

This week in Cuba / March 22 to 28, 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; and secondly, an article in *Granma* reflecting on the geopolitical implications of the new coronavirus.

(1) The Cuba battle against Covid-19

As of Saturday, March 28, Cuba has 119 confirmed cases of Covid-19. Of them, 111 remained hospitalized, three have died, four have been discharged, and one has been evacuated to his country. Some 2,000 patients are hospitalized for surveillance and treatment for respiratory symptoms.

Prior to March 27, all of the persons who tested positive were "imported cases," that is, they are persons who recently traveled to Cuba from abroad, or who had direct contact with someone who had; there had not been discovered a case of local transmission of the infirmity, in which a connection to international travel or travelers is not found. However, on March 27, on the evening television-radio program *La Mesa*

Redonda, the Minister of Public Health, José Angel Portal Miranda, reported on the first cases of local transmission. It is a question of four persons, three family members and a friend, who had contact with a hotel manager in Varadero who had contracted the infirmity from a group of Italian tourists.

The Cuban Plan of Prevention and Control of Covid-19 was approved on March 5, prior to any confirmed cases of Covid-19, and it has undergone adjustments as the situation as evolved. The basic directives of the Plan are the following: international tourists are not able to enter the country; international tourists that remain in the country are being relocated to hotels, where they are confined for isolation; arrangements are being made with airline carriers for the repatriation of international tourists who desire to leave; Cuban citizens resident in Cuba are not permitted to leave at the current time; Cuban citizens and residents outside of Cuba are permitted to enter the country, and upon their arrival, they are immediately transported to isolation centers for fifteen days; bus, train, and air transportation from province to province within the national territory is suspended; private interprovincial travel is prohibited, except for persons with authorization; all passengers in urban buses must wear medical masks; upon the completion of each route, the interior of the buses are wiped clean; primary school, secondary school, and universities classes have been suspended, and the children and youth are expected to stay at home and carry out the educational tasks that are presented on television; persons with respiratory symptoms are to present themselves to the local family doctor; teams of medical students are carrying out a door to door inquiry, under the supervision of professors, identifying persons with respiratory symptoms; all persons are encouraged to stay at home, except for work and necessary purchases; older persons especially are encouraged to stay at home; working from home via Internet is encouraged; the media, the mass organizations of workers and women as well as of neighbors are participating in informing the population and ensuring compliance; limited numbers of persons are permitted in stores at one time; in forming lines outside of stores, customers are to maintain a distance of one or two meters; all recreational and social activities are suspended; and interpersonal greetings are not to include handshakes and embraces, radically altering Cuban customs of salutation.

The Cuban government possesses the moral authority to call the people to support the plan. By and large the people are complying with the plan, although there is some tendency to indiscipline with respect to social distancing.

Cuba has sent medical missions to combat Covid-19 to eleven countries: Venezuela, Nicaragua, Suriname, Grenada, Jamaica, Italy, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Belize, Dominica, and Saint Lucia.

The Cuban Center for Genetic and Biotechnological Engineering has received requests from forty-five countries for the anti-viral medicine Interferon Alfa 2B, which said Center created in the second half of the 1980s. The drug has been effective in treating Covid-19 in China, Cuba, and other nations. It is fabricated by Chang Heber, a Cuban-Chinese mixed company with headquarters in the city of Changchun, China.

(2) The geopolitical implications of the coronavirus pandemic

In the March 26 issue of *Granma*, Enrique Moreno Gimeranez writes of “The challenge of the new coronavirus on world geopolitics.” He begins, “In addition to the serious humanitarian consequences, Covid-19 will impact inexorably the international system. The present situation represents, perhaps, the greatest challenge for human civilization since the two world wars, and even, perhaps, taking into consideration the dimensions and the number of actors implicated, it could be the greatest challenge to the survival of our species in the last centuries.”

Moreno writes that the new coronavirus will be detrimental to an already weakened world-economy, and at the same time, it will have a negative impact on national economies. Already we have seen the greatest fall in the price of petroleum since 1991, a fall in the stock market, and huge effects on the sectors of transportation and tourism. In addition, “the decrease of demand in China, and the Chinese decisions to close industries and quarantine the population, decisions that other countries are increasingly

taking, will cause reduction of the prices of raw materials, interruption of the networks of production, reduction of international commerce, and loss of income and profitability.”

Moreno observes that while the United States is showing more clearly the deficiencies of its system of health, China has demonstrated its capacity to respond rapidly and efficiently to the threat. And whereas the United States has shown its limited solidarity with the world, China has been cooperating internationally in the struggle against the infirmity, including a donation of 20 million dollars to the World Health Organization, the delivery of medical supplies to other countries, the sharing of what it learned concerning the prevention and containment of the infirmity, and support to nearly 100 countries and the sending of teams of experts to various states, like Italy and Iran. In addition to donations by Chinese foundations.

Also important has been the bilateral cooperation between the European powers and Russia and the samples of international solidarity by Cuba. Meanwhile, the United States tried to stigmatize China and has been increasingly unilateral and bellicose.

Moreno maintains that Covid-19 also could give a death blow to the neoliberal system. Many people in the world already, before the endemic, had questioned the effectiveness of a model based on privatization and cuts in social programs. The pandemic has demonstrated the importance of a solid health system and of understanding health as a human right.

Moreno quotes French President Emmanuel Macron, a defender of cuts in social programs, who said that the pandemic shows that health care ought to be free, and it ought to be outside the laws of the market. And he observes that the rapid collapse of the system of health drove the Spanish government to nationalized private health institutions in order to confront the new coronavirus.

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