

Obama and Castro at the OAS summit

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The face-to-face meeting between US President Barack Obama and his Cuban counterpart Raul Castro at the Summit of the Americas in Panama was almost universally described as “historic” in the mass media.

Despite the voluminous media commentary on the weekend event, however, there has been little discussion of the actual significance of the meeting between the two heads of state. In fact, the first such encounter in nearly six decades marked a major step in returning Cuba to the sphere of influence of US imperialism, a process that is fully endorsed by the Castroite regime.

The servile attitude of the Cuban government toward American imperialism was clearly expressed in Raul Castro’s speech at the summit. He heaped obsequious praise on the US head of state, describing Obama as an “honest man,” whose attitudes had been formed by his “humble beginnings,” adding that he had deeply considered the matter before expressing this opinion. He mentioned the name Obama ten times in his 49-minute address.

Reviewing the decades of US aggression against Cuba, Castro begged Obama’s “forgiveness” and declared that “he [Obama] has no responsibility for any of this.”

Hearing his Lincolnesque portrayal of the 44th president of the United States, one would hardly guess that Castro was describing a man who has presided over illegal wars, drone missile assassinations, mass surveillance at home and abroad, and conspiracies to carry out coups and regime-change operations from Honduras and Venezuela to Ukraine. Obama has distinguished himself as the unwavering mouthpiece of the US military-intelligence complex.

His shift toward “normalization” with Cuba reflects the conclusion of predominant sections of the Washington establishment that US imperialism can best advance its interests in the region by dropping its

prolonged blockade and counting on the penetration of the island nation by American capital to create the conditions for returning Cuba to the status of a US semi-colony.

In addition to his meeting with Obama, Castro held discussions in Panama with Thomas Donahue, the chairman of the US Chamber of Commerce. Donahue has long been a leading spokesman for US capitalist interests that are intent on reentering Cuba for the purpose of exploiting its people and resources.

In terms of the broader interests of US imperialism, the rapprochement with Cuba is largely driven by the desire to put an end to a policy that has served as an irritant in the relations between Washington and the other nations in a hemisphere that it once proclaimed its own “backyard.”

US relations with Latin America are of growing concern to the ruling class under conditions in which China is supplanting the US as the main trading partner and investor throughout the region. It is already number one in Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Venezuela and Peru, and Beijing is committed to investing an additional \$250 billion in the region over the next decade.

This decline in the relative weight of American capitalism in the region has found expression in the waning political significance of the Washington-based Organization of American States, which organizes the Summit of the Americas. After the last summit three years ago in Cartagena, Colombia, various countries, including Colombia, Washington’s closest ally, warned that if Cuba did not attend the next session, neither would they.

Castro’s appearance at the Panama summit and his embrace of Obama have thrown a lifeline to an organization that his brother Fidel only a decade ago denounced as “a corrupt, putrid and stinking institution” that had “only humiliated the honor of Latin American nations.”

Underlying this shift are definite material interests of the ruling stratum within Cuba, which is determined to hold onto its privileges and power, hoping to preserve the state as an interlocutor and cheap labor contractor for foreign capital.

The rapprochement of the Cuban government with imperialism says a great deal about the nature of the regime and the revolution that brought it to power in 1959. For decades, left nationalists in Latin America and petty-bourgeois radicals in Europe and North America had held up the nationalist revolution led by Fidel Castro as a new road to socialism, and declared that it had created a workers' state in Cuba.

The most pernicious of these theories were developed by Pabloism, a revisionist tendency that broke with the Fourth International in the 1950s. It insisted that the socialist revolution no longer required the active and conscious intervention of the working class, led by a Trotskyist party. It could, they maintained, be accomplished by means of "blunted instruments," including small bands of guerrillas carrying out an armed struggle against the state, with the workers reduced to little more than passive onlookers.

The promotion of Castroism and guerrillaism had a catastrophic political impact in Latin America. It served to divert revolutionary sections of youth away from the struggle to develop a revolutionary party in the working class and into suicidal armed combat with the state. Thousands of people died in such hopeless campaigns, paving the way for the assumption of power by a series of brutal military dictatorships.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) waged an implacable struggle against this retrograde perspective. It rejected the claims that the Castro regime's nationalizations and social reforms made it a workers' state or signaled a new road to socialism. Rather, it insisted, the Cuban regime represented one of the most radical variants of the bourgeois nationalist regimes that came to power in a number of the former colonial countries during the post-World War II era.

Unable to resolve Cuba's historic problems of backwardness and dependence that were the legacy of colonialism and imperialist oppression, the government in Havana relied heavily on Soviet subsidies. These dried up with the USSR's dissolution at the hands of the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy.

The Cuban regime subsequently kept itself afloat through cheap oil supplies from Venezuela and capital investment from Europe, China, Russia, Canada and Brazil. Now, it has come full circle, seeking its salvation through the return of US imperialism.

This political evolution is a powerful vindication of Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution, defended by the ICFI, which established that the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed colonial and semi-colonial countries could be won only by the working class taking the leadership of the revolution, establishing its own state and extending the socialist revolution internationally.

This perspective and the assimilation of the bitter lessons of the protracted historical experience with Castroism are decisive for the building of new revolutionary parties of the working class throughout Latin America and in Cuba itself, where the turn toward US capitalism will inevitably lead to a sharpening of social inequality and the class struggle.



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