



Down with embargoes

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[1]

The pandemic of the new SARC-CoV2 coronavirus has re-launched the issue of the US embargo on Cuba. Several people and associations are calling for its elimination.

On Friday April 3, the official newspaper Granma published an appeal from 230 political parties entitled "Cooperation, peace and world stability". Among the many responses to this appeal is "Thanks Cuba, no more embargo", signed by Susanna Camusso, head of international politics of the Italian General Confederation of Labor (CGIL), who a week earlier had written something similar on the blog of the Italy-Cuba Association.

Susanna takes as its starting point the news of the suspension of the sale of respirators and fans in Cuba. Among other things, she underlines the behavior of the doctors of the Cuban International Brigade who are in hospitals in Italy to fight the virus. He adds that these sanctions do not concern the rulers or forms of government, but the people and the health welfare that has been so difficult to obtain. He ends up inviting his country to raise his voice to say enough about the embargo.



There is something that offers no doubts and on which we all agree: the suspension of the embargo is a necessity to get out of the crisis in which Cuba is plunged; a crisis compounded by the devastating effects of Covid-19.

The question cannot be reduced to the biblical legend of David against Goliath, it is much more complex. Beyond ideologies, there are factors that cannot be overlooked in order to formulate an objective judgment, which forces us to start from a brief look at the background of the crisis in which Cuba is plunged.

In 1959 the revolutionaries, who became a source of law - without popular consultation - replaced the 1940 constitution with the fundamental law of the Cuban state; with these statutes the prime minister -without being elected- assumed the powers of the head of government and the council of ministers assumed the functions of the congress. Together with the first popular measures, the government concentrated power in the hands of the leader of the revolution, nationalized ownership, monopolized the media, education, culture and the concept of citizen disappeared.

From that position, Fidel Castro announced a program that "will significantly increase agricultural production, double the consumption capacity of the peasant population and Cuba will erase its terrible figure of chronic unemployment, reaching a higher standard of living for the people than any other nation"; [1] a program that has received the support of the vast majority of Cubans, including those who write these lines.

With the elimination of the owners, the interest in the results of production and services has disappeared. From that moment on, the combination of inefficiency, the attempts to export the experience to other countries, the contrast with the United States, the lack of knowledge of the laws that govern economic phenomena, topped with a high dose of voluntarism, it has transformed the Cuban economy - one of the strongest in the region - into a factor of poverty.

The result forced the regulated distribution of basic products, which for its duration - almost six decades - the "rationing card" constitutes a record in the history of humanity. Today the government is again discussing the issue of including basic necessities in the card, because their existence does not allow for a minimum per capita distribution. The Minister of Internal Trade, Betsy Díaz, admitted that he did not have enough to guarantee a soap per capita. [2] And the President, Miguel Díaz-Canel confirmed it when he said: there are products that we can sell in a regulated way, but there are others that we cannot sell in the way that people ask, simply because there are no quantities needed. [3]

Despite the productive inefficiency, the Cuban government gambled for 30 years, while not being able to finance them, it also showed some results in healthcare, education and sport, until, first in 1982, it had to renegotiate the debt with the Club of Paris because he could not pay, and then, in 1989, the loss of the Soviet subsidies that supported it ruined everything: the GDP fell sharply by 34%; a drop that has not yet been possible to recover.

The changes introduced between 1993-1994 and then in 2008, due to their timid and late nature, have failed, forcing the country to depend on Venezuela's subsidies and on voices such as hiring professionals, family remittances and tourism : fragile and insufficient to form the country's economic base.

Finally, given the desire not to change, in 2019 the Communist Party created a Commission of deputies for the drafting of this Constitution, in which the main obstacles that caused the failure were again approved: single party, predominance of state property, absence of political, civil and economic freedoms, prohibition for Cubans to be entrepreneurs in their country and to freely contract with foreign companies.

The request to suspend the embargo, I repeat, is an essential necessity that must unite us all. The question is: if the main cause, that is, the internal obstacles mentioned, is preserved, what is the point of asking only for the elimination of the external embargo?

If the Cuban government had the political will and proceeded to remove these obstacles, it would dismantle the arguments of the US embargo. It would be a gesture not towards the "enemy" but towards the people, who, as Susanna says, are the ones who suffer from it. That opportunity was lost during the administration of Barack Obama, who issued six packages of measures to ease the embargo, while Cuba said it had nothing to change, laying bare the desire to prevent Cuban emancipation. .

The issue of medical brigades, in relation to what has been said so far, has two sides. On the one hand, the Cuban health system creates a large number of doctors, which allows it to send tens of thousands of people to the most remote corners of the planet; an admirable and applaudible behavior that projects a positive image to the world.



On the other hand, these doctors do not go to missions when they consider it, but when the state decides; their salaries are collected by the state, which retains about three quarters of them; they cannot travel with their families and if they decide to leave the missions they are considered deserters and are prohibited from returning home for eight years. In other words, they don't come and go alone, but as part of an army.

Cuban wages are insufficient. The aspirations to buy, or build or improve a house, or buy an electrical apparatus or a means of locomotion are impossible to achieve; while in the mission, that quarter of what they receive from their wages can represent two years of wages in Cuba. Under these conditions, humanism and solidarity are mixed with needs. Furthermore, doctors, like the rest of the Cubans, cannot form independent trade unions or professional associations to defend their interests; which should be unacceptable for a CGIL representative.

Today, due to an unprofitable economic model and the absence of political will to change it, the export of professional services has become the country's main source of income. For these services, the government has received billions of dollars a year. Cuba could also increase the presence of doctors abroad, but not in conditions of modern slavery or to avoid the structural changes that the country needs. With that turn, the doctors, the contracting countries and the Cuban state would emerge victorious and the confused mix of solidarity and need would disappear.

Reform including ownership of the means of production is needed; a regulated market economy; a new investment law that provides Cubans with equal rights; a new labor code that approves free unionization and trade union autonomy, in accordance with ILO Convention 87 on freedom of association; training of small and medium-sized enterprises in all production and service sectors; the promotion of cooperatives based on the principles established by the International Cooperative Association; the transfer of land from usufruct to property; the elimination of centralized collection of agricultural products (acopio), exports and imports; ratification of international human rights pacts, which are binding.

Therefore, Susanna and all of us who want the embargo to be lifted must also call for the implementation of these measures to eliminate the internal embargo. This would open the doors of the financial markets, attract more investors and arouse the interest that does not exist today for the results of the work. The external embargo, as happened in Vietnam, would fall under its own weight, since it would lose the base that supports it.

[1] L M. Buch Rodríguez. Gobierno Revolucionario Cubano: Génesis y primeros pasos, p. 80

[2] Diario Granma, 4 de febrero de 2020, p. 3

[3] Diario Granma, 28 de marzo de 2020, p.4

Palabras claves: [Embargo](#) [2]

[COVID-19](#) [3]

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