

Cuban Roundtable discusses the USA in the times of Trump



By Charles McKelvey

La Mesa Redonda (The Roundtable) is a nightly television news program, dedicated to analysis of international news as well as national developments and issues of importance to the people. It generally has a panel of three or four, formed by journalists, academic researchers, and specialists. Each panelist usually is given ten or twenty minutes to speak, often in two rounds of questions. There sometimes is interaction among the panelists, but generally, one panelist does not criticize what another is saying; each is given space to say what they feel the need to say. The Roundtable is aired on the principal Cuban television station, Cubavisión, and on Cubavisión Internacional, weekday evenings at 7:00, with repeat broadcasts on educational television at 11:00 p.m.

The Roundtable of September 3 was on “the United States in the times of Trump.” The three panelists were Ernesto Domínguez, researcher at the Center for Hemispheric and U.S. Studies (CEHSEU), a research and teaching center of the University of Havana; Jorge Hernández, also a researcher at CEHSEU, and the former director of the Center; and Renaldo Taladrid, a well-known Cuban television journalist and commentator. The panel was moderated by Randy Alonso, the director of the program.

Taladrid observed that Trump has the support of forty-something percent of the people. Even though the major media are constantly criticizing Trump, the forty-something percent are not influenced by this,

because they do not read the mainstream newspapers, like the New York Times, or watch the television news programming of the major news media that are criticizing Trump. The president maintains their support, Taladrid observed, by following up on his 2016 electoral campaign rhetoric. He continues to push for the building of a wall on the border, in accordance with his anti-immigrant campaign rhetoric; and he wages commercial war against China, consistent with his campaign discourse naming China, not Russia, as the real enemy of the United States.

Dominquez, an economist, observed that the USA needs Chinese goods to satisfy the U.S. consumer demand, and the commercial war with China is driving up the cost of consumer goods. He maintained that the possible negative impacts of the commercial war with China on the U.S. economy has produced fissures within the U.S. ultra-Right.

The third panelist, Jorge Hernández, noted that the USA is no longer the unipolar hegemonic power that it was in the 1950s and 1960s. The U.S. economic decline was taken into account in the foreign policy of Richard Nixon's advisor and Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, who identified a multi-polar world-system, with the USA, the Soviet Union, Japan, the European Union, and China being the five centers of power. Hernández noted that, in spite of its economic and commercial decline relative to the other centers of power, the United States remains the dominant military power.

In the second round of questions and commentaries, Hernández maintained that there is an enormous contradiction within the North American society. He observed that Trump has adopted an anti-immigrant discourse, standing against the growing diversity of the society; he connects to the extreme nationalism that has been present since Andrew Jackson, thereby denying the ideas that the USA disseminates throughout the world. Hernández further sustained that nationalism is the only way to reconstruct the national consensus.

Ernesto Dominquez, however, insisted on a differentiation between nationalism and white nationalism. In his view, support for Trump ought not be considered as racism.

In concluding the commentary of the panelists, Taladrid stated that the U.S. power elite seeks to conserve the United States as a unipolar power, but it is divided concerning how to do it. He noted that whereas Obama identified Russia as a threat, Trump considers the Russian economy as no stronger than the economy of the state of California, except that it possesses nuclear arms; the economy of China, however, is a different matter, in Trump's view. Taladrid further observed that the media, in criticizing the position of Trump, is assuming the function of a political party.

The September 3 Roundtable on "the USA in the times of Trump" is one example of how the program, and Cuban television in general, contributes to the education of the people. The Cuban Revolution believes that only an educated people can be free, because ideas are an essential arm of the people.

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