



## Education in Revolutionary Cuba: An Overview

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“A revolution cannot be conceived without education; neither can progress be conceived without education; a splendid future for the Cuban nation cannot be conceived without education; the improvement of all aspects of life cannot be conceived without education.”

Fidel Castro Ruz.

(August 16, 1961, Speech during the summary of the workers' literacy assembly, in Charles Chaplin Theater).



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In 1953, Fidel Castro Ruz faced a trial after his first armed attempt to overthrow Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship. During his self-defense in front of the court that judged him, he denounced the problem of education as a main one in Cuba. The text resulting from his self-defense would become the Program of the revolution that finally defeated Batista in 1959. That is why, from the very beginning, special attention was paid to education, manifested in the first revolutionary

steps, such as the Law of Teaching Nationalization and the transformation of military garrisons into schools. In this context, the eradication of illiteracy was of the essence to pave the way for a fairer society. The scientific, technical, social, and economic development to which the revolution aspired demanded educational progress. It was necessary to teach the entire population how to write and read.

The Literacy Campaign was a feat indeed, because it was carried out within one year, 1961, involving about 260 thousand citizens as facilitators of the campaign. That very same year, Cuba faced a military invasion organized by the United States aimed at overthrowing the nascent revolution,

whereas groups of counterrevolutionaries, also supported by the United States, fought a war in several Cuban mountains for the same purpose. Those groups murdered teachers and farmers taking part in the Literacy Campaign. As a result of the Campaign, the illiteracy rate was reduced to less than 4 percent, the lowest rate in Latin America and one of the lowest rates in the world. Over 700

000 adults were taught how to write and read. In the ceremony held on the Revolution Square on December 22, 1961, the main leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro Ruz, announced various offers for young participants in the literacy brigades and Cubans in general to keep studying.

Throughout the first years after 1959, a true educational revolution was carried out. The first results were a significant reduction of illiteracy, the granting of numerous scholarships, the creation of special education, education for adults, and the The Law of Teaching Nationalization was passed in 1961, which put an end to unfair privileges that hurt and divided the population attending schools. Free universal education was established as a citizen right and a



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state duty, focusing on the cultural, technical, and social needs of the nation.

The educational policy of a country sets the guidelines, principles, and contents for educating the new generations. It includes objectives put into practice in the educational system, composed of a group of school institutions in an educational network, organized on levels that students go through. The Cuban Educational Policy was set in the Program of the First Congress of the Communist Party. This policy is aimed at educating the youth and all the people based on a scientific view of the world, with historical and dialectical materialism as its philosophical foundations. It is also aimed at thoroughly developing people's intellectual, physical, and spiritual capacities, while promoting an appreciation of culture, art, and humanistic values such as solidarity, equity, and social justice.

The Cuban State, assisted by the mass organizations (of students at different levels, women, workers, or citizens in the neighborhoods), aims to carry out an integral, systematic, and participatory learning-teaching process, based on principles such as universality and equity of education, study and experiential learning, involvement of the entire society in school tasks, co-education, and free education. Education is mandatory on the island up to 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

The National System of Education of the Republic of Cuba is organized as a set of subsystems organically interconnected at all levels and types of education. Those subsystems are the following: Pre-school Education, General Polytechnical and Labor Education, Special Education, Technical and Professional Education, Adult Education, Higher Education, and Training and Improvement of Teaching Personnel.

As to the role of professional teachers and professors, they must fulfill three main responsibilities, that is, training in didactics and teaching, educating, and doing research.

After 1959, several programs have been implemented to train educators in Cuba. As of 1962, Schools for Primary Teachers were created, as part of a program known as Minas-Topes-Tarará, which included 5 years of study. In 1964, Pedagogical Institutes were founded affiliated with universities. In the early 1970s, schools were created in the provinces to train primary teachers and educators of day care centers; they would join those schools after finishing their sixth grade. In 1976, the program was shortened to 4 years, to be joined after ninth grade, and the name was changed into Pedagogical Schools.

As a result of the economic crises starting in the 1990s, the education system was hit by teachers leaving for other sectors of the economy that offered better wages. That is why the country had to resort to emergency programs to train teachers as of 2000-2001, primary school (1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade) teachers first, then junior high school (known in Cuba as secondary school, from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade) professors. The

programs included a year of intensive training; afterwards, they would start teaching while continuing their studies as educators. In this context, the Municipal University Centers were founded to facilitate the access to B.A.s in Primary and Pre-School Education. In the year 2000, new Schools for Art Instructors were created to strengthen the field of amateur art that had also been severely hit by the economic crisis.

The emergency programs came to an end in 2009 and Pedagogical Schools were reopened in 2010-2011 to train primary school teachers, educators of day care centers, and teachers of special education. In 2013-2014, the specialty of primary English teachers was created.

An alternative to tackle the shortness of teachers was the use of TV classes, especially addressed to junior high school. The classes were displayed by General Integral Professors in the classroom. The professors in charge of producing the TV classes would create the scripts and prepare guidelines, summaries, and clarifying notes for the General Integral Professors to use in class.

Afterwards, proposed by Fidel Castro, the Educational Channel was founded, with TV programs aimed at different levels of the educational system and the improvement of teachers' work. "University for All" classes were also shown on TV, with different subjects of interest for the population in general. Two years later, Education Channel 2 was founded to reinforce the educational programs of Cuban Television. These two channels permitted the continuation of the teaching-learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic. During lockdown, students at different levels received their lessons remotely aided by the two educational channels. Today, in the face of a fuel crisis, classes in the classroom and remote options like television and Internet platforms are combined.

At the senior high school level (known as pre-university schools, from 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade), Cuba has a network of vocational pre-university schools focusing on sciences and other areas; these schools are famous for their quality. At the university level, the Caribbean island has about 50 universities, with dozens of majors, including medicine, engineering, pedagogy, exact and natural sciences, as well as social sciences and humanities. To access the university, which is free of charge from undergraduate to doctorate level, students must pass entry exams of Mathematics, Spanish, and Cuban History. The results of these exams are combined with the pre-university grades, and a ranking list is made. According to the needs of the country and the resources available, the Ministry of Higher Education allocates a certain number of positions to each province for the applicants to study the different majors available. The positions are granted according to the ranking list and the students application preferences. It is significant that each university graduate has the right to a job related to their studies. The State must guarantee it by law. The people that cannot access the university through entry examinations

after high school have other opportunities later as workers. Some majors are offered to them using different variants of study.

In conclusion, the achievements of Cuban education are essentially due to its universal and gratuitous nature, as well as the holistic approach to it, managed institutionally and systemically by the State. Over the last three decades, Cuban education, together with the whole society, has faced difficulties related to deep economic crises, among other factors. The scarcity of resources, socioeconomic problems, and low wages have taken a toll on the educational system. However, its strengths still allow Cuban education to stand out in the Global South.

## FOR AN IMMEDIATE TOTAL UNCONDITIONAL CEASEFIRE IN GAZA

**The only progressive demand in the genocidal war being waged by Israel on the people of Gaza is for a total ceasefire. Nothing less will do. A total ceasefire will, first of all, stop the wanton, rampaging slaughter by the IDF of defenceless men, women and children in Gaza, enable the rebuilding of health, education, residential and other infrastructure in Gaza, and allow for a long-term peace process to be initiated.**

Or, as Jean Shaoul put it in an article on 24 November: “The demand must be for an immediate end to the genocide of the Palestinians, repudiating Zionism and advocating the creation of a multinational state with full equality for its Palestinian and Jewish citizens as part of a United Socialist States of the Middle East.”

However, there is slim chance of a permanent ceasefire, particularly given the brazenly stated aims of Netanyahu and so many other criminals in the Israel government for the total destruction of Palestine. It is well-known that the Zionification of Palestine is a non-negotiable goal of the Israeli rulers, and that it involves the twin-strategy of annihilation and “transfer,” where “transfer” means expulsion of the Palestinians from their homeland without the option of return. In fact, these elements are proposing voluntary mass emigration on the part of Gazans as the “only solution” to the war on it by Israel. In a 14 November article on the Reuters website, it is stated that “Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who heads one of the religious nationalist parties in Netanyahu's coalition, said he supported a call by two members of the Israeli parliament who wrote in a Wall Street Journal editorial that Western countries should accept Gazan families who expressed a desire to relocate.”

The Israeli campaign for outright theft of the whole of Palestine dovetails very neatly with Western Imperialism's aim to secure its hegemony in the region, hence its ongoing and unconditional support for the mass murder and destruction currently being carried out by the IDF. At a meeting of the G7 foreign ministers in Tokyo earlier in November, unequivocal support for Israel's “right to defend itself” was declared, and, more ominously, threats were directed at Iran, which is being “blamed” for “destabilising the region” through its support for Hamas and Hezbollah.

Without any sense of irony, the major destabilisers of the

region – the G7 countries of America, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan – declared in a statement following the meeting of their foreign ministers

We . . . are more united than ever in the pursuit of international peace, security, and prosperity . . . We remain steadfast in upholding and strengthening the free and open international order based on the rule of law, respecting the United Nations (UN) Charter. We reiterate our strong opposition to any unilateral attempts to change the peacefully established status of territories by force or coercion anywhere in the world. Such attempts undermine the rule of law, which protects all nations, especially the vulnerable, as well as global security and human dignity.

Commenting on the meeting, Jordan Shilton (9 November) says

Needless to say, no mention was made of the “destabilising” role of American imperialism, which has waged wars across the Middle East and Central Asia for the past three decades, destroying entire societies in Iraq, Syria, Libya and Afghanistan. In portraying Iran as the chief escalator of the present situation, the fact that Washington has dispatched two aircraft carrier battlegroups and a nuclear-armed submarine to the region was also passed over in silence.

Jean Shaoul sums up the viewpoint of the global Left: “The lies used to sanction the mass murder and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians are regurgitated by Washington, London, Paris and Berlin in furtherance of their own plans to control the resource-rich Middle East as part of a global war against Iran, Russia and ultimately China. For the millions of workers and young people coming into struggle against their own rotten governments over their collusion with the Zionist

butchers, this means taking up a political struggle against imperialism's drive to war and for socialism."

We should prepare ourselves for a protracted war. Our immediate aims are for an end to the bloodletting in Gaza, and for the immediate withdrawal of troops and settlers from the West Bank. We must apply our minds to what role we should be playing in the global resistance to Zionism's designs for the total destruction of Palestine. We should strengthen our links with progressive forces around the world, including those many millions in the Imperialist countries themselves.

There are legitimate concerns that the current Nakba in Gaza could lead to a global conflict involving all-out nuclear warfare. The imperialist powers have shown their determination to secure their interests at all costs. Our call has to be for workers of the world to unite and to resist the reckless onward march of the imperialists and their allies.

## NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS 2024 - IN A FAILED STATE?

**The IEC's launch of the voter registration campaign for the quinquennial National and Provincial elections which are scheduled to take place in 2024 prompts one to take stock of the current affairs of the state as existing today.**

**For, given the state of affairs prevailing at present, the outcome of that election promises to be somewhat different from the outcomes of the 2019 election which, if anything, signalled the beginning of the decline in the fortunes of the ruling ANC government.**

Whilst it is estimated that only 27% of adult South Africans voted for it, the ANC retained its absolute majority in parliament.

The percentage poll was lower than with previous elections which is largely a reflection of the widespread dissatisfaction of the oppressed with the lack of service delivery by the ANC government.

The manifest decline in support for the ANC has spawned the rise of literally myriads of political parties. There were approximately 515 political parties registered with the IEC during the financial year 2021/2022 but only a total of 15 of the parties are represented in the National Assembly and the provincial legislatures. The other approximately 500 parties have no representation in legislative assemblies.

The 2024 elections will most probably be contested by more parties as well as individual candidates.

A feature of the present state of electoral politics, occasioned largely by the loss of support by the ANC, is the arrival on the scene of coalitions, especially at Municipal level. The outcome of this phenomenon is the spectacle of individuals with negligible electoral support being appointed as mayors and speakers and these institutions being reduced to being dysfunctional veritable

## FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA, PALESTINE WILL BE FREE!!!

### Relevant Articles

Jordan Shilton, "G7 members threaten Iran with regional war amid ongoing Israeli slaughter in Gaza," 9 November 2023, available at website [https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2023/11/09/ospq-n09.html?pk\\_campaign=newsletter&pk\\_kwd=wsws](https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2023/11/09/ospq-n09.html?pk_campaign=newsletter&pk_kwd=wsws)

Jean Shaoul, "Israel's lies about October 7 incursion fall apart," 24 November 2023, available at website [https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2023/11/23/buna-n23.html?pk\\_campaign=newsletter&pk\\_kwd=wsws](https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2023/11/23/buna-n23.html?pk_campaign=newsletter&pk_kwd=wsws)

circuses! The fear that this phenomenon may be replicated at Provincial and even at National level is too ghastly to contemplate!

The euphoria, amongst large sections of the population, generated by the Springboks winning the rugby world cup in October will predictably only briefly serve to obscure the stark reality of the dire state of crisis that this country finds itself in.

This state of crisis is alluded to in the Growth Lab report of the Harvard Kennedy School in the USA which suggests that SA is a failed state.

Researchers at the Growth Lab report on the "*collapsing state capacity in South Africa after decades of policy failures, mismanagement, and patronage, with painful consequences for millions of poor, jobless people.*"

The Growth Lab report which was published on 15 November 2023 notes that many of its recommendations are not new—but they "*will require new approaches*". They go on to say "*Given the toll that collapsing state capacity is having, government leaders will have to exercise bolder leadership to overcome the four-fold causes of state collapse. Current leaders are presiding over a collapsing*

*state and will need to overcome the underlying issues of gridlock, ideology, overburdening of public entities, and patronage that prevents proximate solutions from moving forward.”*

This report has certainly caused somewhat of a flutter in the doves of the liberal establishment and amongst political parties except for the ANC which, via its spokesperson, Minister in the presidency Ms. Ntshavheni, dismisses the report by stating *“Research on its own is not absolute. It considers a period, a sample and is therefore not reliable”*. However, this report tells us nothing new. It merely confirms what we already know.

As such the report repeats the prescient views expressed by Louis Reynolds and David Sanders of the Peoples Health Movement who, in writing in an op-ed piece in the Daily Maverick in 2019, commented *upon the National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill published by the government in August 2019*. Ironically, the Bill which has already been passed in the National Assembly, is due to be passed in the NCOP during this month!

In this article the authors depicted South Africa as being in a *“profound economic, social and political crisis — a crisis characterised by failure of the democratic state under the paralysed ruling party to improve the living and working conditions of the majority and to reduce the dangerous structural inequalities inherited from (and sustained beyond) apartheid; a crumbling, dysfunctional public health sector after more than two decades of crippling public-sector austerity under neoliberalism; an unsustainable and unregulated private health sector; and rampant, deeply entrenched corruption”*.

The Growth Lab report which echoes this description almost word for word makes a number of recommendations which if implemented, they imply, would turn around this state failure. These recommendations will appeal to the liberal establishment which includes all the parliamentary parties in this country.

However, coming as it does, from a think tank of the Neoliberal establishment the researchers make recommendations that will only ameliorate rather than eliminate the causes of the failed state that they describe.

They totally ignore the fundamental causes of this state of affairs, namely the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism. We, however, believe that it is only by eliminating this pernicious system of neoliberal capitalist imperialism, that the failures that they describe may be turned around.

Neither the ANC in its current state of decline nor yet anyone of the other political parties is capable of bringing about the changes that the report recommends.

We, as part of the non Stalinist Left in this country are called upon to respond to the challenges mentioned above. What are we to do?

We need to mount a campaign to counter the false promises to be made by the myriad of parties which will contest the 2024 elections

The failed state status of the country begs the perennial question of the likelihood of our own Arab Spring coming about and how the Left should deal with it, when it does.

Mounting a campaign to build a movement for socialism in concert with such movements to be established internationally

Such a movement must strive to create a new state. One totally opposed to neo-liberal capitalism. In short a socialist people’s democracy.

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