancid Stalinist tradition as 'democratic', and it is hardly likely that there will be substantial changes, it is possible that this reflects, although through the opaque filters of a bureaucratic structure, the climate of distrust and suspicion of hardly popular measures like those that document proposes.

## **The priests are backing the reforms**

The Church, which seeks to carry out the counter-revolutionary role that it already played in Poland and in Eastern Europe, and has the government's recognition as a 'tolerated opposition' and an intermediary with imperialism, is supporting the programme of the 'Guidelines ...', asking the government 'not to be afraid' and to advance further, while it proposes the 'dialogue' with the bureaucracy, in order to encourage moving forward towards [capitalist] restoration, accompanying the pressure from imperialism, which considers the measures 'insufficient' and is demanding that they be intensified, towards a full 'economic and political opening'. If the role of the Church and of the right-wing 'dissidents' (like the former political prisoners exiled to Spain) is widely covered in the international press, on the other hand, critical positions from the left inside Cuba are ignored,

while the regime is stifling, slandering and persecuting them.

### **Critical voices to the left of the Communist Party**

In fact, the acute crisis has been encouraging questioning the ills of Cuban society, the single-party regime and the pro-market and austerity policies, from positions that present themselves as socialist. This phenomenon, although politically and ideologically heterogeneous, and apparently still limited to circles of the intelligentsia (some members of the CP, academic circles, artists) and youth groups, bloggers, etc. – we do not know if ties exist with broader groups of workers – appears despite bureaucratic coercion, gaining admission to certain ‘tolerated’ gaps. Thanks to the internet, some of their writings can be known outside of Cuba.

Among the positions that have achieved circulation, it is possible to mention those that raise as a solution the way of cooperatives and forms of self-management. ‘Cooperativas y Socialismo: Una mirada desde Cuba,’ compiled by Camila Piñero Harnecker (daughter of the well-known theoretician Marta Harnecker) has just been published, and, for their part, authors like Pedro Campos (a former Cuban diplomat, now retired, and the author of numerous works), defend a plan of ‘participatory and democratic socialism’, with an emphasis on self-management of enterprises by workers as an alternative to the bureaucracy’s economic and political management. But is this programme, or that of the political revolution that we Trotskyists defend, the one that can propose a socialist solution to the Cuban crisis

### **Cooperatives and self-management, or a democratically centralized plan?**

In his ‘Propuesta Programática para el VI Congreso del PCC’, Pedro Campos and his comrades suggest ‘Leaving behind the failed centrist, vertically-structured, top-down, authoritarian, statist-wage earner system, inherited from Stalinism, and advancing to the comprehensive, modern, cooperative conception of Twenty-first Century Socialism, to a decentralized communal-democratic system’. This would be based on ‘new cooperative-self-management relationships of production’, that would be characterized by the fact that ‘the associated workers themselves, owners, or those who collectively benefit, from their means of production, self-“exploit” their own labour power; they administer their productive management (control of expenditures, planning and selection of leadership) democratically, and they control and distribute the surplus labour or excess (...)’.

However, cooperatives can be a temporary form, to help as long as a greater advance of the productive forces is not achieved, in those areas of low productivity or small scale (like some agricultural production), on the periphery of the

nationalized economy, but they are not well suited to the requirements of socialist industrialization, that demands a high degree of integration, nor to large-scale contemporary production

On the other hand, proposing self-management of enterprises does not permit combating the logic of greater autonomy to make state enterprises profitable, that the Cuban CP, preparing the road for [capitalist] restoration, wants to impose. Furthermore, it causes the danger of competition in conditions of ‘market socialism’, where the weakest would sink, with deleterious effects among the working class, since, instead of uniting its ranks, it transfers competition to the workers’ collectives of each productive unit, and, at most, could benefit the workers of the most ‘competitive’ enterprises, by creating a ‘workers’ aristocracy’, with which, in short, it would contribute to the fragmentation and dispersion of the proletariat. Self-management already recognizes a precedent in Yugoslavia, where it turned out to be functional for the plans of Tito’s bureaucracy, and, above all, ended up fomenting restorationist tendencies. As a note that defends the proposal of self-management (‘Lecciones de la autogestión yugoslava’, *Kaos en la Red*, April 25, 2010) admits, in Yugoslavia, during the 1950’s, ‘the enterprises were state-owned, and the state entrusted the management of these enterprises to their workers. They called them ‘social enterprises’ instead of ‘state enterprises’. The workers of those enterprises were not viewed as workers, but as members of a work collective. But this system led to ‘inequality between firms within the same industry, inequality between industries, inequality between countryside and city, and inequality between regions’ and increasing differentiation in wages. The article summarizes the results of the system in these terms: ‘(1) Unemployment. (2) A tendency to inequality. (3) Indebtedness of the enterprises. (4) Lack of solidarity within the society. At the end of the 1960’s it submitted to the conditions of the IMF... (5) The workers lost the power that they had to the “experts” (that is, the managerial bureaucracy)’. Obviously, no economic form that increases social inequality and weakens the working class, can be progressive; even worse, when, instead of counteracting this tendency, it adapts itself to attacks, like the announced massive layoff of state-employed workers, by embellishing the ‘socialist’ possibilities of the cooperatives, self-management by enterprises, and self-employed work, instead of proposing a strategy of industrialization, in order to strengthen the working class systematically.

Neither the cooperatives nor self-management as systems can replace a democratically centralized plan combined with the state monopoly on foreign trade, the superiority of which lies in the coordination of all the material, human and scientific resources of society, nor confront pressures from the world capitalist market, in order to advance in the transition to socialism on a national and international scale. The combination of the Plan and workers’ democracy,

if the market is subordinated to the necessary frameworks of a 'healthy' transitional economy, permits orienting development according to the needs of the workers and the systematic strengthening of the working class as the hegemonic subject in the building of socialism.

In every transitional society, as Cuba still is (although very degraded), a struggle exists between socialist and pro-capitalist tendencies, the outcome of which depends on the tempo of development of these two tendencies. Democratic planning is crucial for strengthening the socialist tendencies and fighting those 'of the market,' while the cooperatives and self-management ultimately strengthen the mechanisms of the market.

It is not accidental that the governing team and some of its measures are favourably viewed from 'democratic and participatory socialism.' Pedro Campos writes: 'Comrade Raúl's government has opened a hopeful chapter that we cannot lose, but the natural resistance of the bureaucratic fabric has only permitted the presentation of isolated measures, some counterproductive, to improve wage-earning statism.' The measures introduced include larger spaces for the cooperatives and self-employed labour, more autonomy for the enterprises, and they increase market mechanisms. Campos puts himself in the position of putting pressure on Raúl and 'advising him' to go further, by overcoming the varieties of resistance mentioned above.

### **Participatory democracy or democratic self-organization?**

Pedro Campos proposes: 'To make the power of People's Power real, at every level, by giving full control of all activity in the municipalities to the authorities that must be chosen by the people in a democratic and direct fashion, with control over part of the taxes that will be collected for the organization and carrying out of autonomous budgets, adjusted to the real and concrete needs of each Municipality and Community.'

'Improving the democratic system of elections: to study and apply more participatory, democratic, and direct formulas in electoral processes, in the structure and in the operation of the government.' (Kaos en la Red, April 6, 2011). This is a policy of reform and partial 'decentralization' of the bureaucratic regime, not a strategy so that the working class, by organizing itself from the centres of production, will take into its own hands the management of the economy and policy of the state.

Even if the local administrative institutions (like the municipalities) get to be democratically elected, they will not be organizations of workers' and people's power. A democratically elected 'National Assembly' would be a caricature of a workers' parliament and would reproduce the bourgeois division of powers, but it would not be the

supreme organ of the workers' councils that will assume all the legislative and executive tasks, being composed of elected delegates subject to recall, who will receive the equivalent of the wages of a skilled worker or a teacher, who cannot be re-elected for more than one or two terms, and who will answer to the workers' collectives in the productive



structures. We refer to the historic example of the soviets (or councils) of the Russian Revolution of 1917 (and not to their caricature emptied of all real content by Stalinism), as the most flexible and democratic form of making up the organs of the workers' state, a thousand times more democratic than the representative mechanisms taken from bourgeois democracy.

In what we call 'deformed workers' states', like the Cuban one, the working class did not achieve political power through institutions of the soviet type; rather, a single-party regime was imposed, an expression of the consolidation of a bureaucratic caste that feeds off the workers' state, and now, in going over to the camp of the restoration, it is decomposing in an accelerated fashion. In accordance with maintaining and increasing its material privileges, it stifles every manifestation of workers' democracy, and its monopoly of political power is functional for the plan of gradual restoration of a 'Cuban way to capitalism'.

### **Reform or political revolution**

Campos concludes: 'Improving the operation of the Party, the unions and the political and mass organizations. In order to represent the interests of the entire working class and the people, the Communist Party must be the most democratic and allow the existence of different opinions and tendencies, as long as they all defend the power of the workers and socialism.' We agree on the need to fight for the broadest democratic freedoms for the workers and the people, including their right to strike, to organize unions without the tutelage of the CP and the state, and that the state media be open to all the critical voices of workers and of the left, etc.

But it seems to us that the policy of 'improving' the Cuban CP (which is the political representation of the

bureaucracy, and, as such, cannot represent the interests of the entire working class) and not raising the liquidation of the single-party regime, only creates false illusions in the possibility of 'convincing' the ruling leadership to 'democratize' itself, and does not lead to transforming the institutions of the state, in a democratic sense. It is necessary to achieve complete freedom of action and legality for the parties that are in the camp of the defence of the Revolution. It is not possible to achieve a real democracy of the workers and the masses, without putting an end to the political monopoly of the CP, without questioning the FAR (Cuban armed forces), with its caste of officers with ranks, decorations and perquisites and its power in the nationalized economy, to develop a real system of militias to be the 'people in arms', without replacing the institutions of the current bureaucratic regime with different ones, that will indeed be able to express the decisive intervention of the working class and the masses in the leadership of national political, economic, and cultural life.

We believe that it is not a matter of raising a strategy of gradual reforms in the regime, but, on the contrary, of fighting with the perspective of a political revolution, that is, of the consistent defence of the social bases of the state created by the Revolution, and, at the same time, for the overthrow of the bureaucracy and the establishment of workers' and people's power based on the forms of democratic self-organization that the masses create for themselves.

In short, it is a matter of drawing up a programme of political revolution, opposed both to the programme of 'economic and political opening' that imperialism is pursuing through 'democratic' demagogy, and to the plan of gradual restoration of capitalism according to a 'Cuban way,' to which the bureaucracy is oriented. A programme that raises the banners of anti-imperialism and recovers militant internationalism, to forge bonds with the masses of Latin America and the world, instead of the utopian perspective of 'socialism on a single island,' that the Castroite leadership has always defended.

We believe that the combination of world capitalist crisis, the decline of imperialist hegemony and the awakening of the class struggle, as shown by the 'Arab spring' against the dictatorships, workers' struggles in Europe, and other processes, creates new international conditions that could encourage the resistance of the Cuban masses against the restorationist plans and imperialism. In the heat of the struggle against bureaucratic oppression and in the political and ideological debates about the future of the Cuban Revolution, we think that it is possible to forge a revolutionary left around a programme of political revolution and a strategy of self-organization, to impose the power of the workers and the masses, that is, a real revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, as part of the struggle for international socialism.

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