

# *This week in Cuba / April 12 to April 18, 2020*

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This week in Cuba

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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, the departure of a second Cuban medical brigade to Italy; thirdly, the reception of a Cuban medical mission in Venezuela, where two models in conflict in the world are proclaimed; fourthly, Cuban commemoration of the 59th anniversary of the declaration of the socialist character of the Cuban Revolution; and fifthly, an article in *Juventud Rebelde* entitled, "One must think of another manner of constructing the world."

(1) The Cuban battle to save lives

The Cuban battle against Covid-19 has begun to assume different characteristics. There have been an increasing number of confirmed cases in which the source of the infection could not be traced to international travel, so that there are now a significant number of cases of autochthonous transmission, located in different provinces. Twenty local transmission events have been declared, and seventeen of these communities have been quarantined, which means that all persons in the zone are confined to their

homes, and active inquiries that seek to identify persons with symptoms as well as asymptomatic carriers of the disease is being conducted in all the houses.

The active door-to-door inquiries conducted by medical university students with the support of mass organizations are increasingly oriented not only to identifying persons with symptoms but also those that have had contact with sick persons and may be asymptomatic carriers, transmitting the disease even though they do not have symptoms. As a result of the active inquiries, approximately half of the newly confirmed cases during the past week were asymptomatic. The Cuban strategy of actively looking for transmitters without symptoms removes such persons from contact with the healthy, and therefore it will reduce the number of confirmed cases later on in the cycle of the infirmity.

In accordance with health regulations, many people are working from home via telephone and Internet, or are staying at home on furlough from work, with full pay for the first thirty days and 60% of salary after thirty days. Inasmuch as all public transportation has been suspended, workers in the production and distribution of necessary goods and services arrive to work through transportation arranged through their place of work. Large stores and shopping centers have been closed, and the people purchase necessary items in small stores and stands near their homes. Street activity is far less than what was the norm, and it is virtually non-existent at night. The great majority of the people comply with the health regulations, although there are a few slackers who do not as well as a few scoundrels looking to profit personally, whose comportment draws much comment from the people, and it provokes measures by the government, with the support of the people. On the other hand, there are countless examples of courage, solidarity, and fidelity among the people, who are conducting themselves with an exemplary dignity.

Cuban President Díaz-Canel has declared that the next couple of weeks will be a critical stage in the battle against Covid-19. The nation's leadership, its system of health and the people are prepared.

## (2) Second Henry Reeves Brigade departs for Italy

On April 13, the Cuban daily newspaper Granma reported on the departure of a Cuban medical brigade for Italy. A team of 28 doctors and 18 nurses headed to Torín in the Piamonte region, one of the zones most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in the southern European nation. The brigade pertains to the Henry Reeve Contingent of Doctors Specialized in Situations of Disasters and Serious Epidemics. The members of the brigade are from eleven of the fourteen provinces of Cuba; all of them have at least ten years of work experience, and 81% have participated in international missions previously. It is the second Cuban brigade to arrive in Italy, the first being a contingent of twenty-one doctors, sixteen nurses, and a logistical coordinator that arrived in March in the region of Lombardy.

The April 16 issue of the Granma reports that Cuba, in response to solicitudes received since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, has sent twenty-one brigades of health professionals to twenty countries, adding to the brigades of medical collaboration that already had been present in sixty nations, which now also are lending their support to the global battle against the infirmity.

The April 16 issue maintains that the Covid-19 pandemic has especially impacted nations where neoliberal policies have reduced social costs, limiting the capacity of the State for public administration. It further maintains that the confrontation of the pandemic requires global cooperation, with an important role by the United Nations and the World Health Organization, which is under attack by the present government of the United States. Granma further declares that the United States commits a crime, as its high functionaries know, when it attacks Cuban international cooperation in the middle of a pandemic.

## (3) "Two models in conflict"

The Governor of the Capital District of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Darío Vivas, upon receiving a Cuban medical contingent as they arrived in the South American nation, declared that there are two different political systems in conflict in the world. "The developed countries, like the United States and the

European Union, do not lend any attention to a request for solidarity. On the other hand, we see the people and government of Cuba giving support to human needs. This is saying to the world that there are two models in conflict before the Covid-19 pandemic. One inhumane, that does not believe in solidarity, in the collective, that privatizes everything and sees health as a business; and another that responds to the interests of the peoples, of the human being, and respects human rights, both in word and in practice. Those models are in conflict.”

(4) Cuba commemorates declaration of socialist character of the Revolution, April 16, 1961

The April 16 issue of the Granma commemorated the 59th anniversary of the declaration of the socialist character of the Revolution. The occasion for the declaration was the funeral for the victims of a U.S. air attack on Cuban air fields, an action that was a preparation for the U.S.-supported invasion on the following day at the Bay of Pigs by an irregular troop composed of Cuban counterrevolutionary expatriates. The declaration of socialism was not surprising to the men and women at the front lines of the defense of the aggression. Fidel said, precisely, “what they can’t forgive is that we are in their faces, that we have made a socialist Revolution right in front of the United States. . . . And that socialist Revolution we will defend with these rifles! That socialist Revolution we defend with the same courage of our anti-aircraft artillerymen that yesterday riddled with bullets the airplanes of the aggressors!”

Fidel’s thinking had arrived to the conception of a socialist revolution ten years earlier. But socialism was not at all understood in the Cuban society of that era. As Pedro de la Hoz expresses in the April 16 issues of Granma, “Socialism had been a bad word, synonymous with infinite repression, suppression of liberties, brain washing, quashing of the individual, frustration of the human being.” With such a connotation among the people, the word “socialism” could not be used. Yet, Fidel discerned, that same people, ignorant of the meaning of socialism, possessed a healthy spirit of spontaneous rebellion. So, Fidel conceived of a socialist revolution in two stages. First, tapping that healthy rebellious spirit through concrete proposals for social change that constituted steps toward socialism, without naming them as such. And a second stage, in which the people are taught that their Revolution, which they know in practice, is a socialist revolution. Accordingly, the Cuban people came to understand the meaning of socialism not by reading Marx, Engels, or Lenin, but in the practice of socialism, led by Fidel.

(5) “One must think of another manner of constructing the world.”

In the April 12 issue of Juventud Rebelde, Marina Menéndez writes, “Systems of health privatized, and therefore nonexistent, are making the task more difficult in many countries. . . . Although resources are necessary, what is most important is that States have a capacity to act, and the political will to do so.” A good example is Cuba, which in its “confrontation of the pandemic is placing face-to-face the possibilities and the limitations of two models. One, ruled by capital and the market at the cost of non-existent social policies and States that leave all in the hands of the owners of property; and another, with the capacity of the State to act, as a result of conserving the management of resources in its hands, with human beings placed at the center.” She quotes Argentinian President Alberto Fernández, who declared that “only an organized society saves humanity,” and he exhorted that humanity “to think of another manner of constructing the world, when this passes.”

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