Cuba will never renounce its ideals of independence and social justice
Statement by the International Relations Commission of the National Assembly of People’s Power

• THE International Relations Commission of the National Assembly of People’s Power fully supports the Revolutionary Government’s Statement issued June 16, on the policy directive that President Donald Trump has decided to apply in relation to Cuba.

The Commission welcomes the increasing expressions of respect and consideration for Cuba and the solidarity actions that have taken place in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the world, in rejection of this policy setback; as well as the declarations in the United States by legislators, retired military personnel, academics, solidarity groups, businesspeople, farmers, non-governmental organizations, the media and representatives of the Cuban community, urging President Donald Trump to continue moving forward without being intimidated by anything or anyone.

As Cuban civil society organizations have reaffirmed, neither pressure nor impositions will cause us to move back in the effort to build our independent, sovereign, socialist, democratic, prosperous and sustainable nation.

No one can set standards for the Cuban people. We will never accept any imposition regarding norms of conduct or opinions on our democracy or the functioning of our economic, political and social system.

Cuba is an example in the exercise of human rights, in the political participation of its citizens and in the exercise of the freedoms of its entire people. That is why our Revolution is invincible.

We call on the world’s legislators, parliamentary, regional and international organizations, and parliamentary friendship groups, to address the U.S. Congress and demand once more the end of the economic, commercial and financial blockade that is in force, harms the Cuban people, and that the U.S. government has now proposed to intensify.

The subversive programs against our country must also be stopped and the financing of mercenaries must be eliminated. The territory illegally occupied by the Guantánamo Naval Base must be returned.

The United States Government should not prevent millions of U.S. citizens from free and direct contact with the people of Cuba. Obviously it fears that they will come to know our reality.

The International Relations Commission of the National Assembly of People’s Power supports the willingness of the Revolutionary Government to continue a respectful dialogue with the United States on issues of mutual interest, based on respect and equality between the two nations, and endorses the words of the President of the Councils of State and Ministers, Army General Raúl Castro Ruz, before the Third CELAC Summit on January 28, 2015, in Costa Rica, when he stated: “Cuba and the United States must learn the art of civilized co-existence, based on respect for the differences which exist between both governments and cooperation on issues of common interest, which contribute to solving the challenges we are facing in the hemi-sphere and the world.”

“However, it must not be supposed that, in order to achieve this, Cuba would renounce its ideals of independence and social justice, or abandon a single one of our principles, nor cede a millimeter in the defense of our national sovereignty.”

“We will not invite, or accept any attempt to advise or exert pressure regarding our internal affairs.”

“We have earned this sovereign right through great sacrifices and at the price of great risks.”

International Relations Commission
National Assembly of People’s Power.
Havana, July 11, 2017
“Young 9 of the Revolution”
Work of Cuban teachers recognized

Two new pedagogical schools to open in September
Outstanding provinces recognized

Yenia Silva Correa

• AFTER reviewing the performance and results of the 2016-2017 academic year, Ena Elsa Velázquez Cobiella, minister of Education highlighted the “selfless and committed” work undertaken by Cuban teachers this year.

Over two days the Ministry of Education’s (Mined) Expanded Board of Directors analyzed issues linked to the Economic and Social Policy Guidelines of the Party and Revolution approved during the Seventh Party Congress, as well as the fulfillment of objectives set out by the organization for the recently concluded school year.

“We started the school year in good condition, with material and financial resources guaranteed. It has been possible to continue providing our educational institutions with resources such as laboratories for junior high schools, modules for technical education, and language labs for pedagogical schools,” stated the Minister of Education.

She went on to talk about the work of cadre and students this past year: “I also want to acknowledge the Cuban family which has accompanied us this academic year, and who are aware of the need to contribute to the comprehensive development of our children, adolescents and young people, as well as students, who have also put in a lot of hard work this year, and related organizations, policies and governments,” stated Velázquez.

PEDAGOGICAL SCHOOLS

Advances in training middle school teachers, stemming from work linked to vocational pedagogical training, were also announced during the meeting.

There are currently over 20,000 students enrolled in the country’s 24 pedagogical schools, with another institution of this kind set to be opened in the province of Guantánamo, and a second in Havana, at the beginning of the 2017-2018 academic year.

“We should start this school year with 28,000 students enrolled in high school level teacher training programs. We will continue with the training of Technical-Vocational Education high school teachers and will begin preparing middle school teachers with 9th grade graduates. We will have 1,100 students this coming academic year,” stated the Minister, who went on to note that this year saw the first set of primary school English teachers graduate, all of whom were trained in pedagogical institutions.

A GREAT EFFORT

Given its importance, the third process of reforms to the national education system was also addressed. As early as next September the preliminary results in the elaboration of study plans, programs, methodological guidelines, and text books will be implemented.

“This is a task which requires a great effort, above all from us and the Central Institute of Pedagogical Sciences. The experiment will be implemented in all provinces, meaning that more work will be required during the 2017-2018 academic year to advance and achieve concrete results, which will later be generalized starting from the date which has been planned,” noted Velázquez.

Following the meeting, graduation ceremonies and end of year celebrations took place across educational institutions nationwide, during which outstanding teachers and students were recognized.

LAS TUNAS, MOST OUTSTANDING PROVINCE

For the fourth year in a row Las Tunas, located in the east of the country, was awarded the distinction of most outstanding province, which according to the territory’s director of Education, Nilcer Piñeda Cruz, is “thanks to the work of teachers, the family, students, and political and administrative authorities.”

The ministry decides who receives the honor based on school attendance and retention figures, learning outcomes, and examination results across all levels.

“Today, we are showing good results in school competitions, higher education entrance exams, the supply of resources, and maintenance of school building and study materials,” stated the official.

Teacher coverage in Las Tunas is stable, while work is underway to promote professional development at the postgraduate and university level, looking toward the 2017-2018 academic year. “This, in addition to patriotic and revolutionary sentiment, and the commitment of all educators to Fidel, is what has made such an achievement possible,” added Piñeda.

The provinces of Guantánamo, Camagüey and Santiago de Cuba were also recognized for their outstanding performance during the recently concluded school year, in addition to Cienfuegos, Pinar del Rio, and La Habana.

Lastly, directors of Mined’s Educational Technology department presented distinctions to Cienfuegos and Holguín for their efforts supporting collaborative work across the network.”
Raúl receives President of the Gabonese Republic

ARMY General Raúl Castro Ruz, President of the Councils of State and Ministers of Cuba, officially welcomed the President of the Gabonese Republic, Ali Bongo Ondimba, on an official visit to the island.

In a friendly climate, the leaders noted the positive progress of bilateral relations and ratified their desire to expand and diversify existing cooperation between the two nations, especially in the areas of health and human resources training. They also discussed topics of interest on the international agenda.

The distinguished visitor was accompanied by Gabonese Minister of State and Foreign Affairs, Pacôme Moublet-Boubeya, as well as other members of the official delegation.

Representing Cuba were Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, and other officials.

OTHER ACTIVITIES ON THE ISLAND

Previous to his meeting with Raúl, President Ali Bongo Ondimba laid floral wreaths in the capital’s Parque de los Proceres Africanos (African National Heroes Park) and at the José Martí Memorial in the Plaza de la Revolución.

During the act honoring those who represented the ideals of African emancipation, the Gabonese President expressed his gratitude to the Cuban people "not only for the interest shown in Africa and its history, but also for participating in our future. We honor great Africans of whom we are proud."

"This ceremony," he added, "has touched me; honor to the Cuban people and government for recognizing that their population is of multiple origin and for paying tribute to the other continents."

In the context of the recently concluded 29th African Union (AU) Summit in Addis Ababa, the President of the West African nation warned that the AU is currently carrying out a major reform of its institutions in order to "guide our future."

"We have extensively discussed issues of peace, security and the fight against terrorism," he told Fernando González, president of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples; Victor Dreke, president of the Cuba-Africa Friendship Association; and other members of the African diplomatic corps accredited in Havana.

As part of his activities in Cuba, Ali Bongo also visited the headquarters of the Cuban Parliament, in Havana’s Capitolio Nacional.

He was received by the President of the National Assembly of People’s Power, Esteban Lazo Hernández, who explained the inner workings of this body, which currently sessions in Havana’s International Conference Center.

Lazo recalled the historic ties between Cuba and Gabon, a country interested in intensifying trade and economic exchanges with the Caribbean island, according to its president.

This interest was expressed during a binational business forum held on July 7 with the presence of Rodrigo Malmierca, Cuban minister of Foreign Trade and Investment. (Minrex)

After more than half a century... is the blockade being tightened?

On July 8 of 1963, 54 years ago, the Cuban Assets Control Regulations were approved, an essential component of the U.S. blockade of Cuba by the Cuban government - unless approved under a specific license.

Also prohibited are transactions in U.S. dollars by any person or corporation in a third country with Cuban individuals or entities.

Since its imposition more than 50 years ago, the blockade has caused the Cuban people damage estimated at a value of 753,688,000,000 dollars, impacting health, education, sports, culture, and other strategic sectors key to the country’s development.

THE BLOCKADE SINCE 12/17/14

On December 17, 2014, then President Barack Obama publicly acknowledged that his country’s longstanding policy toward Cuba had failed. He subsequently implemented a series of executive decisions to modify certain aspects of the blockade, among them the Cuban Assets Control regulations.

In terms of travel, he authorized visits by U.S. citizens to Cuba under licenses in 12 accepted categories, including individual people-to-people travel, and allowed regular flights between the two countries to be established, although travel to the island for the purpose of tourism remained prohibited by law.

In the financial arena, use of the dollar was authorized for Cuba in international transactions, although not a single transaction has yet taken place and financial restrictions continue. U.S. banks were also allowed to provide credit to Cuban importers wishing to purchase authorized U.S. products.

Nonetheless, fear of facing sanctions on the part of financial institutions has made the impact of these changes practically null. Moreover, prohibitions have been maintained which prevent Cuban banks from opening corresponding accounts in the United States, which impedes the establishment of direct banking relations between the countries, making commercial operations more expensive.

Changes regarding commercial relations were limited to the telecommunications industry and the private sector in Cuba (the self-employed and cooperatives), consistent with the "soft power" approach of the Obama administration to promote subversion of the Cuban people and replace socialism.

Generally speaking, the measures adopted confirmed that the U.S. President could use his executive powers to substantially modify the implementation of the blockade, without involving Congress. Nevertheless, the changes were insufficient and limited in scope, while the many important restrictions and obstacles which remained in place hampered implementation, effectively blocking progress in the economic arena.

WHAT NOW WITH TRUMP'S ELECTION?

The election of Donald Trump as U.S. President has generated controversy and uncertainty worldwide.

The country’s policy toward Cuba has not escaped this reality. This past June 16, Trump announced a change in policy for his administration, to be implemented over the next few months.

This preparatory period continues, but it can be expected that the new measures will contrast sharply with those previously approved by Obama. Implementation of the Cuban Assets Control Regulations may be notably reinforced, along with other Treasury Department restrictions.

In this context, changes could mean a step backward in the process of normalizing relations between Cuba and the United States, limiting travel by U.S. citizens to the island, as well as commercial and financial relations between companies in the two countries.

*Students at the Raúl Roa García Advanced Institute of International Relations
Deputies set sights on the nation
With the purpose of reviewing and deciding on matters of interest to the country’s development, the National Assembly of the People’s Power, opened its 10th session and the constitutional commissions met July 10-12 in the Havana International Conference Center, prior to the Ninth Period of Ordinary Sessions of the Eighth Legislature of the ANPP, to be held on July 14.

With the presence of Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, Political Bureau member and first vice president of the Councils of State and Ministers, the Education, Culture, Science, Technology, and Environment Commission focused its discussion on the cultural work in communities and efforts to make schools the cultural centers of neighborhoods, as well as the deficiencies and challenges faced by the Cuban Institute of Radio and Television (ICRT) in its programming, in addition to future prospects.

Díaz-Canel commented during the commission debate that community work must incorporate psychological, economic and social processes.

Community cultural work and the role of institutional promoters and art instructors involved.

In this regard, Luis Felipe Rodríguez, former President of the José Martí Brigade of art instructors, noted that 30,000 university graduates professionally trained in the country, and fewer numbers of students enrolled in the longer university program.

Minister of Education Ena Elsa Velázquez noted progress in the sector’s involvement in community work, citing as examples the approval of plans which allow individual schools the flexibility to organize the school day and include more time for neighborhood activities.

Summarizing the discussion, Minister of Culture1 Waldo Ramírez, noted that fundamental to success are training of the people, ensuring the quality of what is being promoted, and articulating work by all actors within the community.

At his point, the commission addressed the ICRT’s difficulties and strategic projections, with emphasis on news and cultural programs.

Waldo Ramírez, television general director, noted among the challenges insufficient media coverage of the public agenda; the need to understand and cultivate audiences as producers of messages and managers of public communication; addressing the scarcity of new productions, which are largely produced in others; as well as professional and cultural shortcomings.

Other difficulties include the lack of research and criticism, and poor planning, conception and evaluation of projects before they are recorded or broadcast live.

In this sense, Ramírez noted among ICRT’s projections the improvement of efficiency and the artistic quality of productions; the use of social research; and prioritizing the most authentic of Cuban and universal culture.

Arín Alberto, deputy from Guantánamo, emphasized the existence of other media and channels which have an impact on the education of youth, which are more attractive than those presented by our media. It is thus of great importance that competitive productions be created, she said, not only for entertainment purposes, but informative multimedia which offer an analytical view of reality.

ECONOMY TO FACE CHALLENGES IN SECOND HALF OF 2017

Inadequate disaggregation of the plan’s components and its conception with reserves, the longstanding problem of misappropriation of gasoline, as well as poor management of inventories, and their tendency to expand, were issues discussed during the Economic Affairs Commission, which reviewed the meeting of objectives for the first half of 2017, with the participation of Esteban Lazó Hernández, Political Bureau member and president of the National Assembly of People’s Power. Ricardo Cabrisas Ruiz, a Council of Ministers vice president and minister of Economy and Planning, referred to "tensions faced last year" and how, with the efforts of all, "the economy’s deterioration was detained."

"This," he emphasized, "does not in any way mean that all the problems are solved. The effort which must be made in the second half of the year is enormous, because at this point, the high tourist season has ended and the sugar harvest completed. Therefore, we must all work to guarantee income from exports and the rational use of fuel, issues which are still pending tasks.

All the problems, he said, "cannot be solved in the short term, what is most important is working together to advance, on the basis of priorities indicated by the country’s leadership. In this sense, among the fundamental activities are the driving force of tourism, the completion of projects linked to renewable energy resources, and, above all, meeting the needs of the population to the greatest degree possible."

Cabrisas Ruiz also commented on the review conducted by deputies at 2,225 workplaces in the country’s 168 municipalities, which confirmed the existence of irregularities in the understanding and implementation of guiding economic documents; failures to meet projections for income from exports and the substitution of imports with domestic products; as well as shortcomings in the management of inventories and investment projects.

Deputy Armando Utrera Caballero, the commission’s vice president, emphasized that during the visits, in which 381 deputies participated, it was observed that efficiency is a problem and that entities were identified which did not meet production or sales projections, that planned on earnings but reported losses, and paid salaries that were not commensurate with results.

Juana Caridad Herrera Pérez, deputy from the municipality of Primero de Enero, in Ciego de Ávila province, stated that the review visits in her province revealed, among other difficulties, poor management of inventories, both in enterprises and budgeted entities, where large quantities of items were in storage, including those unrelated to work underway.

After the discussion, Esteban Lazó questioned the tendency to not give measures implemented the follow-up and regular attention they require. He asked what concrete actions should be taken to address the problems observed.

He reported that in September, about 50% of the municipalities will be visited again to verify what has been done about deficiencies noted, what has been re-solved, because this is one of the fundamental responsibilities of deputies, he said, providing oversight in the name of the people.

Lina Pedraza Rodríguez, minister of Finances and Prices, presented deputies with a close-out report on the 2016 state budget, as well as an update on the execution of the government’s 2017 budget during the first six months.

With respect to the 2017 budget and problems faced thus far, Gladys Bejerano Portela, Council of State vice president and Comptroller General, noted that solutions entailed overcoming shortcomings in accounting and financial information, the balance sheet of income and expenses, reviewing excessive payments to private operators, and deepening the discussion of these issues within management councils.

INVESTMENT AND REORGANIZATION OF TRANSPORTATION

Cuba’s railroad system is a large but aging one, making modernization of infrastructure imperative, along with prioritizing the participation of domestic industries in the fabrication of replacement parts.

For these reasons, an investment plan for 2018 projects the financing of 308 passenger cars, 300 rail buses, 23 high power locomotives, and 75 to carry medium and small loads, along with the renovation of workshops, the purchase of 1,000 freight cars, and the repair of 1,300, according to the report presented by deputy minister of Transportation, who presented a report on the performance of rail transportation to the Services Commission.

Speaking with the press, he explained that there are 1,200 locomotives at the disposal of the rail network, since they require modern technology and long-term financing to cover costs. Moreover, he said, we are immersed in the search for alternatives.

Any discussion of rail transportation involves the population’s dissatisfaction with services provided. According to the report discussed by the deputies, the inability to carry out projected investments in repairs and replacement of equipment; few training programs for operators; misappropriation of fares collected; and uncomfortable stations, agencies, and passenger cars; are among the difficulties facing the Cuban rail system, the Union Ferrocarril de Cuba.

Several persistent complaints about bus transportation were also expressed, including the failure to respect schedules, unnecessary stops, and little comfort in vehicles.

Given this panorama, actions have been taken which include plans to incorporate 480 Cuban-assembled Diana buses to fleets in all provinces, 260 of which have already been delivered; the purchase of KAMAZ trucks in the Soviet Union for difficult to access communities and those in the Turquino Plan; and the regulation of self-employed drivers transporting passengers.

Likewise, the inter-provincial National Bus Enterprise is projecting the gradual renovation of its fleet with the arrival of 100 vehicles, and an automated system of ticket sales has been established in 12 provinces.

Many opinions were offered regarding the participation of privately owned vehicles in public transportation, including those of Deputy Leonardo Naranjo, from Santiaguito, and the self-employed drivers who have not been forgotten, he noted, but the exorbitant prices charged are not sustainable for the population. A consensus must be reached, he said, suggesting that perhaps the state could provide a tax-incentive to lower the price of fuel for these individuals, or allow them access to state repair shops, in order to establish set prices for all, not only in Havana.

SUGAR INDUSTRY NEEDS AND STRENGTHS

Sugar production in the 2016-2017 harvest

Deputies discussed important issues related to the country’s development.
increased by 20%, as compared to last year, and not only due to the small size of the harvest, but also due to the lack of attention to cane fields in some regions, explained Orlando Celso García Ramírez, president of the AzCuba Sugar Enterprise. He explained that the plan’s objectives include strengthening prevention and detection of trafficking; protecting and promoting rights, as well as the improvement of production, processing, and dissemination of reliable information on the topic.

Regarding the second, Ybara emphasized the need to confront conditions which lead to trafficking, via the implementation of programs to warn of its dangers, increasing educational opportunities and improving school systems, while promoting equal rights.

Deputy Teresa Amarielle Boué commented, “When we talk about our country’s strengths in confronting this situation, it must be recalled that Cuban women have an organization that promotes public policies that protect not only women, but boys and girls as well.”

Wherever there is a vulnerable woman, neighborhood Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, social workers, the FMC, the Ministry of Education, Public Health, can take action, she noted, saying that all of this makes it difficult for these things to happen in Cuba, but, “We can’t take it for granted.”

**RENEWABLE ENERGY: ENERGY CARRIER SAVINGS INVESTMENTS IN WATER RESOURCES**

Deputies from the Industry, Construction and Energy Commission discussed the implementation of the policy for the development of Renewable Energy Sources (RES), as well as the fulfillment of energy carrier saving measures by state and private entities. During the session, Alfredo López, minister of Energy and Mines, noted that the RES policy – being implemented from 2014 through 2030 – will generate 14% of the country’s total energy, a program whose conclusion we are committed to.”

“Today, work is underway to set up and negotiate 11 bio-energy plants, four thermal plants, and 26 hydropower plants of various categories of project. The remainder is dedicated to the development of projects for investment opportunities,” he noted.

In regards to wind energy, López reported that the development of a plan for the wind sector has been scheduled to be built by 2030. Meanwhile, some 191 solar parks are set to be installed as part of the country’s energy portfolio, of which 60% will be supplied for the electricity sector. Of these projects, 22 are already in operation, 32 are included in the 2017 plan and 27 are proposed for 2018. Regarding the Ministry of Transportation, the minister reported that 13 million florinesthe equivalent to US dollars – have already been replaced by LED versions in the residential sector. “1.8 million have already been replaced and these are set to be substituted in the 2017 plan.”

He went on to note that the Ministry is also working on two fronts with cooks with induction ones, as well as the acquisition of “$40,000 have been sold to date with 284,000 units scheduled for the 2017 plan.”

Deputies also discussed organizational and control actions carried out to improve energy efficiency and save fuel. Alicia Alonso Becerra, representing Havana, explained measures being taken to control energy consumption in both the state and private sector, especially since the latter provides services such as public transportation which are not only expensive but also use stolen fuel.

In this regard, Alfredo López noted that new mechanisms have already been approved with a reorganization process set to begin until 2019.”

Comandante of the Revolution, Ramiro Valdés Menéndez, also a member of the People’s Power Commission, who is president of the Councils of State and Ministers, explained that the development of Renewable Energy Sources is a process to control fuel distribution and act in a timely and effective manner to combat the phenomenon.

The results of audits and assessments undertaken by deputies of state-budgeted investments in the National Hydraulic Resources Institute (INRH) were also reviewed.

**CUBAN LEGISLATURE STRENGTHENING LINKS WITH PARLIAMENTS ACROSS THE WORLD**

Meetings and exchanges with parliamentarians from various continents held during the first six months of the year not only contributed to strengthening ties between the National Assembly of People’s Power and legislatures from all over the world, but also to promoting solidarity with Cuba. Yolanda Ferrer Gómez, president of the Inter-Parliamentary Commission, provided a recap of the group’s work to date with positive results expected to be seen by the end of the year.

The Commission report highlighted the importance and value of the visits made by ANPP President Esteban Lazo to Vietnam, China, where he gained experiences related to bilateral collaboration; and learned about the inner-workings of the two countries’ parliament armies and their role in the processes of economic renovation taking place in both nations. Deputy Caridad Diego Bello, meanwhile, emphasized specific aspects of Lazo’s visit to the Asian countries, noting that the ANPP President was received by senior representatives from both nations. She also highlighted the various experiences shared within the Cuban parliament can learn, looking toward the future.

The report also noted that Cuba continues to be a member of the Steering Committee of the Directors of the Commissions Secretariat, including Parlatino (Latin American parliaments) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

**CUBA, A PARADIGM OF SECURITY**

The National Defense Commission of Cuba continues to take military service; in fulfillment of their life projects,” adding, “We are also working directly with families, in particular those who are poorly stocked and sell low quality toys.

The need to improve performance was emphasized at the meeting, which featured discussions on consolidating training programs for workers, above all to provide youth the necessary tools to help them to become skilled operators. Calls were made to use new machinery more rationally, in order to allow for better efficiency in the sector.

Problems created by the drought and the lack of attention to cane fields, among other factors, were discussed as issues which had a negative impact on yields and the productivity of the country; conditions in maternity homes are also working directly with families, in particular those who are poorly stocked and sell low quality toys. The need to improve performance was emphasized at the meeting, which featured discussions on consolidating training programs for workers, above all to provide youth the necessary tools to help them to become skilled operators. Calls were made to use new machinery more rationally, in order to allow for better efficiency in the sector.

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“Luces para la vida” is a more integral use in any school in the country. The enterprise made up of entrepreneurs, according to its Director General Iván Barreto.

The technological convergence facing the world today increasingly demands content integration. “Audiovisuals require infographics, animations and computer science, above all, they need more audiovisuality to communicate with students. Cinesoft guarantees that different subjects, from preschool to higher education, will include these contents,” Barreto explained.

One of the enterprise’s production lines is aimed at the creation of educational software that responds to the national education system’s current curricula. Each subject is addressed through different media, with the aim of being suitable for use in any school in the country. Meanwhile, Barreto highlighted that “Luces para la vida” is a more integral project, focused on the subject of addictions.

Computer Games
- Adivina Adivinador
- Recogiendo las frutas
- Pintando con materiales de la naturaleza
- Animales Fantásticos
- Jugaremos a las escondidas
- ¿Quién llegará primero a la meta?

School textbooks
- Preparatory Stage
- Natural Sciences
- The World We Live In
- Spanish
- Physics
- Geography
- History
- English
- Mathematics
- Chemistry

Preparation for admission to Higher Education Subjects:
- Mathematics
- Spanish
- History

This is divided into four main topics:
- family
- study
- grade reports
- general

Main PRODUCT LINES
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With this program we attempt to emphasize the tools that students can use to avoid drug use, and at the moment we are preparing an audiovisual series on the subject to expand the audience, and raise awareness among young people about this dangerous phenomenon,” Barreto explained.

Another area in which the enterprise is working is virtual visits. One of the great dissatisfactions of the Ministry of Education is the teaching of history, Scarce interest in this subject among young people has been detected.

“We started making virtual tours as a product line to support the teaching of history. We began with José Martí’s house, continued with the Gramma yacht and the Museum of Literacy, among others.”

Another of the lines that Cinesoft is working on is the positioning of videos on the Web. For this, WebTV was created to generate audiovisual resources with more dynamic codes and different formats, to complement the information on the Cubaeduca website.

The production of documentaries and the creation of programs for national television is another of the focuses of the enterprise.

“We have sustained production of video games, we focus mainly on those that include a very strong commitment to educating young people, but we also want them to be entertained,” the interviewee stated.

Virtual libraries are another of Cinesoft’s productions, with a strong focus on the “Biblioteca del Docente” (Teacher’s Library), which was created based on teacher training. It includes seven volumes, where teachers can find everything they need to complement their professional development.

The enterprise has also created a compendium of audiovisual and computer materials, among others, in a completely free package called “Pa que te ediques” (To Educate Yourself). It guarantees all possible resources for the package’s distribution and storage in schools.

“Cuban schools compete with a very complicated audiovisual world, which creates an impression of an education, different canons to that which the Cuban educational system usually teaches. Now, any action you want to undertake with young people, with different didactics aimed at this sector, is boring to them.”

That is why Cinesoft tries to keep ahead of the audiovisuality that is experienced today and develop its products in a way that attracts the interest of our students,” the Cinesoft director general noted.

“This means that every program or video game that is delivered to schools supports students’ education.

“We call this learning analytics. The student uses one of our software and that program leaves traces that allow the teacher to evaluate the student without having to conduct a test, i.e. if a student spends 10 minutes on an exercise and the other children took only two, it is a sign that there are problems,” he added.

GROWTH AS A WATCHWORD
Cinesoft has demonstrated its sustainability over time, with growth every year. “We aim to be recognized as an enterprise with high value added. We should close this year with about nine million pesos in sales. The greatest resource we have is not material, but the accumulated knowledge, the intelligence of the staff that works in the entity. Today we have an almost 40% profit margin, that’s clear profit for the state, for the national economy. In addition, we have raised the average salary of workers, we are profitable and continue to grow.”

Given the importance Cinesoft places on teaching, the enterprise is working to create a regional center for the development of educational resources for Latin America and the Caribbean, with the intention of sharing the pedagogical and technological models available to Cuba, that help guarantee the appropriate education of children and adolescents.

It is also working on a mobile augmented reality application, which will allow users to further interact with any museum they visit.

“Looking to the future, we must work more on the services we offer on the Web. We just did a pilot with a program called ‘Repasador en línea’ (Online Revision), with the help of workers from the Cuban Telecommunications Enterprise (Etelsa), because to do so we needed people who were connected to the network, as it is a personalized service, for the family and schoolchildren,” Barreto noted.

For this project, participating teachers will be connected to the network 24 hours a day so that the family can interact with them in solving learners’ daily tasks. In September, this program should begin operating throughout the country and the platform will be accessible from any connection, be it through the Internet or the national navigation service (Intranet). •
Designing Cuba

Design is gaining ground in Cuba in a variety of sectors of the economy.

Yisel Martínez García

Photos: Courtesy of the interviewee

*They* say we interact with more than 2,000 objects every day. The number could be even higher, just look around. Design is everywhere. It gives products value, identity, and seeks to make life easier.

“Design must be increasingly incorporated into different fields of work that range from graphic to industrial design.”

“Design, as value added, dignifies the visual world, and that of objects. Guiding creation implies responsibility. Herrero, as a receptor of images, is concerned about how we are seeing ourselves.”

“Design must be responsible to the environment, to the culture it defends, and identify the value of the Cuban identity.”

CHALLENGES

“Design must be increasingly incorporated into different sectors of the economy. In industry, in culture, in politics. At times I have the impression that this is not happening at the pace we need, but I believe that it is a positive sign that designers are present on all development teams.”

Herrero said.

“The economic crisis of the 90s required putting a hold on everything that had been accomplished, design became known as a tool to alleviate the situation, and allowed Cuba to make good use of its productions. Thus, sectors like pharmaceuticals and tourism began to utilize design, allowing for a recovery in this professional activity, which assumed an important responsibility in development.”

The most important centers within the scientific pole took the lead in their graphic design demands. The use of spaces, clothing for the workforce, the wrapping of products, and the visual aspect of their sale, made design a fundamental tool for these and other industries.

“Talk about corporate identity is emerging in the country. Tourism, as the driving force of the economy, needs to identify new hotels, differentiate chains. And think coherently, about the spaces, the gear, and uniforms of those who work in these places,” Herrero explained.

LOADING ZONES

Becoming everyday, with the passage of time, design is finding its place in the non-state sector of the economy, in fields of work that range from graphic to industrial design.

“Anyone who has set up a restaurant or decided to start a business is looking to differentiate themselves. Be it visually, with a name, a symbol, furnishings, offers, and all these elements together. Fertile ground has been found that has provided designers openings,” Herrero noted.

“The industry is recovering, and one notable area is textile garments, the specialist reported, noting that many clothing designers are thinking about attire for men, women, children, and older adults, as important to identity.

“There are increasingly more people trained and working to have national products in Cuban wardrobes. We must dress more like our colors, like the context in which we live everyday, and there should be no differences,” she adds.

“Design, as value added, dignifies the visual world, and that of objects. Guiding creation implies responsibility. Herrero, as a receptor of images, is concerned about how we are seeing ourselves.”

“Design must be responsible to the environment, to the culture it defends, and identify the value of the Cuban identity.”

Improvements for the country must be generated with a team and collaborating across fields. Economic issues are key to understanding the major role design plays in executing a project.

“There is no way to design without the economy. Design adds value to products and services. This is something that many people still don’t understand. It is an investment, not a cost. We talk about paying for design when we should be investing in design. This turn-around, seeing it from the other side, could be very important to promoting development.

Improvements for the country must be generated with this activity. It must be promoted in industry, in culture, in all areas where a space must be opened up.

Design must be responsible to the environment, to the culture it defends, and identify the value of the Cuban project,” asserted Herrero.

Design in Cuba is looking to gain new ground everyday.
Is it possible to meld the best of capitalism and socialism?
José Raúl Concepción

WHEN the world had two political poles, a statement that sounded obvious was sometimes made: ‘Let’s unite the best of capitalism and socialism in a single system.’ If both have their defects and virtues, why not just discard what doesn’t work? This is attractive, it would be an idyllic society. But what prevents this? Why are we still talking about socialism and capitalism? Behind the apparently self-evident concept lies another: you can’t act the best of capitalism as if it were a damaged spot on a piece of fruit. The virtues of this system are broken, the jungle, because capitalism is a hegemonic system. The idea cannot deliver what it promises, and the same options remain in place. We maintain our place in every corner of the planet or we seek an alternative to solve the problem at its roots. In politics, as in life, trying to find a middle ground is tricky. But those who prefer to straddle the fence exist.

Cubadebate talked about political centrism with the Cuban intellectual, Enrique Ubieta, who responds to simple questions with dissertations on the history, relevance, and possible implementation of a “third way” in Cuba.

Is it possible for centrist to represent the best of both capitalism and socialism?

Capitalism is not the sum of its negative and positive components, of elements that can be saved or discarded. It is a system, that at one point was revolutionary and today is not. It engulfs and links everything: advanced technology, the most sophisticated wealth, the most absolute poverty. The elements that contribute to greater productivity are the same ones that alienate human labor. Those that generate wealth for a few, produce poverty for the majority, on the national and international level. Establishing such a goal seems fallacious to me. The “best of capitalism” doesn’t exist, as if it could be cleaned up, as if a good capitalism were feasible. There are very bad versions, like fascism and neoliberalism, but I am not aware of any good one.

In other words, it's always savage.

On the other hand, socialism, opposed to capitalism, is not an organic total, a reality already constructed, but rather an ideal, a way of characterizing the rest that leave behind the system it is trying to replace. We try this and that, we adopt new structures, advance and retreat, eliminate what doesn't work, correct errors over and over again - a path to another world, in the middle of the jungle, because capitalism is a hegemonic system. The idea is expressed, conscious intention, to replace capitalism.

Does a center exist? On what principles is it founded? In the capitalist electoral system, a left and a right supposedly exist, but this left - with social democracy as its ideological framework, which was Marxist in its origins, and sought to reform capitalism until it gradually disappeared - functions today within the system and has rejected Marxism. This left differentiates itself from conservative parties with its social policies and its non-revolutionary understanding of the world. The centrist formula functions within the capitalist system as an electoral option. The voter is no longer a customer since elections function like a market, and are full of right wing parties and left wing parties that alternate in office, but implement similar policies, of the system constructs a false “third way.”

But real alternatives are not within a system they are constructing. They are capitalism or socialism. A center does not exist; there is no neutral ground between the two systems. Social democracy places itself within capitalism, but pretends to be something different. It attempts what I have described as impossible, taking the best from both systems. In reality, it proposes an alternative method, not a fundamental change. Beyond a few isolated cases, like what Olaf Palme could have been in Sweden, in a very rich country, which even without colonies, as part of the capitalist system benefited from the colonial and neo-colonial system.

Social democracy which appeared to triumph, made no sense when the Soviet Union collapsed and the socialist camp disappeared. Not even in Sweden could it be maintained. (Olaf Palme was assassinated). Since then, the system has no need for it, and it needs to remake itself. The third way is non-existing.

The voter is no longer a customer since elections function like a market, and are full of right wing parties and left wing parties that alternate in office, but implement similar policies, of the system constructs a false “third way.”

In reality, what is this center? It is a political orientation that appropriates elements of revolutionary discourse, adopts a reformist position, and in the end, brakess, detains, and creates obstacles to the development of a true revolution.

In other cases, as in ours, centrists attempt to use the political culture of the left that exists within Cuban society, to appropriate and transform it with an ultra right wing discourse, trying to win adherents. You need to use what the people interpret as fair, and with this left wing discourse begin to introduce capitalism through the back door. This is the role the center would have within a society like the Cuban.

In different contexts, positions similar to centrist have been present in Cuban history since thearton tendency attempted to derail the independence revolution of 1895...

Today a situation exists that favors this kind of centrist tactics, promoted in Cuba from the North. The generation that made the Revolution left, especially in the historic-biological cycle. Some 80% of Cubans never lived under capitalism. Just imagine, Cuba is a country trying to build a society different from one whose roots and traditions are rooted in imperialism. This is a period of change and new, previously rejected elements are being introduced in the construction of the socio-economic model. It is within this context that pro-capitalist forces construct their pseudo-revolutionary discourse, only for show, attempting to link up with changes underway in the country.

Does the updating of Cuba’s economic, social model have any relation to centrist? It does not. It’s not about concepts I found in the philosophy of Argentine Arturo Andrés Roig. It is imperative to differentiate two planes: discourse and discourse directionality, meaning and direction. I recall that when I studied the decade of the 1920s, I noticed that Juan Marinello and Jorge Mañach said almost the same things. They addressed very similar concepts, because they were intellectuals and part of the vanguard of Cuban thought and art. But if you follow the course of their lives, you understand that those words with different intentions.

Marinello joined the Communist Party and Mañach founded a party with pseudo-fascist tendencies. One fought for social justice and socialism, while the other longed, too late, to become the ideologue of a national bourgeoisie which no longer existed. I don’t believe that this rupture was only the result of a later evolution; it was already implicit in the differing historical directionality of their discourses.

It is absolutely imperative to differentiate directionality, today more than ever, because we live in a very contaminated, promiscuous linguistic environment, in a global society which has assimilated the discourse and the institutions of other societies, especially since WWII. The class struggle is covered up, and we must unmask our interlocutors.

What do the Guidelines propose? Seeking an alternative route of our own to advance toward socialism, since no universal model exists, and every country must define it according to its specific. Cuban socialism means a Cuban path toward a society that is different from capitalism, a hostile world, facing poverty, an implacable blockade, and with few natural

Enrique Ubieta, editor of the journals Cuba Socialista and La Calle del medio, talked with Cubadebate about political centrism, neo-annexation, and the permanent clash between socialism and capitalism, as conflicting systems - all important issues in the ideological struggle underway around the world today.
resources, except for the knowledge of its citizens. This is Cuba’s real situation. We propose to maintain and expand the social justice we have achieved, and to do so, we must revitalize our productive forces. We therefore establish limits on the accumulation of wealth and property, and we are concerned about the mechanisms used to enforce these limits. On the contrary, centrists, with language similar to ours, suggest that we have abandoned the idea of social justice, but demand more profound changes that would lead to the dismantling of the minimum achieved in terms of justice. The “deepening” demanded by centrists, from both the economic and political point of view, is a return to capitalism. Divergent, critical opinions can and must be heard, but they must all be directed in the same direction, toward the same horizon.

When someone says that socialism has not been able to eradicate corruption or prostitution, it saddens me, because it’s true. But at the same time, one should ask: What would capitalism do about this? Make it worse. When the accusation is not directed toward strengthening the system we have in the country - the only one which can correct its defects, deficiencies, and errors - but rather toward its destruction, the criticism is counterrevolutionary.

Because everything we do will not be fine. We are going to make mistakes, of this we can be sure. One who moves forward makes mistakes. But what is important is to have the capacity to rectify and be clear about the direction of what we are doing, why we are doing it. If at some moment we lose our way, we will be clear about the direction of what we are, because this room is located in a building, in a city, in a country. That is, in order to be useful, the description presupposes a broader perspective. To be a revolutionary one must take the flight of a condor, which is what Martí demanded.

Reformists are descriptive: they believe that reality is limited to what can be seen and touched - that is why they are confused and fail. In politics, a reformist can only sum up the social environment’s four visible elements. The revolutionary adds a fifth subjective element, that cannot be detected in plain sight - an element reformists do not take into account, because they have no confidence in the people. We can summarize this fifth element recalling the historic reunion in Cinco Palmas of the eight survivors of the Granma expedition. In Raúl’s words, “He (Fidel) embraced me and the first thing he did was ask how many rifles I had, after that the famous phrase: Now, yes, we have won the war!” This is leaping over the abyss, as Martí said.

This is what differentiates a revolutionary from a reformist. And a centrist is worse than a reformist, because in a certain way, he is a fake. In the European tradition, all this conceptual, theoretical, political drama that has been concocted since the 19th century gives these debates some weight. In Cuba the underlying foundations of these debates are revealed much more clearly. And all of this talk of melding capitalism with socialism, trying to stay on a revolutionary plane of discourse, but in practice counterrevolutionary, in one way or another, from my point of view, is also evidence of a certain level of cowardice, of inability to fight for something you believe in. These people believe in a project that is opposed to ours, but don’t have enough political strength, or the courage, to say so openly. (Cubadebate •)
Haila: Woman of Steel

The renowned singer's seventh album offers spectacular sounds

Haila María Mompié has become an example for the new generation of Cuban soneros.

Haila and her orchestra are a reference point in contemporary Cuban music.

Mireya Castañeda

• HAILA María Mompié, one of the best contemporary Cuban performers, is celebrating her 25-year strong career with the release of her seventh album: Haila, Mujer de Acero (Haila: Woman of Steel).

A clear sense of the market, the sonera (Cuban son singer) par excellence began the year with a tour of Cuba, during which she sang the new songs included on the album, recently presented during a press conference held at the Iberostar Parque Central hotel, in Havana.

Ready with the CD physically in hand, the charismatic Haila offered dancers a great show in Havana’s Salón Rosado de la Tropical, alongside some of the well-known singers who featured as guests on the album.

To reach such a high professional level, with widespread popularity among Cuban audiences, the singer assured, has been a long road full, of course, with sacrifices.

A brief history for our readers: in 1991 Haila was invited to become a member of the Septeto Tradición; in 1994, she joined the Bambolino band; in 1998, founded Azúcar Negra; and in 2001 she decided to launch a solo career.

Since then, she has released seven albums. Among them are the first, Haila, followed by Haila live, Haila Diferente, (in which she began singing ballads, bachata, merengue, salsa, and offered something new by singing in a middle range), and Haila Maia (awarded the Cubadisco Prize in the dance music category).

In this intense period, she featured in 2001 on the album La rumba soy yo, winner of a Latin Grammy Award; shared the stage with figures such as Cheo Feliciano, Oscar de León, Olga Tañón, Rey Ruiz, José Alberto El Canario, Gilberto Santa Rosa, Chicho Valdés, Muñequitos de Matanzas, Mario Rivera, Adalberto Álvarez, David Calzado, Issac Delgado, and Lázaro Valdés; and joined the Cuban Grammys project, along with Eliades Ochoa, Juan Formell, Sampling, Chicho Valdés, Los Papines and Ermán López-Nussa.

GOING BACK TO HER ROOTS

During the press conference to launch Haila, Mujer de Acero, the versatile singer was confident in her latest production. “I have always considered myself a rather daring human being. They say that she who doesn’t take risks doesn’t make it across the river.”

Haila was accompanied by Mario Escalona, general manager of the Musical Recording and Editing Enterprise (EGREM), the label under which the album was masterfully arranged and produced by Juan Manuel Caruto. I think it will go down in history and musical history, but for me they are all wonderful. With Mujer de Acero, I feel more mature when it comes to performing, to making Cuban music, and offer dancers a variety of musical genres and styles, guarachas, rumbas, sones, timba.”

Haila always surprises us with excellent music both on her albums and on stage, and with her command of different genres, especially son. She is a woman with a great stage presence, and when she raises her voice, dancers are charmed and listeners impressed.

This true star of Cuban dance music was categorical in her encounter with the press with regard to her passion for son, a genre she includes in all her productions: “It’s my life, my devotion, I experience it to the fullest.”

With Haila, Mujer de Acero, the singer seeks something more: “Cuba is the island of music, and in many genres. I work to reach out to the young, to encourage them toward Cuban music, our rich art, so that their ears are turned away from so much toxic.”

A contemporary icon, Haila owes it all to her audiences, who sing her songs and dance to her music. She is well aware of this, and does not disappoint. •
Cuban baseball’s unbreakable records

Practically everything can be measured in baseball, which is why it’s the sport with the most records.

Sigfredo Barros Segarra

• TALKING about baseball records anywhere in the world is always a passionate conversation because, among other factors, among all the sports that exist, it’s the one with the most records. Practically everything can be measured, from how a team plays on grass or a synthetic field, during the day or at night, or whether a player bats better with three balls and no strikes, or two strikes and no balls.

However, things get a lot more complicated when the discussion turns to Cuban baseball. The game has undergone many changes in the country: from the original four teams, 27-game Series set up, to two 99-game Super Series in 1968 and 1969; then 15 years of the 90-game, 16-team, two-phase, four-group format; followed by 97 in the 51st Series (the only one to feature an odd number of teams) through today, with teams able to select reinforcements half way through the season; meaning that the structure of Cuban baseball has changed almost 20 times to date.

It is also worth noting that in 1977 the traditional wooden bat was replaced with a metal one, following a decision by the International Baseball Federation, which was met with strong criticism from the sport’s amateur movement. According to the majority of experts, the new version increased a team’s offensive capacity by 25%, giving batters a huge advantage over pitchers. Although the metal bat was discarded in 1999, it left its mark on the majority of records which exist today.

When the conversation turns to the most outstanding record, there are as many choices as there are participants in the discussion. For me personally, the one that stands out is that set by Osmani Urrutia from Las Tunas: Five straight batting titles in the National Series, averaging close to .400 in four tournaments. He would’ve secured six consecutive wins but in 2006, despite averaging .425, was surpassed by Michel Enríquez from the Isle of Youth, with a legendary score of .447. Urrutia reclaimed his crown one year later, making for six of seven titles from 2001-2007 - a difficult feat to repeat.

Meanwhile, Enrique Díaz’s record of 55 stolen bases, set in 1993, - following a decline in Cuba’s offense - seems almost unbelievable today, given that there is no sign of anyone even reaching 45. I imagine that this record will remain unbroken for a long time to come.

FOUR HOME RUNS IN A SINGLE GAME

To date, 17 players have hit four home runs in a single game in the Major Leagues, every since Bobby Lowe did it for the first time in 1894. In Cuba, three men have achieved the same feat: Leonel Moa, Alberto Díaz, and Omar Linares in that order. They needn’t make 152 in the 38th National Series - an achievement soon set to celebrate its 20th anniversary. Cuba has tactical batters since Bobby Lowe did it for the first time in 1894. In Cuba, three men have achieved the same feat: Leonel Moa, Alberto Díaz, and Omar Linares in that order. They needn’t make 152 in the 38th National Series - an achievement soon set to celebrate its 20th anniversary. Cuba has tactical batters since Bobby Lowe did it for the first time in 1894. In Cuba, three men have achieved the same feat: Leonel Moa, Alberto Díaz, and Omar Linares in that order. They needn’t make 152 in the 38th National Series - an achievement soon set to celebrate its 20th anniversary. 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In Cuba, three men have achieved the same feat: Leonel Moa, Alberto Díaz, and Omar Linares in that order. They needn’t make 152 in the 38th National Series - an achievement soon set to celebrate its 20th anniversary. Cuba has tactical batters since. During the 1999-2000 cycle, Miguel Saumell was the only player to bat above .400, a difficult feat to pull off that year.

A FORGOTTEN RECORD

The record of most consecutive games played by Alexander Ramos from Granma, set the most recent record, in the 12th Series (1986), Alfredo Despaigne from Gragama, set the most recent record, hitting 38 homers in 2012. But with Cuban batting being fairly weak, a new hom run record doesn’t look to be set anytime soon.

Despaigne is the only player who could potentially break his own record, but his commitment to the Japanese Professional League – with a long season of over 140 games – makes this virtually impossible.

Nor for the moment does anyone seem likely to break the record for runs-batted-in, which rose substantially in one of the two 99-game Series, held in 1998, when Miguel Cuevas from Camagüey made 86. In 2008, during a fantastic season which saw him hit 31 homeruns, Alexei Bell made 111 RBIs. Since then no one has even come close to reaching 80, with Yordannis Samón representing last season’s top scorer with 76.

A FORGOTTEN RECORD

There exists a record which, to put it bluntly, is hardly ever mentioned and seems to have fallen into oblivion. For me it is one of the most important, given the level of dedication and sacrifice it entailed: the 1,112 consecutive games played by Alexander Ramos from Pinar del Río represent one of the most difficult records to match, let alone break.

Why? The reason is simple: there’s no other player with the same spirit of sacrifice, willing to go out on the field day after day, and do their job, despite pain or personal problems.

Another noteworthy record is Rey Isaac’s (Santiago de Cuba) 37 game hitting streak in the 1994-1995 Series, which broke Lázaro Vargas’ previous record of 31, and established a new high which, after more than 20 years, remains unbeaten.

So there you have it, Cuban baseball’s so-called ‘unbreakable’ records. And remember, there are so many records in baseball that I wasn’t even able to mention pitching achievements. That’ll have to wait for another time.*

Osmani Urrutia, holder of six batting titles in seven seasons.
Striving to maintain advances in Venezuela
A Cuban collaborator heading a High-Tech Medical Center talks about the achievements of the Bolivarian Revolution which, despite suffering the effects of a non-conventional war, continues to resist health structures that Venezuela has, the work is as a team; we all work as a machine, and for it to work perfectly, we must all make the maximum effort in the area we are responsible for, so that the patient, when he leaves, does so satisfied with the response, with the service we offer.

Honduras left its mark on you. What will you take away from your experience in Venezuela?

First, a greater commitment to Cuba and to Fidel's ideas, which translates into a commitment to maintain all the achievements of our Revolution, including Public Health. This is no easy task because there will be increasing challenges for our Revolution.

The other thing that marks us is that we have helped to form new generations of revolutionaries. In all the places where we have been, we have also taught, which has helped many professionals grow, including us. Wherever we go, we must leave behind people to continue the work we started.

How are you dealing with the current political destabilization and violence in the country?

I have been here since November 2014. The country has been changing daily. It is suffering a war of attrition. We Cubans are well acquainted with such situations. Perhaps many of us have not experienced them so harshly personally, but our parents experienced them, and that leaves us with an understanding.

We see firsthand what imperialism is capable of doing with its arsenal of methods; and we prepare ourselves better, because this non-conventional war is the scenario that we have suffered in Cuba recently, just not to the extremes seen here. This war prepares us for the future.

So Cuban collaborators are right when they say that Venezuela is a huge school?

It is because our parents' generation saw the beginnings of the Revolution, Playa Girón, the literacy campaign. For us who are here, now, this is the trench, this is ours. We are called on to preserve not only the Cuban Revolution but also the Latin American revolution, because Venezuela defines it, it is a guide that can not be lost.

This is the task that concerns us and it is as important as those others.

With no fear...

None of any kind. Besides, with fear you can not work or create. You have to take care of yourself and have a sense of danger, but that is something else, not fear.

We are all committed to continuing to work and to do our best to maintain the achievements of Barrio Adentro (the “Into the Neighborhood” medical mission). This humane mission, despite the difficulties that may exist, is an indisputable achievement of the Bolivarian Revolution, which is why a great effort is made to continue making progress.

Our medical mission will not fail the Cuban Revolution, nor the Bolivarian, nor presidents Raúl and Nicolás Maduro. Because all this also means defending the ideas of Fidel and Chávez.
The enemies of the left
Sergio Alejandro Gómez

• Running out of enemies is the worst thing that could happen to the left. In a world in which those at the top fear those below, and the supreme law of the land continues to be “every man for himself”, the ideas of the left can do nothing other than scorn executives and rain on the right’s centennial parade.

The boundaries, of course, are a different problem. In the French Constituent Assembly of 1789, the defenders of the king positioned themselves to the right of the president of the Assembly, while the most radical revolutionaries were on the other side. From then until today, the discussions about where each position themselves have not ceased.

The ability of the right to define itself as opposed to a left with recurring identity crises is striking. If the powerful know anything it is how to distinguish their people from those who seek a more just distribution of wealth, reject the naturalization of inequality and believe that “human rights” are extensive to all human beings.

When revolutionaries are marginalized, and their programs are only discussed in small circles, the right often tolerates them to present an image of plurality and openness. But these sectors soon show their true colors when social discontent explodes and they perceive the slightest possibility of losing their privileges.

The dictatorships across Latin America during the last century, the assassination of social leaders, and the destruction of trade union organizations were the elites’ response to the real possibility of the rise to power of the left, as had happened in Cuba in 1959. Advised by the United States, they prepared to shut down any popular insurrection. Although they saw some results, Sandinista Nicaragua and the efforts of other Central American and South American peoples demonstrated that change could be achieved through armed struggle.

However, few believed a victory was possible in their own land. It seemed impossible to shift liberal democracy, designed to benefit the oppressors, to the left. Salvador Allende proved otherwise in Chile and paid a high price. More than two decades later, Venezuela experienced a similar situation with Comandante Hugo Chávez, who opened a cycle of progressive victories that soon spread throughout almost all Latin America.

The right, hit by the catastrophic results of neoliberalism and corruption scandals, did not give a minute’s respite to the new governments, as it retreated to reorganize the counteroffensive.

The left, unlike its predecessors, was respectful of the rules of the game and didn’t flip the table even after the coup attempts in Venezuela in 2002, in Ecuador in 2010, or the secessionist initiatives in Bolivia during the first stage of the Evo Morales government.

Although the political processes were, and are, different in each country, from the objectives outlined to the extent of the transformations in practice, the scenario in which they have developed is very similar. In order to reach political power, it was necessary to make deals with various forces, in many cases reactionary and motivated solely for their own benefit, which ended up curbing the changes demanded by the masses.

A sector of the Latin American left, accustomed to dreaming of the Revolution in philosophical gatherings, ended up on the opposite side after losing disquisitions regarding the particular shade of red each represented. At times due to opportunism, and at others the inability to understand the historical moment, they fell into what Lenin called “ultra-leftism” and described as an “infantile disorder.”

Over the last decade, the power of the media to construct realities, to function as a political actor and to influence public opinion was also demonstrated. Just how far the right is willing to go to achieve its goals was also seen. Those, who in Venezuela described Chávez as a populist dictator, immediately dissolved all democratic institutions as soon as they took control of the country for a few brief hours in 2002. Those, who today oppose the Constituent Assembly convened by Nicolás Maduro, demanded it just a year ago.

There have been no qualms about the use of non-conventional warfare; parliamentary coups, economic boycotts or any other destabilizing method.

Above all, it was learned that it is not enough to reach the presidency to achieve major changes, or to improve living conditions to achieve political awareness. Corruption and clientelism inherited from the Latin American “democratic model” are even more fiercely rejected by the people when they have the hallmark of the left, and neoliberal adjustments are no less unjust when they are made in the name of progressivism.

But perhaps it is healthy to have these enemies. No revolution is worth anything unless it can defend itself. In any case, they help make things clear. To those who speak of the end of the leftist cycle in Latin America, we should remember that apocryphal phrase that some put in the mouth of Don Quixote: “Let the dogs bark Sancho, it is a sign that we are moving forward.”

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GERMANY

Elections in sight

Gabriela Ávila Gómez

GERMANY already held elections at the beginning of this year, during which the Federal Assembly chose Frank-Walter Steinmeier as the nation’s President for the next four years.

The role of President, however, is purely representative and protocolary. It is in fact the Federal Chancellor – currently Angela Merkel – who holds the reins of government, and is in charge of making important decisions, together with other cabinet members.

As such, this September 24 the country will decide whether or not Merkel will continue to hold the position, or if she will be replaced.

On that date, the German people will be called on to choose members of the Bundestag, the country’s Federal Parliament, responsible for exercising the will of the people, passing federal laws, and choosing the nation’s Chancellor.

Recent polls put Angela Merkel in the lead, who if reelected will serve as Chancellor for the fourth time.

The German official, also leader of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) – in coalition with the Christian Social Union (CSU) – recently presented her government program, focused on stemming the tide of migrants to the country.

In a recent press conference Merkel noted that her plan is designed to unite the country, offering well-being and security for all. At the end of the legislative term, we want the people to better off than they were at the beginning, she noted.

Meanwhile, the 72-page document also addresses employment, one of the most important issues currently affecting Germany, with a 5.7% unemployment rate. Merkel, who stressed the importance of providing jobs for all, promised to reduce the figure by 2.5% before 2025.

Increasing security measures, expanding benefits for families, and tax cuts also feature in the Chancellor’s proposal.

In the event that Merkel is reelected, the CSU announced that the country will accept a maximum of 200,000 asylum seekers per year.

Meanwhile, Merkel’s closest rival appears to be 61 year old leader of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), Martin Schulz.

Schulz, who served as President of the European Parliament for many years, believes that he has the best program for the future of the country, and stressed the need to reestablish the continent as a place of freedom, security, and respect for rights.

The SPD candidate is proposing to expand social policies, and combat tax evasion and exploitative employment contracts.

A recent poll showed Angela Merkel as leading the vote with 39%, 15 points ahead of Schulz, who has lost support in recent weeks.

PROSPERITY FOR ALL

The latest figures show that the German economy grew 1.9 percent in 2016, representing its best performance in the last five years.

In this sense, during this year’s G-20 Summit entitled “Shaping an Interconnected World,” held last July 7-8 in Hamburg, Germany, Merkel called on the group’s leaders to focus on achieving sustainable and inclusive economic development, while also stressing the need for markets to “remain open,” and better trade agreements that protect consumer, social, and environmental rights.

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Iran caught in the crosshairs of Trump’s policy

Elison Concepción Pérez

• ON July 14, 2015, the news emerged from Vienna that following 18 months of negotiations, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States, heading the so-called G5+1 group (the U.S., Russia, China, France, the United Kingdom and Germany), had reached a historic agreement which would limit Iran’s nuclear program, while Washington and European countries agreed to lift sanctions imposed on the country.

This agreement would hypothetically put an end to 35 years of confrontational policy backed by U.S. governments, founded on the triumph of the Islamic Revolution.

Then U.S. President Barack Obama congratulated himself on “stopping the spread of nuclear weapons in this region,” while failing to mention Israel and its nuclear development, in defiance of the UN and the international community, as it refuses to allow its program to be monitored by the responsible international agency.

The mass media broadcast claims that the agreement meant Iran’s possibilities of creating an atomic bomb had been frustrated, without recognizing at any point that the country’s nuclear program always had peaceful purposes, in the service of human health and energy development for the progress of the Persian nation.

At the time, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani noted that the deal demonstrated that “constructive engagement works. With this unprecedented crisis resolved, new horizons emerge with a focus on shared challenges.”

Meanwhile, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has confirmed that Iran has fulfilled all requirements for the unfreezing of its financial assets worth between 45 and 90 billion euros, as well as the export of its oil.

Now, two years after the signing of this historic agreement on such a sensitive issue, a new U.S. administration seems determined to act with as much flippancy as it has with regard to other issues such as climate change, immigration, the building of walls between countries, and others.

The Trump administration is proposing to abolish what has been agreed regarding the Iranian nuclear program, and is already taking steps to this end.

In a disjointed speech, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson recently described the deal with Iran as a “failed approach.”

Perhaps what Trump is really seeking is to “constructive engagement works” in addition to the huge agreement with Saudi Arabia to provide 110 billion USD worth of arms, the United States has agreed to sell combat aircraft for 2.7 billion dollars to Bahrain, a small Gulf nation which, in addition to a lot of oil, also has the Fifth Fleet of the United States Navy sitting in its waters.

Qatar is also a major importer of U.S. military equipment, according to the SIPRI report, which notes a 245% increase in recent years.

A few weeks ago, U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis signed a $12 billion dollar deal for the sale of 36 F-15 fighter jets to Qatar, according to BBC Mundo.

While encouraging the rest of the Gulf monarchies to cut ties with Qatar, Washington continues to sell the country arms in astonishing amounts.

In this sense, it is worth remembering that what was expressed in relation to this emirate by Democrat Congressman Ted Lieu during a congressional hearing: “It’s very confusing to work as a member of Congress when the Trump administration does two exactly opposite things.”

Perhaps what Trump is really seeking with the situation created around Qatar and the other Gulf States, is precisely to exacerbate new divisions and create new conflicts that allow for the sales of more weapons by the U.S. military industry.

I coincide with other political analysts who ask whether Trump has a real strategy for the Middle East, beyond selling arms to the region? *
European brigade members express support for the Cuban Revolution

The work of a loyal friend recognized
Nuria Barbosa León
Photos: Kandy Emerson/ICAP

• THE 47th European José Martí voluntary work and Cuba solidarity brigade, composed of over 75 individuals from some 10 countries, is bring a message of support for the Cuban Revolution, as participants learn and become more familiar with the island's people, during their stay in the country.

Based at the Julio Antonio Mella International Camp, in the province of Artemisa, the group is undertaking activities July 3-21, including voluntary agricultural work, visits to sites of historic interest, communities, schools and institutions in the provinces of Villa Clara, Sancti Spiritus, and La Habana.

Brigadistas will also attend conferences by Cuban experts on the life and work of José Martí; the island's economy and the updating process currently underway; its political system and participative democracy; as well as the damage caused by the criminal economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed on the Cuban people by the United States; the political thought of Ernesto Che Guevara, and other relevant issues.

Two participants, Juan Guirau and Schneider Benedet from France – both members of the Marseille branch of the Comité France-Cubain – spoke with Granma International.

This is Guirau’s fifth visit to Cuba with the brigade, while it is Benedet first. Both talked about the work of their organization and its efforts in the struggle against aggressive and interventionist policies toward the island by successive U.S. governments. They also highlighted actions undertaken by the Association to disseminate information about the island’s reality, in order to combat anti-Cuban media campaigns waged by the traditional press in their country.

Meanwhile, their comrade Kasper Libeert from Belgium and representing the Cuba-Socialist solidarity movement, explained that his organization is preparing a day of tributes in September, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the assassination of heroic guerrilla Ernesto Che Guevara in Bolivia.

“We are going to have a huge festival,” stated the Belgian. “We are inviting Cuban intellectuals and artists, Aleida Guevara (Che’s daughter), Harry “Pombo” Villegas who fought alongside Che in Bolivia. There will also be peace activists from the U.S. and a delegation from the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP).”

The group is planning a two-day event in Brussels in November, where participants will visit Parliament to explain to members the negative impact of the U.S. blockade on the Cuban people, and call on them to publicly denounce the genocidal and unjust policy.

“Our organization opposes the occupation of the Guantánamo territory, where an illegal U.S. military base is located,” stated the young activist, noting that this is one of many issues addressed by the group through their Cuba solidarity work.

Recently the organization has denounced the step-back in the process of rapprochement between the U.S. and Cuba, initiated under former President Barack Obama, following a change in the country’s policy toward the island announced in June by current President Donald Trump.

Meanwhile, retired university professor Luisa Canalhés, representing the Portugal-Cuba Friendship Association, chose to join the brigade in order to contribute, in some way, to the construction of socialism and at the same time get to know more about the island and its people.

“I’ve read information that circulates about Cuba in Europe. There are two different positions on the subject: that disseminated by leftist parties and organizations in their struggle defending the Revolution; while right wing groups exploit any negative detail to totally condemn and stigmatize the social construction of the country. We must be ready to refute this kind of information which is being circulated around the world,” she added.

Spanish sisters Rosalía and Luzia Méndez Senra agree. The two brigadistas, perhaps the youngest members of the group: the former 18 years of age and about to start university, and the latter a 16 year old high school student, are visiting the island to meet and talk with the Cuban people, experiences which they will report back to their friends and classmates.

“They are spreading a lot of lies about Cuba and we want to see what it’s really like,” noted the young women.

During the welcoming ceremony, ICAP First Vice President Elio Gálvez, thanked those present for their personal sacrifice and work to support the Revolution from their countries of origin, and for deciding to visit the island as part of a solidarity brigade. “Cuba is proud of its friends and solidarity around the world which has stood the test of time,” he stated.*