

Cuban “Left” Opposition and Annexationists: Two Wings of the Same Eagle

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In my previous article, titled “The End of Ideology in Cuba?,” I created a fair amount of controversy in stating, “I have always maintained that the most dangerous opposition to the Cuban Revolution comes from the so-called left, and not from the openly right Plattists, or annexationists.”

The majority of readers praised the article; many others participated in the serious debate; and only a couple very strongly objected to it, mainly singling out that particular sentence.

Thus, let us deconstruct the perception. It mentions the “openly right Plattists, or annexationists.” This means that there exists in Cuba both the *openly* pro-U.S. opposition and the *hidden* annexationists. The latter comprises these so-called “leftists.” Their narratives are carefully constructed to include some (mild) criticism of the American economic, social and political systems. They do not openly accept capitalism as an alternative, as opposed to the annexationists, who quite frankly do hold the U.S. up as their model. An American who has been living in Cuba as the adopted country for a number of years wrote some thoughtful positive comments on the article and the issue of socialism versus capitalism:

“Up North, in its simplest form, you could reduce it to acceptance of the ‘lesser evil.’ Both systems are flawed, but conveniently, socialism is more flawed, so let’s simply not go there. Any changes to capitalism are purely cosmetic with the objective of avoiding socialism. Here [in Cuba], since we have already arrived at socialism, the argument presented is: capitalism has some good features, let us just add (‘sumar’) those to socialism. Since the approach is to add to (‘sumar’), rather than subtract from (‘restar’), capitalism – that is what makes the objective here reverse to the one up North. Instead of improving socialism with the goal of avoiding capitalism, their idea is to adopt capitalism’s best features, as though both systems were compatible, with interchangeable parts, which of course they are not.”

This is a very good point indeed. One Cuban whom I consulted likened it to “using the spare parts of a Timex watch to fix a Rolex.” In this analogy, of course, the Rolex is socialism, while the Timex is capitalism. Nevertheless, the pieces making up both brands are just not compatible. It may be argued by some of the so-called “left” that Cuba is introducing certain market economy measures that amount to capitalism. However, the market economy existed long before capitalism, even in the most “primitive” systems. It is not an exclusive feature of any one system: capitalism did not invent it. In contrast, Cuba’s changes amount to improving the Rolex but with *Rolex* brand parts, and not some old pieces from a totally different and incompatible brand.

Thus, the “left” opposition objectively contributes to the American Dream of restoring capitalism in Cuba, even though they of course vehemently deny this. To portray their anti-capitalist image, some of them even define themselves as “democratic-socialists” as opposed to the Cuban socialist system, which is supposedly an authoritarian-type of socialism. The U.S.-centric view of systems specializes in adding hyphenated tickets to concepts, such as *democratic-socialists*. “Democracy” is perhaps the most manipulated concept in politics, an analysis that goes beyond the scope of this short article. Suffice it to mention for the moment that, based on the U.S.-centric view, the term *democracy* serves as a code word to contradict socialism. In Cuba, when this “democracy” tag is appended by sleight-of-hand, those in the North interested in subverting the Cuban Revolution know that the individuals espousing hyphenated socialism are in their ideological camp.

These and other similar trends within the “leftist” opposition, although seemingly in contradiction with each other, have at least one feature in common. Coming from different angles, they all converge into one common mindset: the Cuban system and government are “authoritarian,” the Communist Party of Cuba and the Army are omnipresent, and the system is centralized whereby the state plays too much of a leading role (even though Cuba has been decentralizing since 2008, but on its own terms within socialism). This opposition outlook ostensibly favours socialism, but their “socialism” is so very democratic. In order to foster this image, every incident in the Cuban system is pounced upon in order to paint Cuba as authoritarian. By relying mainly on some intellectuals, the “leftists” have set their sights on atomizing and dividing Cuban society, with the goal of destroying the unity it has been building since 1959.

In contrast, other Cuban commentators supporting the openly right annexationist trend criticize the Cuban government for not going far enough or fast enough in adopting what they also call “capitalist measures.” The annexationists *openly* advocate capitalism for Cuba under the tutelage of the U.S. This tendency also blames the “authoritarian” government for holding back what they envisage as Cuba’s inevitable slide into capitalism. Thus, “democracy” is manipulated by both the so-called “leftists” and the openly pro-U.S. and capitalist right.

There is another common denominator linking these two seemingly opposite extremes. There is no doubt that in Cuba today people engage in lively discussion and debate about improving Cuba’s socialism and political system. The attitude toward the U.S. in the new and complicated post-December 17, 2014 context is, of course, tied to these controversies. These deliberations are taking place at many levels and in various circumstances in the Cuban social and political systems. Carrying on a long-standing tradition, these debates constitute a feature of Cuban political culture. If, at this time, one takes the Cuban media as an example, a range of opinion articles is increasingly being published in the official press, such as *Granma* and *Juventud Rebelde*. Some of the pieces are written by what one could call “alternative” journalists and writers, such as Iroel Sánchez, Elier Ramírez, Enrique Ubieta, Luis Toledo Sande and Esteban Morales, just to name a few. These intellectuals and many others have their own active blogs and they participate daily through social media to resist the U.S.-led cultural war.

However, when the “left” or right opposition describes Cuba for the benefit of both foreign and some domestics consumption (and make no mistake about it, their views can be found in the foreign press hostile to Cuba), they invariably applaud and highlight what they call “opposition” or “alternative” journalists. The “leftist” opposition forces, supposedly the

epitome of pluralism, cite only themselves and like-minded opponents, a very monolithic approach. This is also how the U.S. establishment media deals with debate. They cite only their own kind: a perverse consanguinity. In contrast, the real Cuban alternative intellectuals (only some of whom are mentioned above), those who work within the system for improvements, are blacklisted (or even vilified) by the “leftists.” They bestow these credentials on what they consider bona fide “alternatives,” invariably stirring up a backwash of invitations for both the “left” and right to travel to the U.S. or appear on foreign media in Cuba in exchange for delivering the goods: “Cuba is authoritarian or a dictatorship. Amen.” This quid pro quo is quite flagrant, to the extent that for a Cuban to receive these credentials from them could be considered the kiss of death.

Thus, both the “leftist” opposition and the openly right-wing annexationists are two wings of the same American eagle. One cannot underestimate their influence on some intellectual sectors in Cuban society – it would be naive to do so. However, it would also be wrong for the two wings to overestimate their appeal to Cuban society, because Cuban socialism is characterized by an exceptionally high level of political consciousness broadly accumulated over many decades. This allows Cuban revolutionaries and patriots to see through their manipulation and thus in the process further enrich the Cuban Revolution’s ideological heritage.

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