

This week in Cuba January 26 to February 1, 2020



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By Charles McKelvey

In today's "This week in Cuba," we review, first, the commemoration in Cuba of the 167th anniversary of the birth of José Martí; and secondly, the perspective of a Cuban journalist on the Economic Forum of Davos, Switzerland.

(1) Cuba commemorates the 167th anniversary of the birth of José Martí

On Tuesday, January 28, Cuba commemorated the 167th anniversary of the birth of the Cuban revolutionary leader, writer, journalist, and poet José Martí, known in Cuba as the "Apostle" and the "Teacher." The commemoration is an annual event, but this year, it was carried out with more dedication than ever, as a response to a counterrevolutionary act of desecrations busts of Martí.

As Cubans were celebrating New Year's Eve this past January 1, two Cuban citizens spilled animal blood on busts of Martí and sent images of the vile deed on their cell phones to those who had payed them in

Miami, who disseminated them on the social media, presumably as supposed evidence of discontent in Cuba with the revolutionary process. In videos of interviews with them aired on Cuban television, the low character and cultural formation of the two was evident for all to see. One of them asked, why not pour blood on the busts of Martí?

Cuba reacted to the event with indignation. The leaders of the government and the Party called on youth to participate more than ever in the annual March of the Torches on the evening of Monday, January 27. Responding to the call, hundreds of thousands of mostly young people marched from the great stairway of the University, advancing on San Lazaro street and turning on Infanta, arriving to the Fragua Martiana, the memorial at the site of the old quarries of San Lázaro, where Martí, still a teenager, endured several months of forced labor, punished by the Spanish colonial regime for his revolutionary writing. The March was led by Raúl Castro, who participated in the first March of the Torches 67 years ago, on January 27, 1953, on the 100th anniversary of Martí's birth. Other leaders of the Party and the government joined Raul in leading the March, including President of the Republic Miguel Díaz-Canel and Prime Minister Manuel Marrero. The Cuban writer José Lezama Lima observed that in 2020, Martí has more capacity than ever to convoke the people.

There were numerous activities of commemoration on Tuesday, January 28. Raúl and Díaz-Canel placed floral wreaths at the tomb of Martí at the Santa Ifigenia cemetery in Santiago de Cuba. A march was held in the Plaza of the Revolution in Havana, presided by Olga Lidia Tapia, member of the Secretariat of the Party, and Susely Morfa González, first secretary of the Union of Communist Youth. Similar marches at central plazas were held in all the provinces of the country. Military ceremonies of artillery salute were held simultaneously at noon in historic colonial-era military fortresses in Havana and Santiago de Cuba. A Special Supplement to the January 28 issue of the daily newspaper Granma contained five articles by authors reflecting on the meaning of Martí, including fragments of a speech by Fidel Castro on January 27, 1960; and a special section on January 29 devoted four editorial commentaries to Martí. The evening television news program, La Mesa Redonda, was dedicated to Martí; during which Dr. Pedro Pablo Rodríguez, editor of The Complete Works of José Martí, observed that the writings of Martí, with their emphasis on ethical virtues, increasing have universal appeal in an age of savage capitalism.

Elson Concepción Pérez observed that the miserable persons that desecrated the busts of Martí, in offending a patriotic symbol like Martí; an ideal venerated by all; a teacher of ethics, culture, and convictions; are profaning all the Cuban people and all those throughout the world who admire him, study his work, and follow his example. Guille Vilar writes that, when Fidel in 1953, describing the events of Moncada in *History Will Absolve Me*, revealed that he carried in his heart the doctrines of the Teacher, he was not only speaking for himself and for his companions in the assault; he was seeing the future of Cuba, in which millions of his compatriots carry in our hearts the doctrines of the Teacher.

(2) A Cuban take on the Davos Economic Forum in Switzerland

In the January 28 issue of Granma, Elson Concepción Pérez writes that during the last five decades, the Davos Economic Forum in Switzerland “has emerged year after year as a platform of the capitalist system, where the rich exhibit its ‘benefits’ for the planet, and to which is invited some representative of a Third World country, whose discourses appear to freeze in the cold of the Swiss Alps.” This year, the Forum gave space to a charlatan of Venezuelan nationality, Juan Guaidó, who no doubt was seeking funds for what he calls “the overthrow of the regime of Nicolás Maduro.”

Concepción observes that “at Davos it is not prohibited to speak of the 1,200,000,000 hungry persons in the world. Nor of the 800,000,000 human beings that do not know to read or write. Nor the millions that die each year from curable diseases for the lack of economic resources. Reports from international institutions appear there, which deal with the critical world situation, principally the enormous difference between those that have more and those that have nothing. There even was spoken this year that in 2019 the 2,513 richest people in the world have more money that the 4,600,000,000 poorest, as reported by

Oxfam, the Oxford Committee for the Alleviation of Hunger.”

In Davos this year, there had been the daring plan to begin the Forum by taking on the effects of climate change. But Donald Trump was chosen as the first speaker. Concepción writes that “Trump, arrogant as always, warned that ‘we have to reject the eternal predictions of catastrophes and apocalypses’ made by the ‘heirs of the foolish fortune-tellers of the past,’ who are wrong about climate change. In the inaugural address, Trump went on to dedicate himself to reciting the most flattering descriptions of the economy of his nation.

Concepción reports that Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel laureate in economics, criticized Trump’s speech, characterizing it as “astonishing,” and exclaiming that it’s “as if what we are seeing with our own eyes were not there.” Concepción reports that Robert Habeck, leader of the Green Party of Germany, attacked Trump’s harangue: “Only praises for himself, ignorance, disdain for everyone, without perception of global problems. It was the worst speech I have heard in my life.” At the same time, Robin Niblett, director of Chatham House, described the discourse of Trump as “nearly a presidential campaign speech.”

On the other hand, Concepción notes, Greta Thunburg, the adolescent activist against climate change of only 17 years, returned to confront the “monster,” charging herself with the mission of calling for world consciousness, especially political leaders, to make battle against that disaster with something more than speeches, and to create solutions before it is too late.

This is Charles McKelvey. We will be back next Sunday with “This week in Cuba,” reviewing the news emerging during the week from revolutionary Cuba.

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