

# Obama in Cuba

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*“Once the United States is in Cuba, who will drive it out?”—José Martí, 1895.*

The single most iconic image of Barack Obama’s three-day trip to Cuba was that of the US president laying a wreath at the foot of a memorial in La Plaza de la Revolución to Cuban independence hero and poet José Martí, while a military band played “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

The supporters of Castroism have tried to turn Martí into a semi-Marxist and its opponents have remade him into a rabid anti-communist. In fact, Martí was a man of his epoch, a bourgeois nationalist and romantic, a fervent admirer of Abraham Lincoln, who drew incisive conclusions about the evolution of capitalist society in the US based on his 15 years in exile there.

“What is becoming apparent,” he wrote in 1889, “is that the nature of the North American government is gradually changing its fundamental reality. Under the traditional labels of Republican and Democrat, with no innovation other than the contingent circumstances of place and character, the republic is becoming plutocratic and imperialistic.”

One hundred and twenty-seven years later, President Obama comes to Cuba as the representative of a government in which the processes indicated by Martí have not only ripened, they have become thoroughly rotten.

The corporate media all over the world use the word “historic” to describe Obama’s visit to Cuba—the first by an American president since Calvin Coolidge 88 years before. Very few, however, care to invest this adjective with any concrete meaning as to what in the historical development of US and world capitalism, as well as the regime brought to power by the 1959 Cuban Revolution, has brought the American president to Havana.

In his appearance on Monday with Cuban President Raul Castro, Obama postured as the champion of

“democracy” and “freedom,” declaring that they are “not just American values, but are universal values.” He cast his bid to “normalize” relations with Cuba as an exercise in “reconciliation” based on the profound insight that, in the end, “people are people.”

No one would suspect that this great humanitarian is the same president responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands in US-orchestrated wars for regime-change in Libya and Syria—a man who has personally directed a drone assassination program that has murdered thousands of innocent civilians, who directs a covert spying operation against the people of the planet, and who pursues US interests by supporting bloodstained clients and allies ranging from the semi-feudal monarchy in Saudi Arabia to the death-squad regime in Honduras.

Obama’s “human rights” masquerade is aided and abetted not only by the slavish US media, but also by the Castro government itself, which published an obsequious biography describing the American president as someone who embodies the “values of the heartland of America” and is driven by “the conviction that a life so blessed should be lived to serve others.”

What drives Obama and the virtual army of CEOs and business lobbyists who accompanied him to Cuba is the ferocious struggle for markets and profits that underlies the worldwide eruption of American militarism.

Unlike most of the mass media, the financial press was fairly blunt about what brought Obama to Cuba. “As the Obama administration works to expand economic relations with Cuba, it is competing for influence with a familiar rival: China,” the *Wall Street Journal* stated. While China’s trade with the island nation grew by 57 percent in just the first three quarters of 2015, Washington is betting that it can use “cultural attachment and proximity” to defeat Beijing “not only in economic influence, but also in the battle for the

country's political future," the newspaper wrote.

The *Journal* noted that same motive is also behind the second leg of Obama's Latin American tour, which will take him to Argentina for a meeting with recently inaugurated President Mauricio Macri, arguably the most right-wing head of state on the South American continent. While China is the largest market for Argentine agricultural commodities and the country's third biggest foreign investor, Macri has signaled his intention to shift the country more directly into the orbit of US imperialism, an agenda that seemed to be violently underscored by last week's sinking of a Chinese fishing vessel at the hands of an Argentine gunboat.

The Pentagon has increasingly made the argument that Obama's "pivot to Asia" must include an economic, political and military drive to resist Beijing's growing influence in Latin America. Obama's trip appears to be based on the same perspective.

Ironically, the Cuban government appears to desire nothing so much as to emulate China in terms of its state forms, its economic setup and its relations with imperialism. It has already created a "special economic zone" for foreign capitalist investors at the new port facility of Mariel, offering itself as a labor contractor guaranteeing a cheap and state-disciplined workforce. The inevitable outcome will be the enrichment of a thin layer of bureaucrats and "entrepreneurs," together with soaring social inequality and an explosive growth of class struggle.

For pseudo-left forces throughout Latin America, the US-Cuba rapprochement represents one more blow to a bankrupt political perspective already severely undermined by the ebbing—in tandem with the collapse of the commodity and "emerging market" booms—of the so-called "turn to the left" by elements ranging from the ousted Peronists in Argentina to the crisis-ridden administrations of Maduro in Venezuela, Rousseff in Brazil and Morales in Bolivia.

The illusions that the pseudo-left attempted to promote in these governments echoed their attempt in the 1960s and 1970s to cast the Cuban Revolution, Castroism and petty-bourgeois guerrillaism as a new road to socialism, one that no longer depended upon either the building of revolutionary Marxist parties or the conscious and independent revolutionary

intervention of the working class.

The working class of Latin America paid a terrible price for the influence exerted by this theory, which was fostered by the Pabloite revisionist tendency that emerged within the Fourth International. The diversion of radicalized youth and young workers into suicidal guerrilla struggles claimed thousands of lives, disoriented the workers' movement, and paved the way to fascist-military dictatorships.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) fought implacably against this perspective, insisting that Castroism represented not a new road to socialism, but rather one of the most radical variants of the bourgeois nationalist movements swept to power throughout much of the former colonial world during the same period.

The ICFI insisted, in line with Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution, that the task of liberating Cuba and other colonial and semi-colonial countries from imperialist oppression could be achieved only under the leadership of the working class, mobilizing behind it the peasantry and fighting to take state power into its own hands and extend the revolution internationally.

The protracted evolution of the Castro government, now culminating in the rapprochement with US imperialism symbolized by Obama's presence in Havana, has thoroughly vindicated this perspective. What is now emerging on the historical agenda throughout Latin America and internationally is an eruption of class struggle that poses with immense urgency the building of new revolutionary parties of the working class as sections of the world Trotskyist movement, the ICFI.



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