

# Questions About Cuba

[This is a letter to me from a correspondent about the status of Cuba as a socialist country, and my response. —S.H.]

Date: April 16, 2018

From: “R.P.” ...

Hello. I hope you are doing well.

I recently went to Cuba during Spring Break with a class I am a student of. I can tell you that I was amazed at what I saw given the fact that U.S. propaganda distorts the reality and progress made in Cuba and the impact of the revolution (national, anti-colonial, etc.).

But I am curious to know more whether Cuba is socialist or not. I have come across MLM people who have explained to me that it is not and in fact it is a state capitalist and not socialist [country].

I also just read one of your documents on “What is Socialism” but I am also wondering if conditions in Cuba then and now has revealed Cuba taking more steps backwards or forward. Plus, Cuba is undergoing elections because Raul is stepping down.

Please share with me any notes, insights, books, or direction so I can find this out more.

Have a great day. Peace.

—R.P.

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Date: April 20, 2018

From: Scott Harrison

Hi R.P.,

Thanks for your note! If you have written up any impressions from your recent visit to Cuba I would be glad to see them.

I continue to hold that Cuba is not really a socialist country, based on the fact that it is not really in a transitional period *away from* capitalism and towards communism—which is the essence of what real socialism is. In fact the changes these days (which are absurdly called “reforms”) are all in the gradual direction toward more “private industry” (private capitalism). And the new President of Cuba, Miguel Mario Diaz-Canel, has (according to AP reports) promised to continue that process of allowing more private businesses to get established and grow. Probably there will be no drastic changes in the near future, but the trend continues in exactly the wrong direction.

The leaders of Cuba have not been able to create a true socialist economy because—from the start—they never understood exactly what that would even mean. They were actually quite radical state-capitalists with strongly paternalist attitudes toward the people. This did lead them to do many quite positive things for the people, including impressive improvements in education and health care.

But like most people in the U.S., and like the Soviet Union during the state-capitalist period (c. 1955-1991), they tended to identify “socialism” merely with the government ownership and direction of the economy, and with having a state production plan.

Those things are indeed necessary for socialism, but the much more essential thing is for the people to be led *in mass movements* to work in their own collective interests, in the factories and in general. Thus real socialism is the sort of thing that existed in China in the 1970s especially, and requires the solid support, conscious political activity, and enthusiasm of the working class. If you do not have that, you can only have at best a temporary form of state-operated industry that will eventually decay back into outright monopoly capitalism.

Socialism—real socialism—is just not possible without the genuine enthusiasm of the working class for it. This means they *cannot* merely view themselves as employees in state factories, doing what they are told to do, no matter how paternalistic the rulers of society are. “I only just work here” is simply not the economic basis for true socialism. That is the attitude of workers in a capitalist workplace.

But Cuba certainly still is an anti-imperialist country strongly opposed to U.S. domination and intervention there. However, even that seems to be breaking down a little bit, as when deals were made with the Obama administration—largely because of the weak state-run economy in Cuba that has required concessions even to their arch-enemy, U.S. imperialism.

At the present time more such concessions are on hold, as Trump increases the hostility of the U.S. towards Cuba. But the course that Cuba has long been on means that a return to such concessions eventually, and the further deterioration of the Cuban economy, is almost a certainty.

It’s all very sad, but the Cuban Revolution is now pretty clearly living on borrowed time.

Scott Harrison

[End]