

The Cuban Revolution

**Defying Imperialism,
Building the Alternative**

**Theses of the Democratic
Socialist Party**

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Preface

By Dick Nichols

If the Cuban people's struggle for their revolution deserved our understanding and solidarity four years ago, when the theses and report printed in this booklet were first written, how much more true that is today!

In that time Cuba has been squeezed more than ever between a Bush administration bent on counter-revolution in its own lifetime and the ongoing grind of a Special Period in which blackouts and other problems apparently solved have returned to plague the island.

But, as always with this deeply resourceful revolution, aggression and internal stress have inspired creative counterattack. Four years ago Cuba's "Battle of Ideas" — the explosion of talents, creativity and popular culture inspired by José Martí's dictum that "to be cultured is to be free" — was only a year old. Born in the struggle to force the US to return young Elián González from Miami to his father in Cuba, the Battle of Ideas has today become a "revolution within the revolution" and Cuba's main antidote against all the messages flooding in from encircling capitalism.

Four years ago, too, Cuba's alliance with Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution was still young. Today Venezuela-Cuba is an "axis of good" improving life and strengthening revolutionary morale in both countries and inspiring the popular struggles taking place across Latin America.

Where does Cuba stand today? This preface updates the Democratic Socialist Perspective's analysis of the struggle of this critically important bulwark against the predatory, bloody and unsustainable system that is capitalism today.

The Bush administration war plan against Cuba

Four years ago the George W. Bush administration was still only an ugly black cloud on the horizon of world politics. However, since September 11 provided the perfect pretext for Washington's wars of plunder in Afghanistan and Iraq, Cuba too is having its "regime change" minutely planned.

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Washington's vision for "transition" on the island is contained in the May 2004 *Report to the President* of the "Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba", a high-level interdepartmental committee driven by the Cuban-American mafia to whom Bush has handed Latin American policy.

The main message of the report lies in what it doesn't say, in the gap between its first chapter, which outlines a program for "undermining the regime's 'succession strategy' from Fidel Castro to Raul Castro and beyond", and its five other chapters, which detail mopping-up operations after "regime change".

So eloquent is the silence about how Cuba's revolutionary power is to be overthrown that former Assistant Secretary of State William D. Rogers (co-chair of the Independent Task Force Report on US-Cuban Relations discussed below), described its refusal to commit the US to a peaceful transition as "terrifying".

Cuba is facing a brutal drive to create a terminal crisis within the country. In the Miami-speak of Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roger Noriega: "For the first time ever, a US administration has articulated a definitive, decisive and integrated strategy that represents a national commitment to help the Cuban people bring an end to the Cuban dictatorship ... the United States, for one, will not accept a succession scenario."

Besides presupposing US military action Bush's war plan reserves a role for terrorism, triples funding for internal subversion, blocks US citizens from learning first hand about Cuba, boosts punishment of other countries and businesses dealing with the island and strengthens the international alliance against the revolution.

Of course, all the resources that Washington devotes to proving Cuba must "fall" confirm the exact opposite — that the island isn't doomed to follow Eastern Europe at all. That is why the main weapon in Washington's arsenal in 2004 remains what it was four years ago — economic strangulation that kills off Cubans' hopes for a better future.

The Bush gang's obsessions in this area would be blackly comic if they weren't so viciously criminal. While the White House was presenting its "war on terror" as the absolute number one priority of world politics, two years after September 11 it still had five times as many officials chasing violations of the blockade against Cuba as it did tracking down Al-Qaeda. Today a US citizen or permanent resident caught smoking a Havana cigar anywhere in the world faces a fine of up to \$250,000 or 10 years prison!

The most rigorous estimate of the accumulated cost to Cuba of the US's economic war is \$US79.325 billion, the equivalent of two-and-a-half years' of Cuba's output or an illegal tax on the Cuban economy of 6% over the 44 years of the blockade. This figure doesn't include direct US robbery of Cuban assets since 1959 (at least \$US5 billion in today's values) nor the impact of Cuba's exclusion from many international

lending institutions (impossible to quantify).

In 2004 Washington launched a major offensive on two of the Cuban economy's points of vulnerability — its use of the US dollar as means of payment inside the country and its dependence on remittances from Cubans overseas.

In May 2004 the US Federal Reserve fined Switzerland's largest bank, UBS AG, \$100 million for allegedly sending US dollars to Cuba. This move created serious problems for Havana in depositing dollars abroad and renewing bills in circulation, and potentially frightened foreign banks into dropping commercial relations. Washington also set up a special task force to chase down Cuban assets internationally — an act of unprecedented aggression in the history of international financial relations.

To squeeze the flow of remittances the State Department restricted family visits to one every three years, limited the definition of "family" to immediate family and reduced the amount of US dollars available to visitors to Cuba from \$164 to \$50 a day. It banned electronic funds transfer company Sercuba from operating in the US.

On October 9, 2004, Undersecretary of State Daniel W. Fisk boasted to a meeting of the Cuban-American Veterans Association: "When the decline in all income flows is calculated, we reckon that we have deprived the regime of at least \$500 million which Castro would have employed to support his security and intelligence apparatus."

Why is this murderous economic war — implemented in opposition to a United Nations General Assembly vote of 172-4, a majority of both houses of the US Congress, growing sections of the Cuban-American population and even blockade administrators — being intensified?

Appearances notwithstanding, the Bush's decision to try for a "final solution" against Cuba is quite rational from the point of view not only of his own ultraconservative clique but of US imperialism as a whole.

This is not just because the longer Cuba survives in our world of brutal neoliberalism and war the greater becomes its "threat of a good example" and the greater the loss for Washington in the global battle of ideas ("the contagion of our dreams", as Cuban foreign minister Felipe Pérez Roque puts it).

It's also because the balance of forces over Cuba in world politics is turning against Washington and the longer it waits the greater this shift will be. The Cuban and Venezuelan revolutions are already showing big "gains from solidarity", with Venezuela's valuable economic contribution to Cuba being matched by the vital contribution of Cuba's doctors to programs bringing health services to Venezuela's poor and outcast. The experience of such gains helped produce president Hugo Chavez's massive victory in Venezuela's August 2004 recall referendum. At the same time the rise of mass struggles across Latin America (leading to victories for left and centre-left

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forces in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Bolivia) has greatly reduced Cuba's isolation.

The November 2004 decision of the Spanish Socialist Party government to unfreeze its diplomatic relations with Havana also dealt Washington a blow that could unravel the US's anti-Cuba alliance with the European Union.

Economic & social tensions in Cuba

The other big factor driving Bush's aggression is Washington's reading of Cuba's economic and social situation — that ever more Cubans are fed up with the grind of life in the Special Period and willing to listen to alternatives. This is a common theme in the work of the University of Miami's "Cuban Transition Project", Washington's academy of counter-revolution.

How fertile a soil is there really inside Cuba for "regime change"?

There's no denying that the price of Cuba's survival after the collapse of the Soviet bloc (which strongly subsidised the Cuban economy) has been very painful. For example, between 1989 and 1998 the average real wage declined 45% and the real value of the pension by 42%.

Looking back over the past 15 years it's clear that the Special Period has been a permanent state of emergency, throughout which only the most critical things could be done, every choice involved very high costs and many gains were vulnerable to reversal. In this period and despite immense efforts the population "at risk" (unable to meet basic needs) has doubled to 20%.

After 1989 all Cubans faced two survival modes: acceptance of the regime of shared sacrifice and collective struggle for improvement promoted by the revolutionary leadership, or an individualistic struggle for existence. Most had no choice but to embrace a bit of both.

However, notwithstanding all the trials of this period enough progress was won through the sacrifices of the people for most to feel that the country was clawing its way out of the hole. Over the past four years that cautious optimism has begun to give way to new doubts among many.

The most serious problem has been the failure of growth to sustain the 4.1% average achieved in the two recovery phases (1994-2000). Between 2001 and 2003, average growth fell to 2.4%, and is predicted to reach 2.5% for 2004, well below the 4% minimum target set by the resolution on the economy adopted by the fifth congress of the Communist Party of Cuba in 1997.

The main cause of this slowdown was the fall in tourism income from 2000 to 2002, due initially to the slowing of global growth but deepened by the September 11 attacks in 2001, also a year of huge hurricane damage. The collapse in world sugar prices,

leading to the closure of 45% of the country's sugar mills in 2002, was the second major contributing factor.

Nonetheless, social spending as the economic underpinning of the Battle of Ideas has continued to increase. Between 1997 and 2002 real social spending increased from 24.6 to 30.8% of GDP, an annual increase of 7.9% for every Cuban. This in turn boosted employment, such that despite slower growth the unemployment rate fell from 6.2% (1999) to 2.3% (2003).

As a result the growth slowdown has not translated straight into greater social misery (as in any "normal" country). Cubans' resources in education, culture and community life have been greatly strengthened, and through the process 380,000 jobs created, overwhelmingly for young people. In the words of Fidel Castro: "Thanks to the Battle of Ideas the life of the children, adolescents, young people and the Cuban family isn't the same today as it was five years ago."

The main economic price paid in this phase has been the sharp decline in productivity growth, which turned negative in 2002 (-0.1%). Tensions have also increased in Cuba's external sector, due to worsening terms of trade and shortage of foreign exchange. In late 2001 Cuba began defaulting on short and medium term credits.

The debate among Cuban economists about how to shift the economy onto a higher growth path is becoming more intense: is it really possible to make better use of the country's educated workforce, capable of rapid apprenticeship in new skills and technologies, to achieve an export-oriented reindustrialisation of the country? Is this possible without total surrender to the imperatives of the world market?

The enormity of Cuba's economic challenge is conveyed by two sets of statistics:

- The contribution of exports to GDP fell from 26% to 7% between 1990 and 2001.
- Investment as a percentage of GDP collapsed from 23.3% in 1990 to 4.8% in 1993, climbed back to 14.4% in 1998 and has since slipped to 11.4% (estimate for 2003). In recent years, investment from foreign sources has also slowed to a trickle. (Before the collapse of the Soviet bloc annual gross domestic investment averaged around \$7-8000 million: it averaged only \$3500 million over 1998-2003).

What can Cuba do in its struggle against decapitalisation and infrastructure decay? The picture is pretty cloudy, but not without bright spots. Oil and gas offer the possibility of gains, with agreements signed with major multinationals like Repsol-YPF (Spain), Sherritt International (Canada) and Petrobras (Brazil). Also, agreements signed with China in November 2004 will allow nickel production to double from its current level of 75,000 tonnes a year and supply 100,000 computers.

Clearly, the larger the gap in productivity (and remuneration) between the new sectors of the economy and the more backward social (state plus cooperative) sector,

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the more corrosive will be the impact on the egalitarian values of the revolution. For example, with its pitch for “free unions” Washington aims to stir the resentment felt by workers in joint partnerships with foreign capital at getting wages lower than might be the case in a “normal” labour market. This state of affairs arises because the state needs to get as much income as possible from these operations.

According to José Luis Martín of the Centre for Psychological and Sociological Research (CIPS), Cuba’s workplaces are passing through a critical moment, which “could strongly influence our ‘uncertain and turbulent’ surroundings and the transition from ‘actually existing socialism’ to true socialism”.

The key issue is how the struggle for efficiency embodied in the program of Enterprise Upgrading (PE — *Perfeccionamiento Empresarial*) is being implemented. Is it making Cuba’s workers more the masters of social property and real decision-makers? Or is PE mainly an instrument for introducing “world’s best practice”?

Martín has strong concerns about the lack of worker control over the election or ratification of management and the setting of wage incentives as well as the restricted role for unions under PE. He asks:

Why does the system of PE repeat an understanding of worker participation in management which doesn’t essentially depart from that which the modern capitalist enterprise implements, and doesn’t promote a truly socialist vision of the role of the worker in the enterprise? ... It’s true that firms under Eastern European socialism never managed to put this principle into practice; but did this conduct do no harm in its historic defeat as a political system?

Yet socialist consciousness and commitment aren’t just forged at the point of production. How has Cubans’ overall experience of life in the last four years affected support for the revolution? This is no easy question to answer, because the evidence is quite contradictory and should be treated with a lot of caution.

On one hand there’s the overwhelming vote in favour of the June 2002 constitutional amendment establishing the “irrevocability” of socialism, a moment marked by the vigorous mobilisation of the island’s youth organisations. There are also the findings of all researchers that a very large majority of Cubans are very proud to be Cuban, support the gains of the revolution in education and health care (and believe these services should continue to be free) and view the US as the country’s main enemy.

On the other there are the results of the last election for the National Assembly of People’s Power in which, according to sociologist Haroldo Dilla, “around 10% of voters (one million people) used the secret ballot to reject the call of the government to vote for the candidates presented ... either by spoiling their ballot papers, voting informal,

not voting or simply voting for only some of the candidates”.

A common observation among Cuban revolutionaries is that a majority still support the revolution and its institutions, but that this support is, unsurprisingly, less solid than before. Numbers typically mentioned are that of the island’s 11 million people two to three million remain committed supporters of the revolution, up to one million are opponents, and the rest are a “floating mass”. This last, while not opposed to the revolution, relies on its own efforts and participates in the political life of the revolution on the basis of a simple cost-benefit calculation.

If true, such a balance of forces means at least one thing — “regime change”, even though it could only come through the most violent and bloody conflict, is not off the agenda. In mid-2003, Cuban minister of culture Abel Prieto stated that “this small country is going through the most dangerous period in its history”. In September 2004, Communist Party activist Celia Hart told an interviewer that counter-revolution was a “real danger” and that “every sincere revolutionary I know has the same fear”.

Cuba & human rights

Such is the context in which Havana’s March-April 2003 decisions to jail 75 political opponents and execute three hijackers of a Havana harbour ferry must be placed.

Disorienting for many Cuba supporters, these events were seized upon by a corporate media reeling from the February 2003 mass mobilisations against the Iraq war. What a free kick! “Stalinist repression” in Havana! Suddenly left-wing figures critical of Cuba’s actions — prominent intellectuals like Noam Chomsky, Eduardo Galeano, Sergio Ramirez and Howard Zinn — were being covered in the *Miami Herald* and the *Washington Post*.

The main criticism of Cuba within the Western left was contained in the statement of the US “Campaign for Peace and Democracy”, critical of human rights violations wherever they occur. But the statement avoided the facts in both of the cases.

Take that of the three executed hijackers: (1) the US Interest Section in Havana sharply reduced the number of immigration visas granted in the months previous to the hijacking, deliberately increasing the frustration of those wishing to leave Cuba; (2) hijackers of a Cuban aircraft who had flown to Miami on the same day that the US declared war on Iraq were freed on bail; (3) the US officially warned Cuba that aircraft and ship hijackings would be considered a “threat to national security”; and (4) Florida governor Jeb Bush and the US ambassador to the Dominican Republic were saying that “Cuba would be next” after Iraq.

Over the same period Cuban state security detected 29 hijacking plans by people with criminal records who stood no chance of getting an entry visa but had obviously

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got the message from Miami that any hijacking they carried out would go unpunished.

Clearly the Cuban leadership was convinced that it was facing the possibility of a deliberately provoked wave of hijackings that could well have given the US the pretext for some form of military intervention while world's eyes were on its invasion of Iraq. And that, even if the actual US aim was rather to trick Cuba into repressive measures, it just could not risk acting on that assumption. Extreme measures were needed to bring the hijackings to an end.

The Cuban decision was not taken in ignorance of its likely impact. In Fidel Castro's words: "Cuba's revolutionary leadership was fully aware of the political cost of the measures it was obliged to adopt. Let no-one think that this wasn't well analysed in all aspects. It pained us in anticipation to hurt many of our friends and a great number of people in the world whose sensibility with regard to the death penalty for motives of religious, humanist or philosophical conviction we know perfectly well, and which we ourselves share in many aspects."

As for the 75 "independent journalists" and "independent librarians" sentenced to long prison terms, these were not condemned because of their nonviolent expression of views the regime can't tolerate but because they had allowed themselves to be organised and financed by the US Interests Section in Havana. They broke the Cuban law that forbids collaboration in the implementation of legislation hostile to Cuba (like the Helms-Burton Act).

The distinction between their actions and those of other opponents of the present Cuban government who aren't directly in the pay nor operating under the instructions of Washington — like Eloy Gutiérrez-Martínez of "Cambio Cubano" and networks of oppositionists operating through the Cuban Catholic Church — is clear enough.

Those who condemned Cuba over the hijackings and imprisonment of political opponents fell victim to the fiction that universal standards of human and democratic rights can be implemented as if by recipe and regardless of context. Also when made from the left, as with Eduardo Galeano's citing of Rosa Luxemburg's famous critique of the Bolsheviks' suppression of political opponents during the 1918-20 Civil War ("Freedom is always freedom for those who think differently"), this truth is a falsehood when asserted unconditionally. What if those who "think differently" are Adolf Hitler, George Bush and Ariel Sharon and their agents?

The arrests of the 75 certainly violated the freedoms of expression, the press and association — just as Abraham Lincoln was forced to violate these very same rights when exercised by supporters of the Confederacy operating behind Union lines during the American Civil War.

Cuba counterattacks

In the “battle of ideas” over human rights and democracy these events ignited the Cuban leadership went to great lengths to explain its actions and regain lost ground, leading to invitations to Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky and other critical intellectuals to visit the island and study conditions at first hand.

Cuban intellectuals were also at pains to engage in the debate. Typical was this comment of Fernando Martínez Heredia, the former editor of *Pensamiento Crítico*:

There’s the healthy concern that Cuba should not act in any field like the capitalists, because Cuba is a piece of the future in today’s world, carrying the hope that this future is possible. It is very correct to introduce into the analysis of strategy and tactics the principles we share; without them our practice can go off the rails or get corrupted. But those analyses have an obligation to consider all the main aspects of the problem ... and within this framework not counterpose some facts to an abstraction about the correct form of existence of a socialist society. Revolutions are anguished struggles for the future of humanity ... they are not laboratory experiments, nor shop windows inciting the onlooker to consume socialism.

What counterattack has Cuba been able to mount on the economic front?

Its most dramatic economic initiative was the October 2004 decision to eliminate the dollar as means of payment within Cuba. By replacing the dollar with the Cuban convertible peso and imposing a 10% surcharge on all dollars exchanged after November 15, 2004 the government increased the central bank’s ability to control the money supply, made it easier for Cuba to avoid US reprisals and increased dollar reserves (as Cubans either opened bank accounts in dollars or exchanged them for convertible or ordinary pesos). The move also sent a message of confidence to the population, and effectively committed the government to maintaining the convertible peso at a 1 for 1 ratio with the dollar for the foreseeable future.

The move came with a number of costs. It may will reduce remittances by making transactions more costly and cumbersome and may provoke the US into banning the sending of non-US currencies to Cuba (forcing Cubans in America to send money home via third countries). It will also reduce income from the 25% of tourism that comes from the dollar area, increase the costs of imports and the current account deficit. The economy will also move further away from the main market though which it is trying to break down the blockade — the US.

Nonetheless the “dedollarisation” of the Cuban economy is a positive, if small, step towards to a more rational monetary system with a single currency that in the longer term may even be able to be delinked from the dollar.

In the present phase Cuba has no choice but to make her main front of struggle

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political and cultural — the battle for hearts and minds. Here the biggest stake is the support of the rising generation of Cubans. Will they, in their own way, “be like Che”? Or will they follow the youth of 1980s Prague for whom the freedom to say and do what they liked was the glowing vision at the end of the dark tunnel of “communism”?

In this struggle the Battle of Ideas has taken centre stage. Behind its specific programs — the massive upgrading of the country’s schools, universities and specialist colleges, the mobilisation of young people for practical work in education, culture and social support — lies this idea expressed by Fidel Castro in early 2003:

[In the struggle for an alternative to neoliberal globalisation] the subjective factor will play a more important role than ever, and for that reason, it must be informed and encouraged to think ... [O]ur goal is for the entire population to achieve a high degree of comprehensive general knowledge and culture, without which even people with a university degree could be considered functionally illiterate ... Perhaps the most useful contribution to the struggle for a better world that we can make through our modest efforts will be to demonstrate how much can be done with so little, if all of the human and material resources of a society are put to the service of the people ... we want to prove what we all proclaim: that a better world is possible!

There is no space here to give an account of the achievements of the Battle of Ideas, of which Fidel Castro’s December 2004 address to the 8th Congress of the Union of Young Communists (UJC) provides a thorough account. Suffice to say that through its 200 programs, its provision of 22,000 social workers to ensure no Cuban is left without support, its massive expansion of cultural opportunities, its stimulation of debate and critical movements like Cuban rap, its expansion of the Havana Book fair to 34 cities and countless other initiatives, the Battle of Ideas has made big steps forward in breaking down the formalistic and dogmatic methods inherited from Soviet “communism”.

Through all this it is contributing to the renewal of the key organisations of Cuba’s socialism — the UJC (which has grown by over 100,000 members during the Battle of Ideas) and the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), into whose ranks a new generation of revolutionaries is flowing.

They will be needed more than ever because in the struggle for hearts and minds socialism in Cuba also has a second serious opponent besides Miami and Washington. It is the Catholic Church, engaged in a long-term project to build up a counter-revolutionary flock on the island. The Pope himself stated that in late 2004 that in Cuba “it is the duty and right of each citizen to make efforts to find, among all, a peaceful way out of the crisis. But it is likewise a very special duty of lay Christians ... to be light, salt and ferment in the transformation of the society in which they live.”

A constant theme in Cuban Catholic publications is the church as backbone of the growing “civic maturity” of Cubans as against the “hollow” and “noisy” campaigns of the “immobile” official mass organisations. In the November–December 2002 edition of *Vitral*, publication of the Civic And Religious Education Centre of Pinar del Río, leading political opponent Dagoberto Valdés Hernández published an article entitled “Something is moving in Cuba: on the road to civic maturity”. This paints a picture of a growing oppositional movement on the brink of gaining influence over significant sectors of Cuban society.

On the political level the main initiative of the Cuban opposition since 2002 has been the Varela project, a petition to the National Assembly of People’s Power (ANPP) asking for it to conduct a referendum on five legal and constitutional proposals. Its aim was to seek broader freedom of expression and association, amnesty for political prisoners, “the right for Cubans to create businesses”, and changes in the electoral system. The initiative has been boosted by the US government, with its initiator Oswaldo Payá also being awarded the Sakharov Prize for human rights by the European Union.

In November 2002 the ANPP constitutional and judicial affairs commission formally rejected the Varela Project’s request for a referendum on its proposals. But the main political counterattack came earlier, with Cuba’s leadership deciding to propose constitutional amendments that would entrench socialism as “irrevocable” and forbid the island’s foreign relations from being conducted under coercion by a foreign power. This response — also directed against Bush’s call for Cuba’s “liberation” on the 100th anniversary of its independence from Spain — culminated in 8.2 million Cuban electors supporting the proposal.

This vote is directly linked to what will remain a sharp challenge for the revolution — that of strengthening the active engagement of the mass of Cubans in shaping their society. If it is true, as Raul Castro said in 1996, that “we must convince the people or the enemy will do it”, then strengthening the support base of the revolution will require an ongoing process of empowerment that builds on the ground won through the Battle of Ideas.

Given the growing differentiation of Cuban society, opposing interests *will* find political expression, both outside the organisations of the revolution and within them. If the revolution is to win the battle for democracy against initiatives like the Varela project, guiding the expression and resolution of these competing social pressures will be an ongoing, increasingly complex, task.

The emergence of competing ideologies in Cuba also maintains the pressure for the inspiring renewal of Cuban Marxism, initially driven by the need to understand the causes of the collapse of “socialism” in Eastern Europe and leading to an opening

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out to Marxist thinkers banned or marginalised by the “Marxism-Leninism” in which a generation was educated in the 1970s and 1980s. This push was foreshadowed by the revival of Che Guevara’s thinking in the mid-1980s, and has continued in the form of growing Cuban engagement with Gramsci, Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky as well as contemporary Marxists. The creative application of this broader heritage to Cuba’s own reality is already being seen in a younger generation of Cuban thinkers (like Armando Chaguaceda Noriega, Celia Hart and many others).

What scenarios can be drawn for Cuba’s future? Apart from US invasion and counter-revolution run from Miami, there’s also the possibility of a “Chinese” evolution as pressure for increased productivity drives state firms increasingly along the road of marketisation and produces expansion of a domestic capitalist sector. Celia Hart writes:

Although the planned economy in Cuba enjoys a monopoly of foreign trade, although the means of production are the property of the state and the majority of joint ventures are state-controlled, time is running out for us. Dollarisation has had negative effects.

The management of the joint ventures and those in charge of foreign trade risk being bought and could be susceptible to bourgeois ideas.

In the immediate term the struggle to transmit the revolution to the next generation under conditions of siege and provocation continues, but also in a world in which Cuba has never enjoyed so much support from other countries, peoples and movements. The more that solidarity can be strengthened, the greater will be Cuba’s chances.

Why precisely should the Western left redouble its efforts to support and understand Cuba? Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel gives one powerful reason:

Perfect societies don’t exist, but every society can be improved and is open to change.

Cuba is an example for the peoples of the entire continent and the world. We need to have the courage to support the Cuban people, a light in the challenges of our continent.

And Spanish novelist Belén Gopegui gives another:

We must keep searching for that truth [about Cuba]. And not because the Cuban revolution needs us to do it, but because we need it. Because in defending Cuba we defend ourselves. Because if we were to abandon the Cuban revolution we would be abandoning ourselves.

December 2004

Report on the Theses on Cuba

By Dick Nichols

On October 10, 1868 the Cuban landowner Manuel de Céspedes released his slaves from bondage and enrolled them as the initial recruits in the army that fought Cuba's First Liberation War against the Spanish colonial power. Custom dates Cuba's revolutionary tradition, a tradition that is still alive and well today, from that moment.

However, as [visiting Cuban leader] Comrade [Abelardo] Cueto noted in his greetings to our congress, Céspedes's attempt to achieve Cuba's national independence failed after 10 years of fighting, due to divisions within the patriotic forces.

When we look at the root cause of these divisions we can see what is *specific* about Cuba's revolutionary tradition. We can also grasp why today, 143 years later, Cuba still plays such a disproportionately important role in world politics and why understanding and defending the Cuban revolution is so important.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Latin America's *libertadores* — Bolivar, Sucre, Artigas, O'Higgins and others — had been able to win the struggle against Spain without their national liberation struggle overturning the class structure of Spain's Latin American colonies, which were dominated by large landowners and colonial administrative elites. While inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution, while the poor farmers and slaves rallied to the side of the patriots, and while the vision of a Bolivar embraced social justice, the end of slavery and the unity of all the peoples of the continent — in short, while the wars had a class content — Latin America's patriots could take advantage of the fact that Spain, pinned down in fighting the Peninsular War against Napoleon, simply could not send major reinforcements to defend its Latin American possessions. Had this been the case then the *libertadores* would have

This report was given to the 19th Congress of the Democratic Socialist Party, held in Sydney in January 2001. It deals with the draft theses on Cuba, "The Cuban Revolution in the Epoch of Neoliberal Globalisation", submitted by the DSP National Committee for a vote at the congress. Both the report and the theses were adopted by the congress.

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been faced with having to at least promise more radical social transformation — even the end of slavery — to mobilise the support base and military forces needed to defeat the Spanish crown.

By the time of Céspedes matters were different. Not only was Spain determined to hang onto “the most faithful island” — as Cuba was called — but not all of the indigenous landowning class were inclined to follow Céspedes’ example and liberate the chief source of their wealth — the country’s hundreds of thousands of slaves upon whose super-exploitation and unspeakable misery their ease and elegant Havana houses depended. This made many of them halfhearted opponents of Spain and inclined to compromise when the going got tough

Thus, even as early as 1878, when the shameful Pact of Zanjón was signed and the mulatto general Antoneo Maceo issued his rejectionist Protest of Baraguá it had become clear that Cuba’s struggle for national liberation stood no chance unless two preconditions were fulfilled — the organised mobilisation of all patriotic forces, especially the most oppressed and humble, and the unity of these forces in one organisation. It was to be the imperishable achievement of José Martí that he was able, through the construction of the Cuban Revolutionary Party and in alliance with the Liberation Army of Máximo Gómez and Maceo, to create the weapons for the national liberation struggle that had victory stolen from it at the last moment by the Washington imperialists. The strength of that party and army lay in the support it received from the most oppressed sectors of Cuban society within and without the island — like the sugar cane workers and the emigrant tobacco workers of Tampa. Even though the Spanish military governor Valeriano Weyler corralled the population into concentration camps and 22% of Cubans died in the Second Liberation War the drive to national sovereignty could only be stopped by US intervention.

Why could Washington intervene so easily to practice its “ripe fruit” policy? Because neither the politics of the isolationist Congress minority nor principled support for the national rights of Spain’s last colonies — practised by people like William James — corresponded to the political needs of rising US capitalism. Like its European and Japanese rivals, it had no choice but to play the imperialist game. Nor could the underdeveloped and ideologically backward US workers movement, already divided between a conservative and racist craft wing and a smaller socialist wing, worry the US rulers, despite the principled stance of a Eugene V. Debs.

It was also due to the underdeveloped state of the Cuban workers movement itself. Washington could install its puppets and manipulate Cuban politics because a movement did not yet exist that could draw the organised working class, the rural proletariat, the poor and landless peasantry and all oppressed and progressive elements

of the population behind a program that expressed their aspirations for true national sovereignty and social justice.

This program was to emerge through the struggle against the dictator Gerardo Machado, overthrown by the revolution of 1933, and was partially enshrined in the constitution of 1940, only to be violated in practice by various pseudo-democratic governments and then buried once and for all by 1952 coup of the dictator Fulgencio Batista. Those aspirations were next to find their classic expression in Fidel Castro's trial speech after the July 26 attack on the Moncada Barracks — *History Will Absolve Me*.

Finally came the triumph of 1959. The revolution moved to implement its program of democratic measures, beginning with a rather moderate land reform. But even this was too much for the Cuban elite and its Washington backers: every revolutionary measure provoked counter-revolutionary retaliation. The revolution thus had no choice but to counterattack in turn by making increasingly “despotic inroads into the prerogatives of capital” as Marx and Engels once put it, typified by the nationalisation of the US-owned oil refineries. The struggle for national sovereignty and democratic rights and elementary measures of social justice could not be completed without the revolution's passing over into a socialist phase, formalised by Fidel's famous declaration at the time of the victory at Playa Girón.

Moreover, once popular power was consolidated in Cuba it inevitably provoked a violent defensive reaction by imperialism on a hemispheric level. The Cuban infection was to be quarantined by the appropriate combination of measly carrot and vicious stick, beginning with the Alliance for Progress and involving blockade, assassination attempts and the whole panoply of imperialist aggression and crime.

Thus the Cuban revolution exemplifies in a very vivid way two laws of history in the imperialist epoch: the struggle for democracy and national independence and sovereignty for countries oppressed by imperialism inevitably turns, sooner or later, into a struggle for socialism. And that struggle inevitably becomes a conflict with an international dimension.

It fell to little Cuba to exemplify this law because of the historical lateness of its national independence struggle, the ambitions of US imperialism in Cuba, and the closeness of what Martí called “the monster”. This could only be answered by consistently mobilising the Cuban people in the most radical forms of struggle and calling as well on the solidarity of the revolution's friends, whether these were other victims of imperialism, left and progressive parties, Cuban exiles, socialist states or just other peoples with a feeling for ordinary justice

That conflict between the Cuban revolution and imperialism has been going on

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for 42 years now, and it will continue because, irrespective of moments of temporary truce, the revolution embodies human values and forms of economic, social and political organisation that are antithetical and anathema to those of capitalism in general and US capitalism in particular.

Today, 10 years after the collapse of the Soviet camp, the survival and strengthening of the Cuban revolution is a question of transcendental importance for revolutionaries everywhere. The struggle to survive and grow requires the revolution to reach out for new allies and, in particular, to link up with all expressions of opposition to neoliberal globalisation. Everything that restrains the fist of an imperialism that is as intent as ever on destroying the revolution is to be valued and strengthened. As Che Guevara said, internationalism is not just a duty, it's an endogenous necessity for socialism.

This brings us to the question of why we need to take a party position on Cuba and why we have articulated this in the Draft Theses that the National Committee is submitting to the vote of this congress.

First of all because Cuba is under the most refined and multifaceted siege in its history — economic, political and ideological. Secondly, because Cuba is a vital detachment in the new movement against neoliberal globalisation, against which it has launched a range of anti-imperialist initiatives. Thirdly, because a people's state, a postcapitalist state, that has lasted for 42 years under conditions of siege and then double siege is full of lessons for revolutionaries about how workers and the popular masses in general can hold onto state power. And fourthly, because Cuba is being increasingly adopted as the whipping boy of sectarians, and we have to know Cuba in order to defend her and reduce the influence of nonsense and distortion about Cuba to a minimum.

In all this the Cuban Revolution and its leadership have accumulated an unmatched store of experiences, thinking and creativity, a store which it behoves all revolutionaries to study as they learn to think and act in their own national realities.

The struggle for democracy & human rights

Studying Cuba means first of all understanding the objective constraints within which the Cuban Revolution has to work, to grasp the mountain of difficulties that beset Cuban revolutionaries as they seek to defend and strengthen the social base of the revolution at home and build broader and stronger alliances abroad. These are the survival and development conditions of the Cuban revolution in *today's* world — marked by US imperialist domination and the universal recipes of neoliberalism.

Every policy needs a justification, and today Washington's policy for exterminating the Cuban Revolution cannot be expressed in the cheerily aggressive chauvinism of

Teddy Roosevelt and “manifest destiny”. Today, policy has to be justified in terms of the violation by the “Castro dictatorship” of fundamental human and democratic rights. The world must be made to believe that the revolution is fundamentally *illegitimate* and that counter-revolution is the only way to restore government of the people, by the people and for the people on the island. This explains why the US and those doing its bidding, like the Czech Republic, put so much effort into winning votes against Cuba on UN committees, as happened in April last year in Geneva. The more that “world opinion” believes that Cuba is a violator of human and democratic rights, the more the ground is prepared for changing the imperialist policy mix to more overt forms of aggression, economic and even military.

Section 1 of the theses, especially paragraphs 15 and 16, depicts the terms of this struggle over human rights. We can expect to hear much more aggressive noise about Cuba and human rights in coming years. This is not only because Bush is in the White House with a very reactionary team. It’s also because Washington will call on its allies in the anti-Cuba crusade to turn up the heat. The resolution on terrorism presented without warning by Spain at the 10th Iberoamerican Summit, and the response of the Cuban delegation is a sign of things to come. Tarring Cuba with the ETA brush is a smart move for Spanish PM José María Aznar and he has been supported in this by Cuban right-wing expatriate participation in the vast protest rallies against ETA’s criminal and counterproductive bombing campaign.

We can also expect to see countries that might even have voted with Cuba on human rights in the past and continue to vote against the blockade each year in the General Assembly, swing behind the US in votes over the island’s human rights record. Countries who are desperate for economic aid and debt forgiveness are natural candidates. This was certainly the case with El Salvador, and it’s hard to avoid the conclusion that Argentina’s sudden preoccupation with the Cuban human rights situation is not entirely unconnected with a recent immense bailout package to help the country’s staggering economy.

As human rights in Cuba becomes an increasingly hot potato comrades in the unions and student politics will increasingly find themselves being told by Labor right-wingers that Amnesty International has adopted a number of Cuban prisoners of conscience and that Cuba is retentionist as regards the death penalty. As the work of CISLAC [Committees in Solidarity with Latin America and the Caribbean] expands we may even find that government matching funding is not available for Cuba because of Cuba’s refusal to abide by “internationally recognised standards of human rights”. This battle is presently being conducted in the European Union, where a right-wing commissioner in charge of NGO funding is vigorously pushing the barrow of human

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rights conditionality.

What are we then to say? While our defence of Cuba does not oblige us to stand by each and every decision of the Cuban courts nor each and every piece of Cuban legislation, it's important to stress that the cases usually cited typically involve people whose goal is not reform, amendment or improvement of the Cuban system through the channels available to all citizens, but its overthrow. We may or may not agree that imprisoning such people is the best way to handle them in the given instance, and in principle, of course, it would be preferable if repression were not necessary. However, we don't question the right, indeed we understand and support the need, for the revolution to defend itself by whatever means are necessary. That is, we accept the fundamental legitimacy of the revolution as an expression of the majority sentiment of the Cuban people and of the institutions that it has created.

The fundamental reason for this stance is there in Thesis 20. Cuba, like the early Soviet Union before the Stalinist degeneration, is basically a healthy revolutionary organism, and the revolution's institutions are not there to defend a bureaucratic elite that has usurped power from the mass of working people. That's absolutely basic. It's also why there's so little in the way of a "dissident movement" in the country. It's not, as the right-wing opposition claims, because they've all been stuck in goal or sent into exile. It's because they don't strike a chord with the vast mass of the Cuban population.

It's interesting in this light to compare the 1994 events on the Malecon with the Tiananmen revolt. The 1994 outburst was occasioned by the appalling difficulties of the Special Period at its worst moments, with people just wanting to get out. Tiananmen, as we know, was a movement for democratic change in which demands against bureaucratic privilege and arbitrariness featured prominently.

It's surely significant that when Cuba has done the "right thing" by Amnesty and other international human rights groups and released people adopted as prisoners of conscience, this has in no way caused any change in the fundamental hostility of imperialism. Indeed, a key policy goal behind the economic blockade is to force the Cuban government to maintain a more punitive regime than would be necessary if the struggle for existence were less difficult and temptations to, for example, thief state property and flog it in the dollar economy were a lot less.

Compare US policy towards China. Despite a lot of tut-tutting and despite a chauvinist-reactionary campaign to have China excluded from the World Trade Organisation, Washington imposes no human rights conditionality whatsoever on Beijing. Indeed, China could blacken its human rights record tenfold without incurring anything more than words from the US.

The same considerations hold as regards multiparty elections — the other eternal

figleaf for Washington's policy. The argument runs: If Castro is so confident that he has majority support, why not prove it once and for all by allowing a multiparty contest? Why not allow an independent media? Surely, he's got nothing to lose from confirming the revolution has majority support?

Remember the 1986 Nicaraguan elections, which the Sandinistas won? Immediately upon their victory Washington (and some of its friends in Europe) discovered that the process had been flawed — despite all comments by international observers to the contrary — and set about intensifying its support to the *contras*. By the time the next elections came around an exhausted population had been made to understand by parties flush with dollars and US electoral experts, that a vote for Sandinista candidate Daniel Ortega would mean even more war and suffering. A vote for Violeta Chamorro would, of course, mean peace and prosperity. A desperate people voted for what it hoped was a lesser evil. Moreover, if Ortega had still emerged victorious continuing war and suffering is what Nicaragua would have got.

As the anti-Cuba campaign spreads even to these distant shores we will need to make use of the powerful arguments in support of the Cuban cause, explaining the simple truth that there's more human rights and democracy under Cuba's single-party system than under the two-party farce of western money politics. Here it's always a case of *plus ça change, plus la même chose* — the more things change, the more they stay the same — while a multiparty system of the type being pushed for Cuba by the USA would mean a catastrophic decline in human and democratic rights that capitalist restoration would bring.

Even on the grounds on which Amnesty International and the US Human Rights Watch operate — that of “universally recognised human rights conventions” operating irrespective of the intensity of conflict conditions — Cuba's alleged crimes are puny compared to those of its main accuser, the super-powerful, super-secure United States. To get an idea, compare the reports on the two countries in the 2001 Amnesty International annual report:

Political prisoners? Tell that to Leonard Peltier and the Puerto Rican patriots who have been in goal for decades.

Death sentences? A few in Cuba last year, but take a look at the new president's record as the governing ghoul of the Lone Star state.

Prison population as a percentage of total population? No contest, with three million in US goals operating as slave labour.

Catch-all charges that can be used in a wide variety of situations (like the Cuban charge of “dangerousness” — *peligrosidad*)? Check the range of powers available to police in even the most civilised bourgeois nation.

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Conditions in many Cuban gaols? Not the most pleasant in some cases, but take a look at what the law-abiding mass of Cuban citizens has put up with heroically during the Special Period and ask yourself where the country's super-scarce resources are most needed.

As Cuba becomes more of an issue here it may very well be that we will have to gear up on the detail of specific cases. We may find ourselves assaulted with *causes célèbres* like the famous case of the “poet in a wheelchair” Armando Valladares, who, on being released from Cuban gaols and landing on foreign soil miraculously arose and walked. Or of those artists and intellectuals who complained that their “artistic freedom” was under assault in Cuba, when this turned out to be due to their obligation to earn their keep by playing at social and community events, while the alternative of “freedom” was actually a fat cheque being waved by some US promoter.

If we do find ourselves wondering if in some particular case that the Cuban justice system might have made an error, the last thing on our minds will be to join any generalised clamour about human rights violations in the country. Our approach will be, first, to ascertain the facts and then, if we still think the issue serious enough, to take it up privately with the Cuban comrades. We are not, from our big safe island in the South Seas, going to jump into public lecturing of Cuba about human and democratic rights, although we will, of course, keep abreast of the very lively Cuban debate on this issue.

Thesis 16 treats Cuba's refusal to countenance competitive elections between parties. The essential issue here is what it was for the Bolsheviks and what it would be for any revolutionary government. If parties were to show by their actions that they do not represent counter-revolution, openly or surreptitiously, then there's no substantive reason why they shouldn't be allowed and good reasons why they should — in terms of developing a culture of debate and discussion about the options for advancing socialist construction and the self-government of the people.

But this state of affairs is light years away from Cuba's condition as a blockaded island which has only been able to achieve what it has by preserving unity within a single party, whether it was Martí's PRC or today's PCC. The words of Carlos Aldana quoted in Thesis 16 put the issue in a nutshell: “A party represents an option for power. In our country, there is only one option bidding for power against the revolution, and that's the counter-revolution. A multiparty system means legalising what the US hasn't been able to achieve with blood and fire; it means creating a party of capitalism, representing US interests in Cuba ... If, one day, the objective circumstances change, and a multiparty system no longer necessarily means the appearance of a counter-revolutionary party, then we could take up the conversation again.”

We need to make much more widely known, within the party and the left as a whole, the Cuban comrades own position on these issues, as expressed in the central document of the Fifth PCC Congress, “The Party of Unity, Democracy and Human Rights that We Defend”. Unfortunately it was impossible to uncover, neither here nor in Havana, any English translation of this useful document (nor of the Economic Resolution of the Fifth Congress). It is another valuable weapon, along with our book *Cuba as Alternative*, in the fight against ignorance, prejudice and malevolent distortion of the Cuban reality.

A key aspect of our solidarity task is to patiently explain and inform people as to what Cuba has been able to achieve in the area of popular, participatory democracy. Theses 43 to 53 summarise the essence of the development of this situation, but they are only — like the theses as a whole — an abbreviated expression of issues. To be able to grasp how matters work, and what the debates are in Cuba on this issue, it’s important for comrades to read at least three books in English (besides *Cuba as Alternative*, of course). These are Peter Roman’s *People’s Power: Cuba’s Experience with Representative Government*, which comrades Karl Miller and Rachel Evans have reviewed for a forthcoming *Green Left Weekly*, Arnold August’s *Democracy in Cuba and the 1997-98 Elections* as well as Marta Harnecker’s classic *Cuba: Dictatorship or Democracy*.

In the light of all these considerations, we should boldly take up the defence of Cuba on the very grounds on which imperialism has chosen to attack the country, not the least of all because there are clear signs that Washington’s forward positions are increasingly exposed. The Elián González case was a clear turning point: there the combination of mobilised national willpower, international solidarity and appeal to the decent instincts of the mass of people pulled off a major win which revealed the Miami mafia for the maniac thugs they are. Since then we have seen Cuba’s offer to send Pioneers to oversee the recount in that banana republic election vote in Florida as well as the offer to send doctors to the poorest, blackest, counties of the Deep South and to train poor US medical students at the Latin American Medical School.

Most revealing of all, however, has been the tightening of travel restrictions on Americans visiting Cuba, smuggled in as part of the recent legislation that pretended to exempt food and medicines from Washington’s blockade. The fact that the Yankee politicians have had to promote this tightening as an easing, and that they are beginning to worry about their subjects getting exposed to the Cuban reality — that they are uneasy, for example about such dialogues as Fidel’s recent discussion with 700 students from the University of Pittsburgh — carries a loud and clear message. The Berlin Wall has gone but Washington feels it has to heighten its own wall to keep its subjects from

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experiencing something of the truth about a poor, struggling Caribbean island to which an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 Americans travelled in 1999, up from only 40,000 the year before. What's there to be afraid of?

What's more, they know they have to try and fool public sentiment, which can't see why if the US trades with "communist" North Korea and supports "communist" China's entry into the World Trade Organisation, it shouldn't do the same with Cuba. All this should give us heart in our continuing solidarity work. In particular, it should embolden us to think of a more aggressive campaign against the blockade and of finding the ways to put pressure on Labor, Green and Democrat politicians on the issue.

The struggle for economic recovery

However, the fundamental, underlying, battleground between Cuba and Washington is not about human rights and democracy: it's about how Washington can strangle Cuba's economic recovery, and this for the very simple reason that the more difficult the economic situation of Cubans, the more receptive people will be to the enemy propaganda and promises — if only in desperation. The greater will be the chance of creating movements of revolt, such as the 1994 incidents on the Malecon, and the greater the likelihood of success of the range of US tactics of subversion.

On the other hand, if the present phase of economic recovery can translate into sustained higher growth rates based increasingly on a modernised state sector, greater income and jobs, especially for young people, then the revolution's "battle of ideas" — its ongoing war against the values and crimes of capitalism and for a socialist culture — will receive important material backing. The feeling of siege will lift more and a more pluralistic social and cultural atmosphere will become thinkable.

The latest Independent Task Force Report "US-Cuban Relations in the 21st Century", produced by the semi-official Council on Foreign Relations, which was recently the subject of a round-table discussion on Cuban television, does not "join the protracted public debate" over the blockade, effectively supporting its maintenance. It also states that "no serious observer believes that the closed economic model represented by Cuba will survive".

In the span of US and Cuban-American strategic opinion about "what to do" about Castro, this report generally puts its money on carrot rather than stick. The shared assumption of the authors is that "the primary and overriding objective of the US — containing the spread of Cuban communism in this hemisphere — has been achieved. We believe that whatever shape it may take, Castro-style communism will not long survive the post-Castro era in Cuba. Indeed, we believe that many Cubans,

including many who may hold official positions, understand that a transition to a democratic and free-market Cuba is inevitable ... we therefore continue to believe the United States can discuss policy towards Cuba with confidence and from a position of strength.”

Given this assumption the recommendations flow directly enough: proposals for making family reunion and migration easier; increasing the free flow of ideas through such measures as issuing a general license to all Americans wishing to travel to Cuba; encouraging the possibility that the Cuban armed forces will allow a democratic transition; getting around the Helms Burton Act by negotiating for former owners of Cuban property to have access to joint ventures (not necessarily in their old assets); promoting the creation of independent unions, especially in the dollarised, joint-venture dominated economy, and lots more.

But the blockade remains, even for these doves, confident exponents of the superiority and natural attractiveness of the American way of life to the island's people.

But what if, just what if, this assumption is false? For example, what if those Costa Rican polls, which regularly show majority support for the revolution, are true, despite the difficulties everyone faces? This worm of doubt lies behind the plethora of minority dissenting and additional views at the end of the Task Force Report.

Open license for US tourism? That would “overwhelmingly benefit the Cuban government at the expense of the Cuban people” because the government pockets 95 cents of every dollar spent in hotels, says Susan Kaufman Purcell.

Increased military-to-military contacts? Not for Peter Rodman, former presidential adviser on international affairs: “This [military-to-military contacts] is based on a misreading of the experience in Central Europe, where the agents of change were not officials but opponents of the regime — Protestant clergy in East Germany, Solidarity and the church in Poland, and dissident intellectuals in Czechoslovakia. Purging the party hacks from their institutions (academia, judiciary, professions, the military) has been the key to their progress. Expanding exchange with the Cuban military is particularly inappropriate. It is impossible for US to be sending signals for change of the regime while consorting with the security organs that maintain it. Ostracism will have better pedagogical value than seminars at Harvard.”

On attempts to resolve expropriated property claims via negotiating joint venture status? “I am concerned that the recommendation comes closer to legitimising extortion than ratifying the rights of property claimants”, says former senate committee staffer Daniel Fisk.

Rodman summarises the doubts: “The Task Force's new report is more the product of impatience than of analysis. Two years ago, it produced a first report which went

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further than I thought made sense. Since then, nothing significant has happened except that the Elián González case has led (perhaps misled) some to conclude that the domestic political clout of the anti-Castro Cuban Americans has been broken. Those who are eager to restore ties with Cuba undoubtedly sensed an opportunity.”

“But the Castro regime remains as it was two years ago — a petty fascist dictatorship. This is not a regime in its Gorbachev or Khatemi phase but in its Stalinist period. Any ideas that the measures in this report will foster political change are an illusion.”

As for Marc A. Thiessen, press spokesperson for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: “Sadly, the Task Force expended too much effort on proposals aimed at convincing the Cuban establishment of the merits of Western democracy, capitalism and culture. Instead, we should be developing proposals for ways in which the US can do in Cuba what it did in Central Europe — support those who are working to promote democracy and create a free society within the decaying shell of Castro’s totalitarian system.” Translation: Don’t have silly illusions — step up the subversion.

As for Jay Mazur, chair of the international relations committee of the AFL-CIO — he just worries that the Task Force might end up looking like a bunch of mugs: “In promoting conditions for a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba, we must also have realistic expectations and measurements for progress towards the legal recognition of independent labour unions, the release of political prisoners, the legalisation of opposition political parties and the holding of free and fair elections ... If these steps were not to materialise within a reasonable period of time, reasonable people might well conclude that the basic assumption of the Task Force’s approach was wrong.”

So what chance do the Task Force’s policy recommendations have of success? How confident can we be of the revolution’s powers of economic resistance? Here I comment on these 29 to 33, which cover the key economic constraints and challenges facing the revolution in a very condensed way.

A good way to grasp the essential dynamic at work here is to start in the sphere of circulation — with money. The traveller arriving in Cuba has to orient herself or himself to operating in three different currencies, and the interrelationship between these currencies encapsulates the basic barriers, the fundamental challenges, that the economy has to overcome.

The first currency is US dollars. These circulate freely, and over 60% of Cubans have access to them, through special pay arrangements (incentive pay is done in dollars, through remittances received from overseas or, if they are self-employed, through their participation in private or parallel dollar markets).

The second is the standard Cuban peso. This is the domestic currency and its exchange rate to the dollar, presently standing at around 20-21 to 1, is set in the

informal foreign exchange market, where, for example, pesos have to be bought to purchase state-provided food supplies, electricity, transport, and pay taxes etc. At the same time people whose income is in pesos have to get hold of dollars in order to do their shopping in the foreign exchange (basically dollar) shops. There they can increase their consumption beyond the minimum covered by the ration book (*libreta*) and the shops operating in pesos.

The informal rate of exchange is nothing more or less than the equilibrium exchange rate set in this market, although it is, of course, influenced by the buying and selling operations of the Cuban central bank and the money supply. It is this rate that seems to establish that the average income of a Cuban worker is only around 220 pesos (= \$11) a month. (I refer comrades to the essay, "Real Living Standards in Cuba", for a full treatment of this issue. We have included this demystifying piece in *Cuba as Alternative*.)

The third currency is the convertible peso, a hexagonal rather than round set of coins with a value equal to the US dollar. The convertible peso embodies the official exchange rate between the peso and the dollar, which the traveller won't experience in the course of buying and selling within Cuba. It does, however, have a decisive impact on the formation of domestic prices, incomes and finances.

This is because the official exchange rate, a historic rate going back to the days of Cuba as part of COMECON is used to convert costs and income in dollars for firms and state instrumentalities. For example, a Cuban enterprise operating in national currency which has to spend money on, say, imported petrol, counts the dollar expenditure on this input at the rate of one to one. Twenty thousand dollars spent on imported energy is included in the firm balance sheet as equal to 20,000 pesos, not 400,000 pesos (which would be the sum at the informal market rate). Clearly, with Cuba's enterprises now increasingly moving towards self-financing, such an arrangement stimulates the overuse of imported inputs, because these are undervalued in national terms.

Matters are symmetrically opposite with exports. The exporting firms get one peso for every dollar of export income, with the result that its income in national terms is undervalued. Firms in this condition often have to receive state subsidies to cover losses.

But why not just eliminate this official exchange rate and move to a single rate set in the free foreign exchange market? The answer is that such a change wouldn't just restructure prices across the board, it would also restructure, (i.e. reduce) real incomes. Cuban economists have calculated, for example, that if the official rate were changed to two pesos to one dollar, the price of imported energy would double, increasing the price of all products that make up the basic consumption bundle by about 40%.

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Maintaining real living standards would require money wages to increase by the same amount, further impacting on the costs of firms who would already be paying twice as much for their imported inputs. Of course, under neoclassical economic theory and IMF-World Bank structural adjustment packages there would be none, or little, increase in wages in such a case — increased efficiency would get purchased at the cost of the living standards of the mass of working people.

Moreover, under the self-financing arrangements introduced with the 1994 Economic Reform, it rapidly became clear that up to 60% of state enterprises were making a loss. Since most of these are dependent on energy imports and do not export their final product, any rapid shift to change the official exchange rate would increase the global volume of losses, putting even more pressure on the state budget for subsidies.

On the other hand, matters can't just be left as they are. The existence of two exchange rates means that there is no solid accounting baseline for the economy — one that accurately compares the productivity of labour in the advanced capitalist world (enshrined in US dollars) against the productivity of Cuban labour. A Cuban firm that is paying for its energy at 30 pesos a barrel is accounting for energy at \$1.50 a barrel in real terms. With such arrangement it's impossible to establish which factories and industries are viable and which not. Moreover, in such an environment planning via economic regulation is compromised by the need to make hundreds of *ad hoc* arrangements in order to bail out firms and enterprises that are loss-making under this system, but could well be viable under a single exchange rate regime.

The only practical approach is one of microevaluations of the official exchange rate in step with the increase in the rate of productivity of Cuban labour. In this way a 5% increase, say, in the in the cost of imported inputs resulting from a change in the official exchange rate would be compensated by a 5% increase in the productivity of labour. As productivity increases, the official exchange rate can be brought closer to the real rate. Clearly, given the present gap between the two rates, this is a long-term prospect and Cubans will have to live with “money duality” and all the problems it generates for a long time to come.

So the real question behind the monetary conundrums is: how to increase the productivity of Cuban labour?

We need to hold this question in mind as we look at the next issue — the effects of an unofficial/real exchange rate of 20 to 1. Here, contrary to what happens with the official exchange rate, the unofficial rate undervalues the purchasing power of the national currency. As matters stand the exchange rate is abnormally high, because an important amount of consumer goods are unavailable either through the rationing

system or through the free markets operating in the national currency. This shortage of supply provokes a greater demand for dollars than would otherwise be the case, as the desired goods can only be got in the dollar shops. Clearly the only way to change this situation is for there to be an increase of supply of consumer goods into shops operating in pesos, reducing the demand for dollars and appreciating the exchange rate. However, the cost of such an operation would be borne by those firms who are presently supplying dollar shops, yielding them a lower income

Here we touch upon an issue that is being much debated among Cuban economists. Is it better to sacrifice some state income by increasing supply to the shops operating in pesos in order to lower the exchange rate against the dollar, or is it more important to restrain the state budget deficit, which has been brought under control by heroic efforts over the past seven years, by making the most of every opportunity to acquire income for state coffers?

This is not a debate about simple trade-offs in the present tense. For example, a key issue is the effect of an increase in real income on people's willingness to work harder, i.e. on labour productivity. The material incentive effect of a reduction in the market exchange rate could lead to greater production, and greater treasury income in the medium term, potentially compensating for shorter-term losses.

Here we also meet the central question of the impact of economic reforms and measures on social consciousness. When the holding of dollars was legalised back in 1994 because this was unavoidable (an estimated half of all economic activity was taking place on a largely dollarised black market) and the value of the peso *vis-à-vis* the dollar was established on the free foreign exchange market, there was an almost overnight change in the distribution of wealth and income in Cuban society. Highly skilled surgeons who might have been receiving 600 pesos a month suddenly became impoverished compared to small farmers supplying the parallel markets with, say, garlic, who would make that amount of money in half a day.

The Cubans have a phrase for this cataclysmic effect — the “inverted social pyramid” — and it's had a profound impact on a society which used to have an income span of at maximum 4.5 to 1 and within which the greatest span for 90% of salaries was 2.5 to 1. Suddenly, the road to wealth was to get into self-employment or where the money is, particularly in the tourist industry around Havana.

In the mid-1990s this provoked huge internal migration from the eastern province of Oriente of people looking for a higher income in the major centres. Not infrequently the visitor who speaks a bit of Spanish is surprised to find him or herself alongside a taxi driver who wants to have a conversation about Lenin's *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* because his day job is lecturer in philosophy. It also meant that,

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according to the central bank, that in 1998, over 80% of all savings were concentrated in 13% of bank accounts — passive money but potentially convertible to capital if the rules of economic functioning were ever to change.

Clearly, the longer such a state of affairs exists the harder the battle to maintain socialist consciousness and commitment must be. That's why the struggle to eliminate the root causes of the twin exchange rate regime, the struggle for efficiency and labour productivity in a modernised state sector is critical to the long-run health of the revolution. The more labour productivity and efficiency can be raised and the gains from the resulting growth distributed in the combination that squares the circle of increasing investment and income while restraining income inequality, the more solid the economic foundations of the values of the revolution will be. The less glaring will be the contradiction between its values and aspirations and the reality of the daily struggle to make do.

The stress in the theses comes down on the difficulty of this task, not because we're being pessimists, but because we have to have a realistic assessment of the abiding constraints to growth, and awareness, too, that socialist development can't just be any old growth. Growth principally powered by the private sector and tourism which leaves the state and cooperative sector lagging behind can only increase pressure for further concessions to the capitalist market, with all the nefarious effects that can bring.

This sober assessment coincides with the cautious optimism of recent statements and interviews with Cuba's two main economics ministers, Carlos Lage and José Luis Rodríguez. According to Rodríguez the bulk of Cuba's gains from growth has had to be devoted to the investment fund, and it's easy to see why — the volume of new investment achieved in 1997 — the last year for which I have figures — was less than half that achieved in 1989.

This means that even the 7.5% growth registered in the first half of 2000 and the 5.5% rate achieved over 2000 cannot immediately translate into generalised increases in real income and consumption, even though there has been some increase in consumption and the availability of goods as well as wage increases for sectors in most need, like secondary school teachers.

In the interview Rodríguez outlines the gains of the past few years (like the end of blackouts), but dwells on the following constraints:

- The ongoing vulnerability to energy prices, despite the new arrangement with Venezuela and the rapidly growing contribution from Cuba's own oilfields. The most recent decision, made at the time of Putin's visit, namely to abandon the nuclear power program, can only add to this pressure.
- The continuing battle for an accurate and reliable system of accounting and auditing,

essential if the real position of enterprises and the real contribution of individual workers and teams is to be measured truthfully. According to Rodriguez: “Today about 20-odd firms have been authorised to apply Enterprise Upgrading, and this out of the 3000 that operate in the country, which indicates that the process has been very rigorous. That’s because what we are about is a benchmarking process that establishes what we demand of an efficient socialist firm.”

- Then there is the ongoing pressure of falling terms of trade. Physical volumes of Cuban exports continue to expand but Cuba is just one more player in world markets many of which suffer from excess capacity, such that the terms of trade moved against the country by 16% in 1999 alone, more than devouring the considerable efficiency gains being registered in some export sectors. This produces a chronic trade deficit, which has to be balanced by loans at commercial rates, the inflow of remittances and investments from capitalist joint venturers. This is a vulnerable pressure point for the whole Cuban economy which Washington is doing everything it can do squeeze via the Helms-Burton Act and other threats of commercial retaliation against countries and firms that “traffic” with Cuba. Despite some renegotiation of debt with Japan, this situation remains difficult. In the words of Rodriguez: “The external financial imbalance continues to be a fundamental obstacle to more rapid economic advance.”

Rodriguez’s summary judgement is that despite gains on many fronts it is still premature to say that Cuba has come to the end of the terrible tunnel of the Special Period. The differentiations and inequalities that the Special Period and the Economic Reform inevitably brought have meant that some people and industries are already doing much better than they were in 1989. For others, such as the sugar cane industry, there’s still a very long way to go. “There’s a series of things that are improving but this does not mean that we have reached the level of satisfaction of all the needs to which our society aspires. However, without doubt the country is moving forward and showing on that our optimism is justified, and that perspectives are splendid, thanks to the strength, unity and spirit of sacrifice of our people”, the minister concludes.

Strengthening the revolution socially and politically

So economic growth based on a shift to an intensive model of growth is an indispensable precondition for the survival and strengthening of the Cuban Revolution. But is it sufficient? Does it automatically guarantee an ongoing transition to socialism? Of course not. China’s high growth rates based on exploding marketisation, privatisation, stock exchanges, Free Trade Zones offering Chinese labour for multinational exploitation at bargain basement rates and the multiplication of millionaires is leading

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headlong towards capitalism, no matter that you call the process “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics”.

What, then, are the sufficient conditions for ensuring that generalised use of money and commodity relations in a planned economy, enforced “relinking with the capitalist world” won’t just lead straight back to capitalist restoration? Are the Cuban comrades on the right track? This is the issue that underlies the entire Section III of the Draft Theses entitled “Revolutionary Politics in a Period of Siege”. It begins in Theses 35 and 36 with a very condensed sketch of the social impact of the Special Period and the Economic Reform. Of course, a lot more could be said here about the erosion of gains long considered definitively won. The essay entitled “Cuba Begins to Answer its Race Question” gives a glimpse of the impact of marketisation on black and mulatto Cubans, an impact that recent Cuban investigations have charted in detail. The news is not good, as the proportion of blacks and mulattoes employed in the tourist sector falls well below their weight in the population as a whole. Similar studies of the impact of the Special Period on women and young people have thrown up evidence of parallel negative trends.

However, the main point to register is that the Cuban comrades understand perfectly well and stress that “relinking” with capitalism demands of the revolution a multiform counteroffensive. This necessarily includes purely economic measures, like a steeply graduated income tax, but more importantly an offensive around the values of the revolution and continuing effort to involve the people in the revolution’s struggles of survival and reconstruction.

Yet that entity called “the people” is always evolving and methods and techniques of mobilisation and organisation which may have been appropriate with a less educated generation run the risk of not meeting the needs of the new generation. In this sense the battle for the revolution is always the battle for the hearts and minds of young people — a battle that was comprehensively lost in Eastern Europe, where consumerism seized the majority while the minority dreamed of impossible utopias that were “neither communist nor capitalist”.

The same trends are to be found among the young people of Cuba today, especially in Havana. From the totally disaffected *jinetero* who believes everything he hears on Radio Martí and can’t wait to get across to Florida and start buying Nike gear to the young intellectuals who believe that Cuba went astray when it tried to marry Martí’s thought with that of the “foreigners” Marx, Engels and Lenin, the hearts and minds of Cuba’s youth are a battleground on which the revolution must prevail if it is to survive. Winning the great battle of ideas proposed by Fidel actually starts at home with the country’s youth.

But *how specifically* can it prevail? Cuba's young generation is the most educated and questioning in the history of the revolution, the least inclined to be convinced by sloganeering and the most inclined to alienation when their needs are unsatisfied. Yet the revolution has some enormous assets with which to confront that challenge.

The most important is the PCC and the UJC. The fact that these organisations are a selection of the most dedicated and self-sacrificing members of Cuban society, whose membership is controlled and vetted by workplaces and other constituencies and where the only privilege of membership is to work harder, be paid less, and always lead by example. This gives the UJC and the PCC enormous moral authority, even with sections of the population who don't like this or that aspect of government policy or "aren't political". This came out clearly in the role played by these organisations in mobilising young people for the return of Elián González.

The second condition is to counteract consumerism according to the principle of collective sharing — like the collective community centres of activity, enjoyment, education and culture.

Thirdly, as the Cubans stress, people can't be won or rewon to the values of socialism by being kept in a glass case: socialist conviction and consciousness can only come through exposure to capitalist germs and developing the necessary antibodies. As Thesis 39 notes this means that the revolution must always move between two imperatives — that of maintaining unity in action against the imperialist threat and with a wary eye on its increasing attempts at internal subversion, and that of allowing the flourishing of the debate and expression of differences through which alone the best decisions can be made at the lowest cost — the very *modus vivendi* of socialist democracy and people's self-government.

I could find no better overall expression of these imperatives than the following passage from the essay of Luis Suarez Salazar, "The 21st Century: Some Challenges for the Cuban Revolution". Suarez summarises the core challenge:

To re-establish the foundations of a [native] and viable socialist plan ... continues to be a precondition for self-sustained, sustainable, and independent development of the country. It implies, among other things, the maintenance of unity (without sterile unanimity) of the Cuban popular masses and political vanguard; sustaining and deepening the popular character of the state; perfecting the norms of internal functioning and the work of the Cuban Communist Party and of the Union of Young Communists

It also implies completing the construction and consolidation of the popular, democratic, representative and participatory institutions created by the revolution, broadening the political and legal consciousness of the citizenry, as well as improving

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the legal code, legislative system, electoral system, and administration of justice. All of this is linked directly or indirectly to the promotion and increasing satisfaction of all human rights.

The aforesaid also involves maintaining and rethinking the social gains of the revolution, recognising the growing heterogeneity of the Cuban masses and creating new institutional and organisational forms to express this plurality and to realise the rights of citizens to organise autonomously towards diverse social ends without affecting indispensable national unity. It implies perfecting the efforts and representation of the social, mass, and professional organisations and making progress in the administrative decentralisation of the country and in the movement of authority and resources to the municipalities and regions. Finally it means increasing total quantity and quality of information flowing from the citizens to their representatives and vice versa.

All of this will contribute to a constant broadening of participation by the citizenry in the identification, evaluation, decision-making, and solution of all the issues that concern and affect them, including the ever more complex processes of the economy and foreign policy. Under the difficult conditions that lie ahead, what Vladimir Ilyich Lenin outlined is more and more true, in the sense that it is the masses that determine the authority of the state. That authority is stronger “when the masses know everything, can judge everything, and do everything consciously”.

What we have here is a wide-ranging, vitally important debate and, indeed, struggle that will not go away. A fascinating debate and a fascinating field of social initiatives — Cuba as “social laboratory” as someone has termed it. This is a debate from which we can and will learn, as it flows through the pages of Cuba’s newly enriched Marxism in social science and politics, and a lot of it will be included in our next Cuba book.

Cuba & the DSP

Comrades, Australians and Cubans have one distinct national trait in common — the tendency when everything is dissolving in chaos to crack jokes in very bad taste. But the experience of reacquainting ourselves with Cuba’s revolutionary practice and of meeting and discussing with comrades from the Cuban Communist Party convinces us that we have, despite our very different political, social and cultural backgrounds, a lot more in common:

We both oppose neoliberal globalisation, imperialism’s latest form, with a vengeance. We both understand that, as Che said, internationalism is not just a duty but an endogenous necessity for socialism;

We both know that without a fighting vanguard, steeled in struggle and implanted in the masses that victory in the anticapitalist and anti-imperialist struggle is impossible.

In a phrase, we are both Marxists and Leninists;

We both understand that the construction of socialism is the work of free men and women, and that without mass participation, involvement and direction of the process of socialist construction, advance is impossible;

We have both come to the realisation that, in the words Julio García Luis, former secretary of the Cuban Union of Journalists, that no force, not even Cuba “should seek to set itself up as a model or ‘centre’ of the world revolution”, but that the revolutionary socialist movement will be reconstructed through international collaboration between parties implanted and winning authority in their national political reality. We look forward to deepening that collaboration and friendship.

We have our differences, but these are small compared to our agreement on fundamentals. What’s more we don’t know what many of these differences are really worth until we get down to ongoing discussions and collaboration.

In adopting the draft theses we will be saying as a party that we identify with Cuba and its vanguard, not, of course, as a model for Australia, but, in the words of Thesis 62, as “a priceless example, of how a revolutionary people and its leadership have been able to confront life-and-death challenges when under siege from an aggressive imperialism intent on their destruction”. We will be saying that we will do whatever we can to get Cuba’s reality known and to build solidarity by whatever means necessary. We will continue to study Cuba, not in the spirit of becoming Cuba know-alls, but so as to learn from the immense store of the PCC’s revolutionary creativity. In short, we will be making Cuba a priceless part of what inspires us in our struggle for a socialist Australia.

The Cuban Revolution in the Epoch of Neoliberal Globalisation

Theses of the Democratic Socialist Party

Cuba as social alternative & bastion of resistance against imperialism

1. Four decades after its triumph over the Batista dictatorship the Cuban Revolution stands out as a critical point of resistance to US imperialism and neoliberal globalisation. Its continuing survival after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European socialist bloc is witness to its vitality and profound legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of the Cuban people — it is their revolution. Its refusal to die despite all forecasts has exploded the propaganda about Cuba being a simple satellite of the Soviet Union. What Cuba has to say now wins a larger hearing and broader sympathy, such that Washington has to devote more time and effort to its propaganda offensive against the revolution.
2. Despite its condition as a small Third World country, the criminal US blockade and the inevitable decline in living standards brought on by the economic collapse of the early 1990s, and despite the traumatic disorientation caused by the collapse of the “socialist camp”, the Cuban Revolution shows how a people can achieve national self-determination, dignity and a sense of collective and individual worth. Through planned economy and the institutions and mass organisations of the revolutionary state, Cuba has begun the process of transforming the mass of producers and citizens into the real creators of their own destiny. The question begged is: if the Cuban people, beset by difficulties for 40 years and target of unremitting US hostility, can set the foundations for a humane and fair society,

what could be achieved in richer, bigger countries and — by implication — on a world scale?

3. No country of comparative income level can boast anything like Cuba's gains in the fundamental aspects of social, human and environmental development. The central principle of Cuban social policy is to guarantee as every citizen's democratic right access to an adequate diet, health care, education, employment, housing (preferably owned by the occupant), leisure, sport and welfare within the framework of a society that becomes progressively more just and humane. A bare summary of advances from 1959 to 1999 bears out the revolution's achievements:
 - *Infant mortality* has fallen from over 60 to 6.4 for every 1000 live births, a lower rate than for many advanced industrial countries;
 - *Life expectancy* has increased by over 20 years to reach 74 years for men and 76 years for women, the highest of any Third World country and again comparable to that of many First World countries;
 - *Inhabitants per doctor* has fallen from 1355 (in 1962) to 175 (five times the density of the UK);
 - *Illiteracy* has fallen from more than 40% to 3.8%;
 - *Average years of schooling* have risen from less than three to nine years;
 - *University graduates* have risen from 3% to 25% of the population over 10 years of age;
 - *Housing* rents, which used to absorb over 50% of income, have disappeared with most homes now being owned by their occupants;
 - *Agricultural land*, 75% of which used to be in the hands of 8% of landowners, has been nationalised, with 250,000 peasants receiving title to land they previously worked for landlords;
 - *Unemployment*, which used to affect up to 25% of the work force between sugar harvests, has fallen below 5%;
 - *Women*, who made up 12% of the workforce before 1959, now account for 42% and are 60% of technical workers. The heritage of *machismo*, while still not eliminated, has retreated a long way before the country's comprehensive legislation supporting women's equality and rights;
 - *Racial discrimination* has been outlawed and to all intents and purposes eliminated;
 - *Forest coverage*, which had fallen to 14% of the island by 1959, has risen to 21%, while the environmental damage inflicted by 30 years of industrialisation at all costs has begun to be reversed through comprehensive programs of repair and recovery. Environmental sustainability has now been entrenched as a goal

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of the revolution;

- *Culture*, which used to be dominated by US output, has drawn on the country's rich variety of national traditions to produce literature, art, music and cinema of unparalleled quality;
 - *Sport*, from being a pastime of the moneyed elite, has become universally available, and Cuba's sporting achievements a source of pride for the country and Latin America as a whole.
4. The gains of the revolution also have an intrinsic ethical dimension. The victory of 1959, the culmination of a struggle which first exploded with the 1868 uprising against the Spanish colonial power, represented an enormous explosion of popular pride and self-confidence that only a true revolution can bring. It represented the triumph of the values of the Cuban revolutionary tradition, embodied in its heroes and martyrs like Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, Antonio Maceo, José Martí, Máximo Gómez, Julio Antonio Mella, Carlos Baliño, Antonio Guiteras, Eddy Chibas and many more. These values are: an intense patriotism born of centuries of sacrifice against the colonial and neocolonial yoke; a profound feeling of solidarity with the oppressed peoples of the world (which has over the years generated the Cuban people's examples of self-sacrificing aid to countries in the front line of the struggle against imperialism, like Nicaragua, Angola and Ethiopia); and a fundamentally egalitarian and humanist ethic that rebels against the massive inequalities and injustices of capitalism and underpins the revolution's socialist choice. These values have been entrenched in the country's constitution, its system of People's Power and through ongoing massive popular mobilisations against attacks on revolutionary Cuba's national sovereignty.
 5. The Cuban Revolution has also proven capable of abandoning discriminatory or mistaken positions. The best example is the change in its treatment of homosexuality, towards which prerevolutionary Cuba exhibited all the prejudices of *machismo*. Although the revolution originally continued to regard homosexuality as a deviation to be "treated" in special institutions and work brigades, the revolutionary government progressively moved to repeal legislation that was discriminatory against gay men and lesbians. The result is that, while homophobia is far from eradicated and *de facto* discrimination still exists, it is now recognised that the sexual orientation of individual citizens is no concern of government, the law or the country's mass organisations. In similar fashion, a policy of interning HIV sufferers in special institutions was later abandoned.
 6. Cuba's capacity to defend and extend the gains of its revolution is under permanent assault. Not only is economic recovery hostage to continuing foreign investment

and acceptable world prices for the country's principle exports, Cuba, like every Third World economy, has to operate in a global economy marked by excess capacity, ever-increasing competitive pressures and worsening terms of trade. Moreover, besides facing the US blockade Cuba remains the only post-capitalist economy in Latin America and is hence the target of the suspicion and often outright aggression of Latin American elites beholden to Washington. This state of affairs means that it is truer now than ever that the biggest relief that besieged Cuba could obtain would be a successful socialist revolution in one or more countries of the continent. This would reverse the US's "pacification" of the Central American revolutionary movements of the early 1990s and give a strong morale boost to the Cuban people.

7. The international outlook of the revolution has always been in harmony with its revolutionary domestic policy, and the crisis of the 1990s has not led the "first free territory of the Americas" to abandon its internationalist principles and practice. However, since the end of the Soviet bloc brought an end to Cuba's internationalist missions in support of national liberation movements, Cuba is compelled more than ever to fight on the ground of winning over world public opinion to its side. The loss of Cuba's Soviet and Eastern European "rearguard" also makes it vital for Cuba to seek alliances and support wherever there is rebellion against the impact of neoliberal globalisation, not only among the more traditional candidates of the oppressed and exploited Third World (the "South") but among the new antiglobalisation movements of the imperialist "North".
8. Cuban championing of the impoverished majority of humanity against a world order structured to allow the imperialist "North" to continue exploiting and policing the underdeveloped "South" is a vitally important aspect of this struggle. Its political guidance of the G77 group of nations has helped consolidate a more united bloc of resistance around such issues as debt and market access to the advanced industrial economies. Fidel Castro's speeches denouncing the wars and crimes of the US and NATO against Iraq and Yugoslavia as well as his exposures of the imperialist powers' new strategic doctrines (which seek to override national sovereignty on the grounds of the struggle against "terrorism", drugs, the possession of weapons of mass destruction and "defence of human rights") are a powerful indictment of imperialism's military terror machinery.
9. Through its proposals around debt cancellation and a new global trading regime, Cuba has also helped put the economic institutions of the world order, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, in the dock and on the defensive. Cuba continually stresses the gains in lives and living standards that could be

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achieved by diverting resources from military expenditure and profligate consumerism to health, education and welfare. Its call for the abolition of the IMF and World Bank and its proposals for the reform of the World Trade Organisation and the United Nations as well as specific initiatives such as the imposition of a 1% Tobin Tax to fund development of the South are the sort of practical measures needed to underpin a just world order. In providing doctors, nurses and educators to countries across the Third World and in providing training and education facilities in Cuba itself — all on a scale many times greater than any First World country — Cuba also sets a shining example of true internationalism.

10. Washington's policy towards the Cuban Revolution remains what it has always been — to eliminate the Castro leadership and to show that any revolution in its “backyard” is doomed to fail, as “proven” by the examples of Grenada, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. The determination of the Cuban people to defend their revolution and the refusal of the Cuban leadership to compromise on their support for popular struggles means that there can be no question of any type of peaceful coexistence between Washington and Havana. The principle factor is not the weight of the counter-revolutionary Miami lobby in US domestic politics (overridden in the Elián González case to avoid exposing Washington's anti-Cuba policy even more than occurred) but Cuba's role as example, as a social alternative that has put an end to capitalist rule. Thus, even though certain sections of US business (the farm lobby, computing) would gain from an end to the economic war against the island, the overall interests of US imperialism dictate maintenance of the blockade, which all objective accounts show to have inflicted massive damage on the Cuban economy and people (US\$181 billion according to the damages claim of the National Assembly of People's Power).
11. The blockade is not, as some liberal opponents claim, a “mistake” by a US government that doesn't understand its own interests and whose removal would supposedly free the Cuban people to overthrow the “dictator” Castro. It is a vital weapon in a US counter-revolutionary strategy that is composed of five interrelated elements: (1) terrorist acts, economic sabotage, biological war and even military attacks; (2) an intensified economic war, which includes the Torricelli Act (1992), the Helms-Burton Act (1996) and a campaign to dissuade investors from doing business with the island or buying Cuban exports; (3) incitement of Cubans to leave Cuba illegally through the provisions of the Cuban Adjustment Act, which grants automatic residency rights to Cubans reaching US territory; (4) a campaign of financing domestic dissidence in the name of “building civil society”; and, (5) a propaganda and disinformation war implemented in violation of international

law through 24 radio transmitters and Television Martí.

12. While Washington has not totally abandoned the military option that failed so ingloriously at the Bay of Pigs (Playa Girón), its main target today is the hearts and minds of the Cuban people battered by the economic crisis of the 1990s. The message is that the removal of Castro would bring the glittering benefits of US consumerism and “freedom”. At the same time US imperialism looks to defeat Cuba on the battlefield of human rights by forcing the Cuban government to respond to its assaults and provocations by adopting more repressive measures against internal “dissidence”, crime and corruption. Every such reaction by the Cuban government, such as the 1999 Act for the Protection of National Independence and the Cuban Economy, is immediately “spun” as further proof that Cuba is an increasingly repressive dictatorship. In this Washington is supported by European social-democracy which, while opposing the more brutal elements of US policy, fully supports the propaganda war against Cuba’s “lack of democratic rights” in United Nations bodies and backs the central US surrender terms for the revolution — a multiparty political system, “independent” unions and “free” elections.
13. However, attacking Cuba on the grounds of human rights leaves imperialism vulnerable to counterattack. The resolution of the Fifth Congress of the PCC (1997), “The Party of Unity, Democracy and Human Rights that We Defend”, was a detailed rebuttal of imperialist attempts on the legitimacy of the revolution. Its core message is that there would have been no human rights, national sovereignty and dignity, and social gains without the revolution, that the key lesson of Cuban history is that division within the revolutionary and patriotic camp has always enabled the US imperialists to triumph, and that the revolution continues to develop its own values and forms of participatory socialist democracy which are a hundred times more democratic than the farce of US money politics. On the three key battle fronts — within Cuba, within the US, and before world public opinion — Cuba has also successfully exposed the hypocrisy and brutality of the US, which in UN General Assembly votes can now only muster Israel as a supporter of its criminal blockade. The utter hypocrisy and double standards involved in US preaching about human rights, when it supports the princes of Saudi Arabia and the emirs of Kuwait and imprisons and executes its own citizens in unprecedented numbers, leaves Washington without moral high ground in relation to Cuba.
14. Most recently the Elián González kidnapping case showed to millions of people around the world which part of the greater Cuban nation is the more trustworthy custodian of the human rights of a defenceless little boy. The Cuban people and

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government's mass appeal to the decent instincts of the bulk of North American people forced Washington to rescue Elián from the clutches of the Miami mafia and return him to his father and homeland. For the first time since 1959 it is now no longer the case for millions of North Americans that the "Castro dictatorship" must automatically be in the wrong — a major loss of political ground for Washington.

15. The reports of various human rights agencies on the Cuban justice and prison system typically score the "lack of independence" of the judiciary, the existence of crimes of opinion, the death penalty, the absence of a nonofficial media and the presence of "prisoners of conscience" in Cuban prisons. With few exceptions these reports never mention the economic and social impact of Washington's 40-year aggression against the island nor the fact that many "prisoners of conscience" were directly involved in acts of sabotage and terrorism against the revolution. They rarely acknowledge Cuba's ongoing attempts to build a prison system based on the principle of rehabilitation. Most of all, they never engage with the Cuban view of human rights, which starts with the right of every citizen to the material and social underpinnings of a decent life that frees them from the desperate struggle to survive, a gain only the revolution has made possible. Thus, while defence of the revolution involves restrictions on democratic rights and mistakes and avoidable injustices are always possible, it should never be forgotten that the revolution (the "people under arms") is more democratic than the most liberal of capitalist states and that, as with any revolution, the main cause of such restrictions is the need to deny footholds to an aggressive counter-revolution determined to win back its power and privileges.
16. As far as its single-party system is concerned, Cuba takes its stand on any nation's sovereign right to adopt whatever institutional arrangement most accords with its traditions, while not ruling out changes to that system in the future. However, under present conditions of concentrated imperialist aggression — and especially given outright US support for the "rights" of the former capitalists expropriated by the revolution — the replacement of the Castro leadership of the revolution by another party cannot lead to the creation of a "healthy workers' state" and even less to a "social market economy" run by "third way" social-democrats. As matters stand the only feasible alternative holders of power in Cuba are the corrupt Miami mafia and their US backers. In the words of former Political Bureau member Carlos Aldana: "A party represents an option for power. In our country, there is only one option bidding for power against the revolution, and that's the counter-revolution. A multiparty system means legalising what the US hasn't been able to

do with blood and fire; it means creating a party of capitalism, representing US interests in Cuba ... If, one day, the objective circumstances change, and a multiparty system no longer necessarily means the appearance of a counter-revolutionary party, then we could take up the conversation again.”

17. To counter imperialist aggression the Cuban leadership has skilfully exploited divisions among the capitalist powers, and also sought to take the lead in giving regional institutions and arrangements as anti-imperialist a character as possible. Hence Cuba's drive to avoid a future Latin America Free Trade Association from becoming an extension of NAFTA; its championing of the demands of the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking world against US cultural hegemony; its support for independent regional financial and development institutions as steps along the road to models of Caribbean and Latin American integration which can act as counterweights to the overwhelming power of US and European imperialism; and its support for the Euro as a competing world currency to the dollar. Through such initiatives the revolution has increased its breathing space by building a range of alliances — even with the Catholic Church — on such issues as the peoples' right to development, social justice and national sovereignty.
18. None of these initiatives has entailed the sacrifice of revolutionary or progressive movements in other countries — unlike the former Soviet leadership which sought to buy peaceful coexistence with US imperialism by, for example, refusing to supply revolutionary Nicaragua with the arms it desperately needed to win the war against the *contras*. Nor does the Cuban leadership seek to manipulate the domestic policies and practice of the parties of the Latin American left to help it achieve influence with Latin American bourgeois governments. Cuba has long been criticised by many on the left for such issues as its silence about the 1968 massacres of students in Mexico City, its endorsement (critical) of the Soviet bloc invasion of Czechoslovakia in the same year as well as Castro's presence at the 1988 inauguration of corrupt Mexican president Salinas de Gortari. These stances were basically dictated by Cuba's dependence on Soviet economic assistance, as well as by the fact that Mexico alone of all Latin American countries refused to break off diplomatic relations with Cuba at Washington's behest. Had the Cuban leadership intervened openly in such cases it may well have placed the survival of the revolution at risk without being in any position to strengthen the position of the radical and revolutionary forces in struggle in these countries.
19. Nor should the Cuban leadership's restraint or public silence on important issues of world politics be mistaken for assent. For example, Havana's disagreement with the 1979 Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan was communicated

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privately but insistently to the Soviet leadership, as were its fears that glasnost and perestroika were being conducted in a hasty and reckless way that would provide enormous opportunities for counter-revolution. In other controversial cases, such as Havana's support for the Chinese government crackdown against the Tiananmen demonstrations in 1989 and the 1981 suppression of the Polish Solidarity movement the Cuban government was acting on the mistaken conviction that such movements were intrinsically antisocialist from the outset, probably supported by the main imperialist centres, and that the Polish and Chinese leaderships were, for all their errors and bureaucratic methods, defending socialism. Even here, however, the Cuban position always stressed the fact that such rebellions could only have become possible because of the indifference of the party leaderships involved to the concerns and criticisms of the masses.

20. One crucial reason why the US is determined to destroy the Cuban Revolution is that it has never undergone bureaucratic degeneration, unlike the former Soviet Union, nor was it in the hands of a bureaucratic elite from the outset, as in the case of China. "Left" criticism of Cuba has typically confused such a qualitative shift to a *regime of bureaucratic reaction* with the various symptoms of bureaucratisation — corruption, waste, incompetence, privileges, elitism, arrogance, arbitrariness, restrictions on democratic rights, lack of accountability and growing mass indifference to politics. Cuba (just like the Soviet Union in its early years) has certainly had to suffer from many of these problems. However, nobody can point to anything resembling the final victory of an elite with institutionalised special privileges standing above the working masses and pursuing its own separate interests, along the lines of the Stalinist "Thermidor" of 1924 to 1933. Quite the contrary: bureaucratic political factions were defeated in 1962 and 1968 (the two Escalante cases) and while increased bureaucratisation certainly spread between 1970 and 1986 as the Soviet economic model was introduced this did not lead to bureaucratic usurpation of political power. Rather, it helped trigger the Rectification Process, launched at the 1986 Third Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) and an important moment in the revolution's ongoing battle to defend its radical, egalitarian ethic and improve its forms of socialist democracy.
21. Despite the severe hardships to which the collapse of the socialist camp has exposed them, the mass of Cuban working people do not resemble the atomised, demoralised and cynical working peoples of Eastern Europe of the 1970s and 1980s. They were fed up with the hypocrisy of their "socialist" leaders and deaf to the socialist message and its values. Fidel Castro is not Leonid Brezhnev and the PCC is not a party of privilege and social and bureaucratic advancement, but

rather a selection of the most committed and self-sacrificing representatives of the Cuban people. The basic reason why Cuba has survived the “collapse of communism” and the economic and ideological traumas it produced on the island is because that vanguard has kept the allegiance of the mass of working people.

Cuba’s struggle for survival after the ‘end of communism’

22. Cuban economic growth in the years 1959 to 1989 (3.1% annually) was well above the average for Latin America and laid the basis for a steady rise in living standards and the general level of culture and education of the people. It allowed the definitive elimination of the plagues of prerevolutionary Cuba — illiteracy, disease, low life expectancy and all-round poverty, inequality and racial and gender discrimination. It produced a huge increase in social mobility for the poorest Cubans, creating a mass national-patriotic, anticapitalist and anti-imperialist consciousness. New industries were built, old ones expanded and mechanised, and science and technology developed, especially in the health and pharmaceutical sectors.
23. However, the main source of Cuba’s growth and partial industrialisation, like that of all its partners in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon), was basically extensive — the addition of ever-increasing amounts of machinery and labour to the productive task, but at low and declining levels of productivity. This type of growth, especially when combined with Cuba’s form of specialisation within the division of labour of the socialist economic bloc, did little to reduce its vulnerability to fluctuations in export prices and rises in world interest rates — by 1984 Cuba’s combined deficit with the capitalist and socialist economic blocs had reached its highest point ever. The adoption of the Soviet system of planning (the Economic Management and Planning System — SDPE) led to a generalised belief that purely economic mechanisms could resolve all major tasks. Important social investment like housing and childcare centres were abandoned on the grounds that they represented “unproductive” expenditure; economic imbalances grew (for example, domestic food production capacity slumped as food imports soared); the sugar industry showed disappointing results for the level of investments poured into it; specific industries continued to suffer from backwardness and neglect; and the application of science and technology to production lagged — all factors producing a highly distorted and inefficient investment process. The system of economic management was also full of distortions, most of all in the area of payment systems and fake labour norms (three-quarters of bonus arrangements were effectively scams). Economic calculation was reduced to a caricature, firm management was increasingly dysfunctional, the administrative apparatus seemed

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to expand of its own accord (there was, for example, a 150% increase in non-production staff between 1970 and 1985) and worker participation languished. Taken together these symptoms revealed a growing divide between the worker and social property, the individual citizen and society, and between the individual as producer and consumer.

24. This state of affairs, described by Fidel Castro as threatening the very soul of the revolution, led to adoption of the Rectification Process in 1986. Its main goals were to overcome wasteful bureaucratic planning, replace the import mentality with a search for domestic solutions, improve investment efficiency by avoiding Soviet-style “giantism” and by speeding up the application of lead technologies such as genetic engineering, biotechnology and microelectronics; cut back on consumption; promote integrated planning; and boost social and infrastructure investment. Among the methods proposed were the revival of voluntary work and “microbrigades” and the use of the armed forces and their equipment to carry out model production projects. Most of all, Rectification, carried out under the banner of a revival of the thinking of Che Guevara, was a social and political project that aimed to reharness the commitment of the Cuban people to the task of socialist construction. It was not envisaged as an emergency measure, but as a qualitative change in Cuba’s way of building socialism.
25. Rectification could only achieve mixed results before the collapse of the Soviet bloc — between 1987 and 1989 national income per capita and labour productivity continued to fall. However, the main cause of continuing stagnation was not the Rectification Process itself, but external pressures — an accelerated decline in the country’s terms of trade, the decline in supplies of Soviet petrol for re-exporting and the cutting of foreign loans due to the country’s defaulting on debt repayments. The project also presupposed a degree of central planning that the 1989-93 crisis made simply unsustainable and its introduction was compromised by being largely in the hands of cadres who had been responsible for the previous system. The main gains lay on the social-political side. Wholesale sackings of incompetent and corrupt managers took place under worker and union pressure; the media of the mass organisations took the lead in denouncing corruption, scams and bureaucratic inefficiency; union action stopped a bureaucratically implemented price rise on essential commodities; individual workers and local communities took the lead in “dob-in-a-bureaucrat” campaigns, private farmers’ markets were shut down because of popular outrage over the profiteering; and there was an influx of younger, better trained cadres into positions of responsibility. As a result there was a series of spectacular cases of high officials defecting, combined with a new

modesty (and rearguard resistance) on part of important sections of the bureaucracy trained in Soviet-style paternalistic methods. In this way Rectification became an organic part of the social and political method of the revolution, which could confront the trauma of the 1990s economic collapse with greater moral and material resources than would otherwise have been the case.

26. The Special Period in Time of Peace was an emergency survival plan to hold onto the fundamental gains of the revolution in a time of enormous crisis: between 1989 and 1993 output fell by 35%, trade by 85%, investment collapsed and Washington further tightened its blockade. The trauma of the crisis was heightened because the Comecon system had entrenched a twofold overvaluation of Cuban labour relative to that of the advanced capitalist world: not only was the Comecon unit of account, the transferable rouble, overvalued against the dollar, the Cuban peso was itself overvalued against the transferable rouble. Thus when the Comecon economic system collapsed and national Cuban prices had to align with world prices, the real comparative value of Cuban labour, currency and income were exposed. This process re-established in everyone's eyes Cuba's reality as an underdeveloped economy facing all the problems of accumulation, but with the material and moral resources acquired through 30 years of building socialism to still make development a thinkable target for a people imbued with revolutionary spirit.
27. The initial survival plan of the Special Period banked on a revival based on making exports in new sectors like biotechnology and medicine the motor of growth while still preserving key features of Rectification (ban on the private farmers market and on the holding of dollars, tightly controlled inflow of foreign investment). However, by mid-1993, with the black market accounting for nearly half of economic activity, the leadership had little choice but to abandon this approach. Fidel Castro's July 26 speech of that year explained that the construction of socialism had necessarily to be put on hold while doing everything to maintain the basic gains of the revolution. The "crisis of the rafters" (*balseros*) in 1994 confirmed this assessment.
28. The Fourth Congress of the PCC (1991), preceded by 80,000 meetings across the country, had already begun to develop the emergency Economic Reform for the Special Period. Its main features were a shift in the mix of property forms, with cooperative, mixed and private property (especially joint ventures with foreign capital) expanding at the expense of state industry. This trend was most marked in the countryside where nonstate property — grouped principally in the Basic Units of Cooperative Production (UBPCs) — rose from 25 to 67.5% of agricultural land between 1992 and 1996. State industry still predominated but had itself to diversify

through forming legally autonomous state enterprises and breaking down the unsustainable “giant” firms that had relied for their inputs on imports from Comecon partners. However, the most profound change — one that has had repercussions throughout the entire economy — lay in the different relationship between central planning and the market: the bigger role for the market demands an increase in control and surveillance by state instrumentalities and mass organisations as well as new ways of exercising control from the centre. This was particularly so as decentralisation of decision-making both within the state bodies as well as geographically had the potential to see local or sectional interests override those of society as a whole. Other features that flowed from the changed property and planning-market mixes included: an effective end to the state monopoly of foreign trade; reform of the workings of state enterprises with the aim of introducing new systems of management, administration, financing, incentives and worker participation; firm responsibility for financial resources they used with strict deadlines for repayments of debts; the creation/restructuring of a specialised banking system; and the development of indirect and flexible instruments of economic regulation and control through the taxation and finance systems.

29. The Economic Reform has begun the immense tasks of hauling the Cuban economy out of crisis and setting the foundations for intensive growth. Since 1994, the year of the turnaround, GDP growth has averaged 4.1%, the recovery has spread to almost every sector (exceptions: cattle and sugar); debt as a proportion of GDP has declined; the state budget deficit has been brought to under 3% of GDP; the money supply, while still vastly excessive, continues to fall; the peso has fallen from around 150 to 1 to 20 to 1 in relation to the US dollar; labour productivity has risen 12% in five years; and the unit cost of producing sugar has fallen by 18%. A new progressive income tax system is beginning to function. There has been a small increase in wages (13%), living standards and working conditions but much remains to be done. Matters have now reached the point where Cuba is now being accepted as less of a credit risk by international financiers, with commercial loans at 15-22% interest being replaced by long- and medium-term loans at lower rates. Joint ventures and investment in mining, tourism, oil exploration and refining, agriculture, perfumes, rum, beer, agriculture and engineering have enabled paralysed and underutilised productive capacity to be set in motion, earning foreign exchange, creating tens of thousands of jobs and providing tax income. This revival has been achieved without any support from the International Monetary Fund, World Bank or teams of international economic experts.
30. Despite the trauma of the years 1989 to 1994, the Special Period also brought more

lasting gains to Cuba's project of socialist construction. Probably the most important of these were in those areas where Soviet industrialisation methods had wreaked havoc with the environment, in large-scale agriculture, housing construction and energy production. Making a virtue of necessity, but also calling on scientific and technical expertise that had begun to be built up in the 1980s, Cuba carried out the world's biggest ever conversion to organic and semi-organic agriculture in these years, as well as launching experiments and pilot schemes in a whole range of environmentally benign methods of developing building materials and generating energy. At the same time, however, given the country's ongoing dependence on fuel imports, Cuba has still not abandoned its program — dangerously anti-environmental — of nuclear power.

31. The underlying reason for the revival has been the continuing support of the Cuban people for the revolution, their abnegation and stoicism, and their conviction that only a socialist austerity plan — a program of shared sacrifices and commitment and not a purely technocratic operation — could restart the economy. Such was the basic message of the special "Workers Parliaments" attended by three million workers in 1994 to develop practical measures and methods for making the Economic Reform work. It has been the intersection of this sort of mass input with the government's policies of spreading the pain equally while maintaining the basic gains of the revolution (health, education, the food ration, 70% of wages for unemployed or displaced workers) that has guaranteed the social order, discipline and political stability essential to success. The careful preparation of the reform and the involvement of work collectives was also necessary to avoid the destructive "crash-through-or-crash" approach of the Gorbachev economic program. In the words of a specialist analysis of the PCC's Níco Lopez Higher Institute: "It is not possible to pass suddenly, in an uncontrolled way, to a decentralised mechanism. A massive breakdown of the enterprise system could be produced because of the lack of resources at hand for its functioning on a self-financing basis. This would in turn produce a substantial reduction in state budget income with large negative repercussions for social expenditure. Unemployment would be massive and practically uncompensated and there would be a sharp breakdown of traditional ties between enterprises. All that would create a chaotic state of affairs in economy and society and would put an end to the Cuban Revolution."
32. However, the costs of economic revival have been high. In purely economic terms dollarisation has created a double economy and a whole gamut of false incentives that run against social priorities and the needs of the overall plan. The incentive to pilfer resources from the peso (basically state) economy and resell them at a huge

profit in the dollar economy is enormous, and means that state resources flow into these sectors as through a permanently open tap. Since the dollar economic circuits are also those presently making the biggest contribution to growth (tourism generates 50% of foreign exchange) and investment funds for renewing state industry are wanting, this imbalance is set to continue. Fifty per cent of UBPCs continue to lose money and the sugar industry, still essential for sustained growth, continues to stagnate and/or face rock-bottom prices on the world market. Inequality is growing rapidly, as the gap widens between Cubans with access to dollars and those stuck with pesos. Moreover, much of the excess money supply originally generated to maintain basic social services at the depth of the crisis in 1991-94 has ended up in a small number of bank accounts — another boost to inequality in a country used to equating socialism with income equality. Socially, the Special Period has had the unavoidable effect of increasing the burden of domestic labour for women, as time spent in queues and looking after children has increased. Amidst generalised want corruption and petty crime have inevitably revived.

33. Cuba now faces anything between four and nine years of further growth before output and income is restored to 1989 levels. While not excluded, such a growth rate is vulnerable on many fronts. Planning itself has to achieve a much higher degree of complexity and flexibility due to the existence of various types of property, the use of the market mechanism, money duality, the scarcity of foreign exchange and the difficult problem of prioritisation caused by increased demands on scarce material and financial resources. Energy price rises can further open up the chronic gap in the country's current account, making it even more dependent on foreign capital inflows and remittances from families abroad. While the state sector still predominates and the central aim of the leadership is to raise its efficiency to that ruling in the "new economy", this must remain a long-term perspective so long as investment funds are in short supply. In the short term the demands of efficiency mean that the relative weight of the state sector will shrink further, exacerbating double economy problems as increased autonomy and self-financing remain a powerful incentive to regionalism and "looking after number one". Moreover, many of the "easy" measures (one-off price rises and efficiency gains, restarting of unused capacity) cannot be repeated, and this in a global economic universe marked by intensifying competition. Finally, Cuba's commitment to some basic norms of social and environmental justice simply prevents it from winning the "race to the bottom" against the capitalist countries of the Third World, while Cuba's defence of its sovereignty prevent it from entering into many sorts of international trading

arrangements (such as the Lomé Accords).

34. Against all these pressures Cuba can continue to look to economic cooperation with capitalists eager for profit opportunities in some sectors like tourism, while development of the oil industry would significantly ease the constraints on economic development. However, solving the problem of the conversion from extensive to intensive growth above all requires Cuba to continue to develop its scientific and technological base, begun in areas like biotechnology and pharmaceuticals, and showing potential in environmentally sustainable alternative technologies. This will require a much higher level of investment and much greater foreign currency earnings than is presently the case. This will not be easy to achieve and here too, in the strictly economic sphere, a successful revolution in another Latin American country would make the best contribution.

Revolutionary politics in a period of siege

35. The enforced economic reforms of the 1990s have produced a rapid differentiation within Cuban society. While it still makes sense to speak of *el pueblo cubano* in counterposition to US imperialism, the 1990s have accelerated the tendency for different, and often conflicting, class interests to emerge. On the one hand, surreptitiously procapitalist elements are to be found within some sections of state industry most engaged with foreign capital and among the wealthier peasant farmers and self-employed. On the other, the working class itself has become more variegated, according to the particular circuits of the economy workers are engaged. In this process the “new rich” have become more influential and the working class more fragmented. A nascent town-versus-country conflict has emerged, with individual rural producers seeking high prices for their produce on the parallel markets pitted against the bulk of the working class for whom the *libreta* (ration book) covers about only 80% of basic needs and who must necessarily “top up” in these expensive markets.
36. Inevitably the social base of the revolution has narrowed. It could not have been otherwise, given the sharp fall in the standard and quality of life, the increase in inequalities in a society used to identifying socialism with equality and state provision, the diversification of “social actors” as a result of the liberalisation measures, the disappearance of the European socialist camp and bankruptcy of Soviet-style “Marxism” to explain any or all of this. A political, theoretical and ideological vacuum has been created and demands for change, particularly with regards to the economic system, but also as far as the political and legal systems go, proliferate. Recent surveys conducted by the Cuban Institute of Philosophy reveal that half of

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those interviewed placed hopes for a better future not in the social and political system but in individual effort: 30% of respondents said that capitalism would allow better opportunities for such effort to succeed. At the same time, however, an overwhelming majority still treasured the independence Cuba had won as a result of the revolution, a sentiment that will have been reinforced by Cuba's victory in the Elián González case.

37. Despite these trends capitalist restoration is not inevitable. Here, as always, the fighting spirit and socialist commitment of the masses and their leadership is the vital factor. Specific measures, such as the introduction of a sharply progressive income tax scale and encouragement of workers in the tourist industry to donate their tips to social funds and thus "spread the gains", also have an important role to play. Survival will be determined by economic results, but the most important factor in determining these will be popular participation in the leadership of the social process and the political creativity of the leadership in finding counters to the corrosive and atomising impact of the reform. In addition, the crisis could not and cannot be confronted without a carefully and closely articulated series of reforms of all the organisations that make up the Cuban political system, from the PCC, the mass organisations through to new "social actors" like Cuba's NGOs. The decision of the leadership to open up the broadest possible debate in the run-up to the Fourth Congress of the PCC represented clear acknowledgement of this truth and its determination to confront it. Indeed, the fact that the congress call for open debate at first left everyone stunned and worrying about how much they could and couldn't say was evidence of how much such a debate was needed.
38. The general approach of the Cuban leadership to the challenge of combining political and economic reform has been formed by their analysis of the experience of reforms in the former socialist states of Eastern Europe and the USSR. For Cuba these exposed not only the weaknesses of their political systems and narrowness of their social support base, but also the mistakes involved in trying to carry out rapid reforms in the economic and political spheres simultaneously. By contrast, the Cuban interpretation of reforms in China and Viet Nam is that they have shown the viability of economic reforms carried out under the same political regime.

Since overcoming the crisis requires measures that involve a high economic and social cost for the population, as well as the erosion of established social relations at a time of increased vulnerability *vis-à-vis* the US, the *first and foremost condition for overcoming the crisis is the maintenance of national unity*. Any specific reform measures have to enjoy consensus and not undermine the capacity of the

people to mobilise in defence of their own interests and the established social order.

39. Revolutionary politics therefore faces two constraints in Cuba. On the one hand, the revolution cannot survive without maintaining popular participation. This requires the masses to have the ability to discuss, be informed, give their opinion and in some way decide about alternatives. In particular, the greater the restrictions on popular access to reliable and truthful information, the lower the capacity for participation, the greater the risk of apathy and indifference. On the other, given Cuba's condition as a besieged fortress, democracy has to be "guided" to one degree or another, with emphasis placed on the defence of the values and traditions of the revolution and appeal made to the unbreakable willpower and spirit of sacrifice of its vanguard. Restrictions on democratic rights are unavoidable if the internal space for counter-revolution is to be kept under control. Where the needs of one imperative clash with those of the other, the fate of the European socialist bloc and the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua tends to reinforce the Cuban leadership's adherence to the latter orientation. In the words of the PCC's Fifth Congress Resolution: "History has dramatically demonstrated that when the people lose political power they lose everything."
40. It is no answer to this concrete political predicament to invoke the general political truth that socialism requires an expansion of democratic rights compared to capitalism or that the future of the Cuban Revolution requires, as many Cuban revolutionists themselves affirm, a deepening democratisation of the political system, or that every act of repression or curtailment of political freedom comes with a political price. The question is always: which political reform, how and when? And it should always be remembered that any restrictions on democratic rights Cuba is forced to introduce do not change the fact that Cuba's commitment to fulfilling the basic social rights of all make it more democratic than the most liberal capitalist state.
41. In this context a thorny issue in Cuba is the degree of information, debate and difference that it is judged can be safely accepted within the public media. The ban on counter-revolutionary propaganda aside, Cuban media has typically oscillated between mediocre safe reporting and expressions of "official optimism" and vigorous exposure of corruption and incompetence, accompanied by a more faithful reflection of the debates that have always raged in Cuban society at large. At times the Cuban leadership has had to step in to spur the media to greater candour and boldness (most recently to be seen in coverage of the angles and debates around the Elián González case); at other times writers and researchers have been dismissed

from their posts on charges such as “defaming the revolution”. Even party research institutes such as the Centre for Studies on America (CEA) have been restructured because, in the opinion of the leadership, they have conciliated too much to the apparently neutral, but politically insidious, orientations of US academic “Cubanology”. The need to maintain a basic consensus in the face of US aggression again plays the determining role, even as the Cuban leadership stresses its understanding that the revolution cannot develop antibodies to US ideological and cultural aggression by maintaining Cuban society in a “germ-free” environment. But whatever opinion supporters of Cuba’s revolution might have over this or that case of repression, the most important contribution they can make to enabling the growth of a more plural political and cultural life on the island is through building solidarity and thus helping weaken the root cause of such symptoms — US imperialism’s criminal blockade.

42. Over the years the leadership of the revolution has proven capable of meeting the challenges involved in advancing along the road to Cuban society’s proclaimed goal — the progressive development of popular self-government — and this when facing a 40-year long blockade and in permanent rivalry with the enticements of US “culture”. On the other hand, however, it is legitimate to say that it has at times erred in unnecessarily restricting democratic rights and paid an unnecessary price — in terms of suppressing “early warning systems” about policy and chilling essential debate — for so doing. For example, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the real crime of French agronomist René Dumont, accused in the early 1970s of CIA connections, was to have been right too soon about “giantism” and “statism” in agriculture, and that if he had been listened to Cuba would have saved an awful lot of wasted resources and human effort. By the same token, however, the revolution has shown the ability to learn from experience, such that the counterposed positions in the economic debate of the 1960s (between Che Guevara and Charles Bettelheim and others) have been transcended in a sophisticated analysis begun under Rectification and now underpinning the present Economic Reform.
43. The same holds for the development of the country’s political institutions. In its early years the revolution lacked structured forms for mass participation and decision-making (workers councils, etc.). The basic features of this state of affairs, the historically given starting point for socialist construction in the Cuban case (and hence key evidence for some sectarians that the revolution was “deformed from birth”), was analysed by Che Guevara in his famous article “Man and Socialism in Cuba”. Guevara stressed, first, that there is an evolving relationship between “the people, as yet unawakened mass that had to be mobilised, and its vanguard,

the guerrilla, the thrusting engine of mobilisation, the generator of revolutionary awareness and militant enthusiasm”. However, Guevara also observed, “this mechanism is obviously not sufficient to ensure a sequence of sensible measures; what is missing is a more structured relationship with the mass”.

44. This “more structured relationship” between awakening mass and conscious revolutionary vanguard cannot be sucked out of the revolution’s thumb, especially in countries of the Third World. Here, Guevara noted, “the struggle for liberation against an external oppressor, the misery which has its origin in foreign causes, such as war, whose consequences make the privileged classes fall upon the exploited” provide the raw material of revolution. At the same time, however, “underdevelopment and the customary flight of capital to ‘civilised’ countries make impossible a rapid change without sacrifices”. For Guevara the key weapon against reversion to capitalist consciousness and values is education, but “the existence of two principal groups [vanguard and masses] is an indication of the relative lack of development of social consciousness. The vanguard group is ideologically more advanced than the mass; the latter is acquainted with the new values, but insufficiently. While in the former a qualitative change takes place which permits them to make sacrifices as a function of their vanguard character, the latter see only by halves and must be subjected to incentives and pressures of some intensity; it is the dictatorship of the proletariat being exercised not only upon the defeated class but also individually upon the victorious class.”
45. Guevara stressed that this state of affairs can only be temporary. “To achieve total success, all of this involves the necessity of a series of mechanisms, the revolutionary institutions ... The institutionality of the revolution has still not been achieved. We are seeking something new that will allow a perfect identification between the government and the community as a whole, adapted to the special conditions of the building of socialism and avoiding to the utmost the commonplaces of bourgeois democracy transplanted to the society in formation (such as legislative houses, for example).”
46. After the failure to achieve the 10 million-ton sugar harvest (*zafra*) in 1970, the high point of voluntaristic and militaristic methods that had been growing since 1967, “institutionalisation” became a central concern of the Cuban leadership. In his August 23, 1970 address to the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), Fidel Castro said: “We have scores of problems at every level, in the neighbourhoods, in the cities, and in the countryside. We must create the institutions that give the masses decision-making power on many of these problems. We must find efficient and intelligent ways to lead them deliberately forward to this development so that

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it will not simply be a matter of the people having confidence in their political organisations and leaders and their willingness to carry out tasks, but that the revolutionary process be at the same time — as Lenin wished — a great school of government in which millions of people learn to solve problems and carry out responsibilities of government.”

47. Between 1976, the year of its extension to the whole of Cuba, and 1991, the Cuban institutional system of People’s Power (*Poder Popular*) remained basically the same. Combined with the adoption of the country’s constitution, it established a system of government in which the most committed and conscious members of the working class would become the people’s representatives. Based on a high representative-to-population ratio and a restructuring of the country’s administrative set-up it established an electoral system, a structure of state bodies and formal channels through which people could push their suggestions and pursue their complaints with government at all levels. Elected representatives (“delegates”) received no privileges (except that of working harder), were obliged to report back to their electors on a regular basis and could have their mandates revoked by their constituencies.
48. Towards the end of this period, however, especially as Rectification took hold, it emerged that the country’s political institutions were getting out of alignment with the changing aspirations and needs of an increasingly educated society, and this in three broad senses: (1) The number and reach of the functions carried out by the state system had not only achieved a disproportionate weight within society but set limits and controls on other institutions and social groups, “statising”, institutionalising and politicising society at large (2) the fact that the vast majority of economic activity was carried out by the state sector obscured the dividing line between the economic and the political systems, and (3) the extension of the political system into every nook and cranny of society obscured the limits between political space and the private, personal space of individuals. At the same time the centre of discussion and decision-making within the People’s Power system had shifted from the assemblies themselves to their executive committees, and the People’s Power representatives had become little more than petitioners, dispute settlers for their constituencies, and uncritical endorsers of decisions made by expert commissions. The work of the executive committees themselves was poor.
49. In 1992-93, after the Fourth PCC Congress had subjected the institution to a thorough critique, the system of People’s Power direct elections for provincial and national representatives replaced their election by municipal representatives. At the same time the candidacy commissions (responsible for proposing and selecting

citizens to stand as national and regional representatives from amongst the municipal representatives and the population at large) were henceforth to be presided over by the trade unions and not the PCC. These reforms have meant that all candidates have to be elected by at least 50% of the popular vote and that mass scrutiny of potential candidates becomes more intense. Other reforms included: public hearings by the various commissions of the National Assembly; extension and development of the People's Councils (*Consejos Populares*), bodies which had originally been elected from among municipal representatives to force through solutions by achieving intra-bureaucratic coordination locally; and the elimination of the assemblies' executive committees and their replacement by "councils of administration". These reforms were already "in the wings" at the end of the 1980s, but the Special Period accelerated their implementation.

50. Debate continues in Cuba as to the adequacy of these changes. Certainly the People's Councils were an important step forward in self-government, and in overcoming the passivity and formalism that had begun to mark the Assemblies. The People's Councils proved a more active method of resolving the problems of their constituency because they involved the entire population, and were empowered to coordinate all government instrumentalities, mass organisations and work centres operating in the area. More importantly they helped bring about a change in popular mentality, with people more inclined to look for solutions themselves through their People's Council, rather than "demanding that they be solved" by the People's Power Assembly. As a result both real self-government and the sense of self-government improved, even in the depth of the 1990-93 crisis, and in July 1992 the People's Councils were written into the constitution and their functions spelled out in relation to the People's Power organs. Of particular importance is the fact that through the People's Councils work collectives have the potential to become involved in government.
51. However, new forms can always lose their real democratic content and become "one more government body". More precisely, the People's Councils can become the victims of their own success in solving practical day-to-day problems. Under the impact of the crisis these continue to press in from all sides, such that the longer run need to involve and train the people in self-government is being sacrificed to their use as "mobilisation fodder" in solving crisis situations. Jesús P. Garcia Brigos, a former People's Power representative for Havana, comments that the style of mobilisations that were "perhaps an adequate realisation of the principle of participation in other historical periods today has become, more than a failing, a right and proper road block to the development of the social process. Thus, what

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might in immediate terms be a positive result, creates styles and methods which ... alienate the ordinary citizen from the business of social government.” The dangers to the system basically come from three sources: (1) the fact that the People’s Councils were born as an undefined emergency operation to fill in the ever-widening gaps in a system with strongly commandist, top-down traits; (2) the fact that Popular Power delegates are basically complaint servers, problem solvers and bearers of bad news can make for mass passivity and apathy towards *all* areas of government; and, (3) the fact that the attention of the country and its media is overwhelmingly on solving immediate problems and the “success stories” of this or that council, rather than on their success in drawing citizens into the work of self-administration.

52. The debate over the People’s Councils is but one part of an ongoing discussion over how to improve Cuba’s participatory democracy in the present phase. For example, when the question is asked as to what other measures are needed to further develop the embryonic potential of the People’s Councils as organs of popular self-government, the following proposals are often raised: the need to give delegates sufficient training and time so as to be able to participate competently in decision-making; the need to increase the powers, responsibilities and resources of the People’s Councils; and the need to strengthen the role of the constituency delegate, the head of the People’s Council.
53. As matters now stand the organs of Popular Power are finding difficulty in attracting sufficiently skilled personnel; the councils of administration that replaced the executive committees are also drawing life out of the assemblies; municipal representatives elected to higher bodies only have two and a half years to “get the hang” of the system and many have dropped out of the work because of the difficulties in combining it with normal working life; and the change to direct elections of representatives at the regional and national level has disappointed popular expectations. For many Cuban commentators further reforms are needed to draw labour collectives, peasant producers and the expanding circles of self-employed directly into the work of government. They point, for example, to the fact that the structures of People’s Power were simply unable to focus the creativity and richness of analysis that emerged in the Workers’ Parliaments held across Cuba in 1994.
54. Such discussions also bring the evolving role of Cuban mass institutions, in particular the Cuban Workers Union (CTC), into the spotlight. In this relation the demand for their “independence” from the state, raised by some on the left in the advanced capitalist world, is at best misplaced and, at worst, simply part of the armoury of

the counter-revolution. At issue is not some measure of “independence” but the real role that these institutions play in mobilising their constituencies, defending their interests and drawing them into the organised life of the revolution. The capacity of the mass organisations to mobilise Cuba’s people in defence of their own interests has always been a critical measure of the vitality of the revolution. In past periods, as in the discussions during the Rectification and especially before the Fourth Congress, the mass organisations came in for severe criticism for their top-down methods, paternalism and routine. On the other hand, the Elián González case gave the mass organisations of Cuba’s young people (the university students, secondary students and pioneers’ organisations) the chance to prove that they could rouse the most sceptical section of Cuban society into action — a test they passed with flying colours. As a younger generation of leaders takes the helm in Cuba the life of the mass organisations — and the Union of Young Communists — are also reviving, despite ongoing difficulties.

55. In all discussion of Cuba’s continuing attempts at improving its state institutions and mass organisations it should always be kept in mind that there cannot but be objective limits to the development of socialist democracy in a Third World country under present-day conditions. The socialist (and Cuban) ideal of advance towards ever-increasing levels of mass self-government (the “withering away of the state”) depends on achieving an ever higher general level of productivity in the economy. That is to say, the lower the level of productivity, the greater the battle for production, the longer the working day, the less time and energy is available for the business of administration and self-government. Thus there will always be a limiting situation where no matter what particular form of working-class self-organisation is attempted it cannot deliver the content of participatory democracy. The point to grasp, however, is that throughout its history the Cuban leadership has always tried in every given objective situation to find the way to best deepen the process of participatory democracy.
56. The organisation that underpins and provides political orientation to the whole interrelated process of advance remains the PCC and what guarantees its intervention is the clarity of its strategic line and the honesty, intelligence and spirit of self-sacrifice of its cadres, along with their closeness to the concerns and thoughts of the mass of ordinary Cubans. The PCC’s capacity for renewal and its attention to the quality of its membership has been vital during the present period of siege. Membership standards are guaranteed by a rigorous process of nomination, vetting and endorsement based on the candidate’s present workplace, but also on his or her record. Moreover, membership carries no privileges nor access to soft jobs or

an easier career path. Members who fail to meet these standards are weeded out. While much party discussion still goes unreported in Cuba's media, it is clear enough that the resolutions of the fourth and fifth PCC congresses were based on an unprecedented degree of internal debate. The strongest stress within the party in the 1990s has been to make sure, once and for all if possible, that the PCC focuses its energy on being the ideological and political leader of society and people, and that, unlike in previous periods, it leaves the running of the economy and the state to the cadres elected or appointed to fulfil that job. This has become increasingly urgent given that "relinking" with the capitalist world market has opened the flood gates to an influx of capitalist values and attitudes.

57. The PCC's ongoing ban on organised internal factions, a heritage of its past but also reinforced by the need to maintain unity in the present difficult circumstances, has a contradictory impact. On the one hand, it presents society at large with a united approach from its social and political vanguard and better enables the party to defend itself against those elements who are seeking to convert it into a launching pad for capitalist restoration, but it also inevitably makes it harder for party discussion to become a "school of self-government" for Cuba's people as a whole. Here again, the question is not one of timeless models, but which measures are required when. In the present phase one of the important points of reference of the Cuban leadership is Lenin's writings on the role of the party at the time of the New Economic Policy in the Soviet Union, with the stress going on its role as guarantor of the revolution in the midst of a hostile and difficult social environment. On the other hand, as the Fifth Congress resolution also underlines, unity is not unanimity — the principle of democratic centralism remains in force.
58. Essential to the authority and conviction that the party carries with the mass of Cuban people has been the role within it of the historic leader of the revolution, Fidel Castro. Castro's capacity to analyse the politics of complicated and threatening situations, to judge the form and timing of the intervention needed and to expose the motives and manoeuvres of Cuba's imperialist opponents has been unique. Fidel Castro has also been the personification of the revolution, and in many senses: as the figure who embodies Cuba's revolutionary continuity from the days of the struggle against the Spanish colonial power and Martí's fight for independence through the battles against the dictator Machado to the triumph of 1959; as the inspiring leader in moments of open threat or crisis (Bay of Pigs, Mariel); as the embodiment of the ethical spirit of the revolution (a strand of thinking that begins with Martí); and as the figure that reconciles in one discourse Cuban patriotism, revolutionary internationalist humanism and socialism. In this sense Fidel Castro

is not replaceable. However, Castro has also succeeded in building new generations of revolutionary leaders, such that he has already equipped the Cuban Revolution with the leadership needed to carry on its struggle in his absence.

The Cuban Revolution, rebuilding the socialist movement & the DSP

59. In its 1983 resolution *The Cuban Revolution and Its Extension*, the Democratic Socialist Party (then called the Socialist Workers Party) wrote that “we must recognise that we are part of the same movement as these [Cuban] comrades — the world revolutionary Marxist movement, the genuine world communist movement — and act accordingly. We must seek to maximise at every point our fraternal political collaboration with these comrades, to seek out and emphasise the points of agreement we have with them, and to subordinate our differences with them in order to achieve maximum possible collaboration. Without ignoring or blurring over the differences we do have, we should nevertheless not make a priority of polemicising with them on these differences.”
60. The political reasons that gave rise to that stance are even more valid today. Firstly, because the end of the Soviet Union and Eastern European is provoking common reflection about the lessons of that collapse for the task of renewing the socialist movement. Secondly and more importantly, because a new movement against capitalist globalisation is on the rise, and Cuba has a very important and multifaceted role to play within it. In terms of a practical program of demands against the institutions and blights of the world-system, Cuba’s set of proposals, as outlined by Fidel Castro at the G77 Havana summit in April 2000, is clearly inspired by the principle of making the North pay for the decades of plunder it has committed against the South. Here Cuba stands to the left of the movement in contrast to all those forces (mainstream NGOs, etc.) who are looking for ways to “civilise global capitalism”. Its proposals are radical, simple, bold, but feasible, beginning with the cancellation of all Third World public debt and encompassing proposals such as differential petrol prices for the South (for the full text see Fidel Castro, *Neoliberal Globalisation and the Third World*). Numerous other initiatives undertaken by Cuba, such as the Meetings on Globalisation and Problems of Development, also help to further develop practical programs and campaigns for development for the majority of humanity struggling to survive in the South.
61. For the newly emerging generation of anticapitalist activists the example of Cuba is equally important for the simple reason that it can help spread the understanding that in the longer term there can be no “alternative to neoliberal globalisation”

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that is not socialism. The Cuban Revolution has not only demonstrated this through its history and achievements, it also serves as an example of how this struggle can be advanced in all spheres in today's world. For example, the PCC makes an important contribution to the (re)construction of the revolutionary movement internationally through such initiatives as helping found the Sao Paulo Forum as a broad gathering of the Latin American left and potential builder of continent-wide anti-imperialist and anti-interventionist solidarity. This is an important asset for the peoples of Latin America and the Latin American as well as the world socialist movement. PCC analyses of the evolution of contemporary capitalism and the tasks of the communist and socialist movement also form an important reference point. The PCC is thus becoming an increasingly important element in the fight to reconstruct the world revolutionary and communist movement, not in the sense of providing a guiding centre or new set of gurus, but as an irreplaceable store of decades of experience in the theory and practice of the anticapitalist struggle. No other revolutionary party is placed to play this role today.

62. Cuba's leadership role in the struggle against neoliberal globalisation therefore demands the closest support, solidarity and attention from socialist and anticapitalist forces in all countries. Not only is the struggle to end the criminal US blockade a duty for all revolutionaries and democrats, this practical effort should also be combined with two other tasks: to join in Cuba's mission to "globalise ideas" — its ongoing campaign of exposure of the imperialist world system and its values — and to understand the revolution and its evolution. The Cuban experience demands the closest study of revolutionaries everywhere, not as a timeless "answer" to the search for a post-Soviet "model of democratic socialism", but simply as a priceless example of how a revolutionary people and its leadership have been able to confront life-and-death challenges when under siege from an aggressive imperialism intent on their destruction. Addressed in this spirit the Cuban experience can feed positively into the (re)building of the revolutionary movement in other countries, fortifying them through a process of rising mutual solidarity, sharing experiences, and debate.
63. Thus solidarity with Cuba is an integral and important aspect of the struggle against the global neoliberal status quo. Any victory against US imperialism's drive against Cuba and any strengthening of Cuba's capacity to resist will be a direct victory for working people everywhere. In the immediate term the core task of the solidarity movement is to make Washington's criminal blockade politically unsustainable. This not only means getting out the truth about the damage it has done to the Cuban people over the last four decades; it also means destroying the

political justification for the blockade — Cuba’s alleged lack of democracy. In getting out the real story of Cuba, solidarity activists will also be strengthening the socialist cause generally by making a widening circle of people aware that there is an alternative to imperialism’s “unipolar world”. In addition, in going beyond solidarity with Cuba to becoming conscious participants in the socialist movement themselves, activists will be further strengthening both Cuba and the socialist movement.

64. A recent work of the PCC’s Níco Lopez Higher Institute states: “Although we cannot give a complete and finished definition of socialism, we can certainly keep its basic concepts clear so as not to go off course: predominance of social property and conscious and planned leadership by the PCC, the socialist state and the mass organisations, with a view to promoting economic development, material and spiritual wellbeing, the social development of men and women, social justice and socialist values through the broad participation of the Cuban people who, as Martí sought, transform themselves through this process into a new people.” This perspective corresponds fully to that of the Democratic Socialist Party, which stands in full solidarity with the Cuban Revolution, its values, goals and leadership. The DSP commits itself to accomplish everything in its power to extend solidarity with and knowledge of Cuba. We fully understand that, in supporting the Cuban people and their revolution, we are also helping the cause of socialism in Australia and our region.

The survival of the Cuban Revolution for some 45 years in the face of Washington's unremitting hostility shows its tremendous vitality and deep popular roots.

If, in the face of such obstacles, the Cuban people can register such impressive gains in healthcare, education, culture and general living standards in a poor Third World country, what could be achieved by socialist revolutions in the rich First World countries, let alone the world as a whole?

This 2001 resolution of the Democratic Socialist Perspective, along with a report and preface further explaining it, provides an excellent introduction to the Cuban Revolution and its importance in world politics today. It argues that defending the Cuban people and their inspiring revolution remains an important task of the socialist movement in Australia.

Resistance books