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## ***Radical Individualism and Profit vs. Human Solidarity: The United States And Cuba On Ideology***

The economic and political structure of capitalism requires “an ideology, a consciousness, a way in which the citizenry can be taught to accept the system as it is. This ideology has many branches but one root, the maintenance and enhancement of the capitalist economic system. The elements of the dominant political ideology include: privileging individualism over community; conceptualizing society as a brutal state of nature controlled only by countervailing force; acceptance of the idea that humans are at base greedy; and, finally, the belief that the avariciousness of human nature requires police force and laws at home and armies overseas.”

### **The Cuban Alternative**

The webinar “International Conference for the Normalization of US-Cuba Relations,” March 21 and 22 presented panelists who discussed the status of United States/Cuban relations, the contemporary Cuban economy, US and Canadian solidarity movements with Cuba, and the consequences of Cuban medical advances for the fight against the corona virus domestically and internationally.

What figured prominently in the discussion was the history of Cuba’s prioritization of the fulfillment of the health care needs of its people and Cuba’s commitment to the health and wellbeing of people all across the globe. From the early days of the revolution, Cuba committed itself to educating its population and providing free and effective health care. In the spirit of international solidarity, Cuba began sending medical professionals to

countries all across the globe. Its first medical mission, 56 health care professionals, was sent in 1963 to Algeria after the French were ousted.

Since 1963, 450,000 Cuban health care professionals have served in 160 countries serving six million people, according to Dr. Jorge Delgado Bustillo, Director of the Central Medical Collaboration Unit (UCCM). In addition, Cuban tropical medicine has led to the discovery of Interferon Alpha 2b to treat dengue fever, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV. Currently Interferon Alpha 2b is being used in China and elsewhere to reduce the effects of the corona virus among those with severe cases. The medication has been produced since 2003 by a joint Chinese/Cuban corporation called ChangHeber. The development of the medication has its roots in Cuban/US/Finnish collaboration going back to the early 1980s and the establishment of the Cuban Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (CIGB) in 1986 (Helen Yaffe, “Cuba’s Contribution to Combatting COVID-19,”Counterpunch, March 17, 2020).

Today Interferon Alpha 2b is being used in China and there have been requests from Italy, Spain, and countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to receive Cuban doctors as well as the anti-viral medication. In addition, there are currently Cuban medical teams working in 58 countries. The Cuban Ambassador to the United Nations, Ana Silvia Rodriguez, suggested at the webinar cited above, that now was the time to put ideology aside and work for international cooperation.

### **The United States Rhetoric About Overcoming the Crisis: The Politics of Contagion**

At the March 21, press conference update on the status of the COVID-19 in the United States President Trump chose to use the crisis to celebrate his administration’s efforts to combat the spread of the disease. As he does often on various issues, the president claimed that the government response to the crisis was more comprehensive and successful than any efforts ever to combat threats to the health and safety of the United States. President Trump, Vice-President Pence, and other members of the administration political team emphasized five enduring themes deeply imbedded in US ideology.

First, the President said the explicit causes of the crisis were China (“the Chinese virus”) and the flow of immigrants. Second, the disease will be conquered first and foremost in the world as a result of American exceptionalism. The US has the best medical researchers, administrators, and health care professionals. The US, he implied, has won wars, led the way in research, and is the leader of the world. Third, the mobilization of

the nation's resources to defeat the current contagion included the active role of the faith community, referring to productive meetings the administration had with religious leaders. Fourth, and undergirding all the rest, was the centrality of market solutions to this serious challenge to the nation's health. It is the corporate sector that now will produce more masks, more virus tests, and ultimately the vaccines that will control and eliminate the disease. Finally, the American people are contributing to this national effort by staying home, not congregating in numbers greater than ten people, and standing six feet apart from each other. The community mobilizations occurring around the country to bring food to the needy, to house the homeless, and to provide social support for the fearful were only fleetingly mentioned.

### **The Difference: The Choice**

"We are all afraid but we have a revolutionary duty to fulfill, so we take out fear and put it to one side," Leonardo Fernandez, 68, an intensive care specialist, told Reuters late on Saturday shortly before his brigade's departure. He who says he is not afraid is a superhero, but we are not superheroes, we are revolutionary doctors."

– Nelson Acosta, "Cuban Doctors Head to Italy to Battle Coronavirus," Reuters, March 22, 2020, [Reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-coronavirus-cuba/cuban-doctors-head-to-italy-to-battle-coronavirus-idUSKBN200306).

This statement by a Cuban doctor expresses profound commitment to human solidarity. The duty of the Cuban doctor is to help persons in need. The very idea of revolution is solidarity, recognizing the worth of all people, participating with others for the common good, self-sacrifice, and most of all, putting principles of solidarity above profit or any sense of superiority.

The coronavirus crisis and how the US and Cuba respond to the crisis illustrate two paths humankind can take for a better future. It is for all of us to decide. Reports from around the US indicate that citizens are choosing the Cuban path, finding ways to give support to those in need in their communities. These grassroots efforts could be the basis of broader changes in policy and institutions in the future.

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