

US energy blockade threatens Cuba with humanitarian “collapse”

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6 February 2026

UN Secretary-General António Guterres warned Tuesday that Cuba faces an imminent humanitarian “collapse ... if its oil needs go unmet,” citing the devastating impact of Washington’s tightened fuel embargo.

The warning comes after Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel denounced Trump for pursuing a “genocidal” policy against the Cuban people.

Nationwide power outages have persisted for weeks, and analysts estimate barely two weeks of fuel remain. Some parts of the country already go 20 hours a day without power, with a total blackout threatening every aspect of modern society—from hospitals to food production, water treatment and refrigeration. Piles of uncollected trash are beginning to fester as sanitation trucks sit idle; interminable lines snake around gas stations, sparking desperation and unrest.

The Trump administration’s attempt to pull the plug on the Cuban economy is aimed at carrying through the nearly seven decades of efforts to overthrow the Castroite government installed by the 1959 Cuban Revolution.

Following the January 3 US abduction of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, which severed a key oil lifeline, Trump issued an executive order absurdly calling Cuba an “extraordinary threat to national security.” Following Trump’s warning of tariffs on oil suppliers, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum halted vital shipments to the island.

The situation was already dire before this year. A stunning 10 percent of the population, or over 1 million people, had fled the island since 2022 in the largest exodus in Cuban history, accelerated by COVID-19’s demolition of the tourist industry.

Cuba was even selling a fraction of its scarce fuel to pay for vital imports, including drugs and machinery. Finally, last December, a partial dollarization of the economy failed as a last-ditch attempt to attract investments, modernize industry and increase foreign currency reserves.

The Pentagon maintains its largest buildup in the Caribbean since the Cold War, including its most advanced aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald R Ford and 15,000 troops. Contract records, moreover, indicate plans to maintain a heightened deployment through 2028.

On Thursday, Díaz-Canel delivered his first televised address since the abduction of Maduro to declare that he is open to talks with Washington. “Cuba is willing to engage in dialogue with the United States,” he said, insofar as it seeks to “build a neighborly,

civilized relationship that can be a win-win for our peoples.”

Nonetheless, Havana is “preparing for a state of war in any moment,” he added.

The most recent appeal for talks with Washington significantly takes place after the Russian ambassador Viktor Coronelli vowed to continue supplying oil to the island without providing details. Any attempt to overcome the US military blockade of tankers threatens to ignite a military conflict. On January 8, however, after the US seizure of a Russian-flagged tanker leaving Venezuela, Moscow issued only a brief statement denouncing it.

With Beijing’s response similarly limited to expressing concerns and “urging” the US to stop the embargo, the threat to impose famine and genocide on Cuba as the world’s capitalist governments watch recalls nothing so much as what has been taking place in Gaza since October 7, 2023.

Trump is openly stating that he will “run” Venezuela and that he sees the 19th century military theft of half of Mexico’s territory as the compass for US policy for the region today. In this context, Díaz-Canel’s proposal for talks signals the latest capitulation by nationalist forces across the region to Trump’s imperial diktats.

Nicolás Maduro’s repeated calls for “win-win” talks with Washington ended in his kidnapping and the Chavista remnants’ handover of Venezuelan oil control to the US along with their hosting the CIA director in Caracas.

The largest countries in the region are governed by ostensible “leftists” representing the so-called “Pink Tide.” They have long professed a desire for regional integration to protect Latin American sovereignty. Brazil’s President Lula da Silva has remained quiet over threats to Cuba; Mexico’s Sheinbaum has capitulated to tariff threats; Colombia’s Gustavo Petro kissed Trump’s ring in the White House Tuesday and promised collaboration in the carve up of Venezuela.

There is no clearer indictment against all the pseudo-left and petty-bourgeois nationalist tendencies in the region and internationally, especially those that have promoted the Cuban Revolution and later the Bolivarian Revolution as a new road to socialism and anti-imperialism.

Throughout this period, the Democratic and Republican Parties have both sought to restore the kind of semi-colonial rule over Cuba that existed under the hated dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. This has ranged from the more “friendly” approach seen during Obama’s brief “normalization” period to Trump’s hard line ultimatums.

The barbaric displays of aggression by Trump can only be seen as a sign of desperation in the face of the deepening crisis of US imperialism and world capitalism. Nonetheless, the apologists for the likes of Sheinbaum, Lula and Petro, not to mention the Cuban leadership itself, insist that their capitulation amounts to “realism,” arguing that there is nothing else these leaders can do.

However, for workers in Venezuela, Cuba and internationally, it is not a question of what else can the Chavista and Castroite leaders do under these conditions, but how their policies over decades have helped to create these conditions and what workers must do in response based on their independent class interests.

A serious answer to these questions requires a serious examination of the struggle waged by the International Committee of the Fourth International in its principled response to the Cuban Revolution.

Cuba’s historical dependence and the vindication of Permanent Revolution

The Cuban Revolution of 1959 overthrew the US-backed Batista dictatorship but did so initially with the blessings of at least a section of the US ruling establishment and, even in its more radical stages, never transcended bourgeois nationalism. Lacking a socialist program to mobilize the international working class, the Castroite regime has always relied on international capital and remained tethered to patrons across the more than six decades of US trade embargo.

Based upon a Faustian bargain struck by Castro to subordinate his foreign policy to that of the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy, the Soviet Union provided billions annually in subsidized oil and aid. The USSR’s 1991 dissolution triggered the “Special Period” famine. Then, Hugo Chávez’s 1999 rise in Venezuela provided a new lifeline: barter deals exchanged 100,000 barrels of oil daily for Cuban doctors, security personnel and other services. As Venezuela’s crisis deepened, Russia and China stepped in with oil, credits, humanitarian donations and trade deals. Today, isolated amid Trump’s aggression, Cuba’s dependence exposes its nationalist limits.

Pabloism, a revisionist tendency that broke with the Fourth International in the early 1950s, developed pernicious arguments claiming Fidel Castro’s July 26 Movement created a workers’ state in Cuba and was establishing socialism. They insisted that the Cuban Revolution had proven that guerrillas based on the peasantry could achieve this without the independent mobilization of the working class, let alone the building of a Trotskyist leadership.

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the United States used the Cuban Revolution as the primary justification for its 1963 unprincipled reunification with the Pabloite International Secretariat. Under the leadership of Joseph Hansen, the SWP claimed that Fidel Castro had established a “workers’ state” by following the “dialectical logic” of the revolution, despite its lack of proletarian organs of power like soviets. Hansen insisted that this proved all fundamental differences with the Pabloites were water under the bridge.

Against such arguments the International Committee of the Fourth International, led notably at the time by the British Socialist Labour League (SLL), maintained that the Cuban Revolution was

a petty-bourgeois nationalist movement. While the ICFI waged an active campaign to defend Cuba against imperialist aggression, it refused to characterize the regime as a “workers’ state” because the revolution lacked the conscious participation and leadership of the working class. Facing the political degeneration of the SWP, the stance of the SLL was central to preserving Trotskyism as the sole political current fighting for the mobilization of the international proletariat in abolishing capitalism.

Cuba represented a confirmation in the negative of the Theory of Permanent Revolution, the SLL argued, as the Castroite leadership remained unable to achieve genuine liberation from imperialism. The SLL criticized, moreover, the Pabloite’s claim that “natural” or “unconscious” Marxist leaderships could emerge from petty bourgeois movements like Castro’s July 26th Movement, asserting that a proletarian party must be consciously constructed to build socialism.

The SLL combatted the SWP’s position as a liquidationist betrayal, as it maintained that socialism could be achieved through “blunted instruments” and guerrilla warfare rather than the development of socialist political consciousness and a revolutionary leadership in the working class. The SWP’s adoption of an “objectivist” and “empiricist” method focused on the “fact” of nationalizations while ignoring the class nature of the state rendered the Fourth International’s struggle for independent revolutionary leadership superfluous.

The struggle over Cuba was a turning point for the ICFI, as the SLL took up an offensive against revisionism to clarify the movement’s historical tasks. The “myth of guerrillaism” promoted by the Pabloites led to catastrophic defeats and the physical annihilation of revolutionary cadres across Latin America, as youth were diverted into isolated armed actions that separated them from the industrial proletariat. The resulting defeats suffered by the Latin American working class and the imposition of US-backed military dictatorships throughout much of the region only served to intensify the isolation imposed by US imperialism against Cuba.

The catastrophic trajectory of the Cuban regime today provides another tragic vindication of the ICFI’s political perspective. The regime’s turn toward foreign direct investment for decades, the marketing of cheap labor to multinationals, and the persistence of social inequality demonstrate the bourgeois limits of the revolution and its inability to solve the historic problems of Cuban society.

Ultimately, the ICFI’s defense of the political independence of the working class and its fight to unite workers across national boundaries remain the essential preconditions for waging a genuine struggle to defeat imperialist aggression and carry out the socialist revolution.



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