

This week in Cuba February 9 to February 15, 2020



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By Charles McKelvey

In today's "This week in Cuba," we review, first, Cuban reflections on the manipulations of information technology; secondly, a Cuban response to the intensification of the U.S. blockade; and thirdly, a Cuban analysis of the trade agreement among Mexico, USA, and Canada

(1) The manipulations of information technology

An article by Ernesto Estévez Rams in the February 10 issue of the Granma daily newspaper discusses the problem of the explosive proliferation of information on the Internet, inundating readers with content frankly idiotic. Information technologies are capable of transmitting thousands of images in a very short interval after the occurrence of an event. Moreover, the instantaneous transmission can include false photos or photos taken out of context, as, for example, we have seen demonstrations in the Philippines some years ago shown as demonstrations in Venezuela today. He maintains that the election of Trump, the Brexit referendum, and the election of Bolsonaro in Brazil were characterized by the use of such

manipulations. Estévez notes that although propaganda was a persistent feature of the twentieth century, the degree of totalitarian sophistication that has been attained today does not have comparison in human history.

What can be done about the problem? Estévez mentions the Italian philologist and novelist Umberto Eco, who maintained that the filtering of information could be a useful function of journalists. But Estévez maintains that, taking into account the interested comportment of the major mass media today, this cure would be worse than the disease. He proposes instead the recognition by each of us that we are the objects of the manipulations of psychological warfare. To be prepared for this battle, we have to develop consciousness. In order to equip ourselves for this battle, we have to read and we have to develop our capacities to analyze what we read. True revolutionaries, he maintains, have the capacity analyze the causes of phenomena. "The revolution has the discursive advantage of being the carriers of a social and economic order that aspires to human redemption and not to the reduction to mere merchandise. The Revolution is made only with full human beings, and we do not aspire to less."

The theme was also discussed in the evening new program La Mesa Redonda on February 13, with the panelists Miriam Roza Elizade, First Vice-President of the Cuban Union of Journalists and Writers; the Argentinian sociologist Atilio Borón, and the French-Spanish journalist Ignacio Ramonet. They described the phenomenon of electoral campaigns having the technological capacity to identify the preferences and ideological orientations of millions of persons, and sending different messages, selected on their likelihood of being influential. Elizade maintained that the solution to the problem is the development of alternative networks and platforms; Boron and Ramonet concurred.

(2) Cuban response to the intensification of the U.S. blockade

An article by Oscar Sánchez in the February 12 issue of Granma reflects on the intensification of the blockade. He observes that if Trump could see the people at the International Book Fair of Havana, with its 400 titles and four million book copies, he would exclaim, "These people are crazy. With all the problems that we are giving them, how can they be concerned with such things."

Sánchez refers to the intensification of the blockade in the past year. The U.S. government has blocked the arrival of fuel, creating lines at the gas stations; they engage in financial persecution in order to create instability in the availability of household products. These measures are taken to make it appear that the Revolutionary Government is inefficient.

Sánchez maintains that such actions are taken because the United States is upset by the example of Cuba; by its gains; and by its intelligent, wholesome, educated, and united people.

The response of the Cuban people today was previously declared by Fidel, when he said: "Our country has passed the hardest tests; we have arrived to this point, and we will continue forward, carving our future. No force can turn us, intimidate us, or obligate us to renounce even one of our principles."

(3) Cuban journalist analyzes the trade agreement among Mexico, USA, and Canada

Cuban journalist Enrique Moreno analyzes the new trade agreement among Mexico, the United States and Canada (T-MEC) from the vantage point of its advantages and disadvantages for Mexico.

The new treaty replaces the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which went into effect in 1994. NAFTA undermined Mexican agriculture and industry, and created a situation of increased dependency on the United States, reflecting the subordination of the Mexican government of the time to U.S. interests. Mexico today buys 16% of U.S. exports to the world, a quantity of 265 billion dollars, greater than what Mexico buys from the four largest European economies combined (UK, Germany, France, and Italy). Practically all the meals served in the United States contain fresh products produced in Mexico or produced by Mexican companies in the United States.

Moreno notes that during his electoral campaign, Donald Trump promised to renegotiate NAFTA, which he described as one of the worst commercial agreements in history, because it stimulated factories to abandon the United States and to locate outside the country, thus constituting an attack on national industry and jobs. A forced exit from NAFTA would considerably affect the Mexican economy, especially with respect to the automobile industry and the currency exchange rate. For this reason, in spite of the disadvantages of NAFTA for Mexico, the progressive Mexican government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador decided to renegotiate the Treaty and seek to attain an agreement that would better promote the development of Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean.

López Obrador maintains that the new agreement is good news for Mexico, because it will increase investor confidence and lead to the establishment of more companies and the creation of jobs with good salaries. At the same time, it will increase Mexican access to the U.S. market in a variety of areas.

However, Moreno concludes the article by suggesting that the treaty, on balance, may not be beneficial for Mexico. He cites David Lozano, an economist at the Center for Multidisciplinary Analysis of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, who considers the new treaty to be a triumph for the government of Trump. He maintains that the agreement ties Mexico's hands, obligating it to increase purchases from the United States and not from nations in Latin America, the Caribbean, China, or Russia. It implies the reduction of imports to Mexico from other regions. The signatories of the agreement have to report any intention to enter into a free trade agreement with another country that does not operate under conditions of a free market. At the same time, Mexican agricultural production is unprotected and there are new benefits for U.S. companies, without taking into account the probable consequences for Mexican national producers and small and medium companies.

From the point of view of the South, Trump is not wrong in seeking to defend the interest of domestic production, which has been ignored by the U.S. political establishment in recent decades. But this should be done in a form that seeks mutually beneficial trade with the South. The U.S. approach with respect to Latin America ought to be different from its approach with respect to the nations of Western Europe or China, in which there is negotiation among equals. With respect to Mexico, Latin America, and the Caribbean, it is a question of North-South cooperation, seeking exchanges that not only protect U.S. interests but also promote the economic development of Latin America and the Caribbean, seeking to overcome the underdevelopment that is the consequence of colonialism, neocolonialism, and imperialism. In this way, the USA would be expanding the markets for its own products in the long term, and contributing to the development of a sustainable world-system.

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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