Two Worlds, Two Models of Life: Solidarity vs. Money

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The threat is clear and direct: any country that accepts Cuban doctors who save lives without charging patients —regardless of whether they are rich or poor— will be sanctioned. Any country that allows Cuban doctors to enter its most underprivileged and abandoned areas, to share their lives with the population and practice preventive medicine as a revolutionary calling —preventing illnesses rather than profiting from them— will be sanctioned. It does not matter that they do not discuss politics, that they accompany priests, pastors, or shamans in their gatherings or liturgies, that they cooperate with local authorities, and that they respect local traditions. If they do not demand high salaries and special privileges, if they do not see medicine as a lucrative business, if they talk about patients instead of clients, and do not position themselves as a superior class, then the country that welcomes them will be sanctioned.

I have seen them travel in small boats along the Orinoco River in Venezuela or the Coco River in Central America, in fragile planes over

the Guatemalan jungle; hike for hours up mountains to reach remote and sparsely populated villages in Quiché, sleep in huts, in rooms with only the bare essentials, without electricity. I have held candles while they helped a woman give birth in a mud-and-earth-floored adobe hut, listening to the first cry of a newborn whose mother, in gratitude, chose to name the child after the doctor who made the miracle possible. I have seen Cuban doctors and nurses dressed as *"astronauts"* —not to ascend into space on rockets whose cost could feed and heal millions of people— but to *"travel"* to the hell on Earth created by human indifference, where Ebola, then an almost unknown disease, was killing poor communities in West Africa in chains of death, as well as unprepared doctors. While first-world physicians either fled or demanded exorbitant pay, the Cubans arrived. I saw them expose themselves in the wealthy north of Italy when the COVID-19 pandemic established its temporary epicenter there —while its powerful neighbors abandoned it— bringing with them the expertise gained during the Ebola crisis.

But Africans die of malaria, tuberculosis, cholera, and AIDS, and thousands of Cuban healthcare workers are fighting for their lives across almost every country on the continent, training specialists in Africa, Asia, and Latin America who will one day replace them. That, of course, must be forbidden. These are doctors and nurses willing to travel to the most remote corners of the planet at a moment's notice to provide aid after an earthquake, typhoon, or hurricane, or during an epidemic —regardless of whether the government requesting help is a friend or foe, whether it has diplomatic ties with Cuba or not— an undeniably bad example. Trump arrogantly warned that any leaders who accept these doctors, as well as their families, will lose their U.S. visas; he then announced a 25% tariff on products from those countries. The system cannot tolerate the existence of people who embrace solidarity voluntarily, because that would undermine the most fundamental principle of capitalism: take care of yourself and not your neighbor, because success and happiness are measured in money. If they do not consider themselves heroes, then what are they? The only plausible explanation is that they are slaves. But something does not add up —why do their mothers, spouses, children, and even their

neighbors speak of them with pride? Pride in their enslavement?

For decades, Cuba did not receive a cent. On the contrary, it put its scarce resources at the service of international solidarity. Internationalist healthcare workers received a stipend, often provided by the Cuban government itself. Not even the military recruits serving in Angola in the 1970s and 1980s were forced to go —they went voluntarily to defend Angola's independence. If voluntarism was a fundamental principle in the Cuban army, it was even more so in the *"army in white coats."* Internationalism, both internal and external solidarity, is a core value of the new society that Cuba is building. I remember in 1998, when Fidel reactivated this noble tradition in response to Hurricane Mitch in Central America and Hurricane Georges in Haiti, serving a dual purpose: saving lives in affected countries and rekindling the revolutionary sensitivity of those exercising solidarity. The neoliberal Nicaraguan health minister under President Arnoldo Alemán sent a letter to her Cuban counterpart with unusual demands.

I read a copy of the original letter. *"Given our budgetary constraints,"* the neoliberal minister wrote, *"we require that the brigade bring its own food and supplies for their stay in the country; on our part, we can only provide transportation to the designated areas. I must stress that our request is urgent, and we anxiously await your response."* In the left margin of the document was Fidel's directive to the Cuban health minister, handwritten by his office chief: *"Contact the minister tomorrow and tell her verbatim that we will proceed to send the six medical brigades, with the exact specifications, equipment, and conditions she has requested, within the next 48 hours."* In another corner, emphatically: *"They must leave by Saturday at the latest."* For years, the medicines used by Cuban doctors in many of the *"dark corners of the world"* were sent from the rebellious island.

After the fall of Eastern European socialism, and with it, almost all of Cuba's foreign trade, the country sought to triangulate its solidarity efforts with organizations or nations that could fund them. Others had the money; Cuba had the most important resource: knowledge and the will of its men and women to save lives. *"Our country does not drop*

bombs on other peoples," Fidel recalled in 1998. *"We do not send thousands of planes to bomb cities; our country does not possess nuclear weapons, chemical weapons, or biological weapons. The tens of thousands of scientists and doctors in our country have been trained to save lives."* Cuban internationalists would receive a slightly higher stipend from the WHO, the PAHO, or countries like Brazil or South Africa, and their service would be better compensated in oil-rich nations with the ability to pay. But the essence remained the same: solidarity.

After decades of unconditional service, even under the most brutal blockade, Cuba eventually began to receive compensation from those nations, which it used to sustain its expensive and deteriorating national healthcare system. And imperialism seeks to prevent it. Two worlds, two opposing understandings of happiness and success: The American way of life and the infinite pride of Cuba. In this *"war of the worlds"* (solidarity vs. money), which is not interplanetary —though the quality of life gap between some cities in the North and others in the South might suggest otherwise— there is a crucial attempt to strangle an economy that prioritizes solidarity. To the 243 additional measures reinforcing the blockade against Cuba imposed by Trump in his first term, Marco Rubio devises new methods of economic strangulation to advance his political career and personal wealth. If saving lives could bring Cuba additional income, then it is preferable for those *"useless beings"* who never mattered in the statistics to die.

"Dozens of thousands of Cuban doctors have provided internationalist services in the most remote and inhospitable places," Fidel continued in that historic speech, appealing to the most basic human decency. *"Doctors, not bombs; doctors, not smart weapons."* The honorable Caribbean nations have once again humiliated little Marco, representative of a declining empire; in response to threats, they have reaffirmed their support and gratitude to Cuba. Nothing will crush the sense of justice. Nothing will erase or prevent the solidarity that the Cuban Revolution instilled in its people.

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