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To my compañerxs on the Left

A Reaction to the Death of Fidel

Enrique Guerrero-López

November 27, 2016

With deaths and anniversaries there's often a tendency to remember figures and history in a one sided way but as Enrique Guerrero-López reminds us the left should aspire to move beyond simplistic and uncritical narratives to understand them in their complexity – a perspective often missing when looking at the legacy of Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution. Guerrero-López is a member of Black Rose/Rosa Negra in the South and Cuban American.

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We have an unfortunate tendency to view countries through the prism of their rulers, often obscuring the varied contributions of those “from below.” In Miami, people are dancing in the streets, celebrating Fidel’s death, while many segments of the US Left are clearing their throat for a full-throttle, “Que viva Fidel!”

This two-tone caricature has crippled our ability to grapple with the beautiful, tragic, and challenging contradictions of

Cuba's history and current condition, not to mention Fidel's own checkered legacy. While Fidel looms large in Cuba's history, Cuba is not Fidel and the Cuban Revolution cannot and should not be reduced to one man or one movement for that matter.

To my compañerxs on the Left, who rightfully denounce the lack of militancy in the US labor movement, should we celebrate a regime that systematically gutted independent labor activity on the island, banning strikes, persecuting union militants, and converting unions into a largely passive state agency?

To my compañerxs on the Left, who rightfully denounce racism and white supremacy in the US, should we be celebrating a regime that declared racism "over" on the island after the revolution, making it a taboo subject for public debate/discussion for decades, a regime that prevented Afro-Cubans from organizing independently, both politically and religiously, while fostering an ideology of anti-blackness?

To my compañerxs on the left, who rightfully struggle for queer liberation, should we be celebrating a regime that rounded up queer folks and placed them in concentration camps?

To my compañerxs on the Left, who rightfully fight to free political prisoners in the US, should we celebrate a regime that has imprisoned political activists to the left of Castro?

To my compañerxs on the Left, who rightly struggle for free, universal education in the US, should we celebrate an educational regime that privileges those with more resources to replicate existing power imbalances, a system that even state apologists like Afro-Cuban Esteban Morales argues "educates Cubans to be white"?

To my compañerxs on the Left, who rightfully fight for a world beyond capitalism, should we celebrate or defend a regime that has gone from a soviet-style one-party dictatorship to a Sino-Vietnamese form of state capitalism?

To those Cubans dancing in the street in Miami:

Right-wing Cubans in Miami bemoan dictatorship on the island as they embrace the two-party dictatorship of capital at home.

Right-wing Cubans in Miami denounce the lack of "civil liberties" on the island, demanding the release of political prisoners as police kill black people with impunity in the US and Mumia and other political prisoners remain behind bars in the world's most populated prison system.

Right-wing Cubans in Miami crow at the lack of "freedom of speech" in Cuba as protesters in the US are confined to "free speech zones", indigenous water protectors are being violently repressed by the police, and our communications infrastructure becomes increasingly concentrated in fewer corporate hands than anytime in the country's history.

Right-wing Cubans critique the lack of "opportunity" in Cuba while in the US social mobility is in stark decline as the wealthiest 10% of American capitalists own 75% of all the wealth.

Right-wing Cubans denounce the violence of the Castro regime from the privileged perch of the largest empire in world history, in defense of the US state, which, according to Martin Luther King Jr., was (and still is) the "largest purveyor of violence in the world".

There is much to celebrate about Cuba and its history – from Aponte and salsa to baseball and Las Krudas – but Fidel, from my perspective, should be understood, not celebrated.