

Cuban Education in Neo-liberal Times: Socialist Revolutionaries and State Capitalism

Curry Malott

D'Youville College, Buffalo, NY, USA

As Europe's imperial powers, most notably the English, Dutch, French and Spanish, vied for control of the vast fortunes being extracted from the Americas through an emerging global economic system founded on colonization and slavery during the 16th and 17th centuries, the predominantly European maritime workers, whose labor was employed to engage in inter-Euro-king-sponsored piracy, lived under some of the most brutal, dangerous conditions known. When the labor of these men was no longer needed by the nobility and investors many of them began to view their former employers and homeland as their enemies. Many of these weather-worn men-of-the-sea, having renounced their former homelands and Christian masters, turned to the primary enemy of their enemy, that is, Islam and the Islamic empires. The logic being: the enemy of my enemy must be my friend. Given this line of reasoning, it is not surprising that many of these European born men knew very little of Islam except that it was the enemy of Christianity for imperialistic rather than religious reasons. However, some of these men did possess a more in depth understanding of Islam finding it less dogmatic than Christianity, allowing more personal freedoms, such as a relatively progressive approach to sexuality.

Similarly, many people laboring for the interests of profiteers as value-producing commodity dissatisfied with the exploitive and alienating nature of capitalist society, a direct attack on our "species being" (Marx quoted in Allman, McLaren and Rikowski, 2005, discussed in detail below), have turned to the enemy of capitalism, that is, Marxism, anarchism and the movements and nations that claim to follow their texts in the form of socialism and communism. If the longing gaze of those critically conscious laborers, alienated by private capital, has more than once been fixated upon socialist nations, then what is it that we see and hope to see in countries such as post-1959 Cuba, which has been described as an Island of socialism in a sea of capitalism? Put another way, what can we learn from Cuba about resisting capitalism? In the

following essay it is my attempt to begin to answer this question taking cues from some of the most insightful scholars in the struggle.

Given their ability to thwart nearly 50 years of US terrorism (Blum, 1995; Chávez, 2005; Chomsky, 1999), many on the international Left view Cuba as evidence that US imperialism can be successfully resisted, and therefore a source of hope for a global future without capitalism. At the same time many capitalist cheerleaders point to Cuba's restrictions on civil liberties and the country's relatively low standard of living as evidence against not only a "dieing" Cuba but socialism in general and Marxism in particular as "outdated" or simply "wrong." Marxists and socialists, most notably Castro and the Cuban government in general (Báez, 2004), on the other hand, tend to point to the US' trade sanctions and terrorism against the little-big nation explaining the Revolution's militant policy toward counterrevolutionaries, and the poverty and lack of basic necessities rampant among Cuba's population. One of the most common examples put forth by pro-Cuban radicals making the case for the humanitarian nature of the Revolution is that as a result of the social reforms implemented the Cuban people are more educated and healthier than before 1959. That is, Cuba went from having one of the highest illiteracy rates in the so called third world to having one of the most highly educated citizenry in the world. According to Fidel Castro (1999):

In 1961, only two years after the triumph, with the support of young students working as teachers, about 1 million people learned how to read and write. They went to the countryside, to the mountains, the remotest places and there they taught people that were even 80 years old how to read and write. Later on, there were follow-up courses and the necessary steps were taken in a constant effort to attain what we have today. A revolution can only be born from culture and ideas.
(p. 5)

It is the magnitude of such humanitarian achievements, realized under the constant threat of US aggression (outlined below) that has earned Cuba the respect of almost the entire international community. In this chapter, in the spirit of maximizing what can be learned about resisting capital, I take a critical approach to the legacy of revolutionary Cuba honing in on both strengths and weaknesses situated in a larger context of neo-liberal global capitalism. Comprehending this larger capitalist context is crucial because it provides the explanatory insight necessary to fully understand Cuba's resistance to capital and the lack thereof, and the dual role the island's system

of education plays. On one hand, Cuban education serves as an egalitarian leveler, and on the other, is implicated in socially reproducing labor power, upon which the Cuban system draws life.

However, before I outline the events that have led to Cuba's current engagement with global capitalism and the implications for Cuban education, I look at what Noam Chomsky (1999) has repeatedly referred to as "Cuba's trouble making in the hemisphere," such as it is. In other words, I answer the question, "why does the US government hate Cuba?" I then explore the implications of the United States' war against Cuba. After looking at neo-liberalism and the fall of Soviet Communism, finally, I examine Cuba's internationally renowned education system and why it remains sheltered from the direct forces of neo-liberal privatization when other areas of the economy have been opened up for international private investment. Finally, I reflect on the lessons we can discern from Cuba about resisting capitalism.

Cuba's Trouble-Making

What has the Revolutionary Government done? The only accusation that can be made against the Revolutionary Government is that we have given our people reform laws ... The problem is if we plant rice, we interfere with foreign interests; if we produce lard, we interfere with foreign interests; if we produce cotton, we interfere with foreign interests, if we cut down the electric tariffs, we interfere with foreign interests ... If we try to find new markets for our economy, we interfere with foreign interests. If we attempt to sell at least as much as we buy, we interfere with foreign interests ... The reactionaries, the invaders ... will find a nation that is proud to declare that we do not wish to do harm to anyone ... that we wish only to live by our own labor; we wish only to live by the fruits of our own intelligence ... but in order to defend our aspirations ... the Cuban people are ready to fight. (Fidel Castro, 1959/2004, Pp. 538-539)

Why has the US government, nearly alone in the world of industrialized nations, waged an illegal campaign of economic and social warfare on Fidel Castro's Cuba? Even US corporations interested in doing business with Cuba, who would have much to gain from such endeavors, are banned from the "Cuban market." Why? Was it because the Cuban Revolution threatened US investments as Castro alludes in the above quote? Once pushed into a corner by the US, Cuba did socialize the productive capacities of nearly the entire Island effecting foreign investment. However, immediately after the revolution Castro visited US president Richard Nixon seeking a

loan for internal development guaranteeing US interests would not be jeopardized. Cuba and Castro, unwilling to compromise their independence, never received US financial support. Rather than money, from the US Cuba received an endless bombardment of accusations and attacks. For decades, Washington claimed that socialist Cuba, acting as a communist tentacle of Russia, posed a threat to US national security and therefore must be strangled at all costs. Responding to the presidential administration of John Kennedy, Fidel Castro (1961/1969), in a speech made in 1961 in Havana, positioning the US as the real aggressor therefore rejecting the claim that Cuba's socialism and their trading deals with the former USSR threaten a passive US, argues:

The U.S. government says that a socialist regime here threatens U.S. security. But what threatens the security of the North American people is the aggressive policy of the warmongers of the United States. What threatens the security of the North American family and people is the violence, that aggressive policy that ignores the sovereignty and the rights of other people ... That aggressive policy can give rise to a world war; and that world war can cost the lives of tens of millions of North Americans. Therefore, the one who threatens the security of the United States is not the Cuban Revolutionary Government but the aggressor, the aggressive government of the United States. (p. 80)

After the fall of Soviet Russia in 1989, and with it the “threat of Soviet communism,” such that it was, Washington claimed that Fidel's socialist Cuba was anti-democratic and to engage the country in business would prolong its “democratization.” However, while Cuba's human rights violations have intensified in recent years (Amnesty International, 2003), they pale in comparison to the human rights violations in comparable Latin American countries who have received the full support of the US despite their apparent disdain for freedom and democracy as evidenced by the suffering inflicted upon their respective populations.

For example, since the 1950s Washington has supported and helped into office a series of increasingly brutal Guatemalan governments with the effect of squashing popular movement for human rights and liberties leading to the eventual slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Guatemalans (Blum, 1995; Chomsky, 1999). It is not surprising that Castro (2002, 1999, 1959/2004) has consistently spoken out against those very regimes supported by US military and corporate interests and supported

anti-colonialist/imperialist struggles throughout the world (discussed below). It should not come as a surprise that the Cuban revolution has provided an example and model for other oppressed, impoverished Latin American and Caribbean countries suffering similar conditions, such as Guatemala, to struggle for independence. Henry Kissinger of the US State Department understood that the revolutionary spirit of Cuba could (and has) spread like a “virus” empowering other regions to follow suit, an intolerable proposition.

Witness Guatemala 1962-1980s, Brazil 1961-1964, Peru 1960-1965, the Dominican Republic 1960-1966, Chile 1964-1973, Costa Rica 1970-1971, Jamaica 1976-1980, Nicaragua 1981-1990, Panama 1969-1991, El Salvador 1980-1994, Haiti 1986-1994 (Blum, 1995) and we will find example after example of the US military and CIA engaged in both overt and covert acts of interventionist terrorism in an effort to prevent the emergence and/or continuation of independent, democratic governments who lean toward economic policies informed by the principle that the resources in a particular country should, first and foremost, serve the interests of their own populations rather than foreign investors.

Many scholars of international politics such as Noam Chomsky (1999), Lydia Chavez (2005), Antonio Carmona Báez (2004), William Blum (1995), and Howard Zinn (1995) support the previously alluded to analysis that, rather than falsely looking at Cuba as a threat to democracy, point to an anti-independence policy embodied within the Monroe Doctrine as holding the key that unlocks the reasons behind Washington’s unwavering resentment toward Castro’s Cuba. What follows is a summary of that argument. Chomsky (2002) offers one of the most clear and concise explanations of Cuba’s “trouble-making,” which can be summarized as follows:

Since the 1820s Cuba has been on the US government’s menu of expansionist cuisine. Thomas Jefferson wanted to control the hemisphere, however, the British fleet, acting as a deterrent, prevented the US from devouring every tasty morsel of that little island. At the time the powerful and therefore hated British were a bitter enemy of the US. John Quincy Adams argued that in time the political tide would turn, that is, the United States would become more powerful, the British would lose power, fade away

as a deterrent, and thus enable the US butchers to slice up Cuba for corporate consumption. By the 1900s Adams' predictions came to fruition.

Around the same time Cuba was in the process of liberating itself from Spain in what has been misnamed the Spanish-American War. The US intervened, according to Noam Chomsky (1998, 1999), in an effort to prevent Cuba from gaining independence. In other words, the US government was determined to ensure that Cuba's independence did not mean independence. Afterwards, Cuba was "quickly turned into an American plantation with all kinds of restrictions on its options, and bought up by American agri-business ..." (Chomsky, 1998). In short, by the end of the century Cuba was ready for harvest and subsequently served to US military and corporate interests who in turn got to work preparing the feast.

The vast majority of the Cuban population was therefore kept in abject poverty as vast amounts of Cuban-generated wealth flowed to the US via US corporations. Since the Spanish American War any effort by Cuba to achieve real liberation has been repressed without hesitation by the United States. For example, in 1934 Cuba attempted to elect a moderate social democratic president with independent ideas, which, according to US foreign policy, was going too far, and that was not allowed (Chomsky, 1998, 1999). This record goes right up to the 1959 revolution and "the Castro idea of taking matters into your own hands," paraphrasing Noam Chomsky. According to Stephen Lendman (2006), "before the Castro revolution, the Cuban people had only known decades of exploitation, repression and no attention paid to the most basic of human social needs. But since Fidel Castro came to power they've gotten them ..." (p. 11). Describing their revolution, on May 21, 1959 in a televised speech to the Cuban people, Castro announced to the world that the new Cuba was neither capitalist nor communist, but finding, what amounted to, their own social democratic way. In this now famous speech Castro (1961/1969) exclaims:

Our revolution is neither capitalist nor Communist ... We want to liberate man from dogmas, and free his economy and society, without terrorizing or binding anyone. We have been placed in a position where we must choose between capitalism which starves people, and Communism which resolves the economic problem but suppresses the liberties so greatly cherished by man ... Our

revolution is not red, but olive green, the color of the rebel army that emerged from the heart of the Sierra Maestra. (p. 67)

At the outset, Cuba had no connections with Russia—there were no Russians or communism. Castro, to be sure, before joining forces with Cuban and Soviet Communists, was anti-communist and jailed members of the Communist Party (Chomsky, 1999) largely because of their connections to the first Batista administration. Even during the height of Russia's support for Cuba, Castro maintained political independence from the Soviets as evidenced by their support of anti-imperialist, revolutionary movements and governments. According to Báez (2004):

One would think that due to the aid received from the Eastern Bloc, Moscow would most likely have dictated all of Cuba's foreign policies. But nothing could be further from the truth. Ignoring hints from Moscow that Soviet military equipment sent to Cuba should not be used in arming other national liberation movements, Cuba acted independently by aiding guerrilla efforts in Ethiopia and El Salvador and the government in Angola. The Cuban government also played a significant role in the Sandinista Revolution (Nicaragua) of 1979. (p. 80)

What is more, Castro is one of the only, if not *the* only, national leaders who has consistently and openly expressed solidarity for not only revolutionary democratic governments, but the contemporary movement against the intensification of the globalization of capital, serving as another thorn in the side of US imperialism (Báez, 2004; Castro, 1999). For example, in "Message to the Protestors at the Quebec 'Free Trade Area of the Americas' Summit in 2001" Castro (2002) states:

We have just seen on television images of the brutal way in which the Canadian authorities have suppressed the peaceful demonstrations in Quebec, protesting against the crime that is to be perpetrated against the political and economic rights of the people of Latin America and the Caribbean. This is disgraceful!

I wish to express, in the name of the Cuban people, our fellow feeling and admiration for the valiant behavior of those who are struggling there for this just cause.

This is how they treat their own people, these governments that try to deceive the world by calling themselves defenders of human rights. This is how they try to clear their consciences of the millions of [people] around the world who die every year of sickness and hunger when they could have been saved. They will

not be able to go on sustaining this unjust order they have imposed on humanity.
(Pp. 85-86)

In addition to supporting the international movement against the globalization of neo-liberal capitalism, Castro and the Cuban governments' public speech tends to also "... promote an alternative form of globalization, one that is based on the cooperation of states in material development and fair trade among the nations instead of competition" (Báez, 2004, p. 8). In practice, Castro's globalization resembles a form of state capitalism engaged in the process of value production to serve the interests of the public good rather than private interests. When we look at the social conditions of pre-revolutionary Cuba and compare them to the conditions of present-revolutionary Cuba, it can be argued that Castro and Cuba's form of state capitalism has had a democratizing effect. For example, population per physician is often associated with human social progress. Since the revolution Cuba's rate of population per physician, according to the World Bank, has gone from 1,038 in 1960, to 219 in 1980, down to 136 in 1989 (Báez, 2004). As a result, other indicators of human progress and democratization have improved such as Cuba's infant mortality rate (see Báez, 2004; Castro, 2002, 1999).

Again, if Castro's "trouble-making in the hemisphere" cannot be linked to his disdain for freedom and democracy or Cuba's engagement with the former Soviet Union, then only one infraction remains: the violation of President James Monroe's Monroe Doctrine issued in 1823, which bars European interference in the so-called "new world," making it clear that Latin America shall be within the sphere of influence of the US intending to have complete control over the Western Hemisphere. An independent, sovereign Cuba, having removed itself from US influence, while legally recognized internationally, is clearly in violation of Monroe's doctrine. Summarizing the US' implementation of the doctrine in Latin America Chomsky (1999) argues: In Latin America, Washington expected to be able to implement the Monroe Doctrine, but again in a special sense. President Wilson, famous for his idealism and high moral principles, agreed in secret that "in its advocacy of the Monroe Doctrine the United States considers its own interests." The interests of Latin Americans are merely "incidental," not our concern. He recognized that "this may seem based on selfishness alone," but held that the doctrine "had no higher or more generous motive." (p. 22)

Defying the injustice inherent within the Monroe Doctrine, the Cuban state, not foreign US corporations, have exercised near complete control over the Islands' productive capacities, with some recent alterations discussed below, and thus labor power. However, unlike private corporations who exercise control over labor power and extraction of surplus value for personal gain, Cuba does it to fund internal social programs such as education, health care and food distribution, and externally as aid to popular revolutions and developing countries in need. Arguing in support of the Cuban government as the will of the people and their revolution Castro (2002) asks:

Has this power, this enormous prestige, this strength and unity of the people, achieved through the revolution, served to satisfy personal vanity, or greed for power or material goods? No, it has served to withstand the assault launched by the empire at one of the most dangerous and difficult moments in the history of our country ... Today our country is first among all countries in the world, both developed and underdeveloped, in terms of the number of professors and teachers, doctors, and high-level physical education and sports instructors ... We are sharing this immense *human capital* with our sister nations of the Third World, without charging a cent [*emphasis added*]. (Pp. 89-91)

Indeed, Cuba's independence has allowed them to offer aid to other governments attempting to serve the interests of their own populations rather than those of private capital, which tend to be the administrations the US actively works to undermine, such as the Sandinista government of Nicaragua mentioned above.

The Cuban revolution was also interested in doing away with prostitution as part of the effort to engender the creation of the "new man" (outlined below), paraphrasing Ernesto "Che" Guevara, because Cuba, pre-1959, served as a brothel for international businessmen and the US army stationed at Guantanamo Bay, which was ceded to the US in 1901 through Congress' passing of the Pratt Amendment, where they remain to this day, despite the Cuban government's continued objections (Chomsky, 1999; Lendman, 2006). After the revolution the government outlawed prostitution, and engaged in a series of egalitarian social and economic reforms such as the equal distribution of food, agrarian land reforms, free, compulsory education for everyone and a generous trading deal with Russia that raised Cuban's standard of living diminishing the desperation that led to prostitution. However, with the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of Russian aid, coupled with an intensified US blockade,

this desperation has returned to Cuba with alarming fervor. Before exploring the impact of Russia's turn to capitalism on Cuba, I will first explore the implications of the US's anti-Cuba campaign of terror.

The United States' War Against the Cuban Revolution

[The US has not been] trying to influence the revolution but to destroy it. Just as in Hannibal's times when the Senate in ancient Rome proclaimed the destruction of Carthage, the obsessively pursued motto of U.S. administrations has been: Cuba must be destroyed. (Fidel Castro, 2002. p. 6)

After the overthrow of the Batista dictatorship it did not take long for Washington to respond to Castro and his revolution. For example, in *Killing Hope* (1995) William Blum argues that, "bombing and strafing attacks of Cuba by planes based in the United States began in October 1959, if not before. In early 1960, there were several fire-bomb air raids on Cuban cane fields and sugar mills, in which American pilots also took part ..." (Blum, 1995. p. 186). In 1961 the United States, relying on the support of the Cuba people, which they never got, orchestrated an unsuccessful, full-on invasion of Cuba, the "Bay of Pigs," instigating the nearly catastrophic "Cuban Missile Crisis." Embarrassed from the dismal failure of the "Bay of Pigs," the Kennedy administration almost immediately initiated "... a campaign of smaller-scale attacks upon Cuba ..." (Blum, 1995. p. 186), despite how dangerously close to a nuclear war the US had just come. Describing Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) extra-law behavior toward Cuba throughout the 1960s, William Blum (1995) notes how the US repeatedly subjected the island to:

Countless sea and air commando raids by exiles, at times accompanied by their CIA supervisors, inflicting damage upon oil refiners, chemical plants and railroad bridges, cane fields, sugar mills, and sugar warehouses; infiltrating spies, saboteurs and assassins ... anything to damage the Cuban economy, promote disaffection, or make the revolution look bad ... taking the lives of Cuban militia members and others in the process ... pirate attacks on Cuban fishing boats and merchant ships, bombardments of Soviet vessels docked in Cuba ... (p. 187)

The United States government has also been implicated in using chemical and biological warfare directly against the Cuban civilian population by introducing poisons and diseases into the environment via avenues such as food supplies. Other

chemical warfare tactics employed against the Cuban economy have included poisoning their number one export, sugar. The primary theory behind these attacks intended to topple the revolution is that if life is made so unbearable for the population, the people will eventually turn against those leading the struggle for social change, i.e. Fidel Castro. In other words the goal is to turn the people against their government by making them suffer and struggle, and instilling fear and terror into them.

This twisted anti-democratic logic has not only informed and continues to inform the physical assaults against Cuba, but the trade embargo as well (Blum, 1995; Chomsky, 1999), which the Cuban government, drawing on the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, has consistently reminded the world that an embargo is an act of economic war and can therefore only be internationally recognized as legal between countries at war with each other. According to international law, only one conclusion can be drawn: the US embargo against Cuba is an act of US terrorism. Not only is the embargo internationally illegal, it has been revised throughout the course of ten US presidential administrations, consistently intensifying its levels of brutality.

For example, in 1992 the US passed the Torricelli Act, after Cuba lost 85% of its foreign trade after the fall of the USSR, which further restricted Cuba's ability to purchase food and medicine from US subsidiaries in third countries, which, at the time, amounted to 718 million US dollars. Then, in 1996, the Helms-Burton Act intensified the persecution of and sanctions against those investing in Cuba, both currently and potentially, in addition to authorizing funding for aggressive acts against the Island. However, while Cuba has been granted special permission, as of 2001, to make a limited number of purchases in the US, although with extremely tight restrictions, making many transactions, especially those in the areas of medicine, virtually impossible, the administration of President George W. Bush, in 2004, approved a report:

For new actions and measures intended to intensify the blockade by stepping up actions aimed at discouraging tourism and investment in Cuba, by restricting financial flow and visits to the island and by placing even more restrictions on

family remittances and exchanges in various spheres, the aim being to bring about conditions which would allow the US to intervene in Cuba, thus permitting them to impose the “regime change” to which the US president made reference on 20 May of that year [2004]. (Granma, 2005. p. 6)

When the words “regime change” are uttered from the mouth of a US president, catastrophe usually ensues. While it would not be the first time the US attempted to institute a “regime change” in post-1959 Cuba, the phrase “regime change in Cuba,” coming from US President Bush II is nevertheless cause for alarm, as should the embargo in general be a source of indignation for all US citizens (for an increasing number it is) for its illegality is carried out in their name.

The illegal US trade embargo against Cuba has, without a doubt, been the most publicized counter-revolutionary tactic both within and outside of Cuba, which, for the past 15 years, the UN General Assembly has passed a resolution calling for the US to end (Amnesty International, 2003). Summarizing the United States’ Trade Embargo against the nation they have been sworn to serve and protect, quoting a secret State Department report by I.D. Mallory (Department of State: Foreign Relations of the United States, volume VI, 1991), declassified in 1991, the editors of the Cuban government’s publication, *Granma* (2005), note:

The economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States against Cuba is the longest-lasting and cruelest of its kind known to human history and is an essential element in the United States’ hostile and aggressive policies regarding the Cuban people. Its aim, made explicit on 6 April 1960 is the destruction of the Cuban Revolution: “(...) through frustration and discouragement based on dissatisfaction and economic difficulties (...) to withhold funds and supplies to Cuba in order to cut real income thereby causing starvation, desperation and the overthrow of the government (...)” (p. 3)

The effect of the embargo on the Cuban people has been severe. For example, in a groundbreaking analysis of Cuba’s resistance to the pressure to privatize from neo-liberal global capital Báez (2004) notes that the US\$41 billion Cuba lost between 1962 and 1996 has had a real impact on the Cuban people’s standard of living. Báez (2004) notes that “the written object of the law was to punish any businesses that were investing in Cuba, in addition to prohibiting the IMF and World Bank from facilitating business transactions on the Island” (p. 111). In the aforementioned Cuban

report published in *Granma* (2005) the devastating manifestations of the consistently intensifying US embargo, supported and added to by Democratic and Republican presidential administrations alike, are laid out in detail highlighting the implications on Cuba's "food sector," "health sector," "education sector," "tourism sector," "finances," transportation sector," "civil aviation," "oil," among other areas such as the "sports sector." The Cuban report pulls no punches concerning the seriousness of the embargo and its combined effect on the various sectors of Cuban economic and social life:

This policy ... amounts to an act of genocide under the provisions of paragraph (c) of article II of the Geneva Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 9 December 1948 and therefore constitutes a violation of International Law. This Convention defines this as '(...) acts perpetrated with the intention to totally or partially destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group', and in these cases provides for 'the intentional subjugation of the group to conditions that result in their total or partial physical destruction'. (Pp. 3-4)

Again, the Cuban government, noting that the US embargo *has* in fact been designed to "totally ... destroy" their nation constituting an act of genocide, has repeatedly garnered the overwhelming support of the international community in their call for its immediate termination. By not only ignoring the collective voice of the United Nations to end the embargo, but by intensifying it as well, the US has consistently shown a blatant disregard for international legitimacy. Despite the real devastation the embargo and other forms of US terrorism have had on Cubans, Báez (2004) argues that they cannot alone explain all of Cuba's problems. Báez (2004) points to the fall of the Soviet Union as having perhaps the most (or equal) dire effects on Cuba paving the way for the opening up of certain areas of the "Cuban Market" to foreign investors, as Castro struggles to generate value/hard currency/US dollars to fund the Revolution's social programs and feed his people, 70% of whom have lived their entire lives under the embargo (*Granma*, 2005).

The End of Soviet Communism: Neo-liberalism and the Cuban Economy

They took to the former Soviet Union their neo-liberal and market recipes, causing destruction ... They brought about the economic and political dismantling of federations of republics reducing life expectancy in some cases by 14 and 15 years,

multiplying infant mortality by three to four times and generating social and economic problems which not even a resurrected Dante would dare to imagine. (Fidel Castro, 1999, p. 22)

Indeed, while the fall of the Soviet Union has had a tremendously negative impact on not only the *people* of Eastern Europe, but of particular importance here, the *people* of Cuba (for a detailed analysis of the events leading to the fall of Soviet communism see Báez, 2004), it has arguably given Marxism a new beginning, no longer associated with a very specific tyrannical form of state capitalism (see Kelsh and Hill, 2006). Nonetheless, after the fall of the USSR Cuban aid almost immediately dried up. Summarizing the effect the end of European socialism has had on Cubans Castro (2002) argues that:

In economic terms, Cuba sustained terrible damage. The price we had been paid for our sugar was not that prevailing in the unfair world market. We had obtained a preferential price, in the same way the United States grants preferences to Europe for their imports of this commodity. Supplies of fuel, food, raw materials and parts for machinery and factories were abruptly and almost completely cut off. The daily intake of calories dropped from 3,000 to 1,900 and that of protein from 80 to 50 grams. Some people could not put up with the difficulties, but the immense majority confronted the hardships with remarkable courage, honor and determination. (p. 6)

Providing thick description of what this crisis in objective material conditions has meant for most Cuban people Ramor Ryan (2006) in *Clandestines: The Pirate Journals of an Irish Exile*, searching for a “positive story,” read pro-revolution, while in Cuba, befriends a woman, “Victoria,” working in a bar in old Havana providing him with not only a glimpse of the material conditions of her life, but insight into her support for the Revolution. Victoria explains that like most professionals in Cuba she earns what amounts to less than 12 dollars a month working at a hospital for over forty hours a week, surviving on a ration card that provides “the basics,” but beyond that, items such as soap and “fancy” clothing, are only available at dollar stores. Victoria therefore works at a “shitty” nightclub in the evenings for a few extra dollars. Describing the building where she lives Ryan (2006) observes:

The whole rambling tenement smells of piss and that strong butane gas from the cookers. She pushes in the creaking old door and steps into the claustrophobic

darkness of her single room ... “It’s not much, but it’s my own place,” she says defiantly ... There are no flush toilets in the whole tenement. We sit down on the side of the old moldy bed and drink rum straight from the bottle. (p. 188)

After having spent a few weeks with Victoria and hearing her incessant complaints about *the system* and life in Cuba, Ryan asks her if she supports Castro. Without hesitation and with much enthusiasm Victoria responds that she loves Fidel Castro, and that he is her hero. Surprised, Ryan inquires, “but you have so many criticisms of the system here?” Without skipping a beat, Victoria proudly exclaims, “yes, but Fidel is fighting for us. We’re a poor country, but look at all we have achieved!” (Pp. 190-191). Victoria went on to explain the socio-political history of their revolution situated in an international context providing an example of the materialization of what Castro (1999) describes as the “ ... socialist consciousness of our people ... ” as a result of “revolutionary legislation” (p. 5).

It can hardly be denied that Cuba’s achievements, most notably in the areas of education and health care, have been a fundamental source of Cuban pride and support for their government, despite the poverty suffered by most Cubans, which has largely been explained is the result of external factors, as noted above. Cubans do not necessarily have to believe Castro (1999) that neo-liberal global capitalists enter “third world” areas with tremendous tax breaks and ‘ ... pay not more than 5 percent of the salary they must pay in their own countries ... ’ leaving behind nothing more than pollution, poverty and “meager wages” (p. 13), all they have to do, as many do, is look at their neighboring countries to realize that life dominated by the insatiable appetite for profits and personal gain of neo-liberal capitalism would have far graver consequences on their lives than the US Embargo. For example, it is widely believed by Cubans that privatization would almost instantly lead to illiteracy and a spike in infant mortality rates (Báez, 2004).

However, Báez (2004) and other activist scholars are watching closely wondering if the pride of The Revolution will eventually attract investment offers too good to turn down given the economic hardships endured by the Cuban people as a result of US economic warfare/terrorism coupled with the end of Soviet aid. Indeed, it has been noted on more than one occasion that the Cuban people comprise the best-educated

and healthiest populations in Latin America increasing their value as a commodity on the international market. Castro (1999) takes special care to note that even during Cuba's most financially desperate times, funding for their education and health care programs were never cut, and gains in the health of the population were even realized. However, because the state maintains high levels of education as a basic right, and because the economy is set up around an externally controlled global market system based on the manufacture of scarcity, the level of education among the population tends to exceed that which is needed in employment. It is within this context of real material desperation among Cubans, in a context of manufactured scarcity and marked by the fall of the USSR and appropriately dubbed the "Special Period," that we can begin to understand Cuba's economic reform policies that have re-privatized certain segments of the Cuban economy, such as tourism, when Castro himself has spent the majority of his time in office as a staunch opponent of private capitalism. For example, expressing his indignation at the dehumanizing and destructive nature of capitalism Castro (1999) laments, "... neo-liberal globalization wants to turn all countries ... into private property ... into a huge free trade zone" (p. 13). But what role has the Cuban government and Castro himself played in turning their country into a free trade zone in their engagements with private capitalists? After the revolution the Cuban people, inspired by Castro's moving speeches tapping into the populations' patriotism and legacy of imperial resistance, were enthusiastically energized to work in the sugar cane fields striving to produce record breaking yields in order to support the pillars of the revolution, such as education, for the emergence of what Ernesto "Che" Guevara called the "new man," which has been criticized for embracing traditional masculine values within industrialism while ignoring feminist critiques of patriarchy. While the state has heavily relied on the monopolization of agriculture to fund the social programs of the revolution, the state, having had raised and guaranteed wages, found itself under increasing strain in 1968 when the world market price for Sugar, Cuba's primary export, fell to less than 2 cents per pound (Báez, 2004). The crisis resulting from the reliance on a single export crop for national funding made it hard to situate blame outside the country. As rations tightened and Cubans became disgruntled, foot-dragging and absenteeism increased in the sugar mills and factories. Cubans began more regularly engaging in the black market, usually to satisfy food needs, which also hurt the governments' ability to accumulate capital. In an effort to

collect this money, dollar stores were made available (discussed below). What have these changes looked like in practice?

We can begin by looking at some of the more influential economic policies, most of which concern the acceptable level of foreign investment, enacted roughly around the time of Cuba's Special Period to begin to understand how Cuba's system of value production has been altered. The following policy changes and trends, which have influenced Cuba's state-led economy and anti-foreign interventionism, it should be noted, has theoretical roots not in Marxism or Leninism, but in Cuba's long history of struggle embodied in the national hero, José Martí, who predates the Spanish American War of 1898. Since the beginning of the Revolution the state has always emphasized increasing internal production and efficiency. During the special period this emphasis on worker-output saw a renewed focus as well as the opening up of foreign investment, while maintaining state supremacy, and limited entrepreneurship among Cubans—anything to generate currency.

- In 1982 laws on joint ventures, such as the Foreign Investment Code, formalized Cuba's intentions of attracting hard currency allowing investors up to 49% ownership and profit
- In 1986 the government launched what came to be known as the Campaign to Rectify Errors and Negative Tendencies, designed to re-emphasize socialist values and morals through social egalitarianism while simultaneously competing on the world market
- After Russian aid dried up in 1991, the Cuban government further opened up the country to foreign dollars
- In 1993 Castro legalized what was already happening in the black market—Cubans trading in dollars. In an effort to collect these dollars to fund social programs such as education and health care, government dollar stores were made available to all Cubans and opened on nearly every block selling items such as tooth paste not available anywhere else.
- It was in 1995 that the Revolutionary government of Cuba allowed direct foreign investment in a limited number of sectors, most notably tourism. While this move has resulted in many Cubans gaining access to desperately needed dollars, it has not done so in the spirit of revolutionary egalitarianism. That is, the foreign investors who purchase the labor power of Cubans for

dollars are highly selective in who they employ. In an effort to make their visit as comfortable as possible, “light-skinned” Cubans tend to be hired to interact with the European and Canadian tourists. As a result, Cuba is becoming more economically stratified by race.

- A resurgence in prostitution as more and more tourists flood the island. As a result, prostitutes, and other tourist workers, are among the wealthiest Cubans. It is therefore not surprising that it is becoming harder to attract and retain professional workers, such as doctors and teachers, when work in the resorts pays so much more
- “In March 1999, teachers received a 30 percent salary increase ... Teacher motivation and retention are also threatened by decreases in the purchasing power of salaries and the attractiveness of new professional activities, especially in tourism and in foreign firms, as evidenced by teacher attrition of 4 to 8 percent per year in the eastern oriental provinces, where tourism is more developed.” (Gasparini, 2000. p. 16)
- In 1998 the government relinquished control of many businesses to managers while maintaining state-ownership in an effort to reduce bureaucracy and increase efficiency (Báez, 2004, p. 129)

Báez (2004) contextualizes these policies by taking the position that state run economies, like Cuba’s, under external pressure to return or transition to private competitive capitalism, have restructured their production apparatuses “ ... in order for them to resemble those of private companies, thereby making themselves more competitive ... by linking wages and incentives with productivity in the global market” (p. 25). The Cuban government does not seem willing to admit that as long as they operate within the global capitalist market, their economy will be subjected to the root causes of crisis embedded within capitalist production (Báez, 2004, p. 108). Despite Cuba’s economic hardships and the states’ attempts at rectification, unlike their Eastern European counterparts, the Cuban people did not respond with demonstrations and riots, but maintained, for the most part, their support of their government, as argued above (Báez, 2004, p. 142). As a result, Cuba has been able to achieve a number of remarkable gains outlined below. In the following narrative I attempt to formulate an understanding of Cuba’s system of education, situated within

the complexities and contradictions of constructing a social order based on socialist principles in a sea of hostile capitalist profiteers.

Education in Cuba: ‘species being’ and ‘the new man’ versus value production

The work of education is perhaps the most important thing the country should do.
(Fidel Castro 1997, Pp. 4-5)

Cuba’s ability to overcome an almost institutionalized illiteracy rate virtually overnight has been one of their major claims to fame. At the time of The Revolution, stemming from decades of abuse and neglect, more than half of all Cuban children did not attend school, that is, “ ... 72 percent of 13 to 19 year olds failed to reach intermediate levels of schooling ... ” (Gasperini, 2000. p. 14) contributing to the over one million Cubans classified as illiterate. Within a few years after the Revolution Cuba’s chronic illiteracy rate was virtually abolished, and, with every passing year, fades further and further into the past. To this day, after over forty years of regionally unusual political stability and therefore sustained high levels of funding, Cuba, according to UNESCO reports, appears to have maintained a 100% rate of literacy despite the severe shortages in school supplies and facilities directly attributable to the increasingly restrictive US Embargo (*Granma*, 2005).

Compensating for shortages of every sort imaginable, Cuba allocates from 11 to 10 percent of their GDP to education, which, compared to other Latin American and Caribbean countries, is high and 4 to 5 percent higher than recommended by UNESCO. Cuban educational success is also attributable to their strong teacher education and life-long teacher training programs considered among the finest in the world where collectives of teachers meet every two weeks, to discuss strategies, problems and the general climate of the learning environment. What is more, through their teacher-training programs, teachers learn to conduct action research, and are expected to employ those skills in the classroom to improve and develop new learning and teaching strategies. According to Lavinia Gasperini (2000) in “The Cuban Education System: Lessons and Dilemmas”:

The record of Cuban education is outstanding: universal school enrollment and attendance; nearly universal adult literacy; proportional female representation at all levels, including higher education; a strong scientific training base, particularly in chemistry and medicine; consistent pedagogical quality across widely dispersed classrooms; equality of basic educational opportunity, even in impoverished areas, both rural and urban. In a recent regional study of Latin America and the Caribbean, Cuba ranked first in math and science achievement,

at all grade levels, among both males and females. In many ways, Cuba's schools are the equals of schools in OECD countries, despite the fact that Cuba's economy is that of a developing country. (p. 10)

Not only is the Cuban system of education applauded for its ability to consistently produce the highest math and science scores in the region, contributing to their world-class cadre of doctors and scientists, it is also exalted for less traditional advances in education. For example, furthering her analysis of the Cuban system of education, Gasperini (2000) praises Cuba for the egalitarian nature of its schooling practices. For Gasperini (2000), the fact that Cubans have been able to sustain the level of education they have under the enormous pressures they are under from neo-liberal market mechanisms is nothing short of remarkable. In the following passage Gasperini (2000) situates the social justice nature of education in Cuba in the context of an increasingly globalized system of capitalism:

Cuba's schools have been remarkably successful in achieving gender equity, reaching rural and disadvantaged populations, and fostering community participation, even in the context of rapidly dwindling resources. Cuba is a poor country, and the past decade has been particularly difficult economically. Yet the success of its schools flaunts conventional wisdom: Education in Cuba is entirely public, centrally planned, and free, in a global reform environment of privatization, downscaling of the state role, and cost recover (p. 14)

These internationally-renowned achievements gained as a result of Cuba's intense focus on education is in no small part a direct result of Fidel Castro who, according to Peter McLaren (2000) " ... attended the best Jesuit schools in Cuba, instilling in him a legendary passion for learning ... " (p. 43). After the 1959 revolution a reformed compulsory system of education became one of the programs successfully put into practice, as described above. However, because it has already been established that the Cuban government performs the role of a state corporation that has begrudgingly begun placing Cuban labor power on the international market through the opening of a select few areas of the economy to foreign investors, such as tourism, resulting in the partial erosion of the revolutionary sense of cooperation as Cubans are pitted against Cubans in a racially mediated competition for access to dollars, we must examine closely the dual role that Cuba's system of education seems to assume. That is, the egalitarian leveler and the social reproducer of labor power summarize the two roles of Cuba's system of education.

For example, in addition to what has already been laid out above, contributing to the fulfillment of the role of egalitarian leveler is the institutionalized links teachers make to the communities in which they serve. It has been reported that teachers spend 80% of their time at work in the classroom and 20% in the homes of their students assisting in parental education and organizing study groups in targeted homes. Teachers also participate in community organizations. As a result, teachers acquire an understanding of students' lives, their problems and possible solutions, which is precisely why Freire (2005) argued that it is indispensable for teachers to understand their students in the contexts in which they live. Summarizing this position Freire (2005) argues that:

... Our relationship with learners demands that we respect them and demands equally that we be aware of the concrete conditions of their world, the conditions that shape them ... Without this, we have no access to the way they think, so only with great difficulty can we perceive what and how they know. (p. 58)

Freire (2005) goes on to suggest that the ways teachers approach literacy can either facilitate or hinder the student/teacher relationship and the process of liberation. That is, because the form in which literacy takes can either be indoctrinating, implicated in the social reproduction of labor power, or empowering, as an egalitarian leveler, we must deepen our analysis and analyze Cuba drawing on Freire's conceptions of literacy. For example, based on a lifetime of work on literacy, we know from Freire (2005) that we can learn to read passively where reading is viewed as " ... a mechanical exercise in the memorization of certain parts of a text," commonly referred to as *the banking model* of education, or actively where the " ... reading of the word enables us to read a previous reading of the world" (p. 34). What Freire (2005) refers to as the dialectical reading of the word and the world, that is, critical literacy, has served as the primary model, internationally, for revolutionary education since the 1970s because it is designed to foster critical consciousness where educators and learners actively engage in a process of discovery with the intention to not only understand the world, but to transform it. Henry Giroux (1987) describes the way in which Paulo Freire has approached literacy as a tool to be put into practice by:

... Movements designed to provide Third-World people with the conditions for criticism and social action either for overthrowing fascist dictatorships or for use in postrevolutionary situations where people are engaged in the process of national reconstruction. In each case, literacy becomes a hallmark of liberation

and transformation designed to throw off the colonial voice and further develop the collective voice of suffering and affirmation silenced beneath the terror and brutality of despotic regimes. (p. 8)

Giroux's understanding of literacy as a central component of political struggle seems to coalesce with Castro's (1999) idea that "a revolution can only be born from culture and ideas" (p. 5). It should therefore be expected that the system of education built under Cuba's Revolutionary government be focused on not only making a conscious connection between school and the community, as outlined above, but it should also follow a revolutionary model of active engagement when it comes to literacy. In other words, are Cuban students taught to dialectically read the word and the world in the spirit of a never-ending revolution? I believe the correct answer is 'it depends.' When engaging with issues external to Cuba, such as US terrorism and foreign corporations externally controlling productive capacities, extracting wealth, that is, the potential capital as abstract or dead Cuban labor embedded within commodities, leaving behind the misery and social decay of abject poverty, absolutely. In other words, when it comes to resisting the external imposition of globalized capitalism education serves as a leveler providing students with a critical analysis of international capitalism and the role played by the US, and the righteousness of laboring for the benefit of their own social programs, rather than a foreign corporation. For example, the following excerpt comes from Cuba's elementary curriculum:

THEME 1: IMPERIALISM

Imperialism is a common phenomenon of our age. Imperialists are those countries that, having well-developed economies, concentrate a large percentage of capital in the hands of a few. They then use that capital to exploit other countries' economies, forcing them to export natural resources and import value-added goods. They thus deform these economies, robbing them of their independence. An imperialist country doesn't necessarily have colonies. Any country that exploits another is imperialistic.

Exercise 1: Once, the Yankees attacked us. They sent many bad people. They wanted to do away with Free Cuba. The populace defeated them. Fidel led the fight.

Question: What does this say about Fidel?

While this example challenges students to think critically about the external threat of US imperialism, it does so steeped in patriotic overtones. Internally, these, very real,

external factors are used by Castro in his speeches and in school curriculum to explain why the system is set up the way it is. That is, the economic decisions that have been made have been done so because they truly benefit the Cuban people, however unequally—compared to fully privatized areas in the region. For example, in the name of the revolution, Cubans expend their labor hours creating products, such as sugar, which the government then sells on the international market realizing the potential value, which is used to fund social programs, which benefit the people. The US trade sanctions and the fall of the former USSR, as demonstrated above, make it increasingly difficult for the government to sell and purchase commodities from other countries to keep the nation afloat. Desperate for the hard currency (i.e. dollars) needed to sustain the Revolution, as outlined above, the Cuban government has engaged in economic reform policies opening Cuban labor power to foreign investment (Báez, 2004; Gasperini, 2000; Lutjens, 1998; Mtonga, 1993).

Not only has Cuba partially opened their doors to foreign investment, they have intensified their efforts to create state-run corporations, as explored above, which require trained managers to operate with a return, that is, to accumulate surplus value. Managers must go to school, the training for which begins quite early as students are tracked for various career paths based on test scores. To accommodate this need the government has dedicated more resources to training better managers to run businesses (Báez, 2004, p. 124). However, Cuba has not completely dissolved pre-1959 systems of racialized privilege, which can be seen in elite pre-university schools designed to train managers such as The Centro Vocational Lenin en Ciencias Exactas outside of Havana. These schools offer a high level of education marked by greater student autonomy where teachers act more as learning facilitators, rather than depositors of predetermined facts. It has been reported that the director of the Vocational Lenin School, when asked about why there were so few Afro-Cubans at the center, responded that change takes time (Gasperini, 2000). However, the primary role of Cuba's system of education is the creation of a productive working class. As a result, when it comes to critiquing the Cuban government's role as a capitalist engaged in the process of creating value through the external control of Cuban labor power (Báez, 2004; Gasperini, 2000; Lutjens, 1998; Mtonga, 1993; Roucek, 1964), critical inquiry seems to diminish. This state run economy requires that the state decide what is to be produced, how it is produced, whose labor produces it, what

wages will be, and how the wealth generated shall be used. As a result, labor power is externally controlled, but not for private enrichment, but for the benefit of the people. However, because the external control of ones creative capacities is dehumanizing, regardless of whose interests it serves, consent must be manufactured. The Cuban system, to my knowledge, never questions this. That is, the external control of labor power is treated as normal and natural. Cuba's system of education is designed to create this consent focusing on the development of attitudes and dispositions through Values Education (outlined below) two hours a week, similar to their US counterparts' (Allman, McLaren, & Rikowski, 2005) Civics education, to ensure consent. In other words, Cubans are expected to allow their labor power to be externally controlled to thwart the increasing external pressures to privatize, which ultimately is for the benefit of the revolution. For example, outlining Cuba's Labor Education program Gasperini (2000) notes:

The primary curriculum includes 480 hours of "labor education" over six years ... By participating in simple agricultural activities, students are expected to develop a positive attitude toward work along with attitudes of solidarity with workers. School gardens size range from one to more than 20 hectares. When schools do not have their own garden, students work in "collective gardens" in the provincial capitals ... In secondary school (grades 7 to 9), labor education represent 280 hours ... a less significant share than in primary school but still equivalent to half the time devoted to History ... Work, when appropriate to children's age, appears to have become an instrument of intellectual and social development and a sharing of responsibilities. The danger is that compulsory work may lead to ... an aversion to work. (p. 16)

Expanding on the argument just laid out, let us proceed, further answering the question: how do we know that education serves this indoctrinating function? Our first clue resides in the fact that schooling in Cuba, until the age of 16, is "compulsory," that is, mandatory/required. Because it has been widely argued from within capitalist nations, such as the US, by Marxist educators that "... the ritual of compulsory schooling serves to assist the state in the enforcement of a market society" (Gabbard, 2003. p. 71), we must look critically at the significance of the compulsory nature of Cuban education. In the following analysis I demonstrate that when labor power is externally controlled, and thus human creativity diminished, as it is in not only private capitalist nations, such as the US, but in state run market societies like Cuba, humans will naturally resist and thus must be controlled by either

force or the manipulation of ideas. In countries such as Cuba whose popular support is, in part, guaranteed by the freedoms and liberties won in The Revolution, the capacity for force as a means of social control is diminished, although not completely. Schooling, in part, serves this indoctrinating function, and therefore must be compulsory. In the following paragraphs I proceed with my analysis drawing on Marx's (1844/1978) conception of "species being" because it provides the framework through which we can begin to understand why humans naturally resist the external control of their labor power. In so doing I draw connections to what Ernesto "Ché" Guevara termed "the New Man," which was to be engendered after The Revolution, in part, through Values Education.

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* Marx (1844/1978) demonstrates, in great detail, what it is that makes humans beings in and of themselves distinct from all other species making the point that in capitalist societies—societies marked by " ... two classes—the property-owners and propertyless workers"—" ... the relationship of the worker to production" (Pp. 70-73) is a direct attack on what it is that makes humans human, that is, the ability to use our labor power to re-create the world in our own image. Marx begins his discussion explaining how workers are alienated not only from, but *by* the very products of their labor arguing that, "the worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. With the *increasing value* of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the *devaluation* of the world of men" (p. 71). If the products of ones labor have an alienating effect, then the process of production must also be alienating, reasons Marx. In other words, " ... the fact that labour is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself ... " (p. 74).

What this implies then is that when at work, when engaged in transforming the natural world from which humans " ... must remain in continuous intercourse ... " (Marx, 1844/1978, p. 75) if we are to survive, the labor of workers belongs not to those who toil, but to someone else, and therefore the individual worker does not belong to herself but to the class of property owners. As a result, workers tend to only feel freely human as creative beings when engaged in animal functions, that is, when eating, fornicating, defecating, dressing, and when at home in general, to the extent

that animal functions become human and vice versa. In short, when our labor is externally controlled, our very human-specific creative capacities, our species being, are suppressed and we become alienated from ourselves, that which we produce, and the natural world, from which life is dependent.

Marx (1844/1978) envisions communism as the solution to this contradiction, involving not only the seizure of state power, like achieved in Cuba, but also the process of re-socialization whereby men and women become humanized by taking control of their individual creative capacities for the common good. During and immediately after the Cuban Revolution, Guevara (1965/1995), interpreting Marx's work, called for the emergence of the "New Man," which he described as being motivated not by individualistic materialism, but by self-sacrifice and the moral incentives embedded therein. Because the external control over one's labor power interferes with our "species being," regardless of whose interests the value generated benefits, Cuba must therefore manufacture consent through cultural institutions such as education. Today in Cuba Values Education assumes this role through the implementation of a curriculum focused on promoting "... social cohesion by preventing internal disruption from violence, drugs, and criminality ... They teach values and attitudes aiming at consolidating internationalism, national identity and patriotism, a morality of work, solidarity and defense against external threat" (Gasperini, 2000. p. 28).

In effect, Cuba's educational system socializes students to be willing to sell their labor power as a commodity for the valorization of state capital, that is, to socially reproduce labor power (Báez, 2004; Gasperini, 2000; Lutjens, 1998; Mtonga, 1993; Roucek, 1964). However, because Values Education tends to have an indoctrinating taste to it, in times of heightened crisis, while maintaining their dedication to an independent Cuba, the Cuban people have been known to abandon the spirit of cooperation and engage in extra-legal individualistic measures to meet their basic necessities, as argued above. The Cuban system, as noted above, has nevertheless been quite successful at maintaining legitimacy, which, in my estimation, can largely be attributed to the righteousness of their just cause to maintain political and economic independence for the benefit of the Cuban people, as well as gains in health and education.

The Cuban state is quite aware that private interests cannot be trusted to uphold the social programs of The Revolution because corporations, by design, and in some nations such as the US, by law, must put the economic interests of its shareholders before those of their stakeholders, such as employees and the communities in which they function. It is therefore not surprising that the state has maintained control over this major achievement in human progress. Indeed, it has been widely publicized that in capitalist countries such as the US that the effect of neo-liberal capitalism on education has been grave. The move to privatize education has resulted in the de-funding of education and therefore an increase in illiteracy. Cuba, in an attempt to not betray the people and their Revolution, has therefore resisted the privatization of their social programs. However, the fact that education in Cuba is mandatory and follows a predetermined curriculum, it is expected that most students, with the possible exception of those who attend the elite schools, will graduate not completely satisfied as a species being. One area that we can return to is the existence of an overt patriotism within the curriculum that has tended to dominate discussions of ethnicity avoiding one of the real social concerns of many Cubans. According to Annelise Wunderlich (2005) in “Hip Hop Pushes the Limits,” referring to a young Cuban rap artist, comments:

Police harassment and discrimination are everyday experiences for many black Cubans ... For years, Castro positioned racism as a problem outside of the country. But a growing number of Afro Cubans wonder if that was just a way of displacing the racial question at home ... In school when Sarrias tried to talk about his African Ancestry, teachers called him unpatriotic for thinking of himself as something other than Cuban ... “In school they taught him about slavery, but they didn’t go into depth,” his mother says. (p. 69)

Wunderlich (2005) goes on to discuss the informal teachers Sarrias and other Afro Cuban rappers have sought out in their efforts to satisfy their human creative impulses, that is, their species being, and ultimately, the fulfillment of the revolutionary call to transform and engage. Young Cubans are not only looking to national heroes such as El Ché and José Martí, but ironically, to the US for a discourse and praxis of liberation in figures such as Malcom X, Mumia Abu-Jamal, as well as politically conscious African American rappers such as Public Enemy and Dead Prez. It is the militant Black identity in songs such as Dead Prez’ “I’m a African” and “They Schools,” that attracts Afro Cubans who live in a context they

deem is falsely described by Castro as “color-blind.” What is more, according to Wunderlich (2005), young Cubans have been taking advantage of the extraordinary privilege of learning from Black Liberationist Assata Shakur about Black history and global politics, who was granted political asylum by Cuba after being liberated from incarceration behind enemy lines in New Jersey, USA.

Lessons on Fighting Capital from Cuba: Solidarity and Marxist

Multiculturalism

I believe in the unity of all the countries in the world, in the unity of all the peoples in the world and in a free unity, a truly free unity. I am not thinking of a fusion but of a free unity of all cultures in a truly just world, in a truly democratic world, in a world where it would be possible to apply the kind of globalization that Karl Marx talked about in his time ... (Fidel Castro, 1999, p. 85)

What is it then that we can decipher from studying the Cuban system about resisting capitalism in the twenty-first century? One of the most obvious lessons we can learn, alluded to throughout this essay, and reiterated in the above quote by Castro in his concluding address to the first International Congress on Culture and Development held in Havana in June 1999 is the power of unity and international solidarity.

Throughout this paper I have made the case that Cuba’s internal humanitarian achievements have garnered international admiration and support. However, perhaps equally important has been their unwavering dedication to other oppressed peoples throughout the world that has earned them not only the respect, but also the watchful eye of the international community, which, it can be argued, has contributed to their longevity. While Castro has consistently been portrayed as a despotic dictator in the United States, his public speech and his national and international policies have reflected those of a man driven by an armed revolutionary love genuinely searching for a more just, egalitarian future beyond the destructive tendencies of capitalism. The example of Castro’s unwavering militant dedication to the People’s Revolution, and the Cuban populace’s relentless push forward in the areas of human social progress stand as a glaring example of the magnitude of what can be accomplished against the neo-liberal push to privatize public services with a continuously diminishing supply of resources in an increasingly hostile environment. In other words, Cuba should be a source of inspiration to those of us who understand the

urgency of creating a life informed by values of cooperation and mutual aid, rather than a world structured around competition and manufactured scarcity. At the same time, however, Cuba makes clear that participating in the global market, even when done as a means of providing for the people, makes them vulnerable to the inherent crises built into the capitalist system of value production. What is more, such engagement has pushed back gains in anti-racism as Cubans are pitted against Cubans in a desperate scramble for dollars. It is obvious that the external investment of foreign capital motivated by private gain is steeped in divisiveness and crises. Even Cuba's state-run businesses, informed by values of cooperation and equality, while producing many benefits when accompanied by a strong trading partner such as the former Soviet Union, depends on the external control of labor power, and is therefore somewhat dehumanizing. The diagnosis: Capitalism is not good for humanity regardless if it is state or privately run. We can therefore conclude that while the Cuban experiment has made progress toward humanization, it is still hindered by the dehumanizing nature of value-production.

Finally, and to reiterate, Cuba's 40 plus years of international solidarity, reminds those of us paying attention that there is little room in today's crisis-ridden global environment for inter-Left squabbling. Open and healthy debate of course should be encouraged for tactical and philosophical reasons, but in the spirit of solidarity. The future truly is undetermined: there is no guarantee, for example, that humanity will overcome the institutionalization of authoritarianism and the process of value production, whether state-sponsored, privately controlled, or more commonly, a mixed system of state and private domination. Marx spoke of strength within diversity providing people with a better opportunity to meet each other's needs in a socialist context. Marx was referring to a diversity of skills. Peter McLaren and Ramin Farahmandpur (2005) and Paula Allman (2001) have extended his analysis to include a diversity of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Similarly, I would add that a diversity of ideas, Marxist and anarchist to name just two, should not only be tolerated, but encouraged as evidence of an open and free movement against all forms of oppression. As we forge ahead into the unforeseeable future, whoever and wherever we are, acting as international solidarity workers, let us image and practice increasingly just, egalitarian, anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic, anti-capitalist

creative ways to regain control of our labor power in the spirit of our species being and for the betterment of all life on this planet.

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Author's Details

Curry Malott, "the roving professor," currently teaches, skateboards and rocks out in Buffalo, NY. He teaches at a number of colleges in New York state, including, recently, Brooklyn College, City College of New York, and currently at D'Youville College, Buffalo, New York.