

# Observations from a visit to Cuba

18 April 2013

José is a taxi driver who works in Havana. While lowering his voice to tell me of his dissatisfaction with the situation in his country—among other things—he asked me to be cautious. He did not want anyone outside his taxi to hear what he had to say.

This obese man of 30-something once studied to be a telecommunications engineer. “I got a ‘gold certificate’ to study whatever I wanted and I chose to do this,” he says with a sigh. He says that this is the only way he could find to deal with a problem that is by no means uniquely Cuban, the lack of jobs. With 600 pesos, he bought this car. He says that in Cuba “to be a taxi driver or have a cafe is far more profitable than working in the field that you studied.” Another way to earn a higher income, but more difficult, is to work for the government but, as José explains, “everyone working for the government steals from the government.”

As we cruise in his cab, I look out the window and find that Cuba, at least superficially, is not very different from the rest of Latin America. Wealth and poverty coexist on this island as in any other country in the region.

The biggest difference of all, however, is the pretense that the existing regime in Cuba represents a socialist alternative.

Approximately five decades ago this pretense was promoted by an opportunist trend within the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution, which hailed the changes that the Cuban Revolution brought to the country as a new form of socialism that did not require the active revolutionary participation of the working class.

The International Committee of the Fourth International unleashed a fierce and principled war against this trend—Pabloism—and its declaration that Cuba had become a socialist “workers’ state.” It defended the true principles of Marxism during the heyday of opportunist adaptation to the petty-bourgeois

tendency of Castroism and Che Guevara and his guerrilla tactics.

While in Cuba, I decided to see for myself the end result of the “Cuban road to socialism” that Pabloism had promoted for Latin America as a whole, helping to lead a whole generation Latin American youth “to the slaughter by the promise that all that was required to overthrow governments and end social oppression was courage and a few guns.” [1]

“This is the town of Miramar,” said José. Located on the outskirts of Havana, it is home to most of the city’s five-star hotels. Since the fall of the USSR and the beginning of the “special regime,” tourism constitutes one of the principal sources of income in Cuba. “Tourism is the job sought by everyone, but to achieve it is difficult; you have to know several languages and have no criminal record,” says José, who says he himself speaks fluent Italian and German.

Some of these hotels belong to the era in which the US turned the country into its private pleasure resort. Legendary gangsters like Meyer Lansky and Lucky Luciano invested in turning the island into a “giant floating casino.”

Today, Cuba’s ruling elite seems to crave those years of endless excess and investments. The Club Tropicana, the famous cabaret—and previously a casino administered by the Mafia—has been renovated and is one of Havana’s main attractions, whose show has a group of exceptional and talented singers and dancers.

“There is a lot of Spanish, Italian, Eastern European investment,” José tells me. “What about Chinese?” I wonder. “Yes, Chinese too. Many of their cars are imported.” We left Miramar and went to “Old Havana.” Old and decayed buildings that appear on the verge of collapse come into view as José explains that these streets are “not good.” Again, there is almost nothing that can differentiate these landscapes of urban poverty from other countries of “capitalist” America.

Increasingly, the limited nationalist achievements of

the revolution—lauded as part of the “socialist” character of the regime by the Pabloites—that survived the collapse of the USSR are disappearing simultaneously with the social counterrevolution unfolding in Western Europe and the US. José now speaks to me about the insufficient food rations that are provided monthly: a bag of beans, a bag of rice and a bottle of milk, among other things. “But you don’t have to pay for it, right?” I ask. “No,” he replies. “You do have to pay for it.” The price of beef is prohibitive, he says.

We arrive at my destination: the “Museum of the Revolution.” Before it was the headquarters of the presidential palace and bullet holes are visible on the marble walls at the entrance. It turns out that during the era of Fulgencio Batista, the last ruler before Castro, Cuban nationalist groups sought to overthrow him by means of military attacks on government offices and on the army. Castro’s guerrilla actions were not the only ones that took place in Cuba.

Composed of several rooms in which the story of the preparation and carrying out of Castro’s revolution is told through documents, artifacts and newspapers, the “museum” is actually another vehicle for the mystification of this era to which Cubans now react, understandably, with a fed-up silence.

However, there was one noteworthy aspect of the museum: the complete absence in all these rooms of any reference to Marxism as a theory and practice in the preparation of the overthrow of the state by Fidel Castro and his guerrillas. And that is because a real class analysis of the revolution will never uncover in these events the slightest evidence that the leadership of Castro’s July 26 Movement sought to bring to the Cuban working class the theoretical weapons of Marxism to achieve the overthrow of the Batista dictatorship and take power.

In this regard, the Pabloites covered up the class character of the new regime, arguing that in a “new reality,” non-proletarian leaderships, whether those of Peron, Castro, the Sandinistas, or Chavez in more recent times, could achieve power and then implement socialism from above, granting organs of workers power—soviets. In the more than 50-year history of Castro’s rule, this never came about.

“When there is a protest, police go out in civilian clothes and attack the protesters with everything

they’ve got,” says José.

Before saying goodbye, he tells me that he is preparing his visa to move to Spain with his family. In the past few months, new means of leaving the country have been authorized. I wish him good luck and get out of his car.

A.C.

Lima, Peru

[1] Castroism and the Politics of Petty-Bourgeois Nationalism, *January 7, 1998*

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