

Washington's assault on Cuba and Latin America: A key front in the capitalist drive to abolish the 20th century

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Coinciding with a total island-wide blackout Monday, US President Donald Trump boasted to reporters, “I do believe I’ll be having the honor of taking Cuba. That’s a big honor.”

“Whether I free it, take it, I think I could do anything I want with it,” he said, with a gangsterism that would make even Theodore Roosevelt—the architect of ‘big stick’ diplomacy—blush.

These arrogant pronouncements come after a series of major concessions by Havana since Trump’s January 29 designation of Cuba as a “national emergency” and the imposition of a complete energy embargo against the island nation.

In a matter of weeks, the Cuban government has: announced sweeping economic “reforms” expanding private business and allowing public-private partnerships; invited FBI “experts” to the island to help investigate an armed incursion by Cuban-American terrorists; openly courted US corporations and exile “*gusano*” capitalists in Miami; and confirmed ongoing talks with the Trump administration over the fuel blockade and “security cooperation.”

Cuba’s President Miguel Díaz-Canel on Wednesday denounced the “almost daily” threats by Trump and vowed “unyielding resistance,” but his administration’s actions signal capitulation. Deputy Prime Minister Oscar Pérez-Oliva told NBC News that “Cuba is open to having a fluid commercial relationship with US companies” and “also with Cubans residing in the United States and their descendants.”

This is a historic reversal of Fidel Castro’s long-standing prohibition on exile capital, justified as a defense against precisely those layers that sought to restore the semi-colonial era through invasions, terrorist bombings and assassination attempts.

Yet this has done nothing to placate White House demands for regime change. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, sitting beside Trump in the Oval Office Tuesday, dismissed Havana’s pro-business measures as inadequate: “They can’t fix it. So they have to change dramatically. What they announced yesterday is not dramatic enough. It’s not going to fix it.”

USA Today has reported that Trump’s team is discussing an “off-ramp” for Díaz-Canel, the Castro family’s continued presence on the island, and deals on “ports, energy and tourism”—in other words, a negotiated recolonization package.

The US siege of Cuba is a component part of a broader imperialist offensive pushed under Trump’s “Trump corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine, which asserts the right of Washington to directly dictate the fate of every country in the hemisphere and to appropriate all of their resources.

Beyond quibbles about how it’s sold to the American public, the genocidal regime-change operation is supported by both parties and the corporate media. Democratic Congressman Ro Khanna, considered part of the party’s “progressive” wing, wrote approvingly on X: “A deal would

allow American and Cuban entrepreneurs to invest in Cuba and help Cuba recover and modernize economically.”

At the Shield of the Americas summit in Miami earlier this month, Trump brought together far-right regimes and allies from Argentina, Ecuador, Paraguay, Chile and elsewhere in the hemisphere on a common program: militarization, mass repression and a massive attack on living standards and social programs.

“Cuba is in its last moments of life,” Trump told the fascistic regional leaders as they applauded.

The United States is deploying troops and opening FBI and military offices in Ecuador under “Operation Total Extermination,” claiming to be fighting “narco-terrorists.” Not only has this joint assault seen the burning of peasant homes, the bombing of rural areas and torturing of workers, but Colombia has denounced the killing of 27 people on its territory in an airstrike launched from Ecuador. Meanwhile, Ecuadorian courts have suspended the main bourgeois opposition party, Rafael Correa’s Citizens’ Revolution.

The Pentagon’s Southern Command is aggressively securing basing rights across the region and expanding naval operations in the Caribbean and Pacific, including an ongoing bombing campaign that has claimed the lives of at least 157 fishermen accused without evidence of drug trafficking.

Trump has also repeatedly threatened the military takeover of the Panama Canal and Greenland, while frequently calling for the invasion and bombing of Mexico.

Treating Venezuela as a conquered territory, Trump recently proposed on social media that Venezuela could become the US 51st state, which follows similar statements about Canada. The kidnapping of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife amid a bombing campaign in Caracas has opened the country to the CIA and the corporate plunder of its oil and mineral wealth.

With Trump’s Treasury secretary declaring Argentina the “centerpiece” of US strategy in the region, Javier Milei has ceded control of the South Atlantic to the Pentagon on the pretext of countering Chinese fishing operations, rammed through a labor “reform” explicitly aimed at erasing more than 100 years of workers’ gains and defended the crimes of the last US-backed military dictatorship.

Following similar coercive endorsements of far-right candidates in Argentina, Honduras and Costa Rica, Trump backed the election in Chile of José Antonio Kast, an open admirer of the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship who is already launching an economic shock therapy program modeled after Milei’s policies.

This is not just geopolitics; it is class war. The aim is to wipe out the social and democratic gains won by workers across the Americas over the course of the 20th century, completing the social counterrevolution

attempted by the military dictatorships in the last century. This is inseparable from Trump's efforts to build a fascist regime at home.

Cuba's collective punishment

Even without a missile fired at the island, the economic strangulation of Cuba is producing devastation on a scale comparable only to war. Following the removal of Maduro in early 2025, the US cut off Venezuelan oil shipments and threatened Mexico and other suppliers with crippling tariffs if they exported fuel to Cuba. Mexico's president, Claudia Sheinbaum halted oil shipments in January. Brazil and Colombia—both governed by "left" leaders and major oil exporters—have likewise refused to break the embargo.

This is not merely capitulation, but rather complicity in defense of local capitalist interests that seek to position themselves as junior partners in Washington's neocolonial carve-up of the hemisphere.

The isolation of Cuba is stark. Ecuador expelled Cuban diplomats; Nicaragua curtailed visa-free travel for Cubans; and countries like Guatemala, Honduras and Jamaica have moved to end medical cooperation deals that provided Havana with vital hard currency.

Cuba's electric grid, dependent on aging Soviet-era thermal plants burning heavy crude and a web of diesel generators, has been pushed beyond the breaking point. On March 16, the entire national grid collapsed, plunging the island into darkness. After 29 hours, power was only partially restored.

A worker in Matanzas told the WSWS that days have passed without electricity in her neighborhood. While drinking water is limited, cooking gas is simply inaccessible. She recounted that a close relative recently died as a result of the healthcare system collapse that is already costing countless lives.

The medical system has a waiting list of nearly 100,000 "non-urgent" procedures, including over 11,000 children. In many cases, "non-urgent" simply means "not dead yet."

Energy analyst Jorge Piñón has warned: "I have never seen or studied a country where 100 percent of the fuel disappears."

Under these conditions, small but significant protests have erupted: university students staging sit-ins against collapsing education, working class neighborhoods banging pots and pans to demand electricity and food and riots like the recent one in Morón, where demonstrators set furniture ablaze in a Communist Party office.

A front in the drive to abolish the 20th century

The imperialist onslaught against Cuba has a distinctively vindictive character. Washington is not merely pursuing corporate and financial interests; it is waging a simultaneous campaign of historical retribution against two revolutions—1959 in Cuba and 1979 in Iran—that toppled US puppet regimes.

As the International Committee of the Fourth International insisted, the Cuban revolution represented not a socialist overturn of capitalist property relations under the conscious leadership of the working class. Rather, its expropriations of US corporate property, land reforms and social measures in health and education were a radical variant of the bourgeois nationalist and anti-colonial movements that came to power across much of the world in the 20th century, ultimately inspired by the 1917 Russian Revolution.

Today, under the whip of the global capitalist crisis and war drive, the

ruling classes are determined to "abolish the 20th century"—to return humanity to the conditions of the 19th: naked exploitation, colonial subjugation and unchecked police/military rule.

The US think tank Jamestown Foundation noted in a January report, the fall of Cuba "would be perceived by the Global South as final proof of the inability of Russia, China, or anyone else to function as an alternative center of power."

The reaction of the so-called "pink tide" governments in Latin America, along with Russia and China, to Cuba's plight exposes their bankruptcy and the fraud of "regional integration" or BRICS as a counterweight to US imperialism.

But the vicious onslaught against Cuba and the attempt to forge a counter-revolutionary axis of far-right regimes in Latin America are signs not of US imperialism's strength, but rather of its profound weakness.

The agony of Cuba is bound up with the broader collapse of the post-1945 world order that relied on US economic and military hegemony, and the impossibility of reconstructing this order on any other capitalist basis, including multipolarity.

Toward an international working class offensive

If the strangulation of Cuba cannot be stopped by appealing to complicit bourgeois-nationalist governments, on what social basis can it be opposed?

The answer lies in the international working class. The siege of Cuba is inseparable from the assault on workers everywhere, including in the United States itself. Rising oil prices driven by the criminal war on Iran are already fueling inflation and austerity that recall the 1970s, when the oil shocks detonated massive class struggles across Latin America and beyond.

The class response to the torture of Cuba must be organized as part of a broader struggle against imperialist war and social counterrevolution. Workers in the US, Canada, Latin America and internationally must demand an immediate and unconditional end to the embargo and all sanctions in order to end the starvation of the Cuban working class, allowing it to settle accounts with its own ruling elite.

The defense of Cuba is not a "national" question in the sense long upheld by the Stalinist and pseudo-left organizations.

As David North explained in his 1993 lecture "Permanent Revolution and the National Question Today," Trotsky demonstrated that imperialism "sounded the death knell of the national state itself." Moreover, "the impossibility of resolving, in the epoch of imperialism, any of the basic problems of humanity on a national basis" made the perspective of "national liberation" under a native bourgeois leadership a reactionary utopia. The record of Castro and the myriad "national liberation" icons has borne this out: all rested on a nation/state framework, sought to balance between imperialism and Stalinism, and left the working class to pay the price as their ostensible gains crumbled.

The current wave of capitulation by the governments in Cuba, and Venezuela, along with the rest of the "pink tide" confirms in the negative Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution: in the epoch of imperialism, none of the fundamental democratic and social tasks facing oppressed countries can be resolved on a national basis under bourgeois or petty-bourgeois leaderships. The only viable basis for the defense of Cuba—and of all the gains won by workers in the 20th century—is the independent, international mobilization of the working class for power as part of the world socialist revolution.

This means the construction of genuinely revolutionary parties in Cuba and across Latin America as sections of the International Committee of

the Fourth International, to provide the coming eruption of the class struggle with a conscious socialist leadership.



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