

Cuba's mass layoffs: The dead-end of Castroism

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This week's announcement that over half a million Cuban workers are to be thrown out of their jobs in the next six months has laid bare the class character of the Castro regime.

The brutal measure was made public by the Central de Trabajadores Cuba (CTC), the government-controlled trade union body, which represents not Cuban workers but rather the ruling layers within the state apparatus.

The CTC announcement began with a ritualistic invocation of 52 years of the Cuban revolution and an affirmation of the "will and determination in the leadership of our nation and our people to continue building socialism."

The empty words of these state bureaucrats masquerading as workers' representatives cannot hide the fact that the Castro regime is carrying out, in a particularly brutal and undemocratic form, the same kind of drastic austerity program that is being pursued by capitalist governments all over the world. In Cuba, as in Greece, Spain, Britain, the United States and elsewhere, the aim of this program is to impose the full burden of the world capitalist crisis on the working class.

With virtually no notice, workers are going to be deprived of their jobs in the state sector, virtually the only employer in Cuba, and told to sink or swim.

This has been further spelled out in a document that surfaced in the wake of the announcement entitled "Information on the Reordering of the Work Force," a power-point style presentation that was apparently drafted for use in preparing the implementation of the Cuban jobs massacre.

Repeatedly, the document stresses the need to eliminate "paternalistic treatment" of Cuban workers. By this it does not mean the overbearing intervention of the Castro brothers into every area of economic and

social life, but rather the limited social benefits and guarantees that have made it possible for workers to survive on a monthly salary that averages the equivalent of \$20 a month.

Among the first "paternalistic" policies slated for the chopping block—for obvious reasons—is the payment of unemployment benefits. The document states that workers with less than 20 years seniority will be paid 60 percent of their basic salary for only one month before being cut off altogether.

The document states that among the self-employment opportunities to which workers will be directed are cutting hair, making bricks, driving taxis, selling candy and dried fruit and raising rabbits! The document states candidly in relation to these new "businesses" that "many of them could fail within a year" because of workers' lack of experience and access to raw materials, credit and other forms support for such ventures. No indication is given that the state has any plans to assist those who suffer such failures.

Envisioned here is the fostering in Cuba of what is known by technocrats throughout the rest of Latin America as an "informal economy," a sector that encompasses up to half the population, made up of urban poor whose ranks have been swelled by waves of privatization and structural adjustment programs throughout the continent.

Other attacks on "paternalism" in Cuba include the elimination of workplace cafeterias, where workers received free lunch; the slashing of ration cards; and a health care "reform" aimed at reducing services.

All of this is being carried out with unconcealed hostility by the ruling elite toward the Cuban working class. This was summed up by Cuban President Raúl Castro, who declared his determination to "erase forever the notion that Cuba is the only country in the world where one can live without working."

This is a libel. Cuban workers are as industrious as those of any other country, and are barely paid for their work. But they do not control production, much less the state that rules them, which is dominated by a layer of privileged and corrupt bureaucrats.

This layer has forged ever closer ties to foreign capitalism, opening up the country to exploitation by Spanish and other European multinationals, as well as firms from China, Brazil, Russia and elsewhere. This foreign capital increasingly dominates key areas of the economy.

The endless corruption scandals that have engulfed one leading minister after another are symptomatic of a ruling elite that wants its own piece of the action from these deals and is engaged in the ever-more open accumulation of personal wealth, even as it demands savage austerity measures against the workers.

For half a century, petty-bourgeois nationalists in Latin America and their “left” counterparts in much of the rest of the world have claimed that the 1959 Cuban Revolution that brought Fidel Castro to power was “socialist,” and that the regime that issued from it constituted a “workers state.”

In reality, the Castro regime was the product not of a workers’ revolution, but of a guerrilla movement based in the Cuban petty-bourgeoisie. The Cuban state was not created by the workers, but imposed upon them, right down to the sham union federation that defends the interests of the state and foreign capitalists.

The Cuban state was one of the most left variants of a large number of bourgeois nationalist regimes that came to power in the oppressed countries in the decades following the Second World War, often proclaiming themselves “anti-imperialist” and “socialist” and carrying out policies of economic nationalization.

For three decades, the Cuban economy rested heavily on subsidies from the Soviet Union provided as part of a Faustian bargain in which Castro defended the counterrevolutionary policies of the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy on the world stage. The bureaucracy’s dissolution of the USSR in 1991 threw the Castro regime into an intractable crisis, to which it responded with a turn to foreign capital and a reduction in the living standards of Cuban workers.

The myth that Castroism represented some new road to socialism was promoted most vociferously by the

revisionist Pabloite tendency that attacked the Fourth International. It embraced the Cuban Revolution as a means of abandoning the struggle of the Trotskyist movement to forge the political independence and develop the socialist consciousness of the working class against the domination of the Stalinist and reformist bureaucracies and bourgeois nationalism.

The promotion of illusions in Castroism and guerrillaism had the most catastrophic consequences in Latin America, where a generation of radicalized youth was separated from the working class and thrown into suicidal “armed struggles” that were drowned in blood by a succession of military dictatorships.

The liquidation of Trotskyist cadre into these guerrilla movements ensured the continued domination of Stalinist and Peronist bureaucracies and their ability to suffocate and betray the wave of revolutionary struggles that swept the continent.

Today, the worst crisis of world capitalism in 70 years is creating the conditions for a new eruption of social revolution in Latin America and internationally. It is vital to draw the strategic lessons of the last period of revolutionary upsurge, above all the necessity of building independent revolutionary parties of the working class, based on the program of socialist internationalism.

The International Committee of the Fourth International is confident that this program will attract the most advanced sections of workers throughout Latin America and provide a revolutionary orientation for the bitter social struggles that will inevitably erupt in Cuba itself.

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