

Cuba holds impressive May Day demonstrations on their own terms

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May 7, 2023



Photo: Syara Salado Massip

It was pitch dark at 4:30 as we started out to find that already thousands were taking over the streets chanting, Viva Fidel! Viva Raul! And Viva Diaz Canel! Moving with purpose past the Plaza of the Revolution, turning onto La Rampa and down towards the Malecon.

This is how Cuba dawned today in celebration. It was not the customary International Workers' Day on May 1, but it was celebrated with great enthusiasm as if it were. Tens of thousands of Cubans in the streets and avenues of their communities, with banners, flags, and lots of music. Everyone walked to the event, including President Miguel Diaz-Canel, who arrived with other leaders of Cuba; waiting for them was Army General l Raul Castro Ruz.



Mariano. Photo: Yaimi Ravelo

The familiar attendees were there: the father with his son on his shoulder, the grandfather walking holding the hand of his granddaughter, known Cuban cultural and sports figures, and our many friends from other latitudes. There were the curious eyes watching from the balconies, private sector workers, the local Conga musicians merging with their energy and rhythm carrying drums and trumpets.

Over 300 Cuban municipalities held International Workers Day events today including 100,000 people at the Malecon in Havana.

Right at 7, when the sun began to rise over the Florida Straits, the Cuban National

Anthem was played, followed by music and two talks that could be heard all along La Piragua at the foot of the emblematic and renowned Hotel Nacional.

Karen Urrutia Pérez, researcher at the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, recalled that the Cuban scientific community responded to our president's call on May 19, 2020, when he summoned them to create their own vaccines.

"May Day, the day of the world proletariat, is commemorated in a complex international scenario because of the global economic crisis and the ravages of a pandemic that left in its wake a trail of pain and death."

"In Cuba it is even more challenging because of the cruel imperialist blockade for more than 60 years. Today we have absolute control of covid-19 and it is due to the effective protection of our vaccines, all this thanks to the greatness of scientists and health personnel," she stressed.

Ulises Guilarte de Nacimiento, secretary general of the Central de Trabajadores, said that the celebration of the day of the workers was preceded by the International Meeting of Solidarity with Cuba, which allowed more than 1,000 representatives of 261 political, youth, trade union, and social organizations to share with work centers and neighborhoods, "where our realities prove the ability to overcome obstacles and shortages of our people, and reaffirm the solidarity and commitment that Cuba is not alone."

Although this year the May Day parade changes its traditional scenario -commented the union leader-, the Malecon is a space of historical and multitudinous mobilizations, many of them led by Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro Ruz to demonstrate Cuba's right to its sovereignty and independence, including those held to demand the return of the child Elián González and the five heroes who spent many years in US prisons for defending their country against terrorist attacks.



President Diaz Canel, Raul Castro, and other leaders of Cuba. Photo: Syara Salado Massip

According to the union leader, this celebration of the world proletariat is dedicated to the daily heroism of the Cuban people, and to the high responsibility and decisive contribution of the workers to achieve a superior performance of the economy, focused on raising and diversifying food production, the use of idle productive capacities and the increase of foreign exchange income consolidating the transformations demanded today by the socialist state enterprise.

The shortage of fuel in the country prevented the traditional march that takes place every year in the Revolution Square and the main monuments of the country.

To further complicate things on May 1st, there was a risk of a serious storm so the country's authorities decided to postpone the workers' gathering. The day before, on Sunday, April 30, heavy rains and strong winds knocked down trees and affected part of the technical equipment due to be used on May Day, creating the necessity to move all the events to today.

The corporate media took the opportunity to cast the decision to not have a march in the Plaza of the Revolution, where thousands of workers would have to be bussed in from the provinces, as a failure of Cuba, implying that it was a defeat rather than a pragmatic decision based on what is best for the people.

El Pais, The Guardian, and others made it seem that the shortage of gas in Cuba was their fault and not the blockade and the sanctions that are piled up against the island and its ability to function with any normalcy. "A Cuba Without May Day?" a sensationalized New York Times headline read.

Writing on how the corporate media operates, Fidel once explained how they come up with repetitive negative themes about Cuba, creating a conditioned reflex that takes away the capacity for many to think critically about what they are reading.

One thing clear today was that the tens of thousands of Cubans in the streets were anything but defeated.



Photo: Bill Hackwell

The celebrations today also coincide with the 205th anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx, who characterized the exploitation of man as the source of surplus value, the very essence of capitalism and was “one of the paradigms of the struggle against domination; who believed in the decisive and radical social struggle to obtain freedom for all, and believed in the need for political institutions of the workers to make proletarian policies,” as Cuban philosopher Fernando Martínez Heredia described him.

“He deserves honor as he stood by the side of the vulnerable ones,” Jose Marti wrote in 1883 after hearing about his death.

This year there was no tight parade through the Plaza of the Revolution, but the world witnessed again that the Cuban people can stand against any adversity as long as they remain united, defending causes for justice and fighting from their space for a more just Cuba. There is much work ahead, but today was a day of pride.

Source: [Resumen Latinoamericano - English](#) with contributions from Cuba en Resumen

