

# *With Covid-19, the nations of the North begin to see the dignity of Cuba*

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By Charles McKelvey

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As the United States and the nations of Europe experience the sad tragedy of an uncontrolled pandemic, they are beginning to take notice, not with malice but with wonder, of the alternative road taken by the small Caribbean island nation that declared itself socialist fifty-nine years ago. In spite of its ideological blinders, the North cannot completely overlook the well-organized and coherent plan of the Cuban government and vanguard political party, being carried out with the determined and patriotic support of the people; nor the availability of a Cuban created drug that has been effective in treating the disease, for which, so far, forty-five nations have made requests; nor the presence of Cuban medical missions in eleven countries of the world to fight the pandemic, and still counting.

The dignified Cuban response to the pandemic is not an accident. It is a response that emerges from the political-economic-cultural system that Cuba has been struggling to create for the last six decades, since the triumph of the Revolution on January 1, 1959. It is a system that above all is characterized by a political process that has cast aside the farce of the democratic façade of representative democracy; and has replaced it with structures of direct democracy and people's democracy, characterized by political control by the elected delegates of the people and the active participation of mass organizations, with the guidance but not the direction of a vanguard political party. Armed with a government that is by and for the people, and does not represent the interests of any particular social class or sector, the nation has attended to the development of systems of education and health, universally available without cost, as well as other social and economic rights; and to the formulation of the foreign policy that is committed to respect for the principles of the equality and sovereignty of nations, the self-determination of peoples, and solidarity and cooperation with the nations and peoples of the world.

Why has the world not seen the dignity of the Cuban alternative? Why has it not seen that the road taken by Cuba is the road that all nations of the world, in one form or other, have to take? The answer is that the Cuban Revolution, in seeking to attain its sovereignty, has struck at the heart of neocolonial structures that are essential for the continuation of the world-system as it is presently organized.

Neocolonial domination is characterized by an economic relation that continues the colonial economic relation; by the control of the economic and financial institutions of the neocolony by large transnational corporations and banks; by control of the political institutions of the neocolony by a figurehead national bourgeoisie that is totally subordinate to the interests of international capital; and by the utilization of political repression and military intervention, when popular resistance provokes political and social instability. As is evident, global patterns of neocolonial domination violate the true sovereignty of the former colonies of the world, who today are supposedly independent nations.

At the time of the triumph of the Revolution on January 1, 1959, the revolutionary leadership discerned that the social and economic development of the nation required the severing of the Cuban neocolonial relation with the United States, which had been forged from 1898 to 1958. In 1959 and 1960, the Cuban revolutionary government took decisive steps in this direction.

The Agrarian Reform Law of May 17, 1959 nationalized the large-estates that dominated the countryside, defining the terms of compensation to the proprietors, which included large U.S. agricultural companies that owned extensive lands, primarily dedicated to the production of sugar. The National Institute of Agrarian Reform distributed the land to state-owned enterprises, cooperatives, and small-scale peasant owners.

On July 6, 1960, the Revolutionary Government emitted a law authorizing the President and the Prime Minister of Cuba to nationalize U.S. properties by means of joint resolutions. The law established compensation for the nationalized properties through government bonds at 2% annual interest, with payment to begin in thirty years. Cuba was to create a fund that would be fed by deposits equal to 25% of the U.S. purchase of Cuban sugar in excess of the sugar quota. The Law, therefore, proposed a mutually beneficial resolution, linking compensation for nationalized properties to the U.S.-Cuban sugar trade. By means of a higher U.S. sugar purchase and Cuban use of the additional income to finance compensation and invest in industrial development, the July 6 nationalization law pointed to the transformation of core-peripheral exploitation into North-South cooperation.

The Cuban proposal to compensate the properties through mutually beneficially trade and cooperation was rejected without negotiation or discussion by the U.S. government. On July 6, the very same day that the nationalization law was emitted and the Cuban proposal was announced, the U.S. government announced a reduction of U.S. purchases below the sugar quota. Nevertheless, thirty days later, in the announcement of first resolution nationalizing U.S. properties, Fidel appears to remain hopeful that the U.S. government would accept the proposal of compensation through U.S. purchases above the sugar

quota. But it was not to be. The United States had already embarked on its policy of regime change through economic sanctions and terrorist activities.

In order for things to play out differently, it would have been necessary for the U.S. corporate sector to adopt an enlightened response to the Cuban Revolution. In fact, the U.S. corporate sector in 1959 was economically, politically, and ideologically positioned to take an enlightened turn of accommodation to the Cuban Revolution, a fact that Fidel discerned. At that time, there were various indications that the neocolonial world-system, which had been emerging as a replacement for the European colonial empires, was not going to be politically nor ecologically sustainable. The national liberation movements of Africa and Asia were in the midst of sustained drive for political independence, and the radical character of some of the revolutionary leaders as well as the cases of Vietnam and Cuba constituted evidence that the newly independent nations were not going to accept the limited forms of independence that the colonial powers were prepared to concede. Moreover, it was patently evident that the world-system was reaching the geographical limits of the earth, and that its historic method of expanding economically by conquering new lands and peoples had reached its natural limits.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt had seen the need for a transition to a form of neocolonialism that itself would evolve step-by-step toward a more genuine form of equality. Fidel in 1960 was proposing a first step in that direction, converting the U.S.-Cuba sugar trade into the source of compensation for U.S. properties as well as for a Cuban fund for its own industrial and scientific development. This would have enabled Cuba to become a more equal trading partner with the United States, transforming the exploitative neocolonial relation between Cuba and the United States into a mutually beneficial trade relation on the foundation of the principals of the equality and sovereignty of nation. If the neocolonial hegemonic power had taken this step, thereby demonstrating the advantages of cooperation, it would have been a model for others, taking the world-system beyond its colonial foundation.

But the U.S. corporate sector in 1960 did not have sufficient historical and political consciousness to see that Fidel's proposal not only defended the right of Cuba to participate in international commerce as an equal and sovereign nation, but it also was consistent with the long-term interest of U.S. corporations in a politically stable and ecologically sustainable world-system. Not discerning the wisdom of Fidel, the U.S. political establishment continued on the road that had been taken by the Truman administration, defined by a permanent war economy and the military industrial complex, with military bases everywhere ready to support accommodationist governments in the neocolonies of the world. This militarist policy ignored the fact that the neocolonial world-system had reached and overextended its geographical and ecological limits. When the political and ecological contradictions of the neocolonial world system gave rise to a sustained structural crisis in the 1970s, the global elite turned to neoliberalism in the 1980s. When the contradictions of the world-system gave rise to a new form of terrorism at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the global powers turned to more aggressive forms of imperialism. In taking this direction, the U.S. political establishment reveals stunning shortsightedness, inasmuch as neoliberalism and aggressive imperialism only exacerbate the contradictions, making more evident the unsustainability of the neocolonial world-system, and a need for a world-system governed by principals that it preaches but does not practice, such as the equality of all nations, the rights of national to sovereignty, and the need to cooperation in world affairs.

Now an uncontrolled pandemic demonstrates the consequences of systemic inattention to human needs, and the prioritizing of profits and military force; and it makes more evident the need for the alternative road exemplified by Cuba. Perhaps, after the plague, the global powers will be prepared to consider the 1960 proposal of Fidel.

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