

Title: A Transnational Battle of Ideas led by Cuban and American Youth to Combat Disillusionment, Artificial Isolation, and Mutual Misunderstandings

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I would like to thank CIPI for the invitation to this prestigious event filled with esteemed academics, diplomats, and experts and I am honored to have the opportunity to speak. I hope I can aid this panel in providing you all with an insight into what at least one young American is thinking.

I would like to begin by thanking the older generations who have fought to keep the dream alive of a world based on international solidarity and not one based on the continuous and increasing exploitation of the Earth and each other. But more than anything, I thank the Cuban Revolution and those that continue to carry it forward for showing that this dream is not a fairy tale. For activists, it is our job to provide alternatives and new forms of collective organization and the survival of the Cuban Revolution has kept this dream alive for the whole American continent, if not the whole world. I hope that we can give back to the Cuban people, who have given so much in their unwavering commitment to internationalism.

The younger generations in the United States are increasingly disillusioned, amid permanent uncertainty of their futures, and their futures' very existences, with the political and economic landscape in the U.S. As a result they are more and more active in progressive, and increasingly anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist, movements and organizations. We are in an explosive moment where youth are forming and rejuvenating mass movements in large numbers while also leading the so-called "union boom" and pushing for more democratic unions based on class struggle not class collaboration. More and more young workers are identifying as working class and rejecting the mass media's phrasing of "middle class". Many are slowly unlearning the false narratives told about their neighbors and themselves while simultaneously unlearning the lies told about the struggles for liberation and of the working-class around the world. Most importantly, young Americans are discovering more and more that their struggles in their workplaces or their universities are part of a shared fight for

humanity and against the apathy and dehumanization that has thus far allowed them to ignore the plights of their homeless neighbor or the genocide against those in other countries. However, in the United States there is a long way to go to expand this recognition of humanity and condemnation of violent 'excesses' against the oppressed to acting in solidarity with the oppressed. Cuba plays an incredibly key role in this process for many working-class Americans as they see their fights, from peace to healthcare access, reflected in the Cuban Revolution which has been consistently smeared by the U.S. government.

A recent welcome and symbolic development in the United States is the recent mobilizations of hundreds of thousands of people led by American youth in support of Palestine. A generational break from unwavering support of Israel. However, the overall reaction has unsurprisingly been suppression and repression from universities trying to shut down pro-Palestine student organizing to Republican and Democratic officials pressuring Cooper Caraway, a state union leader, to resign after accurate comments at a Palestine solidarity rally such as "Our enemies are the politicians who lock our people up and leave them to sleep on the streets. Our enemies are not in Gaza. Our comrades are in Gaza." Working-class internationalism and unity have always been red lines for mass movements drawn by the U.S. government because this fundamentally threatens the ideological grounds for their imperialist project and power. It is this fear of unity, or should I say connection between our peoples, and a good example that are the reasons that

the U.S. has continued its blockade on Cuba. Their long-term hegemonic power comes before profit or any business interests. If their military dominance and cultural hegemony is maintained then profit is secured in the long-term. I believe that it is likely the U.S. will not lift the blockade before the day it becomes impossible to enforce either due to a changed world order, or hopefully due to a drastically changed domestic situation combined with powerful unofficial relations between Americans and Cubans.

While the blockade has not had the ultimate intended effect of regime change in Cuba, it has had a large effect on Cuba. U.S. economic warfare has had a devastating, cumulative effect on the Cuban economy and is the primary factor in the current

economic crisis and uncertainties. Combined with American cultural influences and

active, ideological subversion the blockade has created a noticeable amount of youth disillusionment within Cuba which can be seen either in personal conversations or in decreased participation in youth mass organizations and events. American cultural influences have created images of an America that does not exist in the minds of many young Cubans as a potential alternative while individualism and consumerism are also on the rise.

Yet these false images can only be maintained by the artificial separation of the American and Cuban people, which is the prevention of large-scale cultural exchange and the forming of personal friendships and direct channels of communication, that would dispel falsities both ways. This also allows the U.S. to maintain its many lies about Cuba, such as that Cuba's inspirational international medical brigades are human trafficking, as well as helping the U.S. maintain the lies it tells about itself, such as the American Dream, which I've found some young Cubans believe in more than all the other American students in my study abroad program combined. I was shocked in my first week in Cuba to be told by some young Cubans that the blockade doesn't exist among other obviously false things. Another shock was when I asked a very small number of university students their views of the United States and about half said "U.S. capitalism, in a good way

." Yet the most absurd thing I heard in that first week or two from some young Cubans was that the police in Cuba are worse than in the United States. This brought a large degree of pushback from all the other Americans who overheard that, as there is no way to believe this falsity, or any of the others for that matter, if one has an understanding of the United States. These conversations and more took place in casual, unplanned exchanges, from conversations in class to chat on the way to sports fields. It became increasingly clear to me that it is of vital importance for young Cubans to hear directly from young Americans about our personal experiences and struggles in the belly of the beast instead of through American shows and pop music, which it seems to me I have watched and listened to less than thousands of young Cubans. It is of utmost importance to the left in the United States to help wage this ideological battle both in the U.S. and in Cuba through combatting U.S.

propaganda. When most Americans think of Cuba, they too have many false ideas of the Cuban realities caused by the American mass media, which has also blocked accurate understandings of their own country and the world.

While disillusionment has an economic, material basis, we must not be crude

materialists and remember that it also has a strong ideological component powered by hegemonic American cultural influence. The war on Cuba is not just an economic war.

There also exists a 'blockade of hearts,' as a comrade in the UJC said to me yesterday, which prevents large-scale cultural exchanges which could rectify misunderstandings and bring our peoples closer together and this 'blockade of hearts' thus simultaneously allows the spread of misunderstandings and disillusionment by the U.S. mass media.

Cuba has not lost its sense of internationalism, whether seen through continued international fight against COVID-19 or the recent march past the U.S. embassy in support of the people of Palestine. Not has Cuba lost the value they put on every human life despite a profound economic crisis. Most young Cubans, even the very misinformed, have not abandoned these principles. These two principles are united in an ideological struggle that everybody, specifically the oppressed, has the right to a long life, not be shortened for somebody else's consumption or profit. It is this fight for humanity that has made many young Americans feel solidarity with the Cuban project, yet it is important young Cubans simultaneously understand and feel solidarity with our struggles within the U.S. It is a battle of ideas we just wage together.

Not all visits from Americans have the same potential for positive long-term impact on the improvement of unofficial relations, and subsequently official relations, between Cuba and the United States. While the goal is mass cultural exchange, the fight against the legal or cultural restrictions preventing such exchange will be led in the U.S. by young, working-class progressives. To best aid this increase in exchanges, it must be recognized that unions are the heart of the organized American working class and the increasing participation, influence and leadership of unions by young Americans has great potential to build Cuban solidarity. We need more progressive U.S. union

members, leaders and rank-and-file unionists, to come to Cuba as part of a pre-existing commitment to labor internationalism, or to arrive in Cuba with union consciousness and

develop a class consciousness that makes Cuban solidarity a permanent part of every union's work. By building more bonds of solidarity between young American unionists and young Cubans, we can best build long-term relationships of friendship and solidarity, and work together to combat disillusionment, misunderstandings, and end the economic and cultural blockade on Cuba by the United States.