

Cuban worker describes hellish conditions, appeals to US workers to force an end to embargo

Our reporters
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The humanitarian situation in Cuba has undergone a catastrophic decline in the three weeks following Donald Trump's January 29 executive order declaring the island a "national security threat" and threatening tariffs on any nation supplying it with oil. Washington has effectively turned its long-standing embargo into an overt attempt to starve the population into submission.

While US officials discuss allowing only "small quantities" of fuel to prevent total infrastructure collapse, the White House demanded last week "very dramatic changes" in Cuba. The US Supreme Court, moreover, is considering cases demanding Havana pay billions in compensation to US corporations like ExxonMobil for key ports, plantations and other infrastructure expropriated six decades ago.

In this dire context, the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with María, a 32-year-old worker and single mother in Matanzas ("María" is a pseudonym used to protect her identity.) Her harrowing testimony exposes the reality of "maximum pressure" and highlights the necessity of an independent mobilization of the international working class to break the siege.

"This place is a hell"

María describes a reality that exceeds the horror reported in the corporate media. Basic necessities like cooking gas have vanished entirely; many now rely on increasingly expensive charcoal or even broken furniture for firewood, she explains. While she views Trump's policies as "asphyxiating," she also holds the Cuban government responsible for the country's debacle.

"I am 32 years old," she continues, "I belong to a generation that went to university with enthusiasm and professional ambitions. The Cuban people are tired of being censored, without freedom of expression, afraid to speak freely about the fact that we live in a failed state." The pain is sharpened by the

fact that "Our friends and colleagues are political prisoners for peacefully disagreeing. The country has been on the road to disaster for years. This did not start with Trump, although it has worsened under him. ... Nobody wants to stay here," she says, noting that the sector of society that still trusts in the government is tiny and unrepresentative.

Daily life for María is a struggle for survival:

- Electrical outages last between 20 and 30 hours, with power available for only two hours or less.

- The Cuban peso is totally devalued, with 1 USD equaling 500 pesos.

- Her two jobs as an editor and librarian barely cover the cost of a carton of eggs.

- Running water is frequently unavailable for days at a time.

- The black market for imported medicines charges unaffordable prices.

"There are hardly any cars on the streets, the country is at a standstill, inflation is skyrocketing," she explains. "This place is hell."

For her infant daughter, even watching cartoons has become a "luxury for which she cries daily" and basic items like toys or clothes are "unaffordable for the average citizen."

María adds that no one has any clear idea how close a full collapse is. "Here, no one has any idea how long it will be before everything collapses," she said. "We often feel that it is close, but nothing ever happens. Although no one remembers things ever being worse than they are now."

Children go to sleep hungry

The crisis has manifested in widespread hunger, including among children. María confirms that most families cannot afford three meals a day and survive on low-quality food with almost no protein. Often, a child's only breakfast is an instant soft drink, as even bread has become scarce.

This malnutrition is compounded by outbreaks of respiratory

and mosquito-borne diseases, which strike a population with weakened immune systems. In schools, meals are often reduced to a single boiled vegetable or a thin broth. María notes that a single bag of milk for her daughter costs half of her monthly salary.

These accounts are mirrored by some reports on the mainstream media, including workers who describe sleeping in schools to avoid unaffordable transport costs and feeding children soft drinks when milk is unavailable.

Information monopoly and a climate of fear

According to María, the Cuban government maintains a total monopoly on domestic media, while internet content is often manipulated by various political interests. Cubans are acutely aware that President Díaz-Canel and other officials frequently lie or provide incoherent data. During recent epidemics, the government denied the crisis even as people died in hospitals, choosing to minimize the crisis until the last possible moment.

Despite the misery, a “palpable” climate of fear prevents many from speaking out. Workers contacted by the WSWS reported being interrogated for hours, extorted, or threatened with jail for speaking out about social conditions.

The role of the American and international working class

When asked about appealing to the American working class rather than the Trump administration, María notes that the ideological situation is complex. Decades of “indoctrination to remain silent, ideological disorganization, the lack of coherent political leaders, and the primitive survival mode” have left many Cubans unaware that the American people could offer real support.

But the thought that the American working class could mobilize to end the embargo is “moving,” she added, noting that most Cubans feel they do not matter to anyone.

María expresses interest in the fact that millions in the US have protested against the genocide in Gaza and that workers have the objective power to stop wars by mobilizing independently to stop weapons from reaching Israel. The same power could be used to supply Cuba with fuel, medicine, food and other vital goods and services and, ultimately, to end the blockade entirely.

She concludes: “I think it’s commendable that the option is on the table. I hope to be of assistance in any way I can, and let’s stay in touch.”

The first step must be communication, María adds, as the

information reaching Cuba is heavily biased or controlled by the government.

In the United States, workers instinctively recognize the need for solidarity. A New York teacher interviewed by the WSWS stressed that more people need to be informed about the situation in Cuba, though many are currently pulled in different directions by crises in Gaza, Venezuela and Sudan. She explains: “I feel like the people that want to help are pulled in different directions.”

The teacher supports this perspective: asked about a call to mobilize American workers to end the embargo, she replied: “I will gladly protest and try.” That determination must be generalized and organized.

The way forward

A planned “Convoy to Cuba,” involving humanitarian organizations and figures like Greta Thunberg who supported aid flotillas to Gaza, is set to deliver humanitarian aid on March 21. Such efforts are courageous challenges to imperialist aggression, and the *World Socialist Web Site* insists that workers internationally must actively defend any such convoy against attempts to block it.

However, the limitations of such initiatives to overcome a decades-long embargo by the world’s dominant power must be recognized. The continuous provision of food, fuel and medicine requires the organized intervention of the international working class:

- Oil, logistics and transport workers, including dockworkers and maritime sailors, must use their control over production and distribution to further the shipment of supplies to Cuba.
- Port workers must also refuse to load or unload military and other ships enforcing the embargo.
- Workers across the Americas and Europe must coordinate these actions through rank-and-file committees.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees provides the framework for this global struggle. Only on this basis can the Cuban working class begin to chart a path out of the nightmare created by the crimes of US imperialism and settle accounts with the island’s bourgeois regime.



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