

This week in Cuba / April 5 to April 11, 2020



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By Charles McKelvey

In today's "This week in Cuba," we review, first, the battle in Cuba against Covid-19; secondly, a message of gratitude to Cuba from the Communist Party of Italy; and thirdly, an editorial in the Granma declaring, "Only socialism saves."

(1) The Cuban battle to save lives

The Cuban Plan of Prevention and Control of Covid-19, approved on March 5, prior to any confirmed cases of Covid-19, envisions three phases. During this past week, Cuba passed to the second phase, that of limited autochthonous transmission. In the first phase, the pre-epidemic stage, sick persons have contracted the infirmity in the exterior or through contact with persons who had traveled in the exterior; but the second stage is characterized by the appearance of cases in which a connection to a foreign traveler cannot be established. In the second stage, the autochthonous transmissions are confined to particular localities, distinct from the third stage, in which the cases without links to international travel are

disseminated throughout the national territory.

The Cuban Covid-19 epidemic continues to be defined primarily by connection to foreign travel. As of Saturday, April 11, Cuba had 620 confirmed cases. The great majority of cases involve international visitors or travelers, direct contact with international visitors or international travelers, or direct contact with previously confirmed cases. There have been 11 events of location transmission involving 48 cases, where a Cuban who had not traveled internationally transmitted to another Cuban; but in most of these cases, a connection to international travel could be traced. That is, most of the cases of local transmission have not been autochthonous transmissions. But there are fourteen cases in which the source of the transmission has not been identified, and these could be autochthonous transmission.

There are some communities in various provinces in which there is a high number of cases, involving imported transmission through international travel or contact with international traveler, local transmission with ties to international travel, and possible autochthonous transmission. These communities are in quarantine; the population cannot move out of or into the quarantined zone, except for those who are supplying the communities with necessities.

With the passing to the second phase, more strict measures are being imposed, with the intention of maximizing the number of people who stay at home. Public transportation has been suspended, whether it be state- or privately-owned vehicles. Transportation to necessary work in essential goods and services will be provided by the companies for their workers; and vehicles for the transportation of workers can have no more than 50% of their capacity. In addition, large stores have been closed. All necessary items are being sold in small stores and in recently established stands. Moreover, cloth face masks are mandatory when leaving the home. And restaurants and cafeterias can only offer takeout meals, which cannot include alcoholic beverages.

Cuba more and more is giving attention to searching for asymptomatic cases, persons without symptoms who test positive for Covid-19. It is conducting investigations of contacts with confirmed cases and with persons who work in the tourist sector. As a result of the aggressive investigation of contacts with the confirmed cases, approximately half of the 224 new cases confirmed on April 7 through April 10 were asymptomatic. The increasing identification of infected persons without symptoms constitute important progress in the struggle, because these persons are transmitting to others, without awareness.

Although Cuba has passed to the second phase, its daily increase in positive cases has not arrived to be exponential, as has occurred in many countries. In the April 9 evening news television-radio program La Mesa Redonda, the Dean of the Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science of the University of Havana, Raúl Guinovart, presented a graph that showed three possible trajectories. The graph indicates that Cuba will pass through a cycle of 120 days from the first positive case on March 11, peaking in May and returning to near zero in July. In those four months, Cuba will have 1,000 to 4,000 confirmed cases, depending on the extent to which the people comply with the measures of the plan. The constant exhorting of the people to full compliance with the Plan is a prominent feature of Cuban reality in these days of struggle, which many compare with the great battles that the people and the nation have lifted up in defense of the its sovereignty and its socialism. The Cuban fatality rate for positive cases has been 2.9%, which implies that, if that fatality rate holds and if the University of Havana projections are correct, from 29 to 116 persons will die from Covert-19 in Cuba. As of April 11, Cuba has had sixteen deaths from Covid-19; so far, Cuba is one of the countries that has a death rate from the pandemic of less than one per 100,000 inhabitants.

The number of countries that have asked Cuba for Interferon Alfa 2B has reached seventy. The drug has been shown to have good results in the treatment of Covid-19 in Cuba, China, and other countries. The drug was created and is produced by the Cuban Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, and it is fabricated by the National Center for Biopreparation, which is able to produce quantities in response to national and international demand in the present situation of the Covid-19 pandemic.

During this past week, Cuban brigades arrived to Barbados and Angola. Cuba now has seventeen Henry Reeve brigades in seventeen countries. The Henry Reeve International Contingent of Doctors Specialized in Disasters and Serious Epidemics was founded in 2005, in response to the devastation of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina, but it was not given permission to enter the United States by then U.S. President George W. Bush. Henry Reeves, who gave his life for the Cuban cause of independence in the War of Independence of 1868, was born in New York City.

(2) “Capitalism supplies the superfluous, and socialism gives what is necessary”

On Monday, April 6, the Cuban daily newspaper Granma published a message of gratitude from the Communist Party of Italy to Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel and First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba Raúl Castro. The message expressed gratitude for the assistance of a Cuban medical brigade in Lombardy, the region of Italy most affected by the new coronavirus. It notes that the Italian system of health today has great difficulties, as a result of years of budgetary cuts. The message concludes with a declaration of even greater unity in the construction of a world of peace and social equality, and it declares that today in Italy, thanks to the solidarity of Cubans, it is understood that “capitalism supplies the superfluous, while socialism gives what is necessary.”

(3) “Only socialism saves”

Carlos Luque, in an editorial entitled “Only socialism saves” in the April 7 issue of Granma, maintains that today the most wise and the most committed to truth understand that the cause of the painful world scenario of an unstoppable pandemic is the capitalist economic system, the globalization of commercial interests, and the avarice of the elites that demand austerity of the peoples, claiming that the alternatives are impossible. The only immune system capable of neutralizing the pandemic is the socialist civilizing revolution, which now can be understood by the people, inasmuch as the notion of the superiority of private property and the market to respond to human needs is now exposed as a myth and a lie.

Cuba has always enjoyed prestige and recognition, due to the force of its moral example and capacity for resistance. In the midst of the tragedy, the image of Cuba will be elevated, Luque maintains. Why? Because if the peoples want to free themselves from their exploiters, they have to learn from those who have tried to do it and have overcome. Cuba is demonstrating an alternative approach, not only to the nations of Latin America and the Caribbean, but also to the nations that yesterday were global powers that attained wealth through colonial domination, wealth that they cannot today put to human service, as they drown in their own incapacity. The Cuban capacity to respond is systemic, rooted in its cultural aspiration for true democracy, to which it has been committed for more than sixty years. Cuba is lifting today a light and a moral hope.

Carlos Luque concludes, “We are certain that always it will be possible – and highly probable – that the same or worse as this pandemic will occur, if we do not lift up once and for all a deep world moral clamor for the only effective alternative, that be called socialism, or however it be called by the coming generations, which will have to be decidedly antiimperialist, anti-capitalist, and anti-neoliberal. The possibility of a capitalism with a human face does not exist. The grimace of pain of humanity today shows the true image of Capital and the profound reason for being of socialism.”

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