

The balance sheet of Castroism as Trump prepares war on Cuba

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2 June 2026

Less than six months after the kidnapping and overthrow of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro—an operation in which US Special Forces killed 32 Cuban security personnel and scores of Venezuelans in Caracas—the Trump administration is openly preparing a military operation against Cuba. The threats revive the legacy of US-backed coups and fascist military dictatorships that drenched Latin America in blood throughout the 20th century, and represent a drive to reimpose colonial domination over the island.

Workers in Cuba, the United States and across the Americas must urgently mobilize in opposition to this ongoing imperialist aggression and the plans for war. But against the apologists who say this is no time to scrutinize the Cuban leadership—similarly to what they said about the Chavista government now ceding control of Caracas to the CIA and Pentagon—any effective opposition to imperialism requires a balance sheet of the historical experience with Castroism: not only its impact within Cuba itself, but the role that it has played across the hemisphere.

This is not an abstract theoretical exercise. It is a political necessity, because every political force that today wrings its hands over Cuba's plight while offering no real program for its defense—Lula in Brazil, Sheinbaum in Mexico, the Chavistas, the Stalinist parties and the Pabloite tendencies—are both the products and continuators of the politics that created this catastrophe.

The escalation of US pressure against Cuba has proceeded with a ruthlessness that leaves no room for doubt as to Washington's intentions. On the first day of his second term, Trump restored Cuba to the "State Sponsor of Terrorism" list, triggering a sweeping array of financial, commercial and aid penalties. Following the abduction of Maduro, Trump declared: "Cuba is ready to fall." In late January he declared Cuba "a national emergency" and threatened oil suppliers with punishing sanctions if they delivered fuel to the island. On May 1, the administration issued sanctions against any business with the Cuban economy—a measure that, combined with the existing fuel embargo, threatens the island with an unprecedented economic collapse.

The practical results of this siege are genocidal. The arrival of a single Russian tanker allowed the share of Cuban territory affected by power cuts to temporarily fall from 60 percent to 30 percent, according to Cuba's electrical utility, but this relief lasted only a couple of weeks. In May, the island recorded its worst blackout levels in its history. Between May 6 and May 18, Havana endured continuous 24-hour power cuts. Refrigerators have stopped working, food is spoiling, surgical operations have been canceled, and infant mortality has doubled.

On May 21, the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier and three escort warships entered the Caribbean Sea. Their arrival came a day after the Justice Department announced fraudulent murder charges against former Cuban president Raúl Castro, now 94, for the 1996 shooting down of two planes piloted by CIA-linked provocateurs. The indictment is a transparent threat to reprise the kind of operation used against Maduro: indict a leader on fabricated charges, then use that as legal cover for abduction and military

action.

Deputy Cuban Foreign Minister Carlos Fernández de Cossío has acknowledged that his country is preparing for war, saying "we would be naive not to." Cuban officials have begun circulating a "Family Guide for Protection Against Military Aggression."

The US ruling class's animosity to the Cuban people is driven not only by geostrategic objectives, but also by calculated vindictiveness over the 1959 revolution and the loss of both US corporate control of the island's economy and the Mafia's casinos. To grasp the depth of this hatred, one need only recall the refusal to sell oxygen to Cuba during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the American ruling elite adopted a "let it rip" policy sacrificing the lives of American workers, it simultaneously ordered a policy to "let Cubans suffocate." The same bipartisan commitment to the destruction of the Cuban people animates the Trump administration today.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on workers to oppose the threats of invasion, regime change and recolonization of Cuba by US imperialism. Our defense of Cuba against imperialist aggression is unconditional and unreserved. It is precisely because we base that defense on the independent interests and conscious mobilization of the working class—and not on its subordination to the nationalist Cuban leadership—that a sober evaluation of Castroism is not only compatible with that defense, but is a necessary foundation.

The Cuban revolution and the theory of permanent revolution

Cuba's history is the history of the failure of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist leaderships to secure genuine national independence for the island, whose fate has been inextricably bound up with its proximity and strategic importance to the United States since the latter's emergence as an imperialist power.

US Secretary of State James G. Blaine grasped this as early as 1881. He stated:

That rich island, the key to the Gulf of Mexico, is, though in the hands of Spain, a part of the American commercial system... If ever ceasing to be Spanish, Cuba must necessarily become American and not fall under any other European domination.

The construction of the Panama Canal at the turn of the century only magnified this strategic calculus, as the waters surrounding Cuba connect the canal to both the US Gulf Coast and the East Coast. Today, the stakes are raised further still. A recent industry analysis concludes that "Cuba's nickel and cobalt resources represent one of the most significant

underdeveloped mineral assets in the Western Hemisphere. The global EV battery supply chain needs exactly what Cuba has.”

The Cuban people waged three independence wars against Spain, at appalling human cost. In the last of these (1895-1898), Spain deployed 220,285 soldiers and invented the modern concentration camp. Roughly 20 percent of Cuba’s population died. When the war ended, it was not Cuban independence that was established, however, but US tutelage.

The US intervened in 1898, excluded Cuban leaders from the Treaty of Paris that formally ended Spanish colonialism, and imposed the Platt Amendment—granting Washington the unrestricted right to intervene militarily in Cuban affairs. Washington also secured Guantánamo Bay as a permanent US base. Cuba’s formal Republic Day, May 20, 1902, commemorates not genuine independence, but its simulation: a semi-colonial status that preserved the essential subordination of Cuba to US imperialism even as the Stars and Stripes were lowered at Havana’s Morro Castle.

The class forces that drove this history were clearly identified in a foundational lecture by Bill Van Auken titled “Castroism and the Politics of Petty-Bourgeois Nationalism.” That analysis traced the deep roots of the 1959 revolution in the abortive character of Cuba’s independence struggle and the resulting domination of the island’s economy and politics by American capital and its local agents.

The social reality of pre-revolutionary Cuba was one of extreme concentration of wealth alongside mass rural poverty and urban unemployment. The island’s economy—its sugar plantations, utilities, railroads, hotels, and industries—was overwhelmingly owned by US corporations or the local bourgeoisie tied to them.

The Cuban business underworld was deeply connected to the highest levels of the US establishment. Charles “Bebe” Rebozo, a mafia-tied Cuban banker and one of Richard Nixon’s closest confidants, traveled regularly with Nixon and Florida Senator George Smathers to Havana on gambling excursions run entirely by American organized crime figures such as Meyer Lansky. Rebozo maintained deep personal and business ties with Batista’s inner circle, including Edgardo Buttari and Burke Hedges. The Cuba of Batista was, in effect, a mafia state whose overseers sat in Washington and Miami.

The political paralysis of the Cuban working class in this period, as Van Auken documented, was the product of deliberate sabotage. The Cuban Stalinist Communist Party—the PSP—bore direct responsibility for channeling previous revolutionary upheavals behind Batista, including entering his government. The 1933 general strike and revolution that overthrew the Gerardo Machado dictatorship opened a genuinely revolutionary situation, with workers seizing factories and forming soviets. But the Stalinists subordinated this movement to Batista, who at the time postured as an anti-imperialist. With the working class politically disarmed, the result was not the resolution of Cuba’s democratic tasks, but their postponement under a new capitalist strongman.

When the 1959 revolution came, it was not primarily the guerrilla *foco* in the Sierra Maestra that brought down Batista. It was the mass strike movement in the cities that paralyzed his regime and made it untenable. The Castro movement stepped into a political vacuum created by the collapse of Batista’s authority and the absence of a revolutionary working class leadership capable of contesting for power.

This is a crucial point: the triumph of Castro’s 26th of July Movement was not a confirmation of guerrilla warfare as a road to power, but a demonstration that, bereft of revolutionary leadership, the working class can only witness bourgeois nationalist movements inheriting the state as an overseer of continued capitalist exploitation.

The Eisenhower and then the Kennedy administration refused to negotiate with those who removed their puppet in Havana, or accept even minimal land reforms and other measures demanded by the masses. Instead, they halted the import of Cuban sugar, imposing a near-total US

trade embargo. The Castro government that emerged from this process responded, out of economic necessity, with sweeping nationalizations of US-owned plantations, utilities, railroads, hotels and industries.

Turning to the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union for aid, Castro implemented programs that achieved genuine social gains in literacy, public health and education. These accomplishments were real, but they were achieved within a state apparatus that remained fundamentally capitalist in its class character, and under conditions of total political subordination of Cuba to the counterrevolutionary foreign policy of Moscow.

The structural dependency of the Cuban economy on external patronage confirmed that workers could not and cannot secure the remaining social gains from this period by relying on the Castroite government. The Cuban bourgeois nationalist leadership has always required a sponsor to keep its economy afloat. In the Cold War, that sponsor was the Soviet Union. After the USSR’s dissolution, it was Venezuela, and in a more limited and short-term sense, Mexico.

An entire layer of the Cuban military and party leadership enriched itself through privileged access to tourism revenues and joint ventures with European and Canadian capital. In the last decade, spending on tourism and hotels has overwhelmed all other investment priorities. In 2024, the Cuban state concentrated 37.4 percent of all investments in building resorts, a figure eleven times greater than spending on education and health care combined.

This is the logical economic expression of a state whose governing stratum, despite all its nationalist rhetoric, has always been oriented toward finding an accommodation with global capitalism rather than mobilizing the working class to overthrow it. Instead, attracting capital investment requires competitive costs in the form of cheap labor and natural resources.

The current catastrophe has laid bare this reality. When President Díaz-Canel, in a recent interview with *BreakThrough News*, reflects on the lessons of Cuba’s independence wars and the 1933 revolution, he concludes that the fundamental reason previous movements failed to secure independence was “desunión”—lack of unity among Cubans. The 1959 revolution succeeded, he argues, because it “brought together the main political forces in a single party with the same *Martist* [stemming from Cuba’s 19th century nationalist leader José Martí] conception of the Revolutionary Cuban Party,” and thereby “managed to withstand adversity, defeat the embargo, and overcome all imperialist aggression.”

The opposite is the case. The failure of Cuba’s independence wars and revolutionary uprisings was not a product of disunity among Cubans as Cubans. It was a product of the inability of all nationalist programs, in the epoch of imperialism, to resolve the fundamental contradiction between the democratic tasks of the Cuban nation—national self-determination, land reform, sovereignty over its resources—and the class interests of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie that led every nationalist movement.

That contradiction cannot be overcome by achieving unity under a nationalist banner. It can be resolved only by the working class destroying the capitalist state and seizing power in its own name, as part of the international socialist revolution—exactly what Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution, which guided the successful strategy of the October 1917 Russian Revolution, establishes.

That theory, developed in the context of the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the First World War and broader world developments in the early 20th century, rests on three interlocking theses. First, in countries of belated capitalist development, the bourgeoisie is too weak, too tied to imperialism and landlordism and too fearful of the emergence of a revolutionary working class to complete the classic tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution. Only the working class, leading the peasantry and rural poor behind it, can accomplish these tasks.

Second, the democratic revolution cannot stop at the capitalist

“stage”—it must grow over uninterruptedly to socialist measures, i.e., the expropriation of capital. Third, and most importantly, socialist revolution cannot be completed in one country. It must become international, or it will be strangled—as was ultimately demonstrated by the fate of the Soviet Union under the domination and degeneration of the Stalinist nationalist bureaucracy.

Díaz-Canel’s claim that Cuba has successfully withstood the embargo and imperialist aggression is refuted by the current social devastation. The blackouts, the collapse of the healthcare system, the exodus of more than two million Cubans in recent years testify to this catastrophic failure. Díaz-Canel attempts to minimize the current crisis by comparing it favorably to the Special Period of the 1990s, when the ending of Soviet subsidies caused near-total fuel exhaustion and forced Cubans to survive on one-third fewer calories. But the fact that Cubans are leaving today in numbers that have no precedent in Cuban history gives the lie to this claim.

The Cuban revolution provides a strategic confirmation of the theory of permanent revolution in the negative. Even the most radical nationalizations carried out by a petty-bourgeois nationalist government, under conditions of mass mobilization, could not resolve the democratic task of emancipation from imperialism. Defenders of Castroism could argue that it is precisely the isolation imposed by US imperialism that led to their failure, but that argument only underscores the point that the struggle for workers’ power as an integral component of world socialist revolution is necessary.

Today, with the Castro family’s inner circle negotiating the terms of Cuba’s surrender with the CIA director in Havana, inviting expat capitalist investors back to the island, releasing political prisoners on US demand, and expressing interest in cooperating with American intelligence agencies to enhance “the security of both nations,” the bankruptcy of that nationalist strategy is complete.

The capitalist class character of the Cuban leadership is what prevents it from making a genuine appeal to American workers to rise up against the aggression of their own ruling class. Such a movement from below in the United States would inevitably trigger a movement of workers in Cuba demanding an end to the privileges of the capitalist and military elite that controls the economy. The Castro leadership fears its own working class even more than it fears Washington. This is why it courts the “gusano” Miami exile bourgeoisie—long connected to CIA coup attempts and terrorist plots against Cuba—as potential investors, rather than appealing to American workers in the name of international class solidarity.

Joseph Hansen’s “acid test,” the Pabloites, and the betrayal of permanent revolution

The fate of Castroism within Cuba cannot be separated from the catastrophic role it has played internationally. At the center of its promotion across the hemisphere and the falsification of its class character was Pabloism, a revisionist tendency that emerged from within the Fourth International in opposition to the defense of orthodox Trotskyism by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

A key protagonist in this campaign was Joseph Hansen, a leader of the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP). At the time of the 1959 Cuban revolution, the SWP was a leading section of the ICFI. It initially adopted a critical stance toward Castro. However, in a process inseparable from the class pressures on the SWP throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s generated by the prolonged postwar boom, the stranglehold of the union bureaucracy and the influence of the American radical middle-class intelligentsia, the SWP leadership capitulated to Castroism and Pabloism.

In the months immediately following the overthrow of Batista on

January 1, 1959, the *Militant* newspaper, published by the SWP, had defined Castro as a bourgeois nationalist, while its national secretary, Farrell Dobbs, insisted on “the historically necessary avenue to full workers power, to the full assertion of the power of the working class.”

That assessment, however accurate, stood in growing tension with the SWP’s deepening orientation toward middle-class radical layers and their uncritical enthusiasm over events in Cuba.

This moment was seized by Joseph Hansen, a leader of the SWP, who, as the ICFI later established in its investigation into “Security and the Fourth International,” had functioned as an agent of the GPU in the period leading up to the 1940 assassination of Leon Trotsky and subsequently turned informer and “asset” of the FBI.

In December 1960, Hansen produced his “Draft Theses on the Cuban Revolution,” proclaiming that Castro had established a workers state in Cuba and equating the nationalization of property with the existence of a workers state. On January 14, 1961, he delivered a formal report to the SWP Political Committee in support of these theses. The report, and the discussion it generated within the party’s leading bodies, exposed the full depth to which the SWP’s theoretical level had fallen.

As David North documents in *The Heritage We Defend*, Hansen’s initial framing of the question was itself a revelation: He insisted on the urgency of taking a position on Cuba’s class character not from the standpoint of developing a global revolutionary perspective for the working class, but as a response to the pressure of middle-class intellectual opinion. He asked the Political Committee whether the SWP agreed or disagreed with statements on Cuba by Jean-Paul Sartre, C. Wright Mills, and Huberman and Sweezy, describing them as “big important” people.

Hansen’s actual “theoretical” case rested on what the ICFI correctly characterized as unabashed empiricism. He declared:

Our characterizations simply reflect the facts. The fact that the capitalists have been expropriated in Cuba. The fact that a planned economy has been started there. The fact that a qualitatively different kind of state exists there. No matter what you call these things, they are the facts that everyone has to start with.

As North establishes, these “facts” were entirely devoid of critical analysis. To say that capitalists had been expropriated said nothing about the class nature of those expropriations. The reference to a “planned economy” was abstracted entirely from the absence of systematic industrialization and the continued domination of a monoculture economy based on sugar cane—conditions under which scientific planning was impossible, as history subsequently proved. And the claim that Cuba possessed “a qualitatively different kind of state” posed the question, different from what. Hansen did not bother to say.

The pictorial image of armed guerrillas, as North observed, probably flashed through the minds of the SWP Political Committee members as they listened. But armed guerrillas and popular militias do not by themselves determine the class nature of state power. What made the state arising from the Bolshevik revolution “qualitatively different” was not armed militias—it was the Soviet form through which the proletariat exercised its dictatorship.

The SWP’s 1961 Draft Resolution put the revisionist conclusion in its sharpest form: a “petty-bourgeois leadership, beginning with a bourgeois-democratic program, followed the dialectical logic of the revolution instead of the formal logic of their own program, and ended up establishing the first workers state in the Western Hemisphere and proclaiming it an example for all of Latin America.”

The political implications of this claim were staggering. The ICFI’s

British section, the Socialist Labour League (SLL), led the charge against this massive revision of Marxism, beginning with its January 1961 letter to the SWP leadership.

If workers states could be established through the actions of petty-bourgeois guerrilla leaders—based principally on the peasantry, possessing no significant organizational or political connections to the working class, and under conditions in which there existed no identifiable organs of proletarian class rule—then the entire Marxist conception of the historical path to socialism was rendered obsolete. The relevance of Lenin’s writings on the Commune, Trotsky’s analysis of soviet power as the form through which the proletariat exercises its dictatorship, and generations of struggle to build revolutionary parties rooted in the working class—all of this was being thrown overboard in the name of adapting to whatever nationalist or guerrilla movement happened to be carrying out expropriations at a given moment.

In “Trotskyism Betrayed,” issued in July 1962, the SLL declared:

The Castro regime did not create a qualitatively new and different type of state from the Batista regime. The nationalizations carried out by Castro do nothing to alter the capitalist character of the state.

It concluded:

Cuba constitutes, in fact, a negative confirmation of the permanent revolution. Where the working class is unable to lead the peasant masses and smash capitalist state power, the bourgeoisie steps in and solves the problems of the “democratic revolution” in its own fashion and to its own satisfaction.

The demoralization underlying the SWP’s capitulation was laid bare in the Political Committee discussion that followed Hansen’s January 1961 report. Morris Stein, who had played a prominent role in the fight against Pablo a decade earlier and had then denounced the idea that the crisis of proletarian leadership could be resolved by the growth of “objective factors,” now abandoned every principle he had once defended. He told the committee:

We spend the best part of our lives polemicizing against people who talked like revolutionists and acted like reformists. We have spent our life on it. I think we should welcome a change.

As North observes, this was Stein’s political swan song—an expression of the exhaustion of a generation that had given up on the American working class and saw no revolutionary perspective for the SWP. The adulation of Castroism was the political expression of that abandonment.

It was in this context—with the SWP’s positions consolidated, its leadership demoralized, and its orientation fixed toward middle-class radical opinion—that Hansen launched his November 1962 document “Cuba: The Acid Test.” Its significance lay not primarily in what it added theoretically, but in the political weapon it placed in the hands of all those seeking to destroy the ICFI’s resistance to reunification with the Pabloites. The document was a calculated provocation and slander, designed to blackmail the Trotskyist movement into subordinating itself to petty-bourgeois nationalist forces.

Hansen framed the entire situation in terms that foreclosed principled

political discussion. He declared that such “objective factors” as the colonial revolution and the process of de-Stalinization were “having an effect on the radical movement roughly comparable to that of the Russian revolution some forty years ago,” cutting across all formations, “shaking them and regrouping them, dividing them to right and left.”

From this objectivist and impressionist perspective, the ICFI’s defense of the Trotskyist program was presented not as a principled defense of Marxism and the heritage of the October Revolution, but as an obstacle to be cleared away. The SLL’s resistance to reunification with the Pabloites was painted as “ultraleft sectarianism,” its insistence on the primacy of working class leadership as a dogmatic refusal to acknowledge “palpable events,” and its opposition to adapting to Castro as a deluded effort “to clear itself of any further responsibility by putting the label ‘betrayal’ on everything these leaders do.”

Hansen’s alternative, presented as practical Marxism and attentiveness to reality, amounted to the liquidation of the revolutionary party altogether. He wrote:

By joining in the action of the revolution, they seek to help build a revolutionary socialist party in the very process of the revolution itself instead of arguing with the revolution that it would have been better to delay things until the party had first been constructed.

This formulation—which reproduces almost verbatim the arguments Pablo had used to justify capitulation to Stalinism—meant in practice that the party need not be built before a revolution, only during it, and only by adapting to whatever non-Marxist force happened to be leading it. The logical conclusion, as the SLL recognized, was the abandonment of the struggle to build Trotskyist parties anywhere, including, above all, in the United States.

Hansen’s slander of the SLL as ultraleft sectarians, buttressed with the lie that the SLL refused to defend the Cuban Revolution, became the political foundation for every subsequent Pabloite regroupment maneuver. It inoculated the broad petty-bourgeois left against any engagement with the ICFI’s principled positions, framing Trotskyism’s insistence on the independent revolutionary role of the working class as sectarian irrelevance in the face of the mighty forces of the colonial revolution.

This is why Cliff Slaughter’s response—in *Opportunism and Empiricism* in March 1963, whose significance David North compared to Trotsky’s *In Defense of Marxism* written against Max Shachtman and the petty-bourgeois opposition in the SWP in 1939-40—was not merely a reply to Hansen, but a fundamental defense of the Marxist method itself against the empiricist dissolution that Hansen was promoting as a philosophy:

It is a false and non-Marxist view of “the facts” which leads to these revisionist ideas. What our “objectivists” are saying, with their message “history is on our side,” is this: look at the big struggles taking place, add them together without analysing them, go on your impressions of their significance, and add all these together—and you have “the facts.”... A truly objective analysis begins from the economic relations between classes on a world scale and within nations. It proceeds through an analysis of the relations between the needs of these classes and their consciousness and organization. On these it bases its programme for the working class internationally and in each national sector.

By 1962, Hansen had converted Cuba into what he called the Fourth International’s “acid test”: those who failed to celebrate Castro as a

revolutionary Marxist were, in his telling, sectarian ultralefts cut off from reality. The Cuban question thus became the political lever for the reunification of the SWP with the Pabloite International Secretariat in the congress of renegades that established the United Secretariat in 1963. That fusion was not a principled political agreement. It was an international alliance of the petty bourgeoisie, organized to overthrow the program of the Fourth International and assign to Trotskyism the servile role of helping to “strengthen and enrich the international current of Castroism,” in the words of the official reunification resolution.

This reorientation allowed Hansen to pull the SWP’s youth, press, and internal apparatus into uncritical promotion of Castroism and to re-focus the entire practice of the party behind the state’s infested Fair Play for Cuba Committee.

The SWP’s liquidationist destruction of cadres had immediate and catastrophic consequences in Latin America. After the Castro government responded by seizing the printing press of the Cuban Trotskyists, smashing the type set for a Cuban edition of Trotsky’s *Permanent Revolution*, and imprisoning their leading members, the SWP demanded that Trotskyists in Cuba completely subordinate themselves to the Castroite regime.

The SWP extended this criminal orientation across the hemisphere, declaring that “Trotskyists throughout Latin America should try to bring together all those forces, regardless of their specific origins, ready to take the Cuban experience as the point of departure for the revolutionary struggles in their own countries.”

The trajectory of Argentine revisionist Nahuel Moreno illustrates the consequences precisely. Following Hansen’s reunification with the Pabloite Secretariat, Moreno used the Cuban Revolution to break with the ICFI and integrate his movement into the swamp of petty-bourgeois radicalism. He fused with the Guevaraist Mario Roberto Santucho to establish the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT) in Argentina in 1965. When the Cuban Communist Party launched the Latin American Solidarity Organization (OLAS) in August 1967, Moreno proposed that his party’s “number one militant task” was building guerrillas as part of a “technical apparatus rigidly disciplined under OLAS.”

In Chile, Moreno’s liquidationist orientation led to the dissolution of the Workers Revolutionary Party (POR) into the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR)—an amalgam of middle-class tendencies—leaving the Chilean working class without a Marxist leadership in the critical revolutionary situation of the early 1970s.

The international balance sheet of Castroism

The glorification of petty-bourgeois guerrillaism as a new road to socialism played an extremely pernicious role in paving the way for the subordination of the working class to various bourgeois nationalist leaders, from Juan Perón in Argentina to Salvador Allende in Chile, Juan José Torres in Bolivia, and Juan Francisco Velasco Alvarado in Peru.

In 1971, during his own visit to Chile, Castro gave his blessings to the “Chilean [parliamentary] road to Socialism,” led by Allende, calling on workers during several prominent speeches to “unite” behind what he called a “revolutionary process” under the Popular Unity government. The result of these efforts to block workers from taking an independent revolutionary path was the US-backed coup led by Allende’s military chief, Augusto Pinochet, which drowned the Chilean workers’ movement, including many of Castro’s supporters, in blood.

Washington systematically exploited the specter of “another Cuba” to justify its counterrevolutionary drive across the hemisphere: the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965, the invasion of Grenada in 1983, the

backing of repressive dictatorships in South America, and its proxy wars against the FMLN in El Salvador and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. In each case, these bourgeois nationalist governments and movements disarmed workers—politically and physically—facilitating coups and the installation of regimes servile to US imperialism.

The promotion of guerrilla warfare as a substitute for the organization of the working class led thousands of radicalized youth into suicidal adventures isolated from the mass movement. This perspective served only to separate revolutionary elements from the working class, drive them into unequal armed confrontations with the state, and obstruct the construction of revolutionary working class parties. Nowhere has support for such regimes or methods led to socialism.

In the 2000s, Castroism provided political support to “Pink Tide” governments, beginning with Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, that carried out limited social assistance programs but left the capitalist state intact—and whose leaderships have proved entirely complicit with the Trump administration’s onslaught against Cuba today.

The hard lesson of Latin American history is this: the subordination of the working class to bourgeois or petty-bourgeois nationalism creates only the conditions for defeats. The struggle for socialism requires the complete political independence of the working class and the construction of a revolutionary Marxist leadership.

The Trotskyist opposition to liquidationism

The Trotskyist movement organized in the International Committee of the Fourth International has implacably defended Cuba and its people against imperialist aggression. It has coupled this defense with an irreconcilable struggle against the Stalinist and Pabloite forces that subordinated the working class to Castroism and other bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist leaderships. Only in this way is it possible to defend the historical class interests of Cuban workers and the working class throughout the Americas.

This point must be grasped clearly in the present situation. The recent visit of the CIA director to Havana took place barely a month after the 65th anniversary of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion organized by the CIA. These events serve as bookends to an entire historical period. The current prostration of the Cuban leadership before Washington, the courage of the Cuban masses notwithstanding, is not a betrayal of Castroism. It is its logical conclusion.

In 1917, in the period preceding the October Revolution, Lenin adopted the perspective developed by Trotsky in the theory of permanent revolution—that in countries with belated capitalist development, the democratic and national tasks historically associated with bourgeois revolution can be carried out only by the working class, which will be compelled to conquer power and proceed with socialist measures and the fight to extend the revolution internationally.

Exiled in Mexico, Leon Trotsky responded in 1938 to the Lázaro Cárdenas government’s nationalization of Mexican oil by indicating that this represented a real gain, but warned:

In the industrially backward countries, foreign capital plays a decisive role. Hence the relative weakness of the national bourgeoisie in relation to the national proletariat. This creates special conditions of state power. The government vacillates between foreign and national capital, between the relatively weak national bourgeoisie and the relatively powerful proletariat. This gives the government a Bonapartist character of a particular

kind—it raises itself, so to speak, above classes. In reality, it can govern either by becoming an instrument of foreign capital and binding the proletariat with the chains of a police dictatorship, or by maneuvering with the proletariat and even granting it concessions, thereby gaining a certain freedom in its dealings with foreign capital. The present policy of the Mexican government lies in the second direction—its greatest conquests are the expropriation of the railroads and the oil companies. But to claim that the road to socialism passes not through the proletarian revolution but through the nationalizations carried out by the bourgeois state and their transfer to workers' organizations would be a disastrous mistake, a complete deception.

This analysis, developed more than eight decades ago, describes with uncanny precision both the trajectory of Castroism, the dead end to which it has arrived, and the alternative.

Conclusion: The only road forward

The aggression of US imperialism against Cuba, the long history of neocolonial oppression, and the current threat of a war for regime change demand the mobilization of workers in the United States, Cuba and internationally in unconditional defense of the Cuban people. That mobilization cannot be built on the politics of Castroism, Stalinism or any variant of petty-bourgeois nationalism. All of these tendencies have proven themselves to be political obstacles to the independent organization of the working class and instruments of imperialism.

The capitulation of the “left” nationalist governments of Latin America to Washington’s Cuba policy drives this lesson home with brutal clarity. Following a White House meeting with Trump, Brazil’s President Lula da Silva gave credence to Trump’s claims that he does not plan to attack Cuba and ordered the Brazilian Navy to join the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier in military exercises on its way to the Caribbean.

Moreover, Moscow has made empty promises while diverting its tankers when facing American pressure, and China’s Xi Jinping has refused to make Cuba an issue in talks with the Trump administration. These governments are not passive bystanders. Their accommodation to the suffocation of Cuba is the direct expression of their class character: capitalist governments that fear, above all else, the independent mobilization of the working class that a genuine anti-imperialist struggle would require.

This same class character characterizes the Democratic Party’s tepid opposition in the United States. Representatives Jonathan Jackson and Pramila Jayapal traveled to Havana in April to meet with Díaz-Canel and acknowledged that Trump’s Cuba policy is built on lies. Jackson told *USA Today* plainly: “I do anticipate the United States will have military action in Cuba... When they say they’re ready to negotiate, that means they’re ready to invade.” But having acknowledged this, Jackson, Jayapal and their Democratic colleagues have limited their “opposition” to official letters and failed congressional resolutions based on appeals to Trump’s fascist Republican Party.

Sixty-six years of Castroism have vindicated what the International Committee of the Fourth International has maintained from the outset: that no variant of nationalism can resolve the democratic tasks of oppressed nations, defend their social gains against imperialist attack or lead the working class to socialism. The only road is the one opened by the October Revolution and defended by the Trotskyist movement in its struggle against both Stalinism and Pabloism: the conscious, independent

political organization of the working class on an internationalist program, aimed at the conquest of state power as part of the world socialist revolution.



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