

# China and Cuba: A relationship of solidarity, friendship and cooperation

written by Struggle - La Lucha

October 24, 2022



We are very pleased to publish below an interview with Carlos Miguel Pereira Hernández, Cuba's ambassador to China, conducted by People's Daily and [published](#) in Chinese on 13 October. The unabridged English translation has

been provided to us by the Cuban Embassy in Beijing.

Timed to coincide with the 62nd anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Cuba and the People's Republic of China, the interview gives an overview of the history and contemporary reality of relations between the two countries.

Noting that revolutionary Cuba was the first country in the Western hemisphere to extend diplomatic recognition to the People's Republic of China – in 1960, just a year after the 26th of July Movement came to power – Pereira references the role played by Chinese immigrants in Cuba's independence struggle. He points out that Cuba and China consider themselves “mutual referents in the construction of socialism with our own characteristics” and notes that President Miguel Díaz-Canel describes Cuba-China ties as “paradigmatic”, and President Xi Jinping describes them as those of “good friends, good comrades and good brothers”.

Describing the cooperation between China and Cuba fields in a vast array of fields, Comrade Pereira expresses confidence that the relationship will continue to deepen.

- [\*Friends of Socialist China\*](#)

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***This year marks the 62nd anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Cuba, how do you assess the fraternal friendship between the two countries? What are your specific plans to further promote economic, trade and people-to-people exchanges between the two countries?***

Relations between Cuba and China were made official on September 28, 1960, a formal step after the announcement by Commander in Chief Fidel Castro a few days earlier in front of more than a million Cubans, in the context of the historic First

Declaration of Havana, to recognize the New China and rescind ties with Taiwan. That just decision was born of the political and popular will that have accompanied our relations throughout these 62 years.

The nascent Cuban Revolution definitively broke with the Monroe Doctrine and blind obedience to Washington, allowing Cuba to become the first country in the entire Western Hemisphere to establish ties with New China. We are honored to have made that modest contribution as one of the first manifestations of independence from our foreign policy.

The historical foundations and deep bonds of friendship between our peoples go back to the arrival of those first Chinese immigrants 175 years ago, who also had an outstanding and glorious participation in our struggles for independence.

Throughout these years of uninterrupted relations, Cuba has had the historic privilege of always being in the front row in promoting exchanges with China. Our relations represent a model of cooperation based on equality, respect and mutual benefit. We consider ourselves mutual referents in the construction of socialism with our own characteristics and on that basis, we carry out a broad and systematic exchange of experiences.

Our bilateral relations, as we reach the 62nd anniversary of diplomatic relations, are accurate and broadly in line with the definitions given in this regard by our top leaders. In the words of President Miguel Díaz-Canel, the ties between Cuba and China are paradigmatic, and President Xi Jinping has described our bonds as those of good friends, good comrades and good brothers.

The special character of our bilateral ties is a historic consensus, which reaches today an unprecedented solidity, by virtue of the high level of political mutual trust, the broad coincidence of positions in the international arena and the multidimensional and full development of our ties.

In the last two years, even in the midst of the pandemic, our ties continued to grow, the mechanisms of inter-party dialogue, government, parliamentarians and thus of various sectors, continued to strengthen in pursuit of coordination and cooperation both bilaterally and in international organizations.

It can be said that Cuba and China have been fraternal countries, which have supported each other on core issues and, above all, in difficult times. Since our official ties were established, Cuba has always shown its unequivocal support for the “One China” policy, and the firm rejection of any action that threatens China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. For our part, we have counted on the sustained support from the Chinese government and people, and in particular, in our fight against U.S. blockade, which continues to intensify even in times of pandemic.

On September 24, in the framework of the 77th Session of the General Debate of the United Nations, State Councilor and Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, in a historic and unprecedented pronouncement, requested for the first time in that important scenario, the lifting and immediate end of the genocidal blockade policy. This transcendental support from China becomes a new milestone in our bilateral relations that ratifies the special and exceptional character of our ties, as well as mutual support on core issues.

Our ties have had a multidimensional growth, including the integral development of economic, commercial and financial ties. Despite the differences in terms of volume and productive capacity, the complementarity of our economies and the excellent political environment in which they develop, confirm the enormous potential to be exploited in this area.

Today, our ties cover almost all sectors of the economy of both countries. China continues to be Cuba’s second largest trading partner, a fundamental source of financing on favorable terms and the main technological supplier for the execution of projects prioritized for the economic and social development of our country.

China has also consolidated as the main market for our exports of goods. Sugar, nickel, rum and tobacco are emblematic products with great acceptance and demand in the Chinese market, for their good quality and recognition in the international market. New items have been added in recent years and others represent very promising prospects such as lobster, white and sea shrimp, coffee, honey and biotechnology products.

Likewise, we are inserted in new business models such as cross-border electronic commerce, through the creation of the Cuban Pavilion "Cuban Excellences" on JD.com Group platform. This has also been part of strategy of deepening our relations with China and a new milestone in bilateral cooperation, allowing the introduction of more Cuban products to this market, as well as a greater promotion of Cuba's image, through its tourist and cultural resources.

It is worth mentioning as a milestone in our economic ties, the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding in 2018 and subsequently the Action Plan for the joint construction of the "Belt and Road". Under this initiative, we hope to promote new projects linked to tourism, renewable energies, communications with the Digital Silk Road, health, biotechnology and science and technology.

In this context, an important area for cooperation is foreign investment in which China has much to contribute in the development of Sino-Cuban investments in Cuba, especially in the development of infrastructure such as airports, ports, roads, tourism infrastructure, telecommunications, as well as in projects related to renewable energies, biotechnology and health.

It is also of great interest to promote cooperation in the biotechnology sector between Cuban scientific entities and Chinese companies and to promote cooperation in this area, through the models that we are developing today in China, such as joint ventures.

Similarly, and taking into account that China promotes and encourages domestic consumption of high-quality products, we believe that the export of Cuban products to the Asian giant is also an area of potential for cooperation.

Another sector with promise is the export of Cuban medical services. In this regard, our exchanges with Chinese counterparts have transcended broad interests in cooperating in specialties such as oncology, ophthalmology, primary health care, health and wellness tourism and the possibility of applying the innovative products of Cuban biotechnology, which have great impact and recognition at the international level.

People-to-people exchanges are fluid and close, highlighting the close historical and cultural links. There is an increasing interest in Cuba to know the culture and language of China, while, to cite just two examples, the learning of the Spanish language and Cuban salsa, are gaining more and more followers in China. On the other hand, Cuba is a safe destination and could be the gateway for Chinese tourism to the Caribbean.

***The Communist Party of China and the Communist Party of Cuba are the leading nucleus of their countries' respective socialist causes. How do you see the inter-party exchanges and cooperation between Cuba and China? What do you think is the greatest contribution made by the Communist Party of China to world political civilization in the last decade?***

The relations between the Communist Party of Cuba and the Communist Party are forged on the basis of numerous affinities and consensuses, and also by the common challenge of building socialism based on different national realities, in the midst of a complex international situation characterized by growing unilateralism and the hegemonic attempt to impose on us the patterns and models of others.

The fluid inter-party dialogue throughout these 62 years, together with the frequent

exchange of experiences in the construction of socialism, according to the conditions of each country, constitute essential pillars of the solid mutual trust that exists.

The recent exchanges between the party structures of both countries have been projected towards the implementation of the consensus reached between First Secretary Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez and Secretary General Xi Jinping, from a face-to-face meeting they had in Beijing in 2018 and the two telephone calls held after the beginning of the pandemic.

This year we celebrate the virtual IV Theoretical Seminar between both Communist Parties that strengthens the practice of the exchange of experiences in socialist construction. In this context, the messages of both leaders were relevant, ratifying the utmost importance that both countries attach to strengthening the Parties in pursuit of the consolidation of strategic communication and political trust at the highest level.

On the other hand, the Communist Party of China has been central to the achievements of the New China, so it is of great importance in the international arena, for socialist countries such as Cuba and for left-wing and progressive movements.

The CPC was able to innovate Marxist theory by adjusting it to China's own characteristics, which constitutes a valuable contribution to the study, dissemination and promotion of Marxism in the twenty-first century. The process of "sinicization" of Marxism is an example of the application of materialist dialectics, achieving a socioeconomic model, whose successes are undeniable. The feat of eradicating extreme poverty in China is a tangible demonstration of the accurate leadership of the party organization.

For Cuba, China constitutes a benchmark of the conquests of socialism in modern times, which, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, has managed to

overcome adversities and meet development goals such as the revitalization of the nation.

In this regard, the holding of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of China will be a historic moment, to which we will pay maximum attention and follow-up. Cuba wishes China success in celebrating this momentous event. We are convinced that as a result of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of China we will find a strengthened China, determined to maintain its conquests, to build socialism, and to fulfill its second centennial goal.

The strengthening of inter-party exchange will continue at the end of the XX Congress, because it will be a favorable moment to promote new spaces for bilateral dialogue, based on the exchange of experiences, consultation and support in regional and international forums.



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## **Cuba: 60 Years of the missile crisis**

written by Struggle - La Lucha  
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This October, Cuba remembers the installation of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba, a decision that triggered one of the worst crises of the so-called Cold War. For several days, the world was on the brink of a war with incalculable consequences, which showed the will of the Cuban people to defend their sovereignty at any cost.

Sixty years after the crisis, Resumen Latinoamericano takes a look back at the days of terror in which the world was on the brink of World War III in an unprecedented nuclear conflict.

It isn't possible to understand the crisis without an in-depth analysis of the events in the US policy towards Cuba, which led to the presence of the missiles in Cuba.

The story goes back to 1959, when the Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro overthrew the US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista and emerged as a new social justice paradigm, something Washington was unwilling to tolerate. Its new social and political initiatives put the island in the crosshairs of hostilities between Havana

and the White House, a situation that worsened after the implementation of an agrarian reform, which included the nationalization of US-owned land and businesses.

The United States counter-attacked with a commercial, economic and financial blockade to prevent Cuba from buying or selling products. In this context, the newly born revolution declared itself socialist and had the Soviet Union as its main trading partner and ally amid the Cold War between Moscow and Washington.

On January 3, 1961, the then-President of the United States, Dwight Eisenhower, broke diplomatic relations with the Cuban government. Three months later, more than a thousand military personnel trained and paid by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) invaded the Bay of Pigs in Cuba with the aim of overthrowing the revolutionary government. In less than 72 hours, the Cuban army thwarted their plans, an event that would go down in history as the first great defeat of US imperialism in Latin America.

In 1961, the arrival of J. F. Kennedy to the White House launched the most dynamic period of US diplomacy, a period of failures. The US administration's revengeful spirit was born out of the humiliation suffered by the defeat of the US orchestrated mercenary invasion. Cuba became a real obsession for Kennedy.

At the end of that year, Operation Mongoose was born, the biggest subversive plan orchestrated against Cuba from Washington, which was due to end with the direct military intervention on the island by the US Armed Forces in October 1962.

When Soviet intelligence (KGB) became aware of the plans, it offered the island to deploy missiles as a deterrent-defensive measure. However, Moscow had another interest in the background. In 1962, the US had installed a series of nuclear ballistic missiles called Jupiter in Turkey, capable of hitting Soviet territory within minutes in the event of a confrontation.

The proposal took Fidel by surprise. He didn't want to accept at first, because of the risk it represented and because he didn't want Cuba to be seen as a Soviet military base. After much thought, the revolutionary government agreed to accept the installation of the rockets under five conditions: that the United States lift the blockade, withdraw from the Guantanamo Naval Base, and put an end to pirate attacks, subversive activities, and violations of Cuban airspace.

The eyes of the world were on the island and Kennedy was beginning to feel a heavy pressure on his shoulders. He knew that the US people wouldn't accept a nuclear conflict with the island, a war that would have been unleashed just because of his whim of wanting to subjugate the island. His chances for reelection were at stake, and it was then that he negotiated with Moscow the withdrawal of the rockets.

Cuba was excluded from the negotiations and its demands were ignored. Cowardly, the then-leader of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, decided to accede to Kennedy's request, and the missiles were dismantled over three weeks.

In an interview years later, Fidel stated that the island did not feel betrayed but very irritated and upset. "We think it was completely wrong. To exchange Cuba's rockets for Turkey's was immoral and unacceptable. Withdraw the rockets without discussing it with us beforehand was also wrong. I understand that there was a situation of great tension, of danger, but it was unacceptable to decide to withdraw the projectiles without consulting Cuba," he said.

The island would not have objected, but "we would have demanded conditions. Khrushchev could have said he would withdraw the missiles if there were guarantees for Cuba. But this didn't happen. The Guantanamo Base remained there, as well as the pirate attacks, the dirty war, the subversive plans. Everything remained," he concluded.

The Cold War lasted until 1991, with the dissolution of the USSR. Kennedy was

assassinated in 1963. Khrushchev died in 1971 at the age of 77. Neither witnessed the end of the conflict that almost led the world to disaster. Meanwhile, Cuba has been living for 60 years under the impact of an obsolete and failed policy. It is hard for us to not think about where we would be today if the new blockade at the time had been ended as part of the deal for removing the missiles.

Source: [Resumen Latinoamericano - US](#)



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## **On Nov 3 at the UN: The people say yes, will Biden say no?**

written by Struggle - La Lucha

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On Nov. 3, the United Nations General Assembly will vote YES for ending the U.S. economic, commercial and financial blockade of Cuba. Since the resolution was first introduced in 1992, 30 years ago, the global community of 193 countries has rejected the U.S. asphyxiation, maximum-pressure regime-change economic war waged against Cuba, its government, and its 11 million people.

Not surprisingly, the U.S. is expected to once again vote “no” along with apartheid-state Israel. Only once, in 2016 during President Obama’s last term, did the U.S. abstain, making the total 191 in favor of and none opposed to ending the blockade of Cuba. Cheers rang out, breaking the UN’s decorum.

The U.S. insists on maintaining the unilateral economic war against its much smaller island neighbor to quash its rebelliousness by starving the Cuban people through “adroit and inconspicuous” methods as planned in the [April 6, 1960, State Department Mallory-Rubottom memo](#). However, much has changed in the 30 years since 1992.

First, Senator Marco Rubio, representing a small pro-blockade coterie in Congress,

can no longer claim he speaks for Cuban Americans. Thirty years ago, Miami was a dangerous place for supporters of the Cuban Revolution and a center of struggle over Cuban parental rights for six-year-old Elian Gonzalez. In 1998 Miami was the site of the arrest of the Cuban 5 heroes, with screaming headlines falsely maligning them as Cuban spies.

For the past two years, however, on the last Sunday of every month, a movement led by Cuban Americans calls for the U.S. blockade to end and instead build bridges of love, "Puentes de Amor." The car and bike caravans rally and drive through Miami streets, even down Calle Ocho, the iconic center of Cuban Miami. Into the third year, it continues. These activities are replicated throughout the Cuban diaspora and in cities across the U.S. and Canada.

Highlighting this development, Cuban Americans plan to lead a rally and march to the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in New York City on October 29, the Saturday before the upcoming debate on Nov. 2 and vote on Nov. 3. The demands of the march are: End the blockade, remove Cuba from the State Department's arbitrary list of "State Sponsors of Terrorism," and end all U.S. anti-Cuba economic and travel sanctions.

Second, the Puentes de Amor movement sparked "last Sunday" ongoing, coordinated solidarity activities in cities across the U.S., Canada and around the world. In addition to Miami, Bloomington, Indiana; Milwaukee; Minneapolis; Chicago; Hartford, Connecticut; Boston; Seattle; Portland, Oregon.; Albany and New York City; Los Angeles; Albuquerque; Phoenix and more set aside that weekend for activities calling for the U.S. blockade to end.

### **The people of the U.S. vote YES!**

Yet when Biden's administration votes against Cuba's resolution on Nov. 3, the United States government will falsely claim to represent the people of the U.S. This

is no longer true. More than 41 million U.S. residents voted YES to end the blockade through resolutions from elected city councils, county commissions, state legislatures, school boards and labor organizations.

A new round of resolutions will specifically call for the State Department and president to remove Cuba from the spurious List of State Sponsors of Terrorism. Cuba has been the target, not the sponsor, of terrorism organized in and by the United States since its 1959 revolution. The reality is that Cuba sponsors international literacy and health care, as shown from Haiti fighting cholera to Liberia fighting Ebola, to COVID-19 Henry Reeve Brigades in more than 50 countries. In the words of Cuba's national hero, Jose Marti, Cuba acts with all for the good of all.

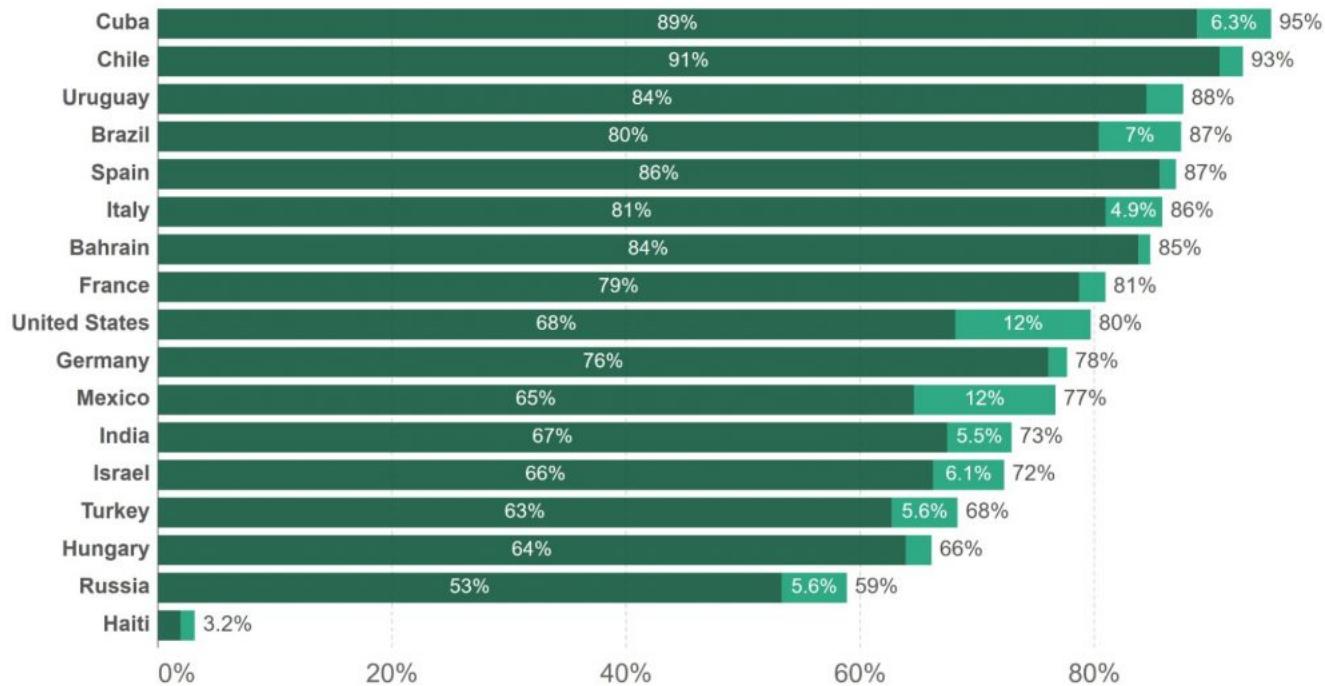
Support for revolutionary Cuba's road, independent of the U.S. "backyard" or the Monroe Doctrine claiming all of the Americas for the settler-colonial U.S., is shown in the generosity of contributors in the U.S. When Cuba developed its own effective vaccines despite the U.S. measures blocking raw materials and syringes, hundreds of thousands of dollars were collected to send six million syringes. Every dollar and every syringe was a U.S. vote for ending the U.S. blockade. Cuba's accomplishment is undeniable and measurable.

Look at this table of vaccination rates. Compare Cuba with Haiti.

# Share of people vaccinated against COVID-19, Oct 15, 2022

Our World  
in Data

■ Share of people with a complete initial protocol ■ Share of people only partly vaccinated



Source: Official data collated by Our World in Data

CC BY

Note: Alternative definitions of a full vaccination, e.g. having been infected with SARS-CoV-2 and having 1 dose of a 2-dose protocol, are ignored to maximize comparability between countries.

As directed in the 1960 Mallory-Rubottom State Department memo, the U.S. war on Cuba is “adroit and inconspicuous.” In the era of fake news, manipulation of images and social media bots, the U.S. war machine employs powerful media tools to obscure the truth about many developments, including Cuba. Going to Cuba, seeing and experiencing it personally, and meeting Cuban people is an important way to learn. But for those of us who have traveled to Cuba and live in the United States, it is our responsibility to act and not stop until the U.S. government fully normalizes respectful relations with Cuba.



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# Did Marco Rubio bite off more than he can chew?

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Florida Sen. Marco Rubio may have overstepped himself. He must have considered it a midterm election campaign stunt to rile up the rabid anti-Cuba electors in his state or to impress his benefactors.

On August 5, Rubio publicly announced from a senatorial bully pulpit his letter to the FBI accusing illegalities and requesting an investigation of the high school teacher, U.S. military veteran, and Cuban American Carlos Lazo and the remarkable movement that has grown around him appropriately named Puentes de Amor, Bridges of Love.

Let's remember Lazo's alleged crime is bringing powdered milk and pediatric liver transplant medicine for Cuban children. In so doing, the intentional harm done to Cuban families by the U.S. extraterritorial blockade is brought into plain view. One

might think that Rubio, instead of multiplying his hate against Cuba, would be paying a little more attention to his Floridian constituents who remain without water and electricity after the devastation they are suffering from Hurricane Ian.

On Oct. 11, the Cuban solidarity group and fourteen individuals responded with force by issuing a letter to the U.S. Senate Ethics Committee requesting an investigation of Rubio's defamation campaign. Most are longtime Florida residents and Rubio's constituents.

The letter cites the Senate Ethics Manual, which "condemns 'improper conduct which may reflect upon the Senate.' ...

"Senator Rubio's conduct harkens back to the dark era of McCarthyism, where the chambers of the Senate were used by its members to target, harass, defame, silence, persecute and imprison citizens whose political and policy views differed from Senators like Joseph McCarthy or Marco Rubio."

Rubio is a self-righteous advocate for starving the Cuban people into relinquishing their sovereignty through an economic war. However, support for this opinion is dwindling in the Cuban-American community in Florida and throughout the U.S. For more than two years, Puentes de Amor has conducted monthly, public, bike and car caravans in Miami, calling for the U.S. blockade on Cuba to end.

These caravans began after Lazo and others rode bikes from Washington State to Washington, D.C., carrying this same message in 2020, inspiring other cities to do it as well. Rubio is no longer the unchallenged spokesperson for Cubans living in the U.S. Many who hid their disagreement out of fear for the Miami terror campaigns of the past are no longer afraid.

A press statement announcing the complaint is on the [ACERE.org](http://ACERE.org) website. The full text of the complaint can be found [here](#). For anyone interested in signing the

complaint, please fill out [this form](#).



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# Cuba: A tale of two hurricanes

written by Struggle - La Lucha

October 24, 2022

Ernest Hemingway learned in Cuba that the best way to get through a hurricane is to have your ears tuned to a battery-powered radio and keep your hands busy with a bottle of rum and a hammer to nail down doors and windows. The American writer appropriated the typical jargon of Cuban meteorologists and fishermen who speak of “the sea” in the feminine and of the hurricane as a demon or evil sorcerer, and who, when a storm leaves the island, usually say that “it entered in the channel” or that “it crossed the land.”

From the clashes with the cyclones and the turbulent waters came that jewel of literature, *The Old Man and the Sea*, which made William Faulkner, another giant, exclaim that Hemingway had found God.

On an island located at the crossroads of the winds, it is impossible

not to live with the culture of hurricanes that have existed in the Antilles since the most remote evidence of life, some 6,000 years before Christ. The Taínos, Indigenous Cubans, gave the phenomenon its name and drew a spiral to represent the hurricane, a rotating symbol of the wind, which could be embodied in a monstrous serpent capable of wrapping the entire universe in its body.

In both reality and mythology, the hurricane has produced “tremendous fantasies” alike, in the words of the greatest Cuban novelist, Alejo Carpentier, who was inspired by the passage of the 1927 meteor over Havana to write some passages for his novel *Ecce-Yamba - O!* The storm, Carpentier wrote, caused the movement of “houses, intact, several kilometers from their foundations; schooners pulled out of the water, and left on a street corner; granite statues, decapitated from a chopping block; mortuary cars, paraded by the wind along squares and avenues, as if guided by ghost coachmen and, to top it off, a rail torn from a track, raised in weight, and thrown on the trunk of a royal palm with such violence, that it was embedded in the wood, like the arms of a cross.”

There are no significant differences between that description and what we have witnessed again in Cuba. Hurricane Ian left three dead and more than 89,000 homes affected in the province of Pinar del Río, caused the destruction of thousands of hectares of crops, led to trees and street lighting poles falling everywhere, left the country in total darkness for hours and with thousands of stories that turn anything told by two literary geniuses like Hemingway and Carpentier into pale tales.

The destruction can have infinite variations, but the hurricane is one

of the few things that has not changed in thousands of years for the people of the Antilles. Whatever it may be called and whatever maybe be the strength of its fury, both the ancient and modern worlds have considered it a living creature that comes and goes over time and is not always cruel. When the excesses do not occur, the waters and the winds cool the summer heat and benefit agriculture, and everyone is happy.

However, this will be the first time that such a well known and recurrent natural phenomenon passes through Cuba accompanied by another equal or greater destructive force that has been created artificially in the new digital laboratories and is capable of such an evil that our Taíno ancestors could not have foreseen it.

While gusts of wind of more than 200 kilometers per hour blew in the north of Pinar del Río, more than 37,000 accounts on Twitter replicated the hashtag *#CubaPaLaCalle* (Cuba to the streets), with calls for protests, roadblocks, assaults on government institutions, sabotage, and terrorism, and with instructions on how to prepare homemade bombs and Molotov cocktails. Less than 2 percent of the users who participated in this virtual mobilization were in Cuba. Most of those who made the call to “fire up” the streets in Cuba were connected to American technology platforms and did so while hundreds of kilometers away from the country that remained in darkness. Perhaps some on the island kept their battery-powered radio. Still, what millions of Cubans had in the palm of their hands was not a bottle of Hemingway’s rum but a cellphone connected to the internet (the country of 11 million inhabitants has 7.5 million people with access to social media).

Let's do an exercise. Imagine this panorama: you are anguished with the here and now. You have no electricity and no drinking water. What little food you have bought with great difficulty and kept refrigerated will go bad in no time. You don't know what has happened to your family that lives in the western provinces, where the damage is apocalyptic. You have no idea how long this new crisis will last. Daily life before the hurricane was already desperate due to the economic blockade imposed by the United States, inflation, and shortages being faced by Cubans. Still, you see on your mobile that "everyone" (on the internet, of course) seems to be doing well and has plenty, while thousands of people on social media (and their trolls) shout that the culprit of your misfortune is the communist government. Your only light source is the mobile screen, which works like Plato's allegory of the cave: you sit with your back to a flaming fire while virtual figures pass between you and the bonfire. You only see the movements of their shadows projected on the walls of the cave, and those shadows whisper the solution to your desperate reality: *#CubaPaLaCalle*.

At no other time in history has an immigrant minority had so much economic, media, and technological power to try to sink their country with their relatives still in Cuba before even trying to lend a hand in the midst of a national tragedy. What Mexican who lives in the United States puts political differences above helping their relatives after an earthquake? Why don't Salvadorans or Guatemalans who live abroad do it now that Hurricane Julia has devastated Central America.

It is unprecedented and unheard of that the hurricane of a lifetime, and the hurricane of virtual hatred can arrive simultaneously, but that is just what happened in Cuba.

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This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#) and was first published on [La Jornada](#). Rosa Miriam Elizalde is a Cuban journalist and founder of the site Cubadebate. She is vice president of both the Union of Cuban Journalists (UPEC) and the Latin American Federation of Journalists (FELAP). She has written and co-written several books including *Jineteros en la Habana* and *Our Chavez*. She has received the Juan Gualberto Gómez National Prize for Journalism on multiple occasions for her outstanding work. She is currently a weekly columnist for La Jornada of Mexico City.



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# Cuba in the eye of Washington's hurricane

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Hurricane Ian [lashed](#) at western Cuba on September 27, 2022. I waited desperately for a phone call from my friends in Puerto Esperanza, a small fishing village on the northern coast of Pinar del Río. Over a crackling phone line, my friends told me that the hurricane had ripped off the roofs of their houses and had cut their electricity supply. But they were safe. What comes next for them and their recovery from the loss and devastation caused by the hurricane is uncertain under the weight of a [U.S. blockade](#) that is now being overseen by U.S. President Joe Biden.

Since the Cuban Revolution [triumphed](#) in 1959, the United States has been at odds with the island's independent path. This led to the [start](#) of a blockade on all trading activities between Cuba and the United States in February 1962, and the continued [imposition](#) of the blockade has put maximum pressure on the 11 million people who live on the island. Cubans have been resilient while dealing with these sanctions, which is "[the longest embargo in modern history](#)." However, over the past

five years, the United States has tightened its blockade by putting in place [243 new sanctions](#), reversing the process of normalization that [began](#) under former U.S. President Barack Obama in 2014 (and culminated in Obama's [visit](#) to Cuba in 2016). Despite Biden's [campaign](#) promise to ensure a more balanced foreign policy toward Cuba, compared to the approach followed by former President Donald Trump, Biden has [increased](#) pressure on the country.

## Maximum pressure

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, Cuba was fortunate to have a robust public health care system and an innovative biotechnological industry. However, under Trump—and later Biden—sanctions put enormous pressure on Cuba's ability to respond to the pandemic. As the number of Delta variant cases grew in Cuba, its only oxygen plant was rendered [nonoperational](#) due to the inability of the plant's technicians to import spare parts because of the U.S. blockade. As thousands of Cuban patients gasped for air, oxygen had to be rationed. Washington [refused](#) to make an exception. Cuban scientists [created](#) five vaccine candidates; only after most Cubans were vaccinated with these vaccines did Washington make an [offer](#) of donating U.S.-made vaccines to Cuba.

Back in 2017, the United States said that the Cuban government had used sonic weapons to attack its embassy—a [phenomenon](#) called “Havana syndrome”—which was shown to be untrue. Nonetheless, it served as a pretext for the United States to freeze relations with Cuba. For example, [tourism](#) began to collapse, and the island lost revenue as [more than 600,000](#) people from the United States stopped traveling to Cuba annually. The U.S. government's sanctions under Trump led to [Western Union's](#) seizing operations on the island in 2020, cutting off the ability of families to send and receive remittances. Visa services were [suspended](#) by the U.S. Embassy in Havana, and the [largest](#) wave of irregular migration since 1980 began as Cubans were forced to trek through Central America or across the Florida Straits to arrive in

the United States.

Cubans suffered through this tightened blockade with the U.S. offering no respite. The gross domestic product of the country began to [shrink](#) as the government and other entities could no longer purchase food, medicine, and oil because banks refused to handle these basic commercial transactions.

### **Using pain to put more pressure**

On July 11, 2021, people across Cuba took to the streets to [protest](#) the difficult living conditions due to the scarcity brewed by the sanctions imposed by Washington. The U.S. government, from [Biden](#) to the lowest employee at the U.S. Embassy in Havana, did not waste any time before making a statement about the need to change the government in Cuba in response to the protests. They [tried](#) to spin the Cuban people's protests over sanctions-related deprivation into an uprising for regime change, a core [demand](#) of a Miami mafia of Cuban exiles. The Cuban government was able to withstand that attempt by being as [forthright](#) as possible with the people about the range of problems that they face.

The year 2022 has not been any easier for the Cuban people. In August, the national energy grid began to [suffer](#) major signs of decay after years without repairs or renovations. Power cuts, a stark reminder of the "special period" during the 1990s when Cuba faced a [similar](#) power situation, have become ever-present from one end of the island to the other. Some provinces go without electricity for eight to ten hours. Then came the [explosion](#) of the Matanzas oil storage facility that left Cuba without urgently needed fuel and resulted in dozens dying while fighting the fire that raged on for five days. While Mexico and Venezuela immediately sent firefighters and equipment, the United States could only contribute with technical advice over the phone despite the [call](#) by U.S. activists, clergy, and intellectuals to provide more sizable aid.

Hurricane Ian's assault on the island on September 27, 2022, has left behind [devastation](#), with more than [50,000 homes damaged](#), Cuba's tobacco crop deeply impacted, and its electricity grid damaged (although it is functional again for now).

## **Washington's rigidity**

[All eyes turned to Washington](#)—not only to see whether it would send aid, which would be welcome, but also if it would [remove](#) Cuba from the state sponsors of terrorism list and end the sanctions. Cuba's inclusion on the list had been a [last-minute decision](#) made by Trump as he was leaving the White House (despite Cuba's [recognized](#) role in the Colombian peace process). These measures mean that banks in the United States and elsewhere are reluctant to process any financial transactions, including humanitarian donations, for the island. The United States has a mixed record regarding humanitarian aid to Cuba.

Rather than lift the sanctions even for a limited period, the U.S. government sat back and watched as mysterious forces from Miami unleashed a torrent of Facebook and WhatsApp messages to drive desperate Cubans onto the street. In Havana, a few hundred people [spread](#) across the city banged pots and pans and demanded water, electricity, and food. Foreign journalists eagerly expected scenes of heavy repression and mass arrests, but this time Cuba's response was one closest to its political tradition. Leaders of the Communist Party began to arrive at protests to speak to the people. Angel Arzuaga Reyes, responsible for the party's international relations department, while speaking of his experience in the Diez de Octubre neighborhood, said that in those tense moments, promises or immediate solutions couldn't be made, but explanations and information could be given to all those protesting.

The Cuban people are not the kind to give up easily and have a history of resilience. Many Cubans are facing the crisis by laughing and fighting through it. Walking in

Havana only a few days after the hurricane, the signs of recovery were clear. Brigades of electricians working nonstop reestablished power back in record time and volunteers have cleaned most of the city leaving very little trace of Hurricane Ian's destruction. After his fourth visit to Pinar del Río since September 27, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, surrounded by an anxious crowd, said, "what we can't do is surrender or remain with our arms crossed." There is yet much to do, but Cubans are determined to overcome all obstacles that come their way.

*This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#). Manolo De Los Santos is the co-executive director of the [People's Forum](#) and is a researcher at [Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research](#). He co-edited, most recently, *Viviremos: Venezuela vs. Hybrid War* ([LeftWord Books/1804 Books](#), 2020) and *Comrade of the Revolution: Selected Speeches of Fidel Castro* ([LeftWord Books/1804 Books](#), 2021). He is a co-coordinator of the [People's Summit for Democracy](#).*



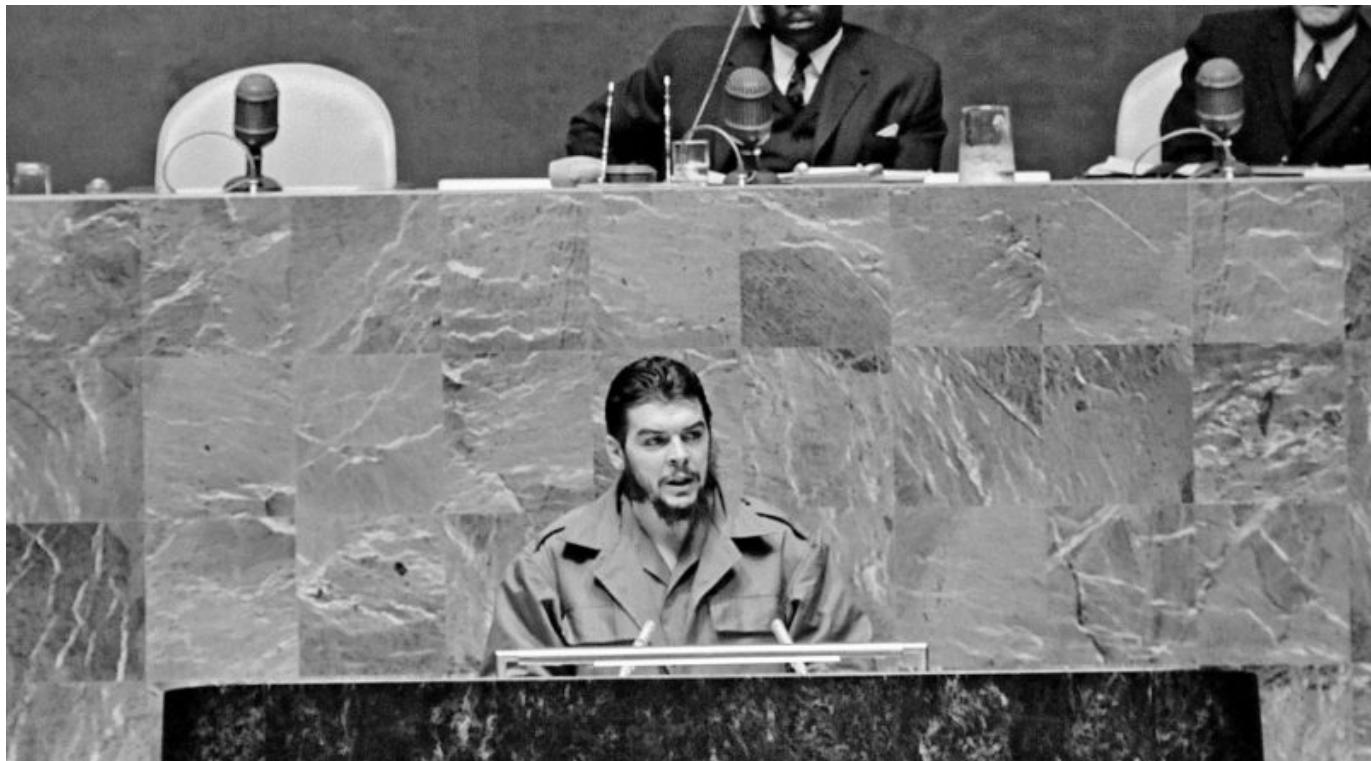
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**¡PATRIA O MUERTE! Che Guevara's**

# 1964 UN speech

written by Struggle-La Lucha

October 24, 2022



Mr. President;

Distinguished delegates:

The delegation of Cuba to this Assembly, first of all, is pleased to fulfill the agreeable duty of welcoming the addition of three new nations to the important number of those that discuss the problems of the world here. We, therefore, greet, in the persons of their presidents and prime ministers, the peoples of Zambia, Malawi, and Malta, and express the hope that from the outset these countries will be added to the group of Nonaligned countries that struggle against imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism.

We also wish to convey our congratulations to the president of this Assembly [Alex Quaison-Sackey of Ghana], whose elevation to so high a post is of special significance since it reflects this new historic stage of resounding triumphs for the peoples of Africa, who up until recently were subject to the colonial system of imperialism. Today, in their immense majority these peoples have become sovereign states through the legitimate exercise of their self-determination. The final hour of colonialism has struck, and millions of inhabitants of Africa, Asia, and Latin America rise to meet a new life and demand their unrestricted right to self-determination and to the independent development of their nations.

We wish you, Mr. President, the greatest success in the tasks entrusted to you by the member states.

Cuba comes here to state its position on the most important points of controversy and will do so with the full sense of responsibility that the use of this rostrum implies, while at the same time fulfilling the unavoidable duty of speaking clearly and frankly.

We would like to see this Assembly shake itself out of complacency and move forward. We would like to see the committees begin their work and not stop at the first confrontation. Imperialism wants to turn this meeting into a pointless oratorical tournament, instead of solving the serious problems of the world. We must prevent it from doing so. This session of the Assembly should not be remembered in the future solely by the number 19 that identifies it. Our efforts are directed to that end.

We feel that we have the right and the obligation to do so because our country is one of the most constant points of friction. It is one of the places where the principles upholding the right of small countries to sovereignty are put to the test day by day, minute by minute. At the same time, our country is one of the trenches of freedom in the world, situated a few steps away from U.S. imperialism, showing by its actions, its daily example, that in the present conditions of humanity the peoples can liberate

themselves and can keep themselves free.

Of course, there now exists a socialist camp that becomes stronger day by day and has more powerful weapons of struggle. But additional conditions are required for survival: the maintenance of internal unity, faith in one's own destiny, and the irrevocable decision to fight to the death for the defense of one's country and revolution. These conditions, distinguished delegates, exist in Cuba.

Of all the burning problems to be dealt with by this Assembly, one of special significance for us, and one whose solution we feel must be found first — so as to leave no doubt in the minds of anyone — is that of peaceful coexistence among states with different economic and social systems. Much progress has been made in the world in this field. But imperialism, particularly U.S. imperialism, has attempted to make the world believe that peaceful coexistence is the exclusive right of the earth's great powers. We say here what our president said in Cairo, and what later was expressed in the declaration of the Second Conference of Heads of State or Government of Nonaligned Countries: that peaceful coexistence cannot be limited to the powerful countries if we want to ensure world peace. Peaceful coexistence must be exercised among all states, regardless of size, regardless of the previous historical relations that linked them, and regardless of the problems that may arise among some of them at a given moment.

At present, the type of peaceful coexistence to which we aspire is often violated. Merely because the Kingdom of Cambodia maintained a neutral attitude and did not bow to the machinations of U.S. imperialism, it has been subjected to all kinds of treacherous and brutal attacks from the Yankee bases in South Vietnam.

Laos, a divided country, has also been the object of imperialist aggression of every kind. Its people have been massacred from the air. The conventions concluded at Geneva have been violated, and part of its territory is in constant danger of cowardly attacks by imperialist forces.

The Democratic Republic of Vietnam knows all these histories of aggression as do few nations on earth. It has once again seen its frontier violated, has seen enemy bombers and fighter planes attack its installations and U.S. warships, violating territorial waters, attack its naval posts. At this time, the threat hangs over the Democratic Republic of Vietnam that the U.S. warmongers may openly extend into its territory the war that for many years they have been waging against the people of South Vietnam. The Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China have given serious warnings to the United States. We are faced with a case in which world peace is in danger and, moreover, the lives of millions of human beings in this part of Asia are constantly threatened and subjected to the whim of the U.S. invader.

Peaceful coexistence has also been brutally put to the test in Cyprus, due to pressures from the Turkish Government and NATO, compelling the people and the government of Cyprus to make a heroic and firm stand in defense of their sovereignty.

In all these parts of the world, imperialism attempts to impose its version of what coexistence should be. It is the oppressed peoples in alliance with the socialist camp that must show them what true coexistence is, and it is the obligation of the United Nations to support them.

We must also state that it is not only in relations among sovereign states that the concept of peaceful coexistence needs to be precisely defined. As Marxists, we have maintained that peaceful coexistence among nations does not encompass coexistence between the exploiters and the exploited, between the oppressors and the oppressed. Furthermore, the right to full independence from all forms of colonial oppression is a fundamental principle of this organization. That is why we express our solidarity with the colonial peoples of so-called Portuguese Guinea, Angola, and Mozambique, who have been massacred for the crime of demanding their freedom. And we are prepared to help them to the extent of our ability in accordance with the

Cairo declaration.

We express our solidarity with the people of Puerto Rico and their great leader, Pedro Albizu Campos, who, in another act of hypocrisy, has been set free at the age of 72, almost unable to speak, paralyzed, after spending a lifetime in jail. Albizu Campos is a symbol of the as-yet unfree but indomitable Latin America. Years and years of prison, almost unbearable pressures in jail, mental torture, solitude, total isolation from his people and his family, the insolence of the conqueror and its lackeys in the land of his birth — nothing broke his will. The delegation of Cuba, on behalf of its people, pays a tribute of admiration and gratitude to a patriot who confers honor upon our America.

The United States for many years has tried to convert Puerto Rico into a model of hybrid culture: the Spanish language with English inflections, the Spanish language with hinges on its backbone — the better to bow down before the Yankee soldier. Puerto Rican soldiers have been used as cannon fodder in imperialist wars, as in Korea, and have even been made to fire at their own brothers, as in the massacre perpetrated by the U.S. Army a few months ago against the unarmed people of Panama — one of the most recent crimes carried out by Yankee imperialism. And yet, despite this assault on their will and their historical destiny, the people of Puerto Rico have preserved their culture, their Latin character, their national feelings, which in themselves give proof of the implacable desire for independence lying within the masses on that Latin American island. We must also warn that the principle of peaceful coexistence does not encompass the right to mock the will of the peoples, as is happening in the case of the so-called British Guiana. There the government of Prime Minister Cheddi Jagan has been the victim of every kind of pressure and maneuver, and independence has been delayed to gain time to find ways to flout the people's will and guarantee the docility of a new government, placed in power by covert means, in order to grant castrated freedom to this country of the Americas. Whatever roads Guiana may be compelled to follow to obtain

independence, the moral and militant support of Cuba goes to its people.<sup>[15]</sup>

Furthermore, we must point out that the islands of Guadalupe and Martinique have been fighting for a long time for self-government without obtaining it. This state of affairs must not continue. Once again we speak out to put the world on guard against what is happening in South Africa. The brutal policy of apartheid is applied before the eyes of the nations of the world. The peoples of Africa are compelled to endure the fact that on the African continent the superiority of one race over another remains official policy, and that in the name of this racial superiority murder is committed with impunity. Can the United Nations do nothing to stop this?

I would like to refer specifically to the painful case of the Congo, unique in the history of the modern world, which shows how, with absolute impunity, with the most insolent cynicism, the rights of peoples can be flouted. The direct reason for all this is the enormous wealth of the Congo, which the imperialist countries want to keep under their control. In the speech he made during his first visit to the United Nations, *compañero* Fidel Castro observed that the whole problem of coexistence among peoples boils down to the wrongful appropriation of other peoples' wealth. He made the following statement: "End the philosophy of plunder and the philosophy of war will be ended as well."

But the philosophy of plunder has not only not been ended, it is stronger than ever. And that is why those who used the name of the United Nations to commit the murder of Lumumba are today, in the name of the defense of the white race, murdering thousands of Congolese. How can we forget the betrayal of the hope that Patrice Lumumba placed in the United Nations? How can we forget the machinations and maneuvers that followed in the wake of the occupation of that country by UN troops, under whose auspices the assassins of this great African patriot acted with impunity? How can we forget, distinguished delegates, that the one who flouted the authority of the UN in the Congo — and not exactly for patriotic

reasons, but rather by virtue of conflicts between imperialists — was Moise Tshombe, who initiated the secession of Katanga with Belgian support? And how can one justify, how can one explain, that at the end of all the United Nations' activities there, Tshombe, dislodged from Katanga, should return as lord and master of the Congo? Who can deny the sad role that the imperialists compelled the United Nations to play?<sup>[16]</sup>

To sum up: dramatic mobilizations were carried out to avoid the secession of Katanga, but today Tshombe is in power, the wealth of the Congo is in imperialist hands — and the expenses have to be paid by the honorable nations. The merchants of war certainly do good business! That is why the government of Cuba supports the just stance of the Soviet Union in refusing to pay the expenses for this crime.

And as if this were not enough, we now have flung in our faces these latest acts that have filled the world with indignation. Who are the perpetrators? Belgian paratroopers, carried by U.S. planes, who took off from British bases. We remember as if it were yesterday that we saw a small country in Europe, a civilized and industrious country, the Kingdom of Belgium, invaded by Hitler's hordes. We were embittered by the knowledge that this small nation was massacred by German imperialism, and we felt affection for its people. But this other side of the imperialist coin was the one that many of us did not see. Perhaps the sons of Belgian patriots who died defending their country's liberty are now murdering in cold blood thousands of Congolese in the name of the white race, just as they suffered under the German heel because their blood was not sufficiently Aryan. Our free eyes open now to new horizons and can see what yesterday, in our condition as colonial slaves, we could not observe: that "Western Civilization" disguises behind its showy facade a picture of hyenas and jackals. That is the only name that can be applied to those who have gone to fulfill such "humanitarian" tasks in the Congo. A carnivorous animal that feeds on unarmed peoples. That is what imperialism does to men. That is what distinguishes the imperial "white man."

All free men of the world must be prepared to avenge the crime of the Congo. Perhaps many of those soldiers, who were turned into sub-humans by imperialist machinery, believe in good faith that they are defending the rights of a superior race. In this Assembly, however, those peoples whose skins are darkened by a different sun, colored by different pigments, constitute the majority. And they fully and clearly understand that the difference between men does not lie in the color of their skin, but in the forms of ownership of the means of production, in the relations of production. The Cuban delegation extends greetings to the peoples of Southern Rhodesia and South-West Africa, oppressed by white colonialist minorities; to the peoples of Basutoland, Bechuanaland, Swaziland, French Somaliland, the Arabs of Palestine, Aden and the Protectorates, Oman; and to all peoples in conflict with imperialism and colonialism. We reaffirm our support to them.

I express also the hope that there will be a just solution to the conflict facing our sister republic of Indonesia in its relations with Malaysia. Mr. President: One of the fundamental themes of this conference is general and complete disarmament. We express our support for general and complete disarmament. Furthermore, we advocate the complete destruction of all thermonuclear devices and we support the holding of a conference of all the nations of the world to make this aspiration of all people a reality. In his statement before this assembly, our prime minister warned that arms races have always led to war. There are new nuclear powers in the world, and the possibilities of a confrontation are growing. We believe that such a conference is necessary to obtain the total destruction of thermonuclear weapons and, as a first step, the total prohibition of tests. At the same time, we have to establish clearly the duty of all countries to respect the present borders of other states and to refrain from engaging in any aggression, even with conventional weapons.

In adding our voice to that of all the peoples of the world who ask for general and complete disarmament, the destruction of all nuclear arsenals, the complete halt to

the building of new thermonuclear devices and of nuclear tests of any kind, we believe it necessary to also stress that the territorial integrity of nations must be respected and the armed hand of imperialism held back, for it is no less dangerous when it uses only conventional weapons. Those who murdered thousands of defenseless citizens of the Congo did not use the atomic bomb. They used conventional weapons. Conventional weapons have also been used by imperialism, causing so many deaths.

Even if the measures advocated here were to become effective and make it unnecessary to mention it, we must point out that we cannot adhere to any regional pact for denuclearization so long as the United States maintains aggressive bases on our own territory, in Puerto Rico, Panama and in other Latin American states where it feels it has the right to place both conventional and nuclear weapons without any restrictions. We feel that we must be able to provide for our own defense in the light of the recent resolution of the Organization of American States against Cuba, on the basis of which an attack may be carried out invoking the Rio Treaty.<sup>[17]</sup> If the conference to which we have just referred were to achieve all these objectives — which, unfortunately, would be difficult — we believe it would be the most important one in the history of humanity. To ensure this it would be necessary for the People's Republic of China to be represented, and that is why a conference of this type must be held. But it would be much simpler for the peoples of the world to recognize the undeniable truth of the existence of the People's Republic of China, whose government is the sole representative of its people, and to give it the seat it deserves, which is, at present, usurped by the gang that controls the province of Taiwan, with U.S. support.

The problem of the representation of China in the United Nations cannot in any way be considered as a case of a new admission to the organization, but rather as the restoration of the legitimate rights of the People's Republic of China.

We must repudiate energetically the “two Chinas” plot. The Chiang Kai-shek gang of Taiwan cannot remain in the United Nations. What we are dealing with, we repeat, is the expulsion of the usurper and the installation of the legitimate representative of the Chinese people.

We also warn against the U.S. Government’s insistence on presenting the problem of the legitimate representation of China in the UN as an “important question,” in order to impose a requirement of a two-thirds majority of members present and voting. The admission of the People’s Republic of China to the United Nations is, in fact, an important question for the entire world, but not for the machinery of the United Nations, where it must constitute a mere question of procedure. In this way justice will be done. Almost as important as attaining justice, however, would be the demonstration, once and for all, that this august Assembly has eyes to see, ears to hear, tongues to speak with and sound criteria for making its decisions. The proliferation of nuclear weapons among the member states of NATO, and especially the possession of these devices of mass destruction by the Federal Republic of Germany, would make the possibility of an agreement on disarmament even more remote, and linked to such an agreement is the problem of the peaceful reunification of Germany. So long as there is no clear understanding, the existence of two Germanys must be recognized: that of the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic. The German problem can be solved only with the direct participation in negotiations of the German Democratic Republic with full rights. We shall only touch on the questions of economic development and international trade that are broadly represented in the agenda. In this very year of 1964 the Geneva conference was held at which a multitude of matters related to these aspects of international relations were dealt with. The warnings and forecasts of our delegation were fully confirmed, to the misfortune of the economically dependent countries.

We wish only to point out that insofar as Cuba is concerned, the United States of America has not implemented the explicit recommendations of that conference, and

recently the U.S. Government also prohibited the sale of medicines to Cuba. By doing so it divested itself, once and for all, of the mask of humanitarianism with which it attempted to disguise the aggressive nature of its blockade against the people of Cuba.

Furthermore, we state once more that the scars left by colonialism that impede the development of the peoples are expressed not only in political relations. The so-called deterioration of the terms of trade is nothing but the result of the unequal exchange between countries producing raw materials and industrial countries, which dominate markets and impose the illusory justice of equal exchange of values.

So long as the economically dependent peoples do not free themselves from the capitalist markets and, in a firm bloc with the socialist countries, impose new relations between the exploited and the exploiters, there will be no solid economic development. In certain cases there will be retrogression, in which the weak countries will fall under the political domination of the imperialists and colonialists.

Finally, distinguished delegates, it must be made clear that in the area of the Caribbean, manoeuvres and preparations for aggression against Cuba are taking place, on the coasts of Nicaragua above all, in Costa Rica as well, in the Panama Canal Zone, on Vieques Island in Puerto Rico, in Florida and possibly in other parts of U.S. territory and perhaps also in Honduras. In these places Cuban mercenaries are training, as well as mercenaries of other nationalities, with a purpose that cannot be the most peaceful one. After a big scandal, the government of Costa Rica — it is said — has ordered the elimination of all training camps of Cuban exiles in that country.

No one knows whether this position is sincere, or whether it is a simple alibi because the mercenaries training there were about to commit some misdeed. We hope that full cognizance will be taken of the real existence of bases for aggression, which we denounced long ago, and that the world will ponder the international responsibility

of the government of a country that authorizes and facilitates the training of mercenaries to attack Cuba. We should note that news of the training of mercenaries in different parts in the Caribbean and the participation of the U.S. Government in such acts is presented as completely natural in the newspapers in the United States. We know of no Latin American voice that has officially protested this. This shows the cynicism with which the U.S. Government moves its pawns.

The sharp foreign ministers of the OAS had eyes to see Cuban emblems and to find “irrefutable” proof in the weapons that the Yankees exhibited in Venezuela, but they do not see the preparations for aggression in the United States, just as they did not hear the voice of President Kennedy, who explicitly declared himself the aggressor against Cuba at Playa Girón [Bay of Pigs invasion of April 1961]. In some cases, it is a blindness provoked by the hatred against our revolution by the ruling classes of the Latin American countries. In others — and these are sadder and more deplorable — it is the product of the dazzling glitter of mammon.

As is well known, after the tremendous commotion of the so-called Caribbean crisis, the United States undertook certain commitments with the Soviet Union. These culminated in the withdrawal of certain types of weapons that the continued acts of aggression of the United States — such as the mercenary attack at Playa Girón and threats of invasion against our homeland — had compelled us to install in Cuba as an act of legitimate and essential defense.

The United States, furthermore, tried to get the UN to inspect our territory. But we emphatically refuse, since Cuba does not recognize the right of the United States, or of anyone else in the world, to determine the type of weapons Cuba may have within its borders.

In this connection, we would abide only by multilateral agreements, with equal obligations for all the parties concerned. As Fidel Castro has said: “So long as the concept of sovereignty exists as the prerogative of nations and of independent

peoples, as a right of all peoples, we will not accept the exclusion of our people from that right. So long as the world is governed by these principles, so long as the world is governed by those concepts that have universal validity because they are universally accepted and recognized by the peoples, we will not accept the attempt to deprive us of any of those rights, and we will renounce none of those rights." The Secretary-General of the United Nations, U Thant, understood our reasons. Nevertheless, the United States attempted to establish a new prerogative, an arbitrary and illegal one: that of violating the airspace of a small country. Thus, we see flying over our country U-2 aircraft and other types of spy planes that, with complete impunity, fly over our airspace. We have made all the necessary warnings for the violations of our airspace to cease, as well as for a halt to the provocations of the U.S. Navy against our sentry posts in the zone of Guantánamo, the buzzing by aircraft of our ships or the ships of other nationalities in international waters, the pirate attacks against ships sailing under different flags, and the infiltration of spies, saboteurs and weapons onto our island.

We want to build socialism. We have declared that we are supporters of those who strive for peace. We have declared ourselves to be within the group of Nonaligned countries, although we are Marxist-Leninists, because the Nonaligned countries, like ourselves, fight imperialism. We want peace. We want to build a better life for our people. That is why we avoid, insofar as possible, falling into the provocations manufactured by the Yankees. But we know the mentality of those who govern them. They want to make us pay a very high price for that peace. We reply that the price cannot go beyond the bounds of dignity.

And Cuba reaffirms once again the right to maintain on its territory the weapons it deems appropriate, and its refusal to recognize the right of any power on earth — no matter how powerful — to violate our soil, our territorial waters, or our airspace.

If in any assembly Cuba assumes obligations of a collective nature, it will fulfill them

to the letter. So long as this does not happen, Cuba maintains all its rights, just as any other nation. In the face of the demands of imperialism, our prime minister laid out the five points necessary for the existence of a secure peace in the Caribbean. They are:

1. A halt to the economic blockade and all economic and trade pressures by the United States, in all parts of the world, against our country.
2. A halt to all subversive activities, launching and landing of weapons and explosives by air and sea, organization of mercenary invasions, infiltration of spies and saboteurs, acts all carried out from the territory of the United States and some accomplice countries.
3. A halt to pirate attacks carried out from existing bases in the United States and Puerto Rico.
4. A halt to all the violations of our airspace and our territorial waters by U.S. aircraft and warships.
5. Withdrawal from the Guantánamo naval base and return of the Cuban territory occupied by the United States."

None of these elementary demands has been met, and our forces are still being provoked from the naval base at Guantánamo. That base has become a nest of thieves and a launching pad for them into our territory. We would tire this Assembly were we to give a detailed account of the large number of provocations of all kinds. Suffice it to say that including the first days of December, the number amounts to 1,323 in 1964 alone. The list covers minor provocations such as violation of the boundary line, launching of objects from the territory controlled by the United States, the commission of acts of sexual exhibitionism by U.S. personnel of both sexes, and verbal insults. It includes others that are more serious, such as shooting

off small caliber weapons, aiming weapons at our territory, and offenses against our national flag. Extremely serious provocations include those of crossing the boundary line and starting fires in installations on the Cuban side, as well as rifle fire. There have been 78 rifle shots this year, with the sorrowful toll of one death: that of Ramón López Peña, a soldier, killed by two shots fired from the U.S. post three and a half kilometers from the coast on the northern boundary. This extremely grave provocation took place at 7:07 p.m. on July 19, 1964, and the prime minister of our government publicly stated on July 26 that if the event were to recur he would give orders for our troops to repel the aggression. At the same time orders were given for the withdrawal of the forward line of Cuban forces to positions farther away from the boundary line and the construction of the necessary fortified positions. One thousand three hundred and twenty-three provocations in 340 days amount to approximately four per day. Only a perfectly disciplined army with a morale such as ours could resist so many hostile acts without losing its self-control.

Forty-seven countries meeting at the Second Conference of Heads of State or Government of Nonaligned Countries in Cairo unanimously agreed:

“Noting with concern that foreign military bases are in practice a means of bringing pressure on nations and retarding their emancipation and development, based on their own ideological, political, economic and cultural ideas, the conference declares its unreserved support to the countries that are seeking to secure the elimination of foreign bases from their territory and calls upon all states maintaining troops and bases in other countries to remove them immediately. The conference considers that the maintenance at Guantánamo (Cuba) of a military base of the United States of America, in defiance of the will of the government and people of Cuba and in defiance of the provisions embodied in the declaration of the Belgrade conference, constitutes a violation of Cuba’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Noting that the Cuban Government expresses its readiness to settle its dispute over

the base at Guantánamo with the United States of America on an equal footing, the conference urges the U.S. Government to open negotiations with the Cuban Government to evacuate their base".

The government of the United States has not responded to this request of the Cairo conference and is attempting to maintain indefinitely by force its occupation of a piece of our territory, from which it carries out acts of aggression such as those detailed earlier.

The Organization of American States — which the people also call the U.S. Ministry of Colonies — condemned us "energetically," even though it had just excluded us from its midst, ordering its members to break off diplomatic and trade relations with Cuba. The OAS authorized aggression against our country at any time and under any pretext, violating the most fundamental international laws, completely disregarding the United Nations. Uruguay, Bolivia, Chile and Mexico opposed that measure, and the government of the United States of Mexico refused to comply with the sanctions that had been approved. Since then we have had no relations with any Latin American countries except Mexico, and this fulfills one of the necessary conditions for direct aggression by imperialism.

We want to make clear once again that our concern for Latin America is based on the ties that unite us: the language we speak, the culture we maintain, and the common master we had. We have no other reason for desiring the liberation of Latin America from the U.S. colonial yoke. If any of the Latin American countries here decide to reestablish relations with Cuba, we would be willing to do so on the basis of equality, and without viewing that recognition of Cuba as a free country in the world to be a gift to our government. We won that recognition with our blood in the days of the liberation struggle. We acquired it with our blood in the defense of our shores against the Yankee invasion.

Although we reject any accusations against us of interference in the internal affairs

of other countries, we cannot deny that we sympathize with those people who strive for their freedom. We must fulfill the obligation of our government and people to state clearly and categorically to the world that we morally support and stand in solidarity with peoples who struggle anywhere in the world to make a reality of the rights of full sovereignty proclaimed in the UN Charter.

It is the United States that intervenes. It has done so historically in Latin America. Since the end of the last century Cuba has experienced this truth; but it has been experienced, too, by Venezuela, Nicaragua, Central America in general, Mexico, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. In recent years, apart from our people, Panama has experienced direct aggression, where the marines in the Canal Zone opened fire in cold blood against the defenseless people; the Dominican Republic, whose coast was violated by the Yankee fleet to avoid an outbreak of the just fury of the people after the death of Trujillo; and Colombia, whose capital was taken by assault as a result of a rebellion provoked by the assassination of Gaitán.<sup>[18]</sup> Covert interventions are carried out through military missions that participate in internal repression, organizing forces designed for that purpose in many countries, and also in coups d'état, which have been repeated so frequently on the Latin American continent during recent years. Concretely, U.S. forces intervened in the repression of the peoples of Venezuela, Colombia and Guatemala, who fought with weapons for their freedom. In Venezuela, not only do U.S. forces advise the army and the police, but they also direct acts of genocide carried out from the air against the peasant population in vast insurgent areas. And the Yankee companies operating there exert pressures of every kind to increase direct interference. The imperialists are preparing to repress the peoples of the Americas and are establishing an International of Crime.

The United States intervenes in Latin America invoking the defense of free institutions. The time will come when this Assembly will acquire greater maturity and demand of the U.S. Government guarantees for the life of the blacks and Latin

Americans who live in that country, most of them U.S. citizens by origin or adoption.

Those who kill their own children and discriminate daily against them because of the color of their skin; those who let the murderers of blacks remain free, protecting them, and furthermore punishing the black population because they demand their legitimate rights as free men — how can those who do this consider themselves guardians of freedom? We understand that today the Assembly is not in a position to ask for explanations of these acts. It must be clearly established, however, that the government of the United States is not the champion of freedom, but rather the perpetrator of exploitation and oppression against the peoples of the world and against a large part of its own population.

To the ambiguous language with which some delegates have described the case of Cuba and the OAS, we reply with clear-cut words and we proclaim that the peoples of Latin America will make those servile, sell-out governments pay for their treason.

Cuba, distinguished delegates, a free and sovereign state with no chains binding it to anyone, with no foreign investments on its territory, with no proconsuls directing its policy, can speak with its head held high in this Assembly and can demonstrate the justice of the phrase by which it has been baptized: "Free Territory of the Americas." Our example will bear fruit in the continent, as it is already doing to a certain extent in Guatemala, Colombia and Venezuela.

There is no small enemy nor insignificant force, because no longer are there isolated peoples. As the Second Declaration of Havana states:

"No nation in Latin America is weak — because each forms part of a family of 200 million brothers, who suffer the same miseries, who harbor the same sentiments, who have the same enemy, who dream about the same better future, and who count upon the solidarity of all honest men and women throughout the world..."

This epic before us is going to be written by the hungry Indian masses, the peasants without land, the exploited workers. It is going to be written by the progressive masses, the honest and brilliant intellectuals, who so greatly abound in our suffering Latin American lands. Struggles of masses and ideas. An epic that will be carried forward by our peoples, mistreated and scorned by imperialism; our people, unreckoned with until today, who are now beginning to shake off their slumber. Imperialism considered us a weak and submissive flock; and now it begins to be terrified of that flock; a gigantic flock of 200 million Latin Americans in whom Yankee monopoly capitalism now sees its gravediggers...

But now from one end of the continent to the other they are signaling with clarity that the hour has come — the hour of their vindication. Now this anonymous mass, this America of color, somber, taciturn America, which all over the continent sings with the same sadness and disillusionment, now this mass is beginning to enter definitively into its own history, is beginning to write it with its own blood, is beginning to suffer and die for it.

Because now in the mountains and fields of America, on its flatlands and in its jungles, in the wilderness or in the traffic of cities, on the banks of its great oceans or rivers, this world is beginning to tremble. Anxious hands are stretched forth, ready to die for what is theirs, to win those rights that were laughed at by one and all for 500 years. Yes, now history will have to take the poor of America into account, the exploited and spurned of America, who have decided to begin writing their history for themselves for all time. Already they can be seen on the roads, on foot, day after day, in endless march of hundreds of kilometers to the governmental “eminences,” there to obtain their rights.

Already they can be seen armed with stones, sticks, machetes, in one direction and another, each day, occupying lands, sinking hooks into the land that belongs to them and defending it with their lives. They can be seen carrying signs, slogans, flags;

letting them flap in the mountain or prairie winds. And the wave of anger, of demands for justice, of claims for rights trampled underfoot, which is beginning to sweep the lands of Latin America, will not stop. That wave will swell with every passing day. For that wave is composed of the greatest number, the majorities in every respect, those whose labor amasses the wealth and turns the wheels of history. Now they are awakening from the long, brutalizing sleep to which they had been subjected.

For this great mass of humanity has said, "Enough!" and has begun to march. And their march of giants will not be halted until they conquer true independence — for which they have vainly died more than once. Today, however, those who die will die like the Cubans at Playa Girón. They will die for their own true and never-to-be-surrendered independence".

All this, distinguished delegates, this new will of a whole continent, of Latin America, is made manifest in the cry proclaimed daily by our masses as the irrefutable expression of their decision to fight and to paralyze the armed hand of the invader. It is a cry that has the understanding and support of all the peoples of the world and especially of the socialist camp, headed by the Soviet Union.

That cry is: *Patria o muerte!* [Homeland or death]

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# **Che as minister: the promotion of science and technology for Cuba's socialist development**

written by Struggle-La Lucha

October 24, 2022

Che Guevara (14 June 1928 – 9 October 1967) was killed 55 years ago. Following is a report on Che's legacy in socialist construction in Cuba.

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As Minister of Industries in Cuba between 1961 and 1965, Che Guevara addressed the challenge of increasing production and labor productivity in conditions of underdevelopment and in transition to socialism, without relying on capitalist mechanisms that undermine the formation of new consciousness and social relations integral to socialism. Under capitalism, Guevara noted, competition for private profit drives the application of science and technology to industrial development, revolutionizing the productive forces. Socialist

governments must find alternative methods. To these ends, Guevara set up nine research and development institutes, focussing on sugar cane derivatives, minerals and metals, the chemical industries, agricultural by-products, the mechanical industry, technological innovations, and automation. He established an institutional framework to begin experimentation at different ends of the production chain simultaneously. The short-term results were inevitably limited, but more significant than the productive achievements attained was the methodology introduced, the application of science and technology to production.

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Speaking at the Cuban Academy of Sciences in mid-January 1960, one year after the Cuban revolutionaries took power, Fidel Castro declared: 'The future of Cuba will be a future of men of science' (Castro Ruz, [1960](#)). This must have seemed like a pipe dream, given the backward state of Cuban scientific research and generally low level of literacy and education.<sup>1</sup> The Revolution, declared Castro, needed thinking people who would put their intelligence to 'good', on the side of 'justice', in the interests of the nation. A succession of programs, regulations and institutions followed; the Literacy Campaign in 1961, the University Reform Law of 1962, the establishment of the National Centre for Scientific Research in 1965. New schools, colleges and universities were built, new teachers trained. Thousands of technicians, educators and advisors arrived from Latin America, the socialist countries and elsewhere. Thousands of Cuban students studied overseas.

The endeavor to harness science and technology for national development was championed by Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, Cuba's Minister of Industries, between 1961 and 1965. Guevara developed a unique system of economic management for the transition to socialism in Cuban conditions, known as the Budgetary Finance System (BFS). His practical policies were the product of three lines of enquiry: the study of Marx's analysis of the capitalist system; engagement in contemporary socialist political economy debates; and recourse to the technological and administrative advances of capitalist corporations (Yaffe, [2009](#)).

Guevara perceived socialism as a phenomenon of both technology and consciousness. Advanced technology, including electronics, automation and computing, would facilitate productivity gains based on technological innovations and administrative controls and not by appeals to workers' self-interest, via material incentives, or by increasing labor exploitation. Adopting the most advanced technologies and techniques would facilitate Cuba to 'burn through stages' of development. Guevara insisted:

*We cannot follow the development process of the countries which initiated capitalist development ... to begin the slow process of developing a very powerful mechanical industry, before passing on to other superior forms, metallurgy, then chemicals and automation after that. We have to burn through stages. And ... try always to make use of the best world technology, without fear. (Guevara, [1962a](#), p. 140)*

Under capitalism, noted Guevara, competition for profits drove the application of science and technology to industrial development, constantly revolutionising the productive forces. The socialist government had to find a method for fostering the application of science and technology to production without relying on capitalist mechanisms, which would hinder Cuba's socialist transition. An immediate rise in productivity could be achieved just by rationalising production, improving wealth distribution and offering incentives to workers. However, the precondition to sustained economic development was research and innovations. How could this be achieved in an underdeveloped country emerging from dictatorship and imperialist domination via violent revolution - blockaded, attacked and in transition to

socialism?

In the search for solutions to this challenge Guevara set up an apparatus within the Ministry of Industries (MININD) to institutionalise research and development for industrial production.

## How to industrialise Cuba?

Following the Revolution of 1959, the UN's Economic Commission for Latin America sent an advisory mission to Cuba to promote its import substitution industrialisation (ISI) strategy for bolstering national (capitalist) development.<sup>2</sup> Guided by this ISI approach, the Cuban trade mission to the socialist bloc which Guevara headed in October 1960, purchased factories according to a list of finished products needed in Cuba, with the intention of replacing imports. Within a year and a half Guevara complained this had been the wrong criteria:

*We worked with our vision fixed on the substitution of imports of finished goods, without seeing clearly that we can't produce those articles without having the raw materials they need ... We continue to be largely dependent on foreign trade to resolve our problems. (Guevara, [1962a](#), p. 103)*

He listed factories for brushes, screws, pickaxes and shovels, electric solders, barbed wire, among others, which Cuba had purchased because the finished product was needed, but which relied on imported materials to manufacture. This was a costly mistake; the US blockade was cutting off imports from the capitalist world.

In August 1961, the National Production Conference confirmed that the revolutionary state would maintain the sugar industry's historic role as Cuba's principal export, to secure vital imports, serving as the basis of accumulation for longer-term investments in industry and social welfare. Guevara concurred, but advocated an industrialisation strategy using endogenous resources, including sugar cane and its derivatives, and pursuing a diversified chain of production with both horizontal and vertical integration: '... We have to develop cotton together with the textile factory; to develop iron together with the factories that will consume

iron ... From sugar everything should be extracted ... sugar [could] serve as a primary material' (Guevara, [1962b](#), p. 286). He pointed to the use of pork to produce lard in the United States as an example.

As the US government pressured other capitalist countries not to trade with Cuba, the revolutionary state was obliged to import equipment from the socialist bloc, which was sometimes two decades behind that existing in advanced sectors of Cuban industry in 1958. Edison Velázquez, director of the Consolidated Enterprise (*Empresa Consolidada*, or EC) of Nickel in MININD explained:

*Many factories turned out to be inefficient, because we depended on what the Russians and the socialist camp had achieved, and they were behind. You could say these factories were obsolete. This wasn't Che's fault. The Yankees wouldn't sell us factories ... we had to make more effort, it was more work for the country. (Velázquez, [2006](#))*

Nonetheless, Guevara acknowledged the essential support received from the socialist countries, which provided credit, advisors, technicians, and other specialists (Guevara, [1962a](#), p. 100). All MININD's vice ministers and directors were assisted by specialists from throughout the socialist bloc or Latin American communists and sympathisers. Guevara asserted that 'all the socialist countries with the capacity to do so have contributed, and contribute day after day to our Revolution, with identical enthusiasm' (Guevara, [1964](#), p. 139). By the end of 1964 there were 640 foreign technicians working in MININD, 492 of them from socialist countries (MININD, [1965](#), p. 78). Most trained Cubans to operate new plants and technologies or worked in research and development institutes. From 1964 to 1965, some 2000 Cubans received onsite training for plants under construction (Sáenz, [2005b](#), p. 206).

Meanwhile, thousands of Cubans went to the Soviet bloc. On 31 December 1964, MININD had 1271 Cubans abroad studying at universities, receiving technician training or other 'worker qualifications' (MININD, [1965](#), p. 78). This assistance, Guevara said, would create Cuban technicians who would construct Cuban factories built with machines designed by Cubans, using domestic raw materials, processed

with Cuban technology (Guevara, [1964](#), p. 139). In the short term, however, he acknowledged the advantage enjoyed through socialist bloc assistance in mitigating US sanctions and consolidating the Revolution.

*The Soviet Union did this alone; without friends, without credit, surrounded by ferocious adversaries, in the middle of a bitter struggle, even within its own territory. We do this in far superior conditions than those of the Peoples' Republic of China, and those of the peoples' republics of Europe, which came out of destructive war. (Guevara, [1962a](#), p. 118)*

Guevara did not criticise the Soviets for the relative backwardness of their technology *per se* but for the disparity between the high level of research and development applied to military technology and low investment channelled to improving civilian production. In addition, he opposed ideological resistance to transferring the most advanced technology from the capitalist world. This 'error', he said 'has cost them in terms of development and in terms of competition in the world market' (Guevara, [1962b](#), p. 289). For example, Guevara criticised the Soviet's rejection of cybernetics on ideological grounds, 'cybernetics is a branch of science that exists and that should be used by man' (Guevara, [1962c](#), pp. 318-319).

Technology has no ideology *per se*, he insisted: 'a tractor has a function: to plough ... why are we going to take the technology of a socialist tractor in place of a capitalist one, if the capitalist one is better?' (Guevara, [1963a](#), p. 422). He cited Polish economist Oscar Lange's prediction back in 1953 that new countries entering socialism would adapt the modern capitalist technology they inherited, speeding up the construction of socialism (Guevara, [1963a](#), p. 421). The origin of the BFS lay in the capitalist corporations of pre-Revolution Cuba, and it was, therefore, more progressive than the Soviet Auto-Financing System (AFS), which developed out of 1920s pre-monopoly Russian capitalism, he concluded.

Technological incompatibility was also a problem, as explained by Tirso Sáenz, named director of the nationalised petroleum industry in 1961.

*Refineries are designed according to the type of oil they are going to process. Soviet petroleum was different from the Venezuelan oil that we received before -*

*it had a higher content of salts and sulphur. The corrosion problems were terrible. The crude was eating away the pipes and equipment and we had the blockade so we couldn't get spare parts from anywhere. (Sáenz, 2005)*

Guevara advocated a long-term development strategy of fostering industrialisation based on endogenous resources with investments in science and technology to overcome trade dependency. While the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA) were responsible for developing the food industry and other agricultural derivatives, Guevara announced in 1962 that MININD would: 'orientate ourselves towards four lines of development: metallurgy, naval construction, electronics and *sucroquímica* [chemical derivatives from sugar]' (Guevara, [1962a](#), p. 105).<sup>3</sup> The prerequisites were the rational exploitation of natural resources, creation of a mechanics base and training at all levels.

To address the lack of adequate training and infrastructure in the existing academic institutions, Guevara set up nine research and development institutions within MININD, focussing on sugar cane derivatives, minerals and metals, the chemical industry, agricultural by-products, the mechanical industry and technological innovation and automation. This institutional framework would initiate experimentation at both ends of the production chain, raw materials and manufacturing simultaneously. Not all these projects could possibly come to fruition in the short term, however, more significant than the productive achievements was the methodology introduced, the application of science and technology to production. The following discussion about nine research and development institutes set up within MININD is informed by archive documents and interviews with those involved.

In 1964, these research institutes accounted for 53.2% of MININD's total costs, reflecting their prioritisation. They were located outside the ministry building but integrated under the organisational and financial structure of the BFS, receiving a planned budget for investments and salaries, and operating with some independence.

For the purpose of analysis, the research apparatus has been divided into three categories: first, those concerned with the sugar industry; second, those involving the extraction and exploitation of natural resources (excluding sugar); and third,

naval construction, electronics, and automation.

## **The sugar industry**

The pre-revolutionary Cuban economy was dominated by the sugar industry; 75% of arable land was controlled by sugar companies, half of which they left fallow. They employed 25% of the Cuban labour force, but only 25,000 workers full time, with up to half a million workers hired for the labour-intensive harvest lasting two to four months, and afterwards dismissed for the *tiempo muerto* (dead season). Underemployment was integral to the sugar industry and plantation workers constituted a rural proletariat with a history of class-conscious militancy. Cuba was the world's largest exporter of sugar in the 1950s; sugar and its by-products accounted for 86% of exports.

The sugar industry was dominated by US interests. In 1955 US investors controlled 40% of raw sugar production (US Department of Commerce, [1956](#), p. 37). The United States received 80% of Cuban sugar exports while US imports flooded Cuba's internal market. The US-imposed a quota for sugar imports, which disincentivised investment, contributing to the industry's stagnation and serving as an instrument of political-economic control over the Cuban government. No new sugar mills had been founded since 1926 and by 1951 the World Bank warned: 'Cuba's standard of living ... depends mainly on an industry which stopped growing many years ago' (IBRD, [1951](#), p. 5).

For most Cubans, the sugar industry was associated with slavery, racism, poverty, unemployment, underdevelopment and imperialism.<sup>4</sup> The first instinct of many in the revolutionary government was to replace sugar with diversified agricultural production, manufacturing and heavy industry (Boorstein, [1968](#), p. 205). However, as Cuba shifted to trade with the socialist countries, the government fell back on a development strategy where sugar exports were the mainstay of capital accumulation. In 1963, Guevara acknowledged:

*The entire economic history of Cuba has demonstrated that no other agricultural activity would give such returns as those yielded by the cultivation of the sugar cane. At the outset of the Revolution many of us were not aware of this basic*

*economic fact, because a fetishistic idea connected sugar with our dependence on imperialism and with the misery in the rural areas, without analysing the real causes: the relation to the unequal balance of trade. (Cited by Pollit, 2004, p. 323, fn 6)*

Given favourable trade deals with the socialist bloc, the revolutionary government believed it had redressed the unequal balance of trade.<sup>5</sup> While sugar production remained pivotal to Cuban economic development, Guevara sought to mechanise its cultivation and develop a secondary manufacturing industry on the back of it.

There were three incentives to mechanise the sugar cane harvest. First, the shortage of *macheteros* (cane cutters) following the post-1959 rural-urban migration as real wages rose and employment was created. The harvest in 1961 required 200,000 volunteers to be mobilised. The long-term solution was mechanisation. Second, to humanise the work so that in the near future, Guevara said, 'those who speak of cutting by hand, loading by hand, would be considered to be proposing inhumane, bestial work, something from the past' (Sáenz et al., 2003, p. 151). Third, to cut the costs of production and raise productivity (Guevara, 1962a, p. 108). This would be achieved by mechanisation and development of sugar derivatives; value-added products using sugar as a raw material.

Alfredo Menéndez, director of the EC of Sugar in MININD, recalled how Guevara's experience of voluntary labor in the cane field strengthened his resolve to mechanize the harvest:

*It was a hot day... already 11am and everyone was tired, but they had not finished cutting parts of the cañaveral [cane field], which means that the cane can't be picked up. Che sat down to rest in the shade. When people saw this, they stopped working too. I explained to him why you had to finish the cañaveral. He said: 'Damn, I am going to get up and cut cane; but this is slave's work, this has to be mechanised!'. (Menéndez, 2005a)*

Attempts pre-1959 to mechanise the sugar harvest had been resisted by *macheteros* who relied on this back-breaking work to survive (Cushion, 2016; US

Department of Commerce, 1956, p. 34).<sup>6</sup> The minor feats accomplished by Guevara's mechanisation project were perhaps more significant in assuaging resistance to mechanisation than in productive results. Confident that the Revolution would provide alternative employment and social welfare, militant sugar workers dropped their resistance to mechanisation. 'In the epoch of the Revolution, these machines did not mean unemployment' explained Miguel Ángel Duque de Estrada Ramos (2005), who was head of the Office of Special Issues which set up the mechanisation task force. Young *macheteros* moving to cities to study and work had no wish to return to manual labour in the countryside. They stopped opposing mechanisation and *machateros* contributed to these efforts.

## 1961 Commission for the Mechanisation of the Sugar Harvest

*Have you seen film footage of Che cutting cane? That was one of the first prototypes. He was struggling to breathe ... The dust from the sugar cane was terrible for him. Che was one month, 30 days cutting cane, with a terrible asthma attack! (Sáenz, 2005)*

The Commission for the Mechanisation of the Sugar Harvest was set up in early 1961 and headed by Duque de Estrada and Menéndez. The first problem was the lack of materials; the US blockade was already hurting. Duque de Estrada Ramos (2005) explained: 'Che knew the task of mechanisation would take a long time, but he believed that you had to make a start quickly'. It took nine months to create an enterprise to construct the machines, but with cooperation between the mechanics and the sugar mills and assistance of engineers from the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Argentina and Bulgaria, by the start of the 1962 harvest the Commission had built more than 500 cane cutters and 500 *alzadoras* (retrievers). The *alzadoras* were a simpler design than the cutters and more successful in raising productivity from the outset. They retrieved piles of cut cane to load onto the mill transportation. Up to 40% of the *macheteros* labour had been consumed by loading cane (Menéndez, 2005b).

Circumventing the US blockade, Guevara had one US and one Australian cane cutter imported to serve as prototypes. The engineers adapted the design to build on top of tractors imported from socialist countries (Borrego Díaz, 2001, p. 235). 'Adapting the cutters to Cuban conditions was a long process' explained Duque de Estrada

Ramos (2005). However, the Commission did not delay in introducing the first prototypes. The first version of the cutters was simple and problematic. Speaking to sugar workers after six hours of cutting cane on the machine that morning and ten hours the previous day, Guevara described them as in the experimental stage, liable to breakdowns, especially with inexperienced operators. 'The cutter, as it is today, is cutting cleaner than the average *machetero*', he announced, while inviting constructive criticisms to improve the machine. 'The machine is dangerous' he warned, admitting that the previous Monday the blades had broken, injuring a compañero who had not taken precautions (Guevara, 1963b, p. 31). Guevara challenged Orlando Borrego, his deputy in MININD, to a competition on those first cutters. They worked from 6am to 6pm, with a 15-minute break. 'When we finished the work, almost at dusk', Borrego Díaz recalled (2001, p. 236) 'Che appeared jubilant, and with his short breaths [from asthma] he spoke about the advantages and disadvantages of the cutter and ended by saying that the battle to mechanise cane was being won'.

'Che drove me crazy', said Menéndez (2005b), about Guevara's insistence on inaugurating equipment for transporting *azúcar a granel* [sugar in bulk], built but abandoned due to workers' resistance before 1959. The Cuban engineer Roger López who had designed the equipment was preparing to join his family in the United States, a move complicated by migration controls at both ends. In 1962, Guevara instructed Menéndez to contact López to request assistance. Having agreed to the project, 'because he wanted to see his work finished', López was provided with a car and a 'revolutionary engineer' to shadow him (Menéndez, 2005b). The *azúcar a granal* equipment was inaugurated, alleviating the back-breaking work of loading 300 lb sacks onto boats in the ports. Guevara then facilitated López's exit to join his family.

It was a similar story to the *centros de acopio*. Mechanising cutting and retrieving necessitated mechanical cleaning of the cane before processing. Duque de Estrada Ramos recalled (2005) that before 1959: 'an engineer in Camagüey had designed a plant to "dry clean" the cane with air to remove the earth and straw'. His design was abandoned after workers' opposition. Another Cuban engineer Robert Henderson Kernel assisted the Mechanisation Commission to complete the construction of the *centro de acopio*. Henderson inaugurated five *centros de acopio* and worked on a

combine harvester, mounted on a bulldozer, which cut a whole furrow of cane in one go (Duque de Estrada Ramos, [2005](#)). For Guevara the Commission's importance was not just measured in concrete results, but in the Revolution's audacity in working towards complex goals. He told sugar workers: 'objectively the cane cutting machines represent a triumph for the Revolution, showing its capacity to focus its forces in order to resolve problems' (Guevara, [1962d](#), p. 127).

The mechanisation project continued after Guevara's departure from Cuba. However, only 1% of the harvest was mechanically cut by 1970 (Pollit, [2004](#), p. 324). However, with Soviet assistance from that date, and with the increasing use of Cuban components in new combines, by 1990, that figure had reached 71% (Pollit, [2004](#), p. 327). In 2004, Fidel Castro announced: 'today, there is no one left that cuts sugar cane by hand' (Castro Ruz, [2004](#)). Guevara's ambitious project was achieved in Cuba's most important productive sector.

### **1963 Cuban Institute of Research into Sugar Cane Derivatives (ICIDCA)**

*...the day will arrive when the derivatives of sugar cane have as much importance for the national economy as sugar has today. (Guevara, [n.d.](#), ICIDCA)*

The ICIDCA was established to investigate the potential for establishing new manufacturing industries based on sugar as a raw material, achieved through vertical integration of primary and secondary sectors, and increasing the value of sugar-based exports. The principal sugar by-products were syrup (molasses) from cane juice, already used to make alcohol, principally rum, and bagasse, the cane after the juice has been extracted. Bagasse had long been used as fire fuel in sugar mills, but Guevara aspired to use it to manufacture cardboard and paper and synthetic fibres, including rayon and furfural which has multiple uses in the medical industry, cosmetics and animal feed. This would create industrial zones around the mills, bringing employment and development to rural areas. Internationally, little research had been undertaken on sugar by-products. The technology required hardly existed, so it could not be imported. Success would largely depend on the ICIDCA's ability to develop its own technology. Given the lack of scientists and technicians and the absence of a mechanical industry in Cuba, advances would clearly be made very slowly and require significant investment. However, Sáenz also acknowledges that Guevara's vision was underappreciated within Cuba: 'Che said "let's

manufacture products with more value added than sugar, so that sugar is a sub-product and plastics, pharmaceutical drugs and so on are the main products". But I think we missed the point at that time' (Sáenz, [2005](#)).

The short-term goals were less ambitious. A 1964 report said: 'the future of the ICIDCA is in the growing emphasis on the processes of fermentation ... to have advanced technology in this area' (ICIDCA, [1964](#), p. 101). With the assistance of East German specialists, they developed research centre technology, including a pilot plant set up in a former US sugar mill, for extracting dextran (used medically as an antithrombotic and to reduce blood viscosity) from sugar cane. They also developed technology for producing torula yeasts for cattle feed. Sáenz ([2005b](#), p. 171) confirmed that: 'Che was very satisfied with the results obtained'.

In June 1964, the EC of Sugar split from MININD to become the Ministry of Sugar (MINAZ) headed by Borrego. The ICIDCA passed over to MINAZ's jurisdiction where it remains today. Luis Gálvez, who Guevara once called 'the administrator of the future', was its director for over 30 years (Gálvez, [2006](#); Sáenz, [2005b](#), p. 55).

### **The extraction and exploitation of natural resources**

Cuba has among the world's largest known reserves of nickel. In 1959, there were two nickel mines, both in Oriente province. The Nícaro mine was owned by the US government and the Moa mine by a private US company, the Freeport Sulphur Company. The nickel was sent to the US for processing. A 1961 report to the US President highlighted the importance of Cuban nickel for the development of the US military industry, including space exploration projects (Borrego Díaz, [2001](#), pp. 140-141).

Nícaro was founded in 1943 during the Second World War and expanded for military purposes in 1952 during the Korean War. By 1958 the plant was valued at \$87 million and its annual production represented 11% of world supply, excluding the socialist countries (*Time Magazine*, [1958](#)). The plant had its own electricity supply and employed 4000 workers in continuous production. A manganese plant in Felton, a town outside of Nicaro, had another 400 workers. Production stopped at Nícaro in 1960, after the US government refused to pay a new 25% tax imposed by the revolutionary government on exports. The plant at Moa was inaugurated in 1958 with more complex, modern technology, employing 1600 workers in continuous

production, and valued at \$75 million. It was abandoned the following year after the Revolution. US technicians left the island and US imports vital for production, particularly ammonia, were cut off.

'The technological dependence of the nickel industry on the US was total', stated Borrego Díaz ([2001](#), p. 141). Restarting production at Moa and Nícaro were major achievements; paralysis would have been politically, as well as economically disastrous, leaving 6000 Cubans, including skilled workers, unemployed. The Revolution relied of the support of the mine workers to re-establish production, and on the expertise of Soviet specialists sent to assist. One Cuban engineer, Demetrio Presilla played an essential role at Nícaro. Presilla rejected tempting offers to work in the US because of racism in that country (Gálvez, [2006](#); Regueira Ortega, [2006](#)). Initially he also refused to co-operate with the Soviet technicians, on the basis of anti-communism. According to Benigno Regueira Ortega, head of the Cuban Mining Institute (ICM) from 1960 following the nationalisation of the mines, Presilla finally he agreed to collaborate: 'because of his respect for Che' (Regueira Ortega, [2006](#)).

From February 1961, responsibility for mining was transferred to the new EC of Nickel set up in MININD. Guevara also established the Cuban Institute of Mineral Resources (ICRM) to conduct research in cooperation with the EC, thereby establishing a model for collaboration between research institutions and production enterprises that is an established feature in Cuba. New mines were opened with co-ordinates provided by the ICRM. A new railroad and other facilities were built with equipment imported from the USSR and England.

From 1963, the administrator at Nícaro was Luis Gálvez, a young chemical engineering student. 'My main role was to get a good understanding of that complex technology, to establish good relations with the workers and take a lead on the technical side' he explained. 'I had the factory and the mine 20 kilometres away. I practically lived in the factory' (Gálvez, [2006](#)). The ammonia necessary for nickel extraction arrived in weekly shipments from the USSR, which also provided credit for Cuba to purchase spare parts from the west. The credit was repaid in nickel.

Restarting production at Moa was an even greater accomplishment. The Soviet engineers sent to assist were unfamiliar with the modern technology, so Guevara tracked down and met with technicians and engineers working at the plant before the Revolution. They were now mostly reemployed in Havana and most planned to

leave the country. Emphasising the vital role of the mine in Cuban development and the importance of their own contribution, he persuaded them to return to help restart the Mao mine, offering to facilitate their departure from Cuba subsequently. An Indian engineer Dr T K Roy was also tracked down abroad and agreed to travel secretly to Cuba to help rehabilitate production. Borrego described this as a defeat for the 'yankee government' which showed that 'revolutionary daring could triumph with decisive and intelligent work when faced by a powerful adversary' (Borrego Díaz, [2005](#), p. 144).

New mines were opened which had various metals with productive potential and economic value. Gálvez ([2006](#)) explained that Guevara and Castro envisaged moving beyond the production of nickel, which is an intermediary product, to produce stainless steels for use in the chemical and food industries. This was achieved in the 1980s, but in Guevara's time the principal achievement was to restart nickel production and shift exports to the USSR.

## **1961 Cuban Institute of Mineral Resources [ICRM]**

*We must search for mineral resources ... it is a task for everyone. We must prepare many geologists or mine engineers ... and do the industrial preparation to get at those metals .... (Guevara, [1961](#), p. 276)*

Oil was first extracted in Cuba in 1881, but with little economic significance (Morales). Only in 1954 did industrial production begin, at a well in central Cuba. The consequent exploration by foreign oil companies between 1954 and 1957 revealed small reserves in four locations. Following the Revolution, a new law enabled the government to collect technical information from the oil companies granted a concession under Batista's regime. In protest, companies withdraw from the island. Consequently, the government set up the Cuban Petroleum Institute (ICP) to lead the industry. With assistance from Argentinian specialists the first new well was opened up in May 1960.

In 1961, the ICRM was established to study the mineral and petroleum mines under production and begin locating and prospecting for mineral resources. It was MININD's first research center. There were only two geologists in Cuba, so the institute relied mainly on Argentinian, Soviet and Czechoslovakian geologists. From 1963, it was directed by Jesús Suárez Gayol, a captain in Guevara's Rebel Army

column. In 1963 the ICRM's annual report concluded: 'the real possibility has emerged of finding [petroleum] in some zones. We must continue the investigations to see if it is possible to reduce imports which consume \$80 million every year' (ICRM, [1963](#), p. 80). The institute was instructed to produce a geological map of Cuba: 'with special practical consideration for the economic problems of the country, such as an increase of reserves and the prospecting of supplies of those minerals which substitute imports and would be a source of hard currency' (ICRM, [1962](#), p. 591).

In 1964, 21 oil wells had been finished and 34,343 tonnes of oil extracted, up from 27,800 in 1959, but below the peak of 79,200 in 1956 (MININD, [1964](#), p. 84; Morales, [n.d.](#)). The Institute had calculated Cuban reserves of over a dozen metals (including iron, magnesium, copper and gold) and located the necessary primary materials for making cement (MININD, [1964](#), pp. 84-87).

Suárez Gayol organized 'peoples' explorations' to search for minerals.<sup>7</sup> In 1964 a book entitled *Geology in Cuba* was published to educate and train new Cuban geologists. Guevara wrote the prologue outlining the objectives, weaknesses and challenges the ICRM faced, while praising: 'our capacity to learn from our contact with the most progressive scientists of the most advanced fraternal countries, as much in technology as in organisation' (Guevara, [1964a](#), p. 741). By 1964, 153 foreign specialists worked in the ICRM.

In 1965 the ICRM was searching for rare mineral and copper reserves to serve as the foundation for a future electronics industry and investigating the organisational and technical-material requirements for drilling the sea around the Keys in the north coast of central Cuba where Guevara correctly believed there were oil reserves (Gravalosa, [2006](#)).

## **1962 Cuban Institute of Mining and Metallurgy Research (ICIMM)**

*We have lots of iron ... nickel, cobalt, chrome, manganese; there is a set of minerals that permit us to make alloys, to make special metals when we have developed our steel and iron industry, and furthermore, we have copper which is also a really important metal. That means that we have to ... develop with audacity, to go on creating our own technology ... here there are no metallurgists, but there can and should be. (Guevara, [1961](#), pp. 286-287)*

Cuba is abundant in *lateritas*, reddish ground in humid tropical regions, rich in minerals, iron, nickel, cobalt and albuminate. In 1962, Guevara set up the ICIMM, to complement the work of the ICRM, in 'developing and applying new technologies' in the mineral and metallurgy branches, focussing on *lateritas* whilst searching for other natural resources (magnesium and dolomite) and increasing the extraction of copper for future utilisation in the electronics industry (MININD, [1962](#), p. 592). In addition, the ICIMM was to develop technology and investments to expand a steel plant in Havana, assist a metal plant in Pinar del Río and instruct MININD enterprises on the development of the iron and steel industry in the west (Sáenz, [2005b](#), pp. 160-161).

The ICIMM's achievements were limited. While Sáenz ([2005b](#), p. 163) largely blamed the managerial deficiencies of the Institute's director Faustino Prado, who soon left Cuba, he recognized that, 'it was impossible to achieve technological results of magnitude within only two or three years of work'. Gálvez ([2006](#)) explained that while good results were achieved in separating cobalt from nickel in pilot plants, industrial application required huge investments, which were just not available. The USSR was interested in importing Cuba's nickel, but not in manufacturing cobalt, so they lacked an incentive to invest.

## **1962 Cuban Institute for Technological Research (ICIT)**

*The main task of the ICIT is in agriculture, to facilitate our industrial development and for the maintenance of botanical science ... with scientific controls from the planting of the seed up to industrial exploitation. (MININD, [1964](#), p. 143)*

The ICIT was founded in 1962 to facilitate the industrial application of agricultural products and other plants, with a view to import substitution and the creation of new products with strong markets (MININD, [1962](#), p. 590). Guevara endeavoured to strengthen the links between agriculture and industry, introducing industrial management methods to agriculture in a way which, Sáenz ([2005b](#), p. 176) claimed, 'anticipated the idea of the future complex agroindustry'.

Taking over an abandoned mansion outside Havana, the ICIT constructed laboratories, pilot plants and workshops. By 1964, they were researching the textile branch and had invented a machine to wash fibre produced from the kenaf plant (MININD, [1965](#), p. 81). They conducted research on over a dozen plants and crops.

The industrial potential of this flora ranged from fabric dyes, to sewing thread, fishing ropes, food colouring, animal feed, vegetable oils, perfumes, and so on. Successful laboratory research was carried out for extracting tannin from Eucalyptus trees and other plants, and with inorganic pigments, using Cuban chromite as a primary material. The 1964 annual report recorded that the ICIT had conducted work related to the ceramics industry, 'an interesting project linked to the manufacture of chemical earthenware' (MININD, [1965](#), p. 81). It was also responsible for 'studying the application of experimental cultivation being carried out in our experimental unit' (MININD, [1963](#), p. 611), Ciro Redondo, discussed below.

## **1962 Ciro Redondo experimental farm**

*Che's visits to the farm 'Ciro Redondo' were very frequent ... he instigated experiments with the new salary system based on conceptions which were part of the Budgetary Finance System ... Ciro Redondo developed a group of medicinal plants for the production of medicines, convinced of the future importance of 'green' medicine. (Borrego Díaz, [2001](#), p. 138)*

An abandoned farm in Matanzas was taken over for MININD to carry out socio-productive and botanical or agricultural experimentation. It was named Ciro Redondo to honor a Rebel Army captain who died during the revolutionary war. The scientific-technical work was led by Guillermo Cid Rodríguez, a Cuban botanist who had pioneered the exploitation of kenaf, the study of forage and the development of horticulture for exports. Guevara described him as: 'a scientist with calloused hands' in praise of his intelligence and hard work (Hernández Serrano, [2007](#)). In January 1962, 165 students from the Rebel Army school were sent to the farm; most had fought alongside Guevara and had low educational levels. Their challenge was to get 200 hectares of farmland productive within one year with little mechanical equipment and to combine agricultural work with evening study (Sáenz, [2005b](#), p. 178). A mathematical physicist, Dr Raúl Arteche Duque, directed the school at the farm.

Ramiro Lastre, a former Rebel Army soldier at Ciro Redondo, recalled 23 varieties of medicinal plants being cultivated and used in experiments. 'At one stage we had Chinese scientists, a doctor of science and three agronomy engineers, who lived with

us', he recalled (Hernández Serrano, [2004](#)). The main experimentation was with textile fibres, oleaginous plants, and tung trees and safflower for making paints. Cid headed two missions to Brazil to visit agro-industrial experimental centres and establish a program for cooperation, but the project was frustrated by the military coup in Brazil 1964. Medicinal plants from Ciro Redondo were taken to the Hospital of Oncology in Havana where Cid's wife, Cora Lazo Jesús, who held a doctorate in pharmaceuticals, and three other scientists, carried out laboratory experiments. She recalled: 'we began to work with varieties of these plants. I worked as a chemist. The fourth floor of the building was practically part of the Ministry of Industries' (Hernández Serrano, [2004](#)).

In addition, Ciro Redondo was a site for social experiments in the organization of work, management techniques, incentives structures and salary scales, aspects of the BFS (Yaffe, [2009](#), pp. 188-190). In 1965 Ciro Redondo was transferred to the new National Centre for Scientific Research.

### **1963 Cuban Institute for Development of Chemical Industry [ICDIQ]**

*The ICDIQ was created to develop the chemical industry ... For now, this institute should just work to create technology and build factories to match that technology ... to act as the investor organisation in relation to new plants.* (ICDIQ, [1964](#), p. 98)

The ICDIQ was established in 1963 to address the lack of material and intellectual resources in this sector and collaborate with MININD's Light and Heavy Chemical production branches, which incorporated 12 ECs, including the EC of Pharmaceuticals. The institute built its own prototypes, pilot plants, and equipment. It was instructed: 'to consider the satellite plants necessary for the supply of primary materials' and develop technology for the extraction of steroids and carotene from the wax of *cachaza*, the outer film of sugar cane (MININD, [1962](#), p. 612). Later the ICDIQ was instructed: 'to develop the industrial application of antibiotics, not only for human use, but also for animals' (MININD, [1965](#), p. 116).

Its director Álvaro García Piñera was a chemical engineer lacking ideological affiliation to the Revolution. 'He dared to do things irrationally' complained Sáenz ([2006](#)), 'he broke the laws of engineering. With a pencil and slide rule, he designed an antibiotics plant. That's crazy!'. The plant failed to produce a single antibiotic and

the factory was returned to yeast production. This scenario was repeated with 'all the chemical plants García Piñera had announced and included in the ministry plans' (Sáenz, [2005b](#), p. 175). However, even with a superior director at the ICDIQ, Sáenz concluded, much better results were unlikely. The Cubans were starting from scratch, with few scientists, little equipment and scarce capital. Vice Minister of Industrial Construction Ángel Gómez Trueba ([2001](#), pp. 43-45), reflected that: 'the lack of understanding and internalisation at that time about this sector had an adverse effect on socialist economic development'. Nonetheless a valuable idea and a research methodology were established, Sáenz said ([2006](#)): 'The idea was excellent, to make an institute with what they call a complete cycle of innovation. The institute develops products at a scale where it can build pilot plants which, if successful, are turned into production plants' (Sáenz, [2006](#)). This innovation cycle methodology is applied today in Cuba's research and development institutes.

### **1963 Cuban Institute for Machinery Development [ICDM]**

*They tried to organise the production of spare parts - to generate ideas, to train people, with the aim of producing our own spare parts. Cuba didn't have a mechanical industry, only small workshops. They also tried to develop some machines ... This institute was the cornerstone for future developments.* (Sáenz, [2006](#))

Guevara lamented that the Revolution's early trade deals had excluded the purchase of a spare parts factory (Guevara, [1962a](#), p. 289). In 1963, he set up the ICDM to address the lack of capital goods and spare parts resulting from the US blockade and the shift in trade. Assisted by Soviet advisors, the ICDM worked to install spare parts factories and optimise the use of machines and tools already available in MININD (MININD, [1965](#), p. 116). Within one year, there was a 132% increase in the production of spare parts, a new mechanics plant was to be inaugurated in Santa Clara in 1965 and a metallurgy plant was under construction (MININD, [1965](#), p. 81). The ICDM constructed agricultural machinery for sugar cane and kenaf. For example, in 1963, a kenaf cutter was built, and improved the following year. Another machine for stripping the bark from the kenaf plant was also improved in 1964 reducing the number of operators required by over 40%. A combine harvester was built for the sugar industry in 1964 and improved the following year. While the

ICDM's work was considered satisfactory, its principal weakness was the dependence on foreign technicians (MININD, [1965](#), pp. 82-83).

## **Naval construction, automation and electronics**

MININD's research and development institutes related to two of the four lines of development proposed by Guevara in 1962, metallurgy and sugar cane derivatives. Efforts to foster progress in the remaining two sectors, electronics and naval construction, were integrated into MININD's main apparatus, rather than as research and development institutes, via the EC of Naval Construction, the Office for Automation and Electronics, the EC of Electrical Equipment and the EC of Electricity.

### **Naval construction**

*The naval industry offers prospects of enormous importance to Cuba, but it is not just one industrial branch. Rather it is made up of a complex of factories: metallurgy, motors of various types, cables, electrical equipment and electronics, carpentry, etcetera. (Guevara, [1962a](#), pp. 106-107)*

As early as January 1959, Guevara spoke about the need for a merchant fleet as a corollary to Cuba's export industry (Guevara, [1959a](#), p. 19). Naval construction, he said, could be developed at a faster or slower pace, but it must be considered as an important aspect of Cuban industry, given the country's dependence on international trade (Guevara, [1959b](#), p. 300). Building domestic merchant ships would save Cuba millions of pesos on transport costs every year, given that 80% of trade had shifted from the US (150 kilometers away) to the USSR (8000 kilometers distance) and to the rest of the socialist bloc: 'Cuba will need to transport more than eight million tonnes [of sugar] in 1965 ... at least 80 ships will be needed just for Cuba'. Pre-empting objections to the huge investments required for a naval industry, Guevara ([1962a](#), pp. 106-107) asserted that: 'in terms of hard currency, a ship would recoup a value of 2.5 million peso in five trips to Europe ... a succulent saving for a country such as ours, maritime exporter par excellence'. He pointed to other benefits: 'such as ships for the coastal trade, which is the cheapest form of internal transport, and the construction of an adequate fishing fleet'. With an expanded fishing fleet Cuba could substitute costly food imports with local fish and sea foods, to the benefit of

the underdeveloped coastal regions.

In 1962, the EC of Naval Construction was set up in the Metallurgy Branch of the Vice Ministry of Basic Industry. It achieved few concrete results, however, and Guevara assessed its management negatively in 1964 (Guevara, [1964b](#), pp. 109–110). That year it fell 61% short of planned production, accounting for 25% of the total shortfall of that Vice Ministry (MININD, [1965](#), p. 10). Plans to expand the shipyards in Havana with Cuban architects and civil engineers were put aside because investment was not available (Gómez Trueba, [2001](#), p. 35).

After visiting shipyards in Poland, Sáenz advised Guevara that Cuba lacked the technological and economic capacity to build major transport ships. He was right. In Guevara's time, the EC of Naval Construction produced wooden fishing boats for Cuba's Gulf Fleet, which contributed to the increase in total fish production from 30,000 to 40,000 tonnes from 1960 to 1965 (FAO, [1967](#)). Later developments in naval construction included iron and cement boats. Meanwhile, Cubans were trained in naval engineering in the socialist bloc, learning to operate and maintain the merchant ships acquired by Cuba from elsewhere over the years (Guevara, [2003](#), p. 13).

## 1962 Office of Automation and Electronics

*Automation and electronics were a passion for Che as minister of industries. (Gómez Trueba, [2001](#), p. 44)*

In January 1962 Guevara told MININD directors:

*We are entering the era of automation and electronics. We have to think of electronics as a function of socialism and the transition to communism ... Electronics has become a fundamental political problem of the country. Today and tomorrow cadre must be prepared so they are ready in the future to take up the next great technological tasks and for the automation of an ever-increasing part of total production, the liberation of man by means of the machine. (Guevara, [1962e](#), p. 149)*

Technological progress imposes the centralization of the productive forces, he told MININD administrators, pointing to US power generators which, with a handful of

operators, produced one million kilowatts each, greater than the total installed capacity in Cuba (Guevara, [1962f](#), p. 91). This should be a phenomenon of socialism and communism, he said:

*In all the great modern, centralised and automated industries, man's activity should take place outside of production. In the future man will express his wishes through political institutions which are being created, and which will determine the types of production which the country needs. (Guevara, [1962f](#), p. 92)*

Automation would permit political control over the economy. It could 'even accelerate transition to the new society ... Without automation, that is, without substantially raising productivity, we will take much longer to reach that stage' (Guevara, [1962g](#), p. 207). However, Guevara also cautioned that these steps could not be achieved quickly, describing automation as both an 'aspiration' and a 'precondition' for the development of a new society. 'But for this there has to be preparation' (Guevara, [1962g](#), p. 221).

In 1962 the Office of Automation and Electronics was established within MININD to find immediate solutions to concrete production problems whilst laying the foundations for future advances. The Office directed projects underway in the EC of Electrical Equipment, studying, repairing, and carrying out maintenance on the means of industrial control. It studied the feasibility of installing an electronic components factory and introducing automation in the sugar industry. It oversaw the training of electrical engineers and other technical cadre to operate imported equipment, build experience in the fields of electronics, cybernetics, instrumentation and computing, and to assess the possibilities for automation in industrial sectors (MININD, [1962](#), pp. 589-590, [1963](#), p. 610; Sáenz, [2005b](#), pp. 163-164).

Ultimately, there were few tangible results during Guevara's time. Ambitious projects were underway by 1964, including for the automation of the Maritime Terminal in Matanzas for sugar exports, and installation of a system to control *tachos* and evaporators (MININD, [1965](#), p. 80). However, the annual report complained that the Office suffered from: 'a lack of definition of objectives, a lack of technical cadre and internal organizational deficiencies'. Trueba recalled

negotiations with Poland for the construction of a plant to assemble televisions in Cuba which: 'gave few results' (Gómez Trueba, [2001](#), p. 44). The tasks set were changed often and substantially.

The Office directed the School of Automation, where Czechoslovakian engineers taught Cuban technicians about automated control systems (Sáenz, [2006](#)). Effectively, it was a theoretical school, lacking the technology for the applied aspect. In December 1964, 69 students graduated as mechanics of measurement and control. A further 39 students were studying instrumentation techniques and 28 were students of automation (MININD, [1965](#), p. 75). In 1964 the Office was instructed to lead on Guevara's plan to import computer components and assemble the machines in Cuba, reducing the cost of technology transfers and training up electrical engineers until they were capable of manufacturing computers domestically. According to Oscar Fernández Mel, a doctor in the Rebel Army, Guevara was already thinking along these lines in early 1959: 'Che was interested in computing, the automation of management, of the economy and the factories', he affirmed. Clearly there were some successes, as Mel recalled: 'one of Che's happiest moments was when the EC of Perfumes had managed to automate their supply. He created the first school of computing and acquired the first computers ... Che was the pioneer of the introduction of computing in Cuba' (Fernández Mel, [2006](#)).

## **Conclusion**

*We are inaugurating an epoch in which scientific knowledge is, and will increasingly be, the main force that determines our rhythm of development and our capacity to 'burn through stages' in the construction of socialism.* (Guevara, [1962f](#), p. 148)

Guevara's promotion of science and technology within MININD was part of his theoretical understanding that communism should arise out of the highest stage of development of the productive forces. The greater the level of automation and centralisation, the greater would be the potential for conscious, political control of the economy, as market forces were replaced by planning in determining production and consumption. More concretely, however, MININD's research and development institutes worked towards immediate goals: finding substitutes for costly imports; increasing the value added to raw material exports, particularly sugar and nickel;

creating a mechanical industry to exploit Cuba's metallurgy reserves; producing spare parts and laying foundations for the production of capital goods. Parallel to these projects was the imperative of reducing inequality by extending electrical provision and, hence, employment opportunities, to mechanise agricultural production, raise productivity and create a training infrastructure for future developments. The institutes reflected Guevara's understanding of which sectors were leading international developments, technologically and economically, while also being grounded in Cuba's concrete conditions and development needs. Reality imposed many obstacles, as the discussion above demonstrates. When Guevara left Cuba in 1965 the research and development institutes within MININD were neglected. 'This lasted about two years', according to Borrego Díaz (2005). 'It was a mistake on our part, but luckily we realised that quickly and refocused on them.'

There is no space here to discuss Guevara's legacy, but it would be possible to track the impact of his approach on Cuban development. One example is offered Jorge Ruiz Ferrer, a close collaborating with Guevara in MININD, including on attempts to apply computer processing to optimise production. After the division of MININD, Ruiz became Vice Minister in the new Ministry of Minerals and Metallurgy where he applied those methods first tentatively experimented with in MININD. Through an investigation into the mining process at Moa using a computer that Guevara had imported from England they saved the country millions of dollars (Ruiz Ferrer, 2006). Ruiz was clear that although substantial results were not attained in MININD, later achievements were the direct legacy of a methodology that Guevara promoted.

While MININD's achievements were modest, arguably Guevara's real accomplishment was to introduce a methodology for applying science and technology to production, forcing that agenda onto the national development strategy, initiating the necessary training and research infrastructure, including investing in laboratory research, experimental areas, pilot plants and prototype workshops to create a cycle of innovation. Today, institutes operate in Cuba covering all the areas of those set up by Guevara between 1961 and 1963.

## Notes

1.

The 1951 report by the Truslow Commission for the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) announced that 'the Mission could not find any suitable applied research laboratory, public or private, in Cuba' (IBRD, [1951](#), p. 223). Cuba's 1953 census recorded that 60% of Cubans had between three years and no schooling; just over 1% had university education, and only 1.7% of them were science students.

2.

US pressure led to the ECLA mission to Cuba being withdrawn in summer 1960.

3.

By 'sucroquímica' Guevara was referring to chemical derivatives from sugar cane (Sáenz et al., [2003](#), p. 29).

4.

The countryside was populated by rural huts made from sticks and mud; 75% were one room dwellings, with earthen floors, no power or electricity. Only 3% of rural Cubans owned the land they worked while 35% had parasitic diseases (MacDonald, [1995](#), pp. 48-50).

5.

Cuba was paid above world market price for sugar. However, 'free' or world market price applied to only 10-15% of internationally traded sugar, the rest being produced to quotas and sold for predetermined prices.

6.

Mechanisation could reduce the efficiency and profitability of the sugar industry (Yaffe, [2009](#), p. 174). Cushion ([2016](#)) has details of workers resistance to mechanisation.

7.

In mid-1964, Suárez Gayol left MININD to become Vice Minister of Production in the new Ministry of Sugar (MINAZ). In 1966, he went to Bolivia to join Guevara's guerrilla campaign and was the first Cuban to die there in April 1967.

## **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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# Open letter to LGBTQ+ activists: Learn from Cuba! End the blockade!

written by Struggle-La Lucha  
October 24, 2022



In September, [Serena Brennerman](#), a 16-year-old white trans woman, was found drowned in Salem, Oregon. Serena's death was ruled a suicide by the police. But her friends and community don't believe it. She was physically harassed by bigots in her school for a long time. Some of this violence was even captured on video. Whether Serena was murdered or took her own life, she was a victim of the trans panic being pushed by the rich and powerful and embraced by violent neo-Nazis and TERFs.

There's no ambiguity about the murders of Semaj Billingslea, a Black trans man, who was shot to death in Jacksonville, Florida, on Sept. 21, or Mya Allen, a Black trans woman, who was murdered on Aug. 29 in Milwaukee. [Nearly three dozen trans people](#) have been killed so far this year, most of them people of color, and that's only counting those who were correctly gendered and identified.

There's a war against trans, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people in this

country. It's not new. But it has escalated to unprecedeted heights in the last year and is spilling over into the whole LGBTQ2S community and those who support us.

Doctors and children's hospitals are threatened with bombings. Neo-Nazis shut down drag events, often aided by local cops. Parents are threatened with prosecution for supporting their trans kids. We are increasingly threatened and accosted on the street, in stores, on public transportation, with slurs and threats.

What are the supposed friends of the LGBTQ+ community in Washington doing to stop this? Not a damn thing. They tell us to vote for them, the way they told women to vote for them before standing aside and letting abortion rights be stripped away. Meanwhile, alleged progressives like Hillary Clinton and the New York Times are spouting TERF rhetoric and dismissing trans rights.

The Biden administration and Congress have made it crystal clear that their priority is funding wars for empire on the other side of the world, not protecting the rights of people here.

It's painful to watch. But we are not powerless.

On Sept. 25 something incredibly important happened just 90 miles from U.S. shores. After three years of democratic discussion and education at all levels of society, the people of socialist Cuba voted by a two-thirds margin for [a new Code of Families](#). It enshrines in law the rights of queers, trans people and women in marriage and adoption. It changes the fundamental relationship between parents and children to one based on responsibilities and rights. It elevates chosen families to the same status as blood families. It embraces the rights that are being stripped away from us or that we never had at all.

In the U.S. media this was reduced to a vote for gay marriage. The Washington Post, Fox News, CNN and the rest don't want people in this country to know what Cuba's

Code of Families is, or how it was achieved. They especially don't want the trans and LGBTQ+ community to know, because people here might realize that we need to fight for what Cuba has: free health care, including gender-affirming care, free education, including comprehensive sex education, the right to housing and work and dignity for all.

There's an old liberal saying from the 1960s that those who make reform impossible make revolution inevitable. Today's liberals don't mention that much, because it's a damning indictment of their own inaction and complacency.

Cuba made a revolution to get out from under the thumb of the U.S. empire. Washington has been punishing Cuba ever since. Cuba has been subject to a 60-year economic blockade on trade, medicine, food and more. Trump tightened the blockade and Biden has kept his hateful measures in place despite the pandemic and climate collapse.

One of the most hateful and destructive policies of the U.S. empire is using the rights of trans people, LGBTQ+ people and women as an excuse to attack other countries around the world in its wars for profit. It's so obvious right now, as our own limited rights are being viciously stripped away.

We need to rely on ourselves, not corporate-sponsored politicians, to fight for our rights. We need to build alliances with other people here and around the world who are fighting for their rights and against the U.S. empire. Trans people who are on the front line of so much abuse and bigotry can play a leading role in building a revolutionary movement here. Just look at how trans and other queer workers at Starbucks and Amazon have become an incredible force for organizing unions.

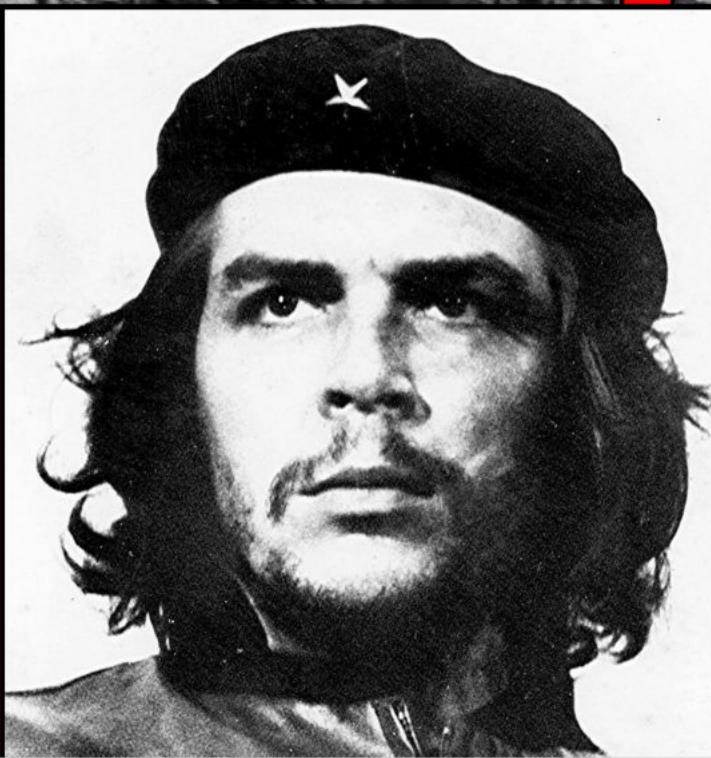
Bigots say get back, we say fight back! Protect trans kids! Unblock Cuba!



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# Che Guevara

written by Struggle-La Lucha  
October 24, 2022



## Ernesto Che Guevara

14 June 1928 – 9 October 1967

*"The true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love."*

*"Above all, always be capable of feeling deeply any injustice committed against anyone, anywhere in the world."*

Che Guevara



Struggle-La-Lucha.org & Socialist Unity Party  
Salute the life of Comandante Che

Ernesto "Che" Guevara — the great internationalist and revolutionary leader — died 55 years ago on Oct. 9, 1967, at the hands of Bolivian soldiers who were trained, equipped, and put in motion by U.S. Green Beret and CIA operatives. Che's last

words proved their defeat and his victory: “Shoot, cowards. You are only going to kill a man.” Che still lives.

