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Struggle for unity: the secret of Cuba's success

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Cheryl LaBash. SLL photo by Greg Butterfield

Talk given by Cheryl LaBash at the “Unity for Socialism and Revolution” conference in Los Angeles on March 16.

The U.S. blockade was imposed on Cuba in 1960, just after the revolution, to try and

starve the people of Cuba into submission, into selling their sovereignty and going back to capitalism. But the Cuban people have been absolutely resolute. They've refused.

They've beaten back military attacks. They've withstood virtual starvation. They found a way to develop medicines, so that the blockade doesn't impact the health care of the people of Cuba.

I think everybody knows someone who has diabetes. It's very common. We know people who've had amputations because of it. Cuba has a medicine and a treatment that prevents 70 percent of diabetic foot amputations. But it's not used here in the U.S.

Cuba has a vaccine that very successfully treats lung cancer. It prevents the growth of the tumor and extends the life and the quality of life for people who have lung cancer. It's being studied in Buffalo, N.Y., at the Roswell Park Institute. But again, it's not available to people in the U.S., at least not yet.

We have an internationalist responsibility to fight against the blockade. It's the same kind of blockade that U.S. imperialism is putting on Venezuela. It's the same kind of unilateral sanctions put on Syria and Iran. The U.S. government uses the fact that the dollar is the international currency for trade to damage the economies of people who want to have sovereignty in their own countries.

There's a question I think that we all have, because we're here fighting for unity, for socialism, for revolution in this country. How is it that Cuba has survived? How have they held up over these past 60 years? What's the secret?

The Cubans will tell you that the secret is unity. Finding what you can agree on in principle, and putting secondary issues aside.

Cuba just approved a new constitution. The new constitution updates the one written

in 1976 to reflect the development of Cuban society. And part of the discussion on that constitution was about changing the definition of a marriage, from between a man and a woman to between two people. Marriage in Cuba doesn't carry any special material benefit like it does in the U.S. where, for example, an unmarried partner can be prevented from visiting a loved one in a hospital.

Now, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people have equal rights in Cuba. The socialist medical system even includes gender-reassignment surgery free of charge.

By upending capitalist relations that thrive and profit from prejudice and divisions, Cuba has advanced in 60 short years. Cuba's educational campaign in unions, among educators, has lifted consciousness. The slogan for Cuba's national celebration of the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia — to be celebrated for the 12th year — is "I'm included!"

The concept is "everybody in, nobody out." Have everyone come together. Nobody is excluded. Not because of skin tone, gender, gender identity, sexuality or anything else. And that's what they've been working on. That kind of unity has been the key to the Cuban Revolution being able to withstand the tremendous hardships imposed by the U.S. economic, financial and commercial blockade.

It's something that's not easy to do, especially here in the U.S., where often organizations define themselves by their differences with others. It's okay to have differences. But we need to find what we agree on and find a way to work together. That's a priority. Every issue that's been raised here is everyone's issue.

To a large extent, I think that's what this conference is about: Talking about it, figuring it out and moving forward with that idea that we're going to find what we can agree on and go forward on that. And what we can't agree on, we'll wait and deal with that another day.

On to building a revolutionary working-class country where the most oppressed are the leaders!

