

# *A revolution based in science and solidarity*

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A revolution based in science and solidarity

By Charles McKelvey

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As the world confronts the new coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic, it is a moment to appreciate the Cuban Revolution, which possesses qualities needed at this time, namely, a commitment to science and solidarity.

Cuba is well prepared to respond to the pandemic. Its national Plan of Prevention and Control of Covid-19 was announced by the government on a prime-time television news program on March 9, with extensive newspaper coverage the following day, prior to the detection of a single positive case of infection. The Plan established epidemiological vigilance centered on its system of local family doctors and marshalling the participation of workers in such relevant sectors as tourism, transportation, and points of entry as well as mass organizations of workers, women, and neighborhoods. The strategy includes testing and observation of persons with suspicious symptoms, as well as the dissemination of suggested hygiene practices through the media and the mass organizations. A system of vigilance at airport terminals already had been in place, in order to prevent the entrance into the country of a transmissible infirmity.

The Cuban response to the coronavirus had been evolving less systemically before the announcement of the Plan. From January 25 to March 16, some 470 persons with symptoms were hospitalized and 21,928 patients with relevant symptoms were attended. On March 16, 373 patients remained hospitalized for observation, 145 foreigners and 228 Cubans.

So far, ten patients have tested positive for Covid-19, including one death, an Italian tourist. Inasmuch as the all of the positive cases are connected to international travel, there is not a transmission in Cuba; and for this reason, Cuba is not closing schools.

Cuba's preparedness is rooted in its commitment to the development of its knowledge in microbiology and other sciences and to the creation of an advanced pharmaceutical industry. The Cuban revolutionary commitment to science is historic. On January 15, 1960, Fidel declared that "The future of our country has to be necessarily a future of men and women of science; it has to be a future of men and women of thought." He envisioned a society in which "the people have full access to culture and to science, . . . so that in the future the country will be able to count on an accomplished group of men and women of thought, of research, and of science."

Fidel assured the gathered representatives of Cuban science that the revolutionary government is fully committed to scientific development, because scientific development is the foundation to the economic and social development of the nation. He declared, "Today, in the new country, the country that is truly free, scientists and researchers have full opportunity, so that all the things that you do are going to benefit directly the people. Today you have the satisfaction of knowing that there is a revolutionary government that seeks the truth, that needs scientists, that needs researchers, because this is the moment in which all intelligence has to be put to work." Fidel concluded the historic address by saying that, "Cuba needs men and women of thought, above all men and women of clear thought that put their knowledge on the side of good, on the side of justice, on the side of the country, because only thought can guide the peoples in the moments of great transformations."

Over the following six decades Cuba developed 208 scientific institutions, with ties to educational and productive institutions, so that Cuban scientific research is marked by interinstitutional collaboration and an orientation to the application of results, impacting the socioeconomic development of the country.

As one result of this collaborative commitment to science, the Cuban company BioCubaFarma has emerged as a grouping of institutions of the Cuban Pharmaceutical and Biotechnology Industry. With more than twenty thousand workers, it supplies 357 medicines to the Cuban system of national health, and it has contracts for the supply and distribution of health products with 62 countries. With the Covid-19 pandemic, fifteen nations so far have solicited BioCubaFarma for the Cuban medicine Interferon Alfa 2B, and it has inventory to respond to these requests.

At the same time, Cuba is present in solidarity supporting other countries in confronting the endemic. Of the 139 countries of the world in which the presence of the infirmity has been confirmed, Cuba previously had brigades of medical collaboration in thirty-three of them. In response to a request from Venezuela, a Henry Reeve Brigade of the International Contingent of Doctors Specialized in Disaster and Serious Epidemics arrived on March 15. (The Henry Reeve Brigade is so named in honor of an Irish-American who died defending the Cuban cause in Cuba's first War of Independence from 1868 to 1878). On March 17, Nicaragua also solicited the aid of a Henry Reeve Brigade.

In past years, twenty-six Henry Reeve Brigades have lent service to Pakistan, Indonesia, Mexico, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, and Venezuela, among others. In addition, Cuban medical missions have confronted Ebola in Africa, blindness in Latin America and the Caribbean (in a program known as Operation Miracle), and cholera in Haiti. At present, Cuba has more than 28,000 personnel serving in medical missions in sixty-one nations.

Cuban medical missions of solidarity with other nations, particularly the nations of the Third World, is rooted in the belief that health care is a human right, and that the formerly colonized nations of the Third World have to cooperate with another in protecting their human rights, while at the same pointing in practice to the possibility for a different kind of world, based not on domination, exploitation, and profit, but on cooperation and solidarity. Having been the victims of colonialism, the neocolonized peoples know from their own experience the unsustainability of a world based on domination and exploitation. For them, cooperation is a necessary road. And Cuba, under the leadership of Fidel, emerged to be a nation in the vanguard of the Third World proclaiming in example this fundamental truth.

Cuban solidarity should not be misread as altruism. Cuba wants to attain something, namely, the tranquility of living in a more just and sustainable world, and the satisfaction and pride that would come from awareness of their role in creating such a world. Cuba acts from a vantage point different from the nations of the North. As a historically colonized nation, it sees the unsustainability of the neocolonial order, and the necessity of constructing the world on an alternative foundation. In defending in practice the fundamental rights of the most impoverished peoples of the planet, Cuba defends its own right to live in a world-system that respects its right to be a nation and to shape its own destiny.

The Third World anti-colonial vision includes not only South-South cooperation, but also North-South cooperation. Accordingly, one Cuban gesture of solidarity in the coronavirus emergency is directed toward the North. On March 17, in response to a request from the Government of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Cuba permitted a British cruise ship with more than 1000 persons, five of whom are positive cases of Covid-19, to dock in the Havana port of Mariel. The ship had been stranded in the Caribbean, denied access to various ports in the region. The passengers and crew are being transported by bus to the José Martí International Airport in Havana for charter flights to the United Kingdom. Because of Cuba's experience in attending to problems of this kind in various countries of the world, it is able to establish the conditions for the transport of the passengers and crew from the ship to the charter flights without risk to the Cuban population.

With its commitment of scientific development and its solidarity with the peoples of the world, especially the neocolonized and impoverished, but both theory and practice is pointing the way for a more just, democratic, and sustainable world.

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