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Why Cuba leads the world in confronting climate crisis

written by Scott Scheffer
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Urban farmers harvest carrots in Havana. Making cities more self-sufficient in food production has cut down on dangerous emissions.

COP28, the next annual international conference where countries plan and set goals to limit the emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs), will take place in Dubai from Nov. 30 through Dec. 12. Increasingly, the conferences have come under the control of major capitalist powers – particularly the U.S.

Global South countries have barely contributed to the warming of the atmosphere, but are most vulnerable. COP27 in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt, was something of a battleground between the representatives from Africa, Asia and Latin America, and the imperialist powers of Europe, Japan and especially the United States.

The details of what transpires in Dubai will be analyzed in the weeks that follow, but this is a great time for serious climate change activists to take a good look at the stellar performance of socialist Cuba in the struggle to save the planet.

It is an absolute crime that the mainstream media has ignored what can be accomplished in the global effort to mitigate the crisis of global warming without the influence of giant energy corporations and banks.

Cuba's planned economy has enabled the island – even as the U.S. blockade hinders its ability to trade – to keep sustainability as a major priority for years. This is based on Fidel Castro's keen understanding of the harm of capitalist industry's emissions and the vulnerability of the underdeveloped countries of the world – the Global South. But the revolutionary leader and thinker was aware of the conundrum facing the former colonies in dealing with the destruction of the environment.

In a speech at the 1992 Earth Summit, the Cuban president said: "They have poisoned the seas and rivers, polluted the air, weakened and punctured the ozone layer, saturated the atmosphere with gases which are changing weather conditions with a catastrophic effect we are already beginning to experience.

"The forests are disappearing. The deserts are expanding. Every year billions of tons of fertile soil end up in the sea. Numerous species are becoming extinct.

"It is not possible to blame the Third World countries for this. Yesterday, they were colonies; today, they are nations exploited and pillaged by an unjust international economic order. The solution cannot be to prevent the development of those who need it most."

The Global South needs energy. Because of the poverty from imperialist plunder, much of the world relies on burning wood for heat and for cooking, and access to fossil fuel would be a step in the right direction for development. But even with very

limited access to fossil fuel due to the blockade, Cuba has lowered its emissions and at the same time provided electricity to millions more Cubans.

Workers' government

An Aug. 24 article in the pro-capitalist [Forbes magazine](#) confirms this: "Projects from the University of Leeds, the World Wildlife Fund, the Global Footprint Network, and the Sustainable Development Index show that Cuba is among the leaders in closing the gap between human development and sustainability."

Renewable forms of energy still only account for 4.5% of Cuba's power generation. This amazing achievement happened because there aren't giant energy corporations influencing the workers' government of Cuba.

In 2006 the Cuban government replaced every incandescent light bulb in the country with more efficient fluorescent bulbs. It subsidized modern, more efficient appliances, including 2 million refrigerators, more than 1 million fans, nearly 200,000 air conditioners and a quarter million water pumps. A campaign to replace old water heaters with new models that are run with solar energy is underway now.

During this period, electricity use increased by 142%, but emissions dropped by 14%. The efficiency that accomplished this wouldn't have been possible outside of a workers' run government.

Cuba's transition to urban farming, greatly reducing the need for transportation of food, is even successful in the capital city. The Forbes article quotes economist Sinan Koont, who said, "More than 35,000 hectares of land are being used in urban agriculture in Havana." Cuba's urban farming has become a model for small farmers throughout the Global South.

Cuba is also a world leader in reforestation. At the time of the revolution, only about 14% of the island was forested. That figure is now up to 30.6%.

Internationalism

Given that Global South countries contribute only a tiny fraction of the world's GHG emissions, and their weakened ability to recover from climate catastrophes, the concern for countries saddled with the debt traps of imperialism has rightfully been adaptation – protecting their own populations and recovering from weather related catastrophes.

Mitigation of the global crisis is the responsibility of the biggest polluters. Yet Cuba's internationalist outlook has led this commendable effort to contribute to the effort to save the planet over and above what should be its responsibilities.

Cuban socialism has guided the struggle to adapt to the island's vulnerability to extreme weather and even to mitigate CO2 emissions. These earnest efforts and concern for all humanity puts the U.S. – the world's per capita worst emitter of GHGs — to shame.

Imagine what could be done if Cuba were free of the blockade. It is that example that the imperialist countries fear from Cuba.

Breaking the blockade won't happen without the intervention of the people's movement throughout the world. That is far from out of the question. At the United Nations General Assembly, 187 countries voted to end the blockade. Only two, the U.S. and its client apartheid state of Israel, voted to keep the Trump/Biden warfare against Cuba in place.

More than 100 entities, including city councils in NYC, Chicago, Baltimore, Detroit and others, and scores of union locals and labor councils, have passed resolutions calling on Joe Biden to take Cuba off the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism and end the blockade.

The United Nations has no power of enforcement. Only a powerful people's

movement can and will make it happen.

